

BOOK REVIEW

**Mathews, Freya. *Reinhabiting Reality: Towards a Recovery of Culture*.
Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005.**



In this book Freya Mathews argues that replacing the materialist premise of modern civilisation with a panpsychist one will profoundly transform the fabric of culture.

Mathews claims that the environmental crisis is a symptom of deeper issues facing modern civilization, arising from the loss of the very meaning of culture. To come to grips with this crisis requires a change in the metaphysical premise of modernity. This is a change with profound implications for the full range of existential questions and not merely for questions regarding our relationship with 'nature'.

Commitment to a counter-materialist premise involves an attitude of 'letting things be' as opposed to the interventionism - the disposition to 'make things better' - that characterises the attitude of modernity. This alternative and synergistic form of agency becomes the basis for new forms of environmentalism and politics and represents a return to a more authentic foundation for culture itself. Even philosophical thinking is transformed in this transition: the philosopher thinks in creative collaboration with the world and with place.

A pioneer in ecological metaphysics, Freya Mathews has written a passionate and timely study (begun in *The Ecological Self* and *For Love of Matter*) that argues for materialism to be set aside and the world acknowledged as having an inner life of its own, with attendant capacities for poetic engagement and expression. It is only then, according to Mathews, that the entire focus of culture can shift.

Mathews' ideas of being native, of becoming votary, of engagement in history and technology, of attentiveness, grace, living locally and wisdom are important insights that are well expressed. Her writing is crisp and concise, engaging the reader on a journey where these insights are occurring naturally and are evidenced clearly.