

5 **Ecologism and other ideologies**

We now have the fundamentals of ecologism in place. We have discussed its critique of contemporary society, we have outlined its proposals for an ecologically sound society, and we have assessed its approach to bringing such a society about. I have claimed that ecologism is a new political ideology, worthy of attention in the new millennium alongside other more familiar ones such as liberalism, conservatism and socialism. If this is correct, then it is only natural to want to compare and contrast this new ideology with those which it seeks to challenge. That is what I propose to do in this chapter. In so doing, it is my intention to deepen our understanding of what marks ecologism off from those other ideologies. I shall be arguing that attempts by liberals, conservatives and socialists to appropriate ecological thought for themselves will founder, since, as I pointed out in the Introduction, ecologism is as different from each of them as they are from each other. The examination carried out in this chapter should drive home this point.

In principle, the list of ideologies with which ecologism could be compared and contrasted is a long one. In choosing to devote attention to just four of them I might be accused of pruning that long list unduly. There are two reasons for doing so, however. The first is that I wanted to give each of these four ideologies a run for its money. Broad comparisons have been helpfully carried out elsewhere (see e.g. Hay, 1988; Martell, 1994, ch. 5; Garner, 2000, ch. 3; Connelly and Smith, 2003, pp. 52–65), but the range of coverage has been bought at the cost of making it rather thin, with typically a page or two devoted to each ideology. Particularly recently, and particularly in the cases of the four ideologies I deal with here, some very interesting comparative work has been done, and it is simply not possible to do this work justice in a short space.

Second, the ideologies I have chosen for assessment might legitimately be regarded as lying at the roots of those I have left out. This is to

say that liberalism, conservatism and socialism are widely held to be the most fundamental ideologies of the modern era, and other less fundamental ones can often be read through them (although never wholly reducible to them). I hope, therefore, to have provided an indirect service to those who would want to contrast ecologism with nationalism or with fascism, for example, although I am acutely aware of the breadth I have nevertheless sacrificed. Feminism might not generally be held to be in the same league as liberalism, conservatism and socialism (although I am not so sure myself), but the justification for including a detailed discussion of it here is that it has influenced the development of ecologism in a way unmatched by any other ideology, with the possible exception of socialism. This influence has also, I think, been reciprocal.

For no particular reason, the ideologies with which I compare and contrast ecologism are in the following order: liberalism, conservatism, socialism and feminism.

Liberalism

Ten years ago, Mark Sagoff asked whether environmentalists could be liberals (Sagoff, 1988, pp. 146–70). At the time, the question appeared rather esoteric in that the interesting ideological and theoretical relationships seemed to be between environmentalism (or, as I want to call it here, ecologism) and socialism, or environmentalism and feminism, rather than between environmentalism and liberalism. It is now clear that Sagoff was more perceptive than most of the rest of us, not because ecosocialism and ecofeminism are not interesting – they are – but because the increasing dominance of the liberal world-view in academic and political life has necessarily brought the environmental and liberal agendas into close contact, with the result that some of the most intellectually interesting (if politically questionable) work in environmental political theory is being done in this area.

Thus Robyn Eckersley was able to write in 1992 that:

Although some emancipatory theorists, such as John Rodman, have noted and discussed these byways in liberal thought [that is, potential compatibilities between liberalism and radical ecology], the general tendency has been to look to other political traditions for the ideals and principles that would underpin an ecologically sustainable *post-liberal* society.

(Eckersley, 1992, pp. 23–4)

Since then a number of theorists (e.g. Hayward, 1995; Eckersley, 1996;

Wissenburg, 1998a, 2006; B. Barry, 1999; Miller, 1999; Hailwood 2004) have sought to demonstrate compatibility between liberal and environmental themes or, more strongly, to show how the ecological political project can be expressed more or less completely in the liberal idiom.

My own view is that the answer to the compatibility question depends entirely on one's terms of reference: environmentalism and liberalism are compatible, but ecologism and liberalism are not. So even if it is true to say that political ecology 'draws on' liberalism, Martell is wrong to jump to the conclusion that this 'shows that green political theory does not stand alone as a new political theory' (Martell, 1994, p. 141). The tensions between liberalism and ecologism are by now well rehearsed. Martell himself points out that:

there is a lot in liberal political theory that runs counter to radical ecology. Individualism, the pursuit of private gain, limited government and market freedom are contradicted by radical ecology commitments to the resolution of environmental problems as a collective good and to intervention and restrictions on economic and personal freedoms to deal with them.

(Martell, 1994, p. 141)

The issue of liberty is crucial here. As Wissenburg says, 'in no respect can liberal democracy and environmental concerns be so much at odds as where liberty is concerned' (Wissenburg, 1998a, p. 33), and while it would be wrong to regard political ecology as just a series of personal and social prohibitions, there is no doubt that ecologism's stress on 'limits' of all sorts amounts to the potential curtailment of certain taken-for-granted freedoms, particularly in the realms of production, consumption and mobility. It will not be enough for liberals to be told that these restrictions will be offset by hoped-for improvements in the quality of life: liberty is central to the liberal prospectus, and liberals will regard threats to it with great suspicion.

Liberals resist being told what to think as well as what to do. More technically, they regard their felt *preferences* as an accurate indicator of their *interests*, and they will say that attempts by the state to influence tastes and preferences are generally unwarranted. Likewise, liberals do not typically welcome suggestions that people do not know what is in their own best interest. Thus, 'From a liberal perspective, the objection to denying the equation of people's interests with what they think or say they are is that this appears at the same time to be denying basic respect for people's autonomy' (Hayward, 1995, p. 203). The problem from a political-ecological point of view is that this autonomy may clash with

ecological objectives: 'Liberal democracy is totally incompatible with attempts to dictate people's tastes and preferences, yet we may reasonably assume that preferences are one of the determining factors of sustainability' (Wissenburg, 1998a, p. 7). Far from regarding people's preferences as sacrosanct, political ecologists seek to influence them all the time, and if we add to this the various potential restrictions on liberty referred to above, then the tensions between liberalism and ecologism become palpable.

Often, autonomy for liberals is understood to mean the freedom to develop and pursue one's own moral goals in life. From this point of view, 'Liberalism is the political theory that holds that many conflicting and even incommensurable conceptions of the good may be fully compatible with free, autonomous, and rational action' (Sagoff, 1988, pp. 150–1), and so, 'The liberal state does not dictate the moral goals its citizens are to achieve; it simply referees the means they use to satisfy their own preferences' (*ibid.*, p. 151). It will be clear from Chapter 2 that political ecologists have a quite distinctive view regarding our moral relationship with the non-human natural world, and this is a view that they will feel bound to encourage the rest of us to endorse. This gives rise, though, to another potential tension between liberalism and ecologism – and to the question from Mark Sagoff that heads this section: 'If the laws and policies supported by the environmental lobby are not neutral among ethical, aesthetic and religious ideals but express a moral conception of people's appropriate relation to nature, can environmentalists be liberals?' (*ibid.*, p. 150).

There are two reasons why Sagoff thinks they can, the first of which has been adopted by many people who would like to press for compatibility between liberalism and ecologism (e.g. Barry, 1995, pp. 145–51). This first reason turns on the common distinction in liberal theory between the structure of institutions and the social policies that emerge from them (Sagoff, 1988, p. 166). Sagoff suggests that while liberals must be neutral in respect of the former (that is, that the institutions be fair between the individuals who participate in them), there is nothing to prevent them from having decided views on social policy – even views that are based upon 'particular ethical, cultural, or aesthetic convictions' (*ibid.*). Convictions of this sort, of course, amount to convictions regarding the nature of the Good Life about which liberals are traditionally supposed to be neutral. Sagoff squares the circle by making the distinction between institutions and policy, and arguing that liberal neutrality applies only to the former and not necessarily to the latter. Thus Sagoff's 'liberal environmentalist' will argue for neutrality only at the level of institutions, while remaining perfectly free to advance and

defend Good Life-type views about the proper relationship between human beings and the non-human natural world.

Sagoff's second reason for believing that environmentalists can be liberals is based on liberalism's 'tolerance for competing views' (Sagoff, 1988, p. 167), and its endorsement of institutions 'in which individuals and groups may argue for the policies they favor and may advocate various conceptions of the good' (ibid.). It is a short step from here to the conclusion that anyone with a conception of the good they wish to advance would be well advised to endorse the liberal project because only in a liberal political environment is there the guarantee of being able to advance it. Nor is it just a question of ideas. Liberal tolerance of competing views and the belief that people should be allowed to choose their own versions of the Good Life raises the issue of the material preconditions for living the Good Life, whatever it may be. It is virtually meaningless to say that people are free to choose lives if the conditions for doing so are not in place. Liberals should surely therefore be committed to wide-ranging protection of the non-human world in case parts of it are fundamental to the Good Lives of current people. This point is perhaps even stronger if we take future people into account. We cannot know what conceptions of the Good Life future people will have, so it is incumbent on the current generation (the argument goes) to pass on as wide a range of possible conditions for living good lives as possible. We need only think of conceptions of the Good Life that are land-based (e.g. animist religions) to see the potential force of this argument. More technically: 'liberals . . . should be in favour of strong sustainability – and not because of any special commitment to “nature”, but because a structured bequest package amounts to a wider range of options from which to choose good lives' (Dobson, 2003, p. 168). We might even agree with Sagoff by this point, not only that environmentalists can be liberals, but that they *should* be liberals.

At the same time, some liberals have become less demanding in terms of their views of what 'neutrality' in terms of the Good Life might mean. More accurately, they have come to argue that some 'ecological principles' may be included in 'the set of values on which reasonable individuals should agree'. These values 'make social co-operation possible and at the same time limit the areas in which individuals may disagree on the good life' (Wissenburg, 2006, p. 25). In other words, not all versions of the Good Life are compatible with sustainability, and ones that are not should be ruled out of court – even by liberals.

This second argument, though, merely confirms what we knew already: that liberalism tolerates competing conceptions of the Good Life. What political ecologists will want to know, in addition, is whether

liberalism will bring about their objectives. No political system can offer such guarantees, of course, but liberalism's thoroughgoing focus on the *means* rather than the *ends* of political association makes it only problematically compatible than some other political ideologies with an end-orientated conception of political and social life such as ecologism. Thus while it is true that 'Liberal social policy cannot be inferred from liberal political theory' (Sagoff, 1988, p. 166) – i.e. that liberal political theory's neutrality as regards institutions should not be taken to entail morality-free social policy – political ecologists are likely to support institutions and policies that endorse *their* view of what morality should be, rather than 'merely' neutral ones.

Nor may it be so easy for a putative green liberalism to avoid nailing its colours to the mast so far as a moral conception of people's relationship with non-human nature is concerned. As Marcel Wissenburg surveys the likely future relationship between liberalism and ecologism, he writes:

We may also expect the introduction of the notion of limits to growth and resources, and with it that of sustainability, to lead to questions of a substantive normative nature. A sustainable society need not be one big Yellowstone Park – we can imagine a world-wide version of Holland stuffed with cows, grain and greenhouses, or even a global Manhattan without the Park to be as sustainable and for many among us as pleasant as the first. Hence a greener liberalism will have to define more clearly what kind of sustainability, what kind of world, it aims for.

(Wissenburg, 1998a, p. 81)

If Wissenburg is right about this – and I believe he is – then this 'greener liberalism' will be obliged to develop a moral conception of our relationship with the non-human natural world as a necessary step on the road to deciding what kind of world we want to hand on to future generations. On this reading, environmental sustainability *by definition* raises questions regarding the Good Life, and so if liberalism is to have a 'take' on environmental sustainability then it must also have a definitive moral conception of 'people's appropriate relation to nature' (in Sagoff's words (1988, p. 150)). If this is a pill that liberalism cannot swallow – as I suspect it cannot – then this may be where liberalism and ecologism finally part company.

The history of liberal thought gives some succour to those who seek compatibilities between liberalism and radical ecology. Marcel Wissenburg, among others, has identified two types of liberal legacy,

one centred on the work of John Locke and the other on John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham (Wissenburg, 1998a, pp. 74–6), and he (Wissenburg, 2001) and Piers Stephens (2001a, 2001b) have debated the relative merits of these two types of liberalism from the green point of view. The former type, according to most commentators, is broadly inimical to the modern ecological project, while the latter has resources that may be enlisted in favour of some aspects of it. In Lockean times, writes Wissenburg, ‘Nature had two roles to play in liberal thought: physically, it was an inexhaustible source of resources; intellectually, it was the incarnation of the laws of nature over which humankind had triumphed, which it had transcended’ (Wissenburg, 1998a, p. 74). It will be clear by now that this view of the ‘role’ of nature is roundly rejected by contemporary political ecologists: the limits to growth thesis suggests that nature’s resources are not boundless, and the idea that human beings can ‘triumph’ over the laws of nature is the hubris that political ecologists blame – in part – for environmental problems surrounding issues such as genetically modified foods (discussion of the possibility of a more ecologically friendly reading of Locke may be found at Hayward (1994, pp. 130–6), and Dobson (1998, pp. 144–8)).

Similarly, Wissenburg refers to ‘the crucial role of reason’ in classical liberalism (Wissenburg, 1998a, p. 74). The idea, or category, of reason is central to liberalism since the view that all human beings possess reason (even if they do not always use it) constitutes ‘the beginning of arguments for the political equality and influence of citizens, for the individual as the source of all political authority, for the priority of private over state interests’ (ibid.). The explosive nature of this idea in the late seventeenth century should not be underestimated. But inclusion and exclusion are two sides of the same coin, and just as possessors of reason were drawn into the charmed circle, so those beings lacking it were left outside. As Wissenburg puts it: ‘Classical liberalism recognizes only one essential distinction in nature: the line dividing reasonable and unreasonable beings’ (Wissenburg, 1998a, p. 75). This is an essential and enduring distinction in one type of liberalism that legitimizes discriminatory treatment between humans and other animals.

The second type of liberalism – that developed through the work of Mill, Bentham and their followers – tells a different story, however. As Bentham famously said, ‘The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?’ (Bentham, 1960: ch. 17, sec. 1). This new category of ‘sentience’ clearly broadens the community of beings entitled to moral consideration – broadens it sufficiently, indeed, to include some non-human animals. We saw all this in Chapter 2, and we also saw that the game of defining the ‘X’ in the question ‘What

faculty, X, must beings possess to be entitled to moral considerability?' can be played interminably. For classical liberalism, 'X' is reason, and this gives one kind of answer to the question. For Bentham (and utilitarians in general), 'X' is sentience, and this gives another kind of answer. Ecocentrics will answer the 'X' question in different ways again; Robyn Eckersley, as we saw (p. 42), refers to the 'characteristic of self-reproduction or self-renewal' (Eckersley, 1992, p. 60). This broadens the community of 'moral patients' beyond anything to be found even in Mill and Bentham, and provides circumstantial evidence that, however hard they try, liberals will not find much in their historical legacy to satisfy ecocentrics.

On the other hand, the idea of *rights* is inseparable from liberalism, and this idea can be – and has been – enlisted in favour of environmental objectives. This appropriation can take the form of piggy-backing such objectives on specifically *human* rights. Tim Hayward points out that the idea of a 'right to . . . an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being' was mooted as early as 1972 at the Stockholm UN Conference on the Human Environment. From an environmental point of view, though, there are problems with such a rights strategy. In the first place, as Hayward observes, the problem with the idea of a 'right to an adequate environment' for political ecologists is that 'it does not really go beyond the view that the environment is just a resource which humans have a right to use for their own benefit' (Hayward, 1995, p. 144). Second, the 'limits to growth' thesis suggests that 'natural ecosystems have a limited carrying capacity which simply cannot support all the demands of a growing human population, and so cannot necessarily support all the rights they might want to claim either' (ibid., pp. 144–5).

This second objection points to the need to limit population growth. Such a policy may itself have distinctly non-liberal implications (see Wissenburg, 1998b), but Hayward refers to evidence which suggests that affluence is an effective contraceptive, and he also suggests (along with many others, e.g. B. Barry, 1999) that women's emancipation is the key to reduced birth rates. What should be noted, though, is that the 'affluence' solution both falls foul of the limits to growth thesis and is also the cause of the type of environmental problem associated with wealthy societies. Likewise, the 'emancipation' solution comes from *feminism* not from *liberalism*, so we are perhaps entitled to conclude that liberalism – on its own – lacks the intellectual resources for dealing with the problems associated with piggy-backing environmental objectives on human rights.

Another way in which liberal rights talk can make 'green' sense is in

the context of animal rights. A flavour of this move has already been given in Chapter 2, and there is no need to go over the same ground again. Suffice to say that assuming some animals can be regarded as rights-holders (Feinberg, 1981), then rights claims can, in principle, be as politically useful for those animals as they are for human beings. This begs the question, of course, of whether rights claims *are* politically useful, even when social and economic rights are added to the political rights normally associated with the liberal project. Ted Benton, for one, has deployed a Marxist critique of such rights in the context of animals, and he suggests that the discourse of rights will always come up against the practice of exploitation:

rights are unlikely to be effective in practice unless those who have the power to abuse them are already benevolently disposed to their bearers. . . . Where humans gain their livelihood from a practice which presupposes a 'reification' of animals, or gain pleasure from sports which involve systematic animal suffering, it seems unlikely that a rational argument that this treatment is unjust to the animals concerned would be sufficient to make the humans concerned change their ways.

(Benton, 1993, p. 94)

The crucial thing, he concludes, is to take into account 'the socio-economic and cultural positions and formations of the human agents concerned' (*ibid.*).

One final and very promising area in which rights have been deployed in the name of environmental objectives is in the context of future generations. It may not be immediately apparent how the rights of future generations and environmental sustainability are connected, but once we realize that 'the environment' is one of the things we hand on to future generations, and if we accept that future generations have a right to a sustainable and satisfying environment, then future generation rights and environmental sustainability may be seen to be intimately linked. As Hayward astutely points out: 'In talking about rights of future generations, one is already addressing matters of environmental concern' (Hayward, 1994, p. 142).

In this context as in many others, the work of the most influential (liberal) theorist of modern times, John Rawls, has proved remarkably fecund. Rawls it was who, in his *A Theory of Justice*, developed a 'savings principle' (Rawls, 1973, p. 287), whereby current generations are enjoined to save for future ones. Much turns on just what form this 'saving' is to take, of course, but if it is understood to include

environmental goods and services (understood in the broadest sense), then this liberal theory of justice, at least, appears to be compatible with environmental objectives. Recently, Marcel Wissenburg has argued that this is true of *all* liberal theories of justice: ‘liberals in general need to include a savings principle in their respective theories of justice – and . . . (some form of) obligations to future generations is a *conditio sine qua non* of any liberal theory of justice’ (Wissenburg, 1998a, p. 134). Once again, the *nature* of these obligations is crucial, but Wissenburg believes it to be entirely compatible with a conditional view of liberal rights that these obligations take the form of what he calls the ‘restraint principle’:

no goods shall be destroyed unless unavoidable and unless they are replaced by perfectly identical goods; if that is physically impossible, they should be replaced by equivalent goods resembling the original as closely as possible; and that if this is also impossible, a proper compensation should be provided.

(Wissenburg, 1998a, p. 123)

From an environmental point of view this looks very promising. Yet – as ever – the devil is in the detail: what, precisely, does ‘unless unavoidable’ mean? Carnivores and vegetarians, for example, will have different answers to this question. More broadly still, the ‘unless unavoidable’ proviso takes us back full circle to an earlier point: that the idea of environmental sustainability enjoins us, by definition, to have a definitive moral conception of ‘people’s appropriate relation to nature’ – precisely the kind of conception, though, that liberalism eschews.

The liberal language of rights, then, may be deployed in the service of environmental objectives, but not with conclusive success. My own view is that the intentions of ecologism need the idea of *responsibilities* to be added to those of rights because, as Hayward remarks, this:

seems to capture the key ecological intuition that it is necessary to change our basic attitude to the world from one which considers ‘what we can get out of it’ to one which considers ‘what we can and must do for it’.

(Hayward, 1994, p. 163)

Whether or not animals or future generation human beings have rights, their peculiar vulnerability to our actions ‘demands’ a responsible attitude of care and concern (Goodin, 1985). Normally, rights and duties are seen as reciprocal – ‘rights exist if and only if corresponding duties

exist' (Hayward, 1994, p. 169) – and ecologism's contribution (as we saw in the discussion of ecological citizenship in Chapter 4) to this debate lies in severing the connection between rights and duties.

In sum there will always be tensions, to say the least, between liberalism and ecologism. Marcel Wissenburg summarizes the state of play as follows: 'Although liberalism has not been fundamentally changed by its contact with green political thought, it has developed in many important respects. To be more precise, *some* liberals have taken on a shade of green' (Wissenburg, 2006, p. 23). True though this is, pressure points remain. To the oft-remarked differences of opinion over autonomy and individualism we must add ecologism's insistence on a definitive view of the proper moral relationship between human beings and the non-human natural world. We must acknowledge the uses to which rights talk may be put for environmental ends, but also temper this with the recognition that such talk can never fully express the nature of the relationship between human beings and 'nature' that ecologism seeks to establish. Finally, liberalism is firmly located in a tradition of thought and practice that has distinguished sharply between the human and 'natural' realms, both descriptively and prescriptively (but see Wissenburg, 2006, pp. 26–9). Ecologism, by contrast, insists that we are human *animals*, with all the implications that this brings in its train.

Conservatism

In the context of modern political thought, one of ecologism's signal and novel contributions is the idea that our *natural* condition affects and constrains our *political* condition. This is to say that – following on from the last remark in the previous section – our condition as human *animals* constrains us in ways similar to those experienced by all animals. There are differences, of course. Human animals are able to construct plans for life and strategies for realizing them in ways that most, if not all, other animals are incapable of doing. It is this capacity for autonomous thought and action on which liberal thought focuses, as we saw in the previous section, and this view of the human condition dominates contemporary politics.

Political ecologists do not reject this view entirely, but they do recommend that it be tempered by a hard-headed look at our natural circumstances. The lesson of the limits to growth thesis, as we saw in Chapter 3, is that human beings – like any other animal – have to consume natural resources, and that given that these resources are limited, human projects such as open-ended economic growth are

impossible to sustain. In this regard, ecologism taps into a tradition that is closer to the conservative than the liberal sensibility. Thomas Malthus, for example, famous for his *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1792), is widely regarded as contributing to the conservative tradition – largely due to his belief in ‘the limits to social progress imposed by man’s place in nature’ (Wells, 1982, p. 2).

The intellectual history of the past two hundred years is littered with thinkers who have questioned the idea of progress as understood by modernity, but ecologism’s reluctance to endorse modernity’s notion of progress is not based on ‘some view of the cyclic growth and degeneration of civilizations’, nor on ‘objections based on a philosophical and epistemological opposition to the notion of a “scientific” history’ (as in rejections of the Marxist notion of progress), but on a ‘particular vision of man’s relationship to the physical and biological world: what could be called “the ecological viewpoint”’ (Wells, 1982, p. 3). This viewpoint is animated by the fundamentally conservative thought that ‘the basic political question – “what should be done?” – depends on an account of what *can* be done’ (ibid., p. 15). Conservatives generally oppose the Enlightenment view that humans can control their environment, and while political ecologists obviously have to believe that a modicum of control is possible, they will probably agree that human beings’ determination to ‘interfere’ with nature is a part cause of our environmental problems. As Gray graphically puts it: ‘Most people today think they belong to a species that can be master of its own destiny. This is faith, not science’ (Gray, 2002, p. 3).

In ecologism, this account of what can be done turns on an understanding of human beings’ place in nature. Moreover, the guiding idea of political ecology is that this is an *ecological* place rather than an *evolutionary* place, with all the implications that this entails. Most particularly, the ecological view talks of ‘climax states’ of relative stability, while the evolutionists’ motif is that of ‘progress’. Malthus’ ecological view was superseded by that of Darwin and Wallace, whose ideas were grasped with alacrity by progressive thinkers such as Marx, who:

welcomed the new biological outlook and the support it gave to an evolutionary – and by implication, progressive – view of human society. The idea of general, and perhaps unlimited, progress so strongly attacked by Malthus had been restored as a dominant theme in social and political theory.

(Wells, 1982, p. 12)

With the restoration of the ecological idea in politics, battle with the evolutionary view of political progress has once again been joined.

Luke Martell has summarized the connections between radical green and conservative thinking in the following way:

Some greens urge humans to be more humble and accommodating before nature, adapting to its laws and rhythms and putting less emphasis on exercising control over their environment and manipulating it to their own advantage. They are often sceptical and critical of Enlightenment ideas about the capacity of human rationality and the commitment to progress and innovation.

(Martell, 1994, p. 140)

These are all recognizably conservative notions, and each one amounts to useful ammunition for those who would claim that ecologism and conservatism are fundamentally similar ideologies.

So similar, indeed, that a sustained attempt has been made by John Gray, sometime supporter of Thatcherite liberal conservatism but now an advocate of a more sceptical conservatism, to appropriate political ecology for the conservative cause (Gray, 1993b). Roger Scruton is another who argues that ‘conservatism and environmentalism are natural bedfellows’ (Scruton, 2006, p. 8), and he – like Gray – asks us not to equate conservatism with ‘the ideology of free enterprise, and free enterprise as an assault on the earth’s resources’ (Scruton, 2006, p. 7). So, just as there are many liberalisms so there are many conservatisms, and some are more ‘compatible’ with environmental thought than others. Gray urges us to reject ‘the self-image of the Greens as inheritors of the radical protest movements of earlier times, and as making common cause with contemporary radical movements, such as feminism and anti-colonialism’ (*ibid.*, p. 124). On the contrary, ‘Far from having a natural home on the Left, concern for the integrity of the common environment, human as well as ecological, is most in harmony with the outlook of traditional conservatism of the British and European varieties’ (*ibid.*; and see Scruton, 2006), and:

Many of the central conceptions of traditional conservatism have a natural congruence with Green concerns: the Burkean idea of the social contract, not as agreement among anonymous ephemeral individuals, but as a compact between the generations of the living, the dead and those yet unborn; Tory scepticism about progress, and awareness of its ironies and illusions; conservative resistance to untried novelty and large-scale social experiments; and, perhaps

most especially, the traditional conservative tenet that individual flourishing can occur only in the context of forms of common life.
(Gray, 1993b, p. 124)

To these similarities, Gray adds the observation that ‘both Greens and conservatives consider risk-aversion the path of prudence when new technologies, or new social practices, have consequences that are large and unpredictable, and, most especially, when they [*sic*] are unquantifiable but potentially catastrophic risks associated with intervention’ (Gray, 1993b, p. 137). This is the Greens’ ‘precautionary principle’ for decision-making in all but name – widely advocated in recent debates regarding the experimental planting of genetically modified crops, and supported by many political conservatives. Scruton sees a related link between environmental thinking and conservatism in the idea of the ‘maintenance of the social ecology’ (Scruton, 2006, p. 8). By this he means the duty of the current generation to pass on our social and ecological inheritance – of which we are the ‘temporary trustees’ (*ibid.*). He also believes that there is a link between the idea of local loyalties that is present in some conservative thinking, and the localism of much of the green agenda. ‘There is no evidence that global political institutions have done anything to limit global entropy’, he writes (*ibid.*, p. 16). Thus he finds it surprising that greens have not followed their localism to its logical conclusion: i.e. the conservative view that we ‘must retain what we can of the loyalties that attach us to our territory, and make of that territory a home’ (*ibid.*). Conservatives are suspicious of cosmopolitan rootlessness, and suspicious of it when they see it in green globalists such as George Monbiot (2004). Scruton makes the point that rooted localism should appeal to greens on the grounds that it solves the ‘motivation problem’: that of finding a non-egotistic motive which may be elicited in ordinary members of society and relied upon to serve the long-term ecological goal (Scruton, 2006, p. 13).

The evidence for congruence between radical political ecology and conservatism, then, seems strong, but there are a number of areas where the relationship is severely strained, and others still where it cannot be said to exist at all. We can begin with Gray’s ‘traditional conservative tenet that individual flourishing can occur only in the context of forms of common life’ (Gray, 1993b, p. 124), and that this is an idea shared by ‘Green theory’ (*ibid.*, p. 136). But just what is this ‘common life’, and is it the same for political ecologists and for conservatives? From a conservative point of view, Gray says that people’s ‘deepest need is a home, a network of common practices and inherited traditions that confers on them the blessing of a settled identity’ (*ibid.*, p. 125). The common life

of which he speaks is therefore defined in primarily *historical* and *cultural* terms as expressed through *tradition*. There are indeed radical greens for whom culture and history are very important. Some of the resistance to road-building programmes, for instance, is based on a belief in the cultural significance of features of the land which are destroyed by building contractors. My own view, though, is that valuing 'nature' in the currency of 'culture' in this way is precisely what distances *conservative* defences of nature from *political-ecological* ones. The political ecologist sees value in nature in itself, and if this value derives from history at all, it is *natural* history that counts, and not *human* history in the form of tradition and culture.

This is as much as to say that the 'common life' of which radical greens speak is an ontological and moral one that crosses species boundaries. It is important for Gray that common cultural, conservative forms:

cannot be created anew for each generation. We are not like the butterfly, whose generations are unknown to each other; we are a familial and historical species, for whom the past must have authority (that of memory) if we are to have identity.

(Gray, 1993b, p. 124)

But the moral and ontological common life of political ecologists *can* be created anew for each generation through the intellectual effort of grounding inter-species responsibility in a thoroughgoing naturalism that recognizes the implications of our being human *animals*.

Thus the ecocentrism of radical greenery sets it apart from conservatism just as it sets it apart from all other modern political ideologies. The only time Gray mentions anthropocentrism, the *bête noire* of the political ecologist, is in the following context: 'Green theory is an invaluable corrective of the Whiggish, anthropocentric, technological optimism by which all the modernist political religions are animated' (Gray, 1993b, p. 175). There is no evidence adduced, though, to suggest that traditional conservatism is anything other than as irredeemably anthropocentric as other political ideologies. Where conservative defences of the non-human natural world exist, they are usually rooted in romanticism rather than in an appreciation of the independent moral standing of non-human beings that animates much radical green thought.

The second point at which we should interrogate Gray's agenda is on the apparently unassailable point regarding intergenerational relations. It is true that conservatism, unlike any other political ideology with the exception of contemporary liberalism, talks of 'a compact between the

generations of the living, the dead and those yet unborn' (Gray, 1993b, p. 124), and that intergenerational responsibility is a crucial feature of the political-ecological agenda. Edmund Burke, the 'father of British conservatism' whom Gray paraphrases here, and whom Roger Scruton also recognizes as a potential source of inspiration for greens (Scruton, 2006, p. 10), puts it like this:

one of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and the laws are consecrated, is lest the temporary possessors and life-renters in it, unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity, should act as if they were the entire masters; that they should not think it amongst their rights to cut off the entail, or commit waste on the inheritance, by destroying at their pleasure the whole original fabric of their society; hazarding to leave to those who come after them, a ruin instead of an habitation – and teaching these successors as little to respect their contrivances as they had themselves respected the institutions of their forefathers. By this unprincipled facility of changing the state as often, and as much, and in as many ways as there are floating fancies or fashions, the whole chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken. No one generation could link with the other. Men would become little better than the flies of a summer.

(Burke, 1790/1982, pp. 192–3)

What is striking about these remarks is that the generations in which Burke is most interested are past generations – those from whom we inherit what we have and to whom we owe some obligation of preservation. The green view of intergenerational obligation is rather different to this: most obviously, the generations that usually interest political ecologists are *future* generations. One thing the current generation can be sure of, they say, is that our actions will affect the conditions under which future people live their lives, and this generates a responsibility for us of which other political ideologies have no conception. Conservatism is interested in the conserving and preserving *of the past*; ecologism is interested in conserving and preserving *for the future*. Herein lies a signal difference between the conservative and ecological political imaginations. (Political ecologists might do well to bear in mind, though, Burke's aphoristic warning that 'People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their forefathers' (Burke, 1790/1982, p. 119).)

The third difference between conservatism and ecologism is rooted in

disputes about the nature and relevance of 'imperfection'. It is a conservative commonplace that human beings are irredeemably flawed in their nature, and that political aspirations should reflect this. This is to say that political projects aimed at perfecting society will founder on the rock of unalterable human shortcomings and weaknesses. In this regard, political aspirations need to be drawn up within well-defined limits. As we have seen, the language of limits is the language of ecologism as well as of conservatism:

The earth is finite. Growth of anything physical, including the human population and its cars, buildings and smokestacks, cannot continue forever. . . . The limits to growth are limits to the ability of the planetary *sources* to provide those streams of materials and energy, and limits to the ability of the planetary *sinks* to absorb the pollution and waste.

(Meadows *et al.*, 1992, pp. 8–9)

Gray refers to sentiments of this sort as evidence of an anti-Utopian sensibility that is common to both conservatism and ecologism (Gray, 1993b, p. 127). Burkean conservatism and political ecology (as I have been describing it) seem to be as one in their opposition to the hubristic carelessness expressed in Utopian talk of 'indefinite malleability'. The anti-Utopian's principal target, says Krishan Kumar, is hubris (Kumar, 1987, p. 103), and so is the political ecologist's. If Utopians believe uncompromisingly that '[T]here are no fundamental barriers or obstacles to man's earthly perfection [and that] scarcity can be overcome' (Kumar, 1991, p. 29), then the gap between Utopians and political ecologists is as wide as it can be: scarcity is the most basic and unalterable feature of the human condition so far as political ecologists are concerned (for a full and entertaining analysis of the relationship between Utopianism and political ecology, see De Geus, 1999). So, Utopianism demands malleability, and political ecology's interpretation of the human condition denies its possibility. Does this apparent opposition to Utopianism imply a deep congruence between conservatism and ecologism?

I think not. The crucial and relevant distinction here is between malleability of the human *condition* and the malleability of human *nature*. It is perfectly possible to believe that the human condition is fixed, while human nature is not, and this is indeed what political ecologists believe. Political ecologists do not possess the 'pessimistic and determinist view of human nature' which is common to conservatives and anti-Utopians (Kumar, 1987, p. 100); nor do they believe in 'original sin'

(*ibid.*), if by this we mean unredeemable sin. Tim Hayward believes that ‘one cannot reasonably assume that people are generally motivated to do other than what they take to be in their own interest’ (Hayward, 1998, p. 7), and proceeds to build his own environmental political theory on the foundations of a reinterpretation of human self-interest that will include respect for ‘(at least some significant classes of) nonhuman beings’ (*ibid.*, p. 118). What makes this an environmental political theory rather than an ecological one is its basis in *human* self-interest, but political ecologists will also refuse the belief that self-interest itself is the only credible, or possible, human motivation. Thus while political ecologists believe that there are (more or less) fixed limits to production, consumption and waste, they have a Utopian sense of what is possible within those limits. Unlike conservatives, radical greens believe that human beings are capable of transformation; that they can, if they wish, abandon the acquisitive, instrumental and use-related relationship with the natural environment that dominates the modern imagination.

Acutely, John Gray observes that what he calls ‘green conservatism’ is an instance of an:

ancient paradox, with which the modern world abounds in examples, that conservatives cannot help becoming radicals, when current practice embodies the hubristic and careless projects of recent generations, or has been distorted by technological innovations whose consequences for human well-being have not been weighed.

(Gray, 1993b, p. 128)

In the current environmental climate conservatives may well find themselves opposed to much of the status quo, but radical conservatives are not the same as radical greens, and on at least the three counts discussed above the gap between the conservative and radical green agenda so far as the environment is concerned is wide and deep.

Socialism

In the context of socialism and the largely successful assault launched on it by the right over the past twenty years, the last thing it needed, so the argument goes, was a challenge to its hegemony towards the left of the political spectrum. Early responses to the environmental movement from the socialist left were certainly hostile and often focused on its middle-class nature, either so as to illustrate its marginal relevance to

the working class in particular and thus to socialism in general, or, more aggressively, to cast it in the role of a positive distraction from the fundamental battles still to be fought between capital and labour. Either way, the nascent green movement was generally presented as a blip on the screen of radical politics, which would probably soon disappear and which certainly had nothing to say to the left that was worth listening to.

In the pages that follow I shall set out what I consider to be the principal socialist criticisms of green politics, and then show the ways in which socialists sensitive to the ecological position have reinterpreted their own tradition so as to accommodate it. The debate between ecologism and socialism continues to be acrimonious at times and often there is no debate at all. Jonathon Porritt and Nicholas Winner, for example, refer to David Pepper's presentation of the green movement as 'deeply conservative' and 'reactionary', and as 'just so much angry sputtering from worn-out ideologues who have long since lost touch with the real world' (1988, p. 256). Sandy Irvine and Alec Ponton pointedly characterize socialism as 'fair shares in extinction' (1988, p. 142). Elsewhere, though, and particularly in the work of Raymond Williams (n.d.), Boris Frankel (1987), James O'Connor (1996), Peter Dickens (1992) and Ted Benton (1993, 1996), great strides have been taken (on the socialist side at least) to come to terms with the green perspective without abandoning original socialist impulses. It is also true to say that the growing importance of social justice issues in environmental thought and practice – the environmental justice movement in the USA, and the so-called 'environmentalism of the poor' in both developed and developing nations (Martinez-Alier, 2002) – have brought the traditionally leftist issues of distribution and justice much closer to the centre of ecological ground than used to be the case.

The first area of contention between ecologism and socialism is over the source of the ills of contemporary society. Socialists identify capitalism as that source, while political ecologists are much more likely to refer to 'industrialism'. We know by now that one of the reasons why the green movement considers itself to be 'beyond left and right' is because it believes this traditional spectrum of opposition to be inscribed in a more fundamental context of agreement: a 'super-ideology' called 'industrialism'. Greens 'stress the similarities between capitalist and socialist countries' (Porritt and Winner, 1988, p. 256) in that they are both held to believe that the needs of their respective populations are best satisfied by maximizing economic growth. The equating of capitalism with socialism engendered by the identification of 'industrialism' is the aspect of green thinking attacked most often by its socialist critics,

and Joe Weston's 'It is time that greens accepted that it is capitalism rather than industrialism *per se* which is at the heart of the problems they address' (1986, p. 5) is a typical refrain.

Socialists make remarks like this, in the first place, not because they don't agree with ecologists that environmental decay is upon us but because they argue that it is capitalism's use of industry to produce for profit and not for need, rather than 'industry' itself, which causes the problems. 'Capitalism,' writes David Pepper, 'is about the accumulation of capital through producing commodities.' The capitalist dynamic involves periodic crises of overproduction which are resolved 'by creating new wants, and by extending the system globally to new consumers in new markets'. This dynamic of production and consumption means that '[C]apitalism *must* inherently if not constantly and explicitly, degrade and destroy that part of its means of production that comes from "nature"' (Pepper, 1993a, p. 430). This is as much as to say that capitalism is a precondition for the politics of ecology.

James O'Connor also famously argues, like Marx, that capitalism may be digging its own grave, but for reasons that have as much to do with a contradiction between the forces/relations of production and the *conditions* of production as with the time-honoured Marxist contradiction between the forces and relations of production themselves. O'Connor calls this the 'second contradiction' of capitalism, according to which 'the combined power of capitalist production relations and productive forces self-destruct by impairing or destroying rather than reproducing their own conditions' (O'Connor, 1996, p. 206). Examples of such impairment, says O'Connor, are global warming, acid rain, salinization and pesticide poisoning, all of which, he avers, threaten profit-making. This second contradiction, like the first, gives rise to opposition, not this time in the form of the labour movement, but in the form of the new social movements which harbour the potential for transcending the contradictions that give rise to them. The 'second contradiction' thesis has given rise to a great deal of comment, particularly in the journal *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* (and see Benton (1996, Part 3) for an extended discussion), and in our context it illustrates the yawning gap between greens, who argue that industrialism is the root of environmental degradation, and ecological Marxists, who affirm that capitalism is both the cause of the environmental crisis and the horizon that needs to be transcended if we are to deal with it.

Radical greens will probably accept that a fundamental break with capitalism is indeed a necessary condition for restoring environmental integrity, but they do not see it as a sufficient condition, particularly when they point to former communist countries which had some of the

worst environmental records in the entire world. Socialists respond by pointing out that none of these countries were socialist in the sense they want to ascribe to the word (Miliband, 1994), and that this is because they have developed the same ‘form of demand for material goods’ as the capitalist nations, in competition with them. In this sense, ‘capitalism permeates the whole globe’ (Weston, 1986, p. 4). As Bahro wrote:

We have precisely learned that the Russian revolution did not manage to break with the *capitalist horizon of development of productive forces*. We have seen how right round the globe it is one and the same technology that has triumphed.

(Bahro, 1982, p. 131)

In this way socialists side-step the green invitation to consider the environmental problems suffered by socialist countries and to draw the conclusion that there is little to choose between socialist and capitalist management of industry (from the environment’s point of view). They then suggest that a truly socialist society would produce for need and not for profit, and that consideration of the environment would be integral to policy formation because the ‘traditional humanist concerns of socialism’ inevitably involve consideration of human/non-human nature interaction (Pepper, 1993a, p. 438).

However, in one important respect (from a socialist point of view) the issue is not over what a socialist society might or might not do, but that the green refusal to recognize capitalism as the root of the problem renders ecology incapable of fighting its battles in the right places. If from an environmental perspective the socialist view of capitalism is correct, then ecologism’s best way forward is to confront the capitalist manifestation of industrialism rather than the many-headed hydra: industrialism itself.

Joe Weston reminds us that this would involve the restatement of traditional socialist principles and practices, on the basis that ‘what we find is that behind virtually all environmental problems, both physical and social, is poverty’ (1986, p. 4). Pepper makes a similar point: ‘[A]s the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio showed, the most fundamental issues in global environmental politics revolve around social justice, wealth distribution and ownership and control of the means of production, particularly land’ (1993a, p. 429). Many socialists will then analyse phenomena such as deforestation from just this point of view – the fundamental problem is much more one of inequitable land distribution (which produces the slash-and-burn farmers) and structural poverty (which produces periodic but highly damaging jungle gold rushes),

than it is one of an insatiable and environmentally insensitive desire to eat hamburgers. From this point of view, environmentalist (or even ecologist) strategies will be found wanting: Weston suggests that:

Saving hedgerows does not confront capitalism in the same way as do issues relating to poverty; poverty is, after all, of crucial importance to capitalism and has to be maintained in order to preserve the balance of power in market relationships.

(Weston, 1986, p. 156)

Poverty, then, is at the root of most environmental problems and a far-reaching redistribution of wealth is the solution. Crucially, an attack on poverty would constitute an attack on capitalism, and would therefore be a blow against the root cause of environmental decay.

The green question now might be: Why should a redistribution of wealth bring about improvements in the environment? Much evidently turns on just what 'environment' one is talking about, and it is a socialist strategy with respect to ecologism to accuse it of too narrow a definition of the term. It is probably true that radical redistributions of wealth would improve the sanitation, housing and food of millions of dispossessed poor both here and in the so-called Third World, and that this would constitute a significant improvement in their environment. But it is hard to see how a redistribution of wealth on its own would address green warnings about the unsustainability of present industrial practices. One can perfectly well imagine a world in which incomes between and within countries were more or less the same, but which still subscribed to the view that there were no limits to industrial growth. Indeed, this is precisely the world that the dominant themes of socialism have advertised since its inception, and it is the reason why greens are wary of attacks on capitalism that have no ecological content. In this sense, Weston talks past the green movement rather than to it when he says:

The problems with which most people are now faced are not related to 'nature' at all: they are related to poverty and the transfer of wealth and resources from the poor to an already wealthy minority of the Earth's population.

(Weston, 1986, p. 14)

My own view is that the 'justice' and 'environment' agendas are related in the way that the circles in Venn diagrams are related. That is to say, there are areas of common concern but it is a mistake to regard

them as wholly and completely mapping on to one another. The powerful 'environmental justice' movement in the United States is often deployed as evidence that the environmental and justice movements can sing from the same hymn sheet, but a close examination of the US movement's aspirations shows that it is more concerned with human justice than with environmental protection. Malcolm Dowie, for example, has written that 'The central concern of the new movement is human health' (Dowie, 1995, p. 127), and while there is obviously a link between a healthy environment and human health, concern for the latter will not cover all the objectives of political ecologists. Similarly, Laura Pulido has noted Pezzoli's important observation that 'communities engaged in what appear to be environmentally related struggles at times may not be committed to an environmental agenda' (Pulido, 1996, p. 16). This needs to be taken into account by those who argue that the environmental and justice movements are as one (the issue of the relationship between justice and the environment is addressed in detail in Dobson (1998, 1999)).

A second point of disagreement between socialists and political ecologists concerns 'the environment' itself. It transpired above that Joe Weston's argument that a redistribution of wealth would help solve environmental problems was based upon an interpretation of 'environment' not usually associated with the green movement. In his opinion, greens have policed the word into meaning 'nature': 'the prime concern of the greens is indeed ecology and "nature", which means that other, far more immediate environmental problems are neglected' (Weston, 1986, p. 2). In this context it is indulgent and irresponsible for the green movement to concentrate its 'not inconsiderable resources upon protecting hedgerows, butterflies and bunny rabbits' (*ibid.*, p. 12) while the day-to-day built environments of large numbers of people are in such urgent need of reconstruction.

Sections of the green movement appear to have taken this kind of criticism on board – witness the Friends of the Earth's 'Cities for People' campaign – but there is still a sense in which Weston's critique speaks past the movement rather than to it. Greens have a very good reason for referring so often to the biospherical environment: they are concerned for its survival as a long-term supporter of human and non-human life. From this perspective (eco)socialists are right to ask greens to reassess their understanding of 'the environment', but wrong to ask them to focus on inner city environments if the recipes for them are not placed in the context of the search for a sustainable society.

Socialists (and others) will argue, in any case, that there is no such thing as 'nature' unmediated by human beings, and therefore no great

difference between the urban environment and the environment created by farmed land or deforestation: social relations and the capitalist mode of production that underpins them 'produce' the environment. Green exhortations to 'protect' or 'conserve' the environment betray the unfounded impression that there is an 'untouched' nature alongside the areas already corrupted by human beings, and it is this untouched nature that receives the movement's greatest attention. Pepper writes that '[T]here is not a self-contained "humanity" counterpoised to and ever battling with a self-contained "non-human" world' but rather each is 'part of a unity that is composed of "contradictory" opposites' (Pepper, 1993a, p. 440), and that the ecocentric view regarding our supposed alienation from nature is internally self-contradictory, since it 'rests on a *dualistic* conception of the human–nature relationship: a conception it is supposed to reject' (ibid., p. 443).

Again, I think that this speaks past the radical green point rather than to it. Both Marxism and deep ecology are types of monism, of course, but all monists separate out parts of the common substance for different purposes. It is no contradiction to hold a monist view regarding the nature of things and to simultaneously distinguish between human and non-human nature (indeed, Pepper himself continually does so). Even Spinoza, perhaps the most thoroughgoing monist of them all, allows for two 'attributes' (thought and extension) of a single 'substance' (Spinoza, 1677/1955). Marxists will make the distinction within *their* monism in order, then, to theorize the dialectical relation between the social and 'natural' (nearly always, for socialists, in inverted commas) worlds. Deep ecologists will distinguish within *their* monism, for example, so as to talk of the ethical relationship which should hold between human and non-human nature.

Socialists, in any case, will argue that an awareness of the social construction of the environment would have three effects: first, it would lead to a healthy widening of green activity; second, it would promote an understanding of the capitalist roots of environmental decay – both in the countryside and in the cities; and third, it would improve the chances of the green movement obtaining a mass following.

This latter point needs some explanation. Joe Weston argues that the green movement as currently constituted is an expression of the ennui of a particular section of the middle classes – the professional, educated section. Green politics is 'an attempt to protect the values – rather than simply the economic privilege – of a social group which rejects the market-orientated politics of capitalism and the materialistic analysis made of it by Marxists' (Weston, 1986, p. 27). These values are reflected, partly, in the 'green' definitions of the environment most often

advanced by the movement, referred to above. To the extent that this is 'a political perspective which is specific to a particular social group' (*ibid.*, p. 28) and, moreover, a social group that is of limited size, no mass movement can be formed around it. On this reading ecologism will not progress beyond its minority, subordinate status until it speaks to the kinds of environmental problems suffered by masses of people, and 'that means developing ways to conceptualise and represent ecological issues in ways that speak to the aspirations of the working class movement' (Harvey, 1993, p. 48). This it will never do, suggests Weston, unless it breaks out of its middle-class laager and recognizes that 'rather than conserving the environment in which most people now live, the inner city and the shanty town need destroying' (Weston, 1986, pp. 14–15).

A third faultline between socialists and political ecologists may be found in disputes over the issue of 'limits to growth'. Indeed, the most instructive test to carry out on would-be green socialists is to see how far they have accepted the fundamental green position that there are material limits to productive growth. Some have done so completely, and in the process would appear significantly to have reassessed the content of their socialism. Rudolf Bahro, for example, commented when he was still a socialist that he found it 'quite atrocious that there are Marxists who contest the finite scope of the earth's exploitable crust' (1982, p. 60). We now know that Bahro's dwelling on thoughts like this led him to abandon socialism entirely. Not so Joe Weston and Raymond Williams, but they would probably nevertheless agree with the following remarks:

I do not believe that anyone can read the extensive literature on the ecology crisis without concluding that its impact will oblige us to make changes in production and consumption of a kind, and on a scale, which will entail a break with the lifestyles and expectations that have become habitual in industrialized countries.

(Ryle, 1988, p. 6)

Joe Weston certainly agrees, up to a point: 'it must be stressed that this rejection of green politics does not mean that we now believe that natural resources are infinite' (Weston, 1986, p. 4), and adds that the left can learn from the greens to call the project of 'perpetual industrial expansion' into question (*ibid.*, p. 5). Raymond Williams, too, accepts the ecological position with respect to 'the central problem of this whole mode and version of production: an effective infinity of expansion in a physically finite world' (Williams, 1986, p. 214), and suggests

that ‘the orthodox abstraction of indefinitely expanded production – its version of “growth” – has to be considered again, from the beginning’ (ibid., p. 215).

Others, though, such as David Pepper, find this sort of thing hard to swallow: Pepper is concerned ‘not to abandon humanism by over-pandering to green assumptions about the “natural” limits to the transformation of nature’ (Pepper, 1993a, p. 434). While Saral Sarkar, in his extended defence of eco-socialism, calls these ‘old illusions’ (Sarkar, 1999, p. 197), David Harvey agrees with Pepper that the idea of natural limits is too simplistic and insufficiently dialectical. He suggests that:

if we view ‘natural resources’ in the rather traditional geographical manner, as ‘cultural, technological and economic appraisals of elements residing in nature and mobilised for particular social ends’ . . . then ‘ecoscarcity’ means that we have not the will, wit or capacity to change our social goals, cultural modes, our technological mixes, or our form of economy and that we are powerless to modify ‘nature’ according to human requirements.

(Harvey, 1993, p. 39)

Harvey’s intention here is to damn political ecologists for their (imputed) belief that human beings are powerless in the face of a hostile natural world characterized by scarcity. Yet the intention is subverted upon the realization that political ecology is actually all about doing what Harvey claims political ecologists think is impossible. Political ecologists *do* think we have the ‘will, wit and capacity to change our social goals, cultural modes’ and so on. They even think that we have the power to ‘modify “nature” according to human requirements’ – the question is really over ‘How much?’, and a significant part of the answer is given, for political ecologists, by the fact that our actions take place under the sign of scarcity. This, in the end, is the ‘brute fact’ (for political ecologists) which Marxist critics seek to defuse through deployment of the sense of a *dialectical* relationship between human beings and the ‘natural’ world.

The reconsiderations of socialists like Williams seem to involve them in reconsidering socialism itself. Williams writes that ‘any socialist should recognise the certainty that many of the resources at their present levels of use are going to run out’ (Williams, n.d., p. 15), and that consequently socialists should rethink their traditional belief that the relief of poverty requires ‘production, and more production’ (ibid., p. 6). Mary Mellor turns this into an argument which could benefit socialism itself: ‘Where resources are limited, the question of who

benefits and who loses cannot be passed off as a byproduct of the “hidden hand of the market”, or some personal failure of will, risk or effort. It is clearly revealed as a question of moral and political choices, of power relations and social justice’ (Mellor, 2006, p. 37). In other words, scarcity puts social justice right at the heart of the debate. Promises of plenty, and the trickle-down of wealth from the rich to the poor, seem less persuasive in a limits to growth context. When the cake is of finite size, the question of how to divide it up fairly cannot be avoided. In this way, suggests Mellor, the green critique of ‘growthism’ and the socialist critique of social injustice come together productively. Mellor summarizes thus: ‘Resources are not infinite; the rich are raising their levels of consumption on things such as sports utility vehicles while the poor are finding it harder to meet their needs’ (Mellor, 2006, p. 45).

Of course, socialists have always argued for an equitable distribution of what is produced and in this sense Williams is consistent, but socialism has no dominant tradition of production itself being called into question, and this is what Williams is hinting at here. He appears to be rereading socialism when he refers to ‘the pressure point on the whole existing capitalist mode of production’ as ‘the problem of resources’ (n.d., p. 16). We will not find this kind of analysis of the weaknesses of capitalism in any of the dominant sources of socialist thought. To this degree, acceptance of the green position that there are limits to productive growth can have considerable repercussions with respect to the content of the socialism espoused by socialists.

One of the repercussions that stands out is a rethinking of the socialist tradition itself in the sense of emphasizing some aspects of it at the expense of others. Not surprisingly, it is decentralist, non-bureaucratic, non-productivist socialism to which writers like Williams most often refer, and the Utopian socialists and William Morris are those usually resurrected as evidence for its existence (Pepper: 1993a, pp. 431, 447, 449). Thus Rudolf Bahro suggested that ‘we shall scarcely come up against any elements that have not already emerged in the writings of one or other of the old socialists, including of course the utopians’ (Bahro, 1982, p. 126). By 1994 he was saying: ‘If pushed hard I couldn’t deny that I am a utopian socialist because so many of the elements of utopian socialism appear in my commune perspective’ (1994, p. 235). Martin Ryle echoes this sentiment: ‘utopian socialism would seem to be an obvious point of convergence between greens and socialists’ (1988, p. 21), while Robin Cook, once Foreign Secretary in one of Tony Blair’s governments, is more specific: ‘the future of socialism may lie more with William Morris than with Herbert Morrison’ (in Gould, 1988, p. 163), as is Raymond Williams: ‘The writer who began to unite

these diverse traditions, in British social thought, was William Morris' (n.d., p. 9).

From the other side, Jonathon Porritt accepts such genealogies too: 'My own personal points of familiarity and very close connection with the Left come from the early libertarian traditions, William Morris and so on, and from the anarchist tradition of left politics', and he adds a significant point: 'I think that form of decentralised socialism is something that has had a pretty rough time in socialist politics during the course of this century' (Porritt, 1984b, p. 25).

What emerges from these exchanges is evidence for the selective way in which both socialists and ecologists refer to the socialist tradition. Usually, Porritt does not make the distinctions he makes above. He is keen to dissociate ecologism from socialism because he sees the latter as part of the old order, and so usually refers to it in its bureaucratic, productivist guise. To the extent that there is a decentralist tradition within socialism this is a disingenuous move, but it would be equally disingenuous for socialists to respond to the ecologists' challenge by arguing (suddenly) that William Morris is what real socialism is all about.

Sometimes socialists bend over too far backwards in their search for compatible characters. When David Pepper refers, for example, to a 'Kropotkin-Godwin-Owen' tradition (in Weston, 1986, p. 120), one wonders whether we are talking about socialism at all any more. At the very most there is only one socialist among those three, and, although Pepper does cover himself by positing an 'anarchist rather than centralist' form of socialism (*ibid.*, p. 115), the adjective 'anarchist' has the effect of divesting socialism of much of the resonance usually attributed to it. But there is little to be gained from semantics. The important point is that claims for a convergence between socialism and ecology rest on the resurrection of a subordinate tradition within socialism. To this extent the question of whether or not socialism and political ecology are compatible cannot be answered without first asking: 'What kind of socialism?', and in the end the answer will turn on whether the Utopian/William Morris tradition argues for a sustainable society in anything resembling a modern green sense (Lee, 1989).

In conclusion, some socialists, under pressure from greens, will reassess the traditional goals of production and indiscriminate growth, they will seek to rescue subordinate strains in their political tradition and they may ponder the role of the working class in future political transformations. Greens themselves need to listen to the socialist critique and to think harder about the relationship between capitalism and environmental degradation, about just what 'the environment' is, and

about the potential for social change implicit in the identification of a social subject. In the end, Martin Ryle is probably right to identify political ecology and socialism as engaged on a 'converging critique': they both see capitalism as wasteful of resources in terms of production and consumption, and they both criticize it for its inegalitarian outcomes (1988, p. 48).

Feminism

Within feminism generally there is a discussion as to the best way for feminists to proceed: whether to seek equality with men on terms largely offered by men, or whether to focus on the differences between men and women and to seek to re-evaluate upwards the currently suppressed (supposed) characteristics of women. Beyond this distinction, some ecofeminists see ecofeminism as an opportunity to refuse the choice it implies and to opt, instead, for a refigured politics that goes beyond dualism. To the extent that ecofeminists subscribe to the 'difference' strategy, they do so not with a view to liberating women only but also with a view to encouraging men to adopt 'womanly' ways of thinking and acting, thus promoting healthier relationships between people in general, and also between people (but especially men) and the environment. In what follows, I shall take 'difference' ecofeminism to be the discussion's centre of gravity and develop the 'deconstructive' version through a critique of it.

'Difference' ecofeminism is built around three main ideas. In the first place, difference ecofeminists usually argue for the existence of values and ways of behaving that are primarily female in the sense of being more fundamentally possessed or exhibited by women rather than by men. These characteristics may be 'socially' or 'biologically' produced, and considerable importance attached to deciding which view is adopted. First, to the extent that ecofeminists would like to see men taking on these characteristics, they have to believe it is possible for them to do so. In other words, they cannot argue that it is necessary to be a woman to have such characteristics, although they might suggest that men cannot know what they are unless they listen to women telling them. Second, the belief that characteristics are biologically rooted is open to the charge of essentialism, and thereby to the accusation that such characteristics are unalterably attached to one or the other gender. If we then argue that some characteristics are undesirable, then the gender that has them is stuck with them: any possibility of 'progress' is undone. Associated with this belief is the idea that female values have, historically, been undervalued by patriarchy and that it is the

‘difference’ ecofeminist’s task to argue for their positive re-evaluation. Of course, if there are female values and ways of behaving then there are also male values and ways of behaving. In asking that female traits be re-evaluated upwards, these ecofeminists do not necessarily demand that male traits be policed out of existence – rather they are likely to seek a balance of the two.

The second principle of difference ecofeminism is that the domination of nature is related to the domination of women, and that the structures of domination and the reasons for it are similar in both cases: ‘The identity and destiny of women and nature are merged’, write Andrée Collard and Joyce Contrucci (1988, p. 137). The third idea – related to and tying up the first two – is that women are closer than men to nature and are therefore potentially in the vanguard so far as developing sustainable ways of relating to the environment is concerned – ‘[E]cofeminists argue that women have a unique standpoint from which to address the ecological crisis’ (Mellor, 1992b, p. 236). I shall expand on these three notions and show how some feminists have balked at the ecofeminist programme – and particularly the first point (in its essentialist form, at least) – because of what they believe to be its reactionary implications. In some (‘deconstructive’) hands this has led to a re(de)fining of ecofeminism; Val Plumwood, for example, argues that what is common to all ‘ecological feminisms’ is no more than a rejection of the belief in the ‘inferiority of the sphere of women and of nature’ (1993, p. 33). It is what one does next, having rejected this belief, that distinguishes ‘difference’ and ‘deconstructive’ feminism.

With respect to values and behaviour, Ynestra King writes that ‘We [i.e. women] learn early to observe, attend and nurture’ (1983, p. 12), and Stephanie Leland refers to ‘feminine impulses’ such as ‘belonging, relationship and letting be’ (1983, p. 71). These are the kinds of characteristics (sometimes referred to, as I have already remarked, as constitutive of the ‘feminine principle’) usually ascribed to women by ecofeminists, and, although Val Plumwood rightly suggests that the devaluation of male modes of thought and behaviour does not necessarily entail the affirmation of female traits, my impression is that ‘difference’ ecofeminists usually do make such affirmations.

In support of her position, Plumwood writes: ‘What seems to be involved here is often not so much an affirmation of feminine connectedness with and closeness to nature as distrust and rejection of the masculine character model of disconnectedness from and domination of the natural order’ (1988, p. 19). But this appears to be contradicted by, for example, Judith Plant’s assertion that ‘Women’s values, centred around life-giving, must be revalued, elevated from their once

subordinate role' (n.d., p. 7), and by Hazel Henderson's advocacy of reassessment:

Eco-feminism . . . values motherhood and the raising and parenting of children and the maintaining of comfortable habitats and cohesive communities as the most highly productive work of society – rather than the most de-valued, as under patriarchal values and economics where the tasks are ignored and unpaid.

(Henderson, 1983, p. 207)

It is certainly the case that male values – for example, discrimination, domination and hierarchy (Leland, 1983, pp. 68–9), and 'a disregard for the housekeeping requirements of nature' (Freer, 1983, p. 132) – are seen as positively harmful if pursued to the exclusion of other values. In this context Jean Freer scathingly characterizes the space programme as an exercise in which 'Plastic bags full of men's urine were sent to circulate endlessly in the cosmos', and then asks, 'How can they claim to be caring?' (Freer, 1983, p. 132). Ynestra King concludes:

We see the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way.

(King, 1983, p. 10)

There are several difficulties – apart from political-strategic ones – associated with the assertion of female values and the desire to upgrade them. To begin with there is the notorious problem of identifying female traits in the first place: we could only know what a representative sample of 'female' women would look like if we already had some idea of what female traits were, but then the traits would be announced a priori, as it were, rather than deduced through observation. Is it not also true to say that some men exhibit 'female' characteristics and some women 'male' characteristics, in which case such characteristics are not founded in gender as such but in, for example, socialization working on gender?

Next, there is a series of what might be considered negative traits, such as subservience, associated with women by women (including, of course, a large number of feminists). If we are to use woman as the yardstick for valued characteristics we are left with no room to judge

what we might suspect to be negative traits in what is regarded as typically female behaviour. We can regard subservience as negative only if we value its opposite positively and this will mean valuing positively a characteristic normally associated with men. In other words, how are we to decide which are positive and which are negative forms of thought or behaviour? We may not want to say that all female characteristics are positive and neither do we want to argue, it seems, that all male traits are negative. However, the generalized assertion that female traits are positive allows us no discriminatory purchase.

A related way of approaching this question may be to ask: 'Given that both male and female characteristics have been developed under patriarchy, what gives us the grounds for suggesting that either form is worthwhile?' The separatist feminist might say that what ecofeminists refer to as healthy traits are as tainted with patriarchy as unhealthy ones, and that the only way to find out what genuine female characteristics are like (if they exist at all) would be to disengage from patriarchy as far as possible, and to let such traits 'emerge'. As Mary Mellor points out: 'Feminists have long argued that until women have control over their own fertility, sexuality and economic circumstances, we will never know what women "really" want or are' (1992b, p. 237).

'Difference' ecofeminists do not usually adopt this strategy: they simply identify some traits that they argue most women already have, they value them positively, and then suggest that both we (all of us) and therefore the planet would be better-off if we adopted such traits:

Initially it seems obvious that the ecofeminist and peace argument is grounded on accepting a special feminine connectedness with nature or with peaceful characteristics, and then asserting this as a rival ideal of the human (or as part of such an ideal).

(Plumwood, 1988, p. 22)

Plumwood's refusal of the 'obvious' is what sets her and others (see e.g., King, 1989) on the road to 'deconstructive' ecofeminism. She argues against the idea of accepting the feminine and rejecting the masculine (her terms) and goes instead for rejecting them both. This is part of a sophisticated argument locating her feminist strategy within a general attack on dualistic thinking (Plumwood, 1993, 2006). She argues that:

Women have faced an unacceptable choice within patriarchy with respect to their ancient identity as nature. They either accept it (naturalism) or reject it (and endorse the dominant mastery

model). Attention to the dualistic problematic shows a way of resolving this dilemma. Women must be treated as just as fully human and as fully part of human culture as men. But both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises *human* identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature.

(Plumwood, 1993, p. 36)

In an earlier form this was presented as a ‘degendered’ model for the human being which:

presupposes that selection of characteristics is made on the basis of independent criteria of worth. Criteria selected will often be associated with one gender rather than another, and perhaps may turn out to resemble more closely the characteristic feminine rather than the characteristic masculine traits. But they’re degendered in the sense that they won’t be selected because of their connection with one gender rather than the other, but on the basis of independent considerations.

(Plumwood, 1988, p. 23)

This project would be hard to complete and its implications cannot be followed through here; among other things it would have to ask what such ‘independent considerations’ would look like and what it would mean to be ‘fully human’. Suffice to say that Plumwood’s feminism:

would represent women’s willingness to move to a further stage in their relations with nature, beyond that of powerless inclusion in nature, beyond that of reaction against their old exclusion from culture, and towards an active, deliberate and reflective positioning of themselves *with* nature against a destructive and dualising form of culture.

(Plumwood, 1993, p. 39; emphasis in original)

My principal interest in Plumwood’s position here is that it enables us to mark her off from what I understand to be a pair of basic ‘difference’ ecofeminist principles: that character traits may be identified as either male or female, and that the female traits are those that currently most obviously need to be reasserted, both for our sake and for the planet’s. Plumwood herself distances her position from this sort of ecofeminism by referring to her project as a ‘critical ecological feminism’ (see e.g. Plumwood, 1993, p. 39), or as a theory of ‘hybridity’ (Plumwood, 2006).

This renaming of positions within or around the ecofeminist project is often a sign of unhappiness with the 'difference' feminist position: Mary Mellor (for example) describes hers as a 'feminist green politics' (1992a, p. 238) rather than an ecofeminism.

It is specific to both ecofeminisms to which I refer here that their advocates see them as good not only for women but also for the non-human natural world. Ecofeminists identify a relationship between the subjection of nature by men and the subjection of women by men. The nature of this link may take two forms: weak and strong. In the weak case, patriarchy is seen as producing and reproducing its domination across a whole range of areas and anything that comes under its gaze will be subjected to it. The link between women and nature in this case is simply that they are two objects for patriarchal domination, without the subjection of one necessarily helping to produce and reproduce the subjection of the other. Thus Christine Thomas quotes Rosemary Radford Ruether: 'Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships tends to be one of domination' (Thomas, 1983, p. 162).

Judith Plant makes a similar point: 'we are helping to create an awareness of domination at all levels' (Plant, n.d., p. 4), and then continues with a thought that gives a flavour of the strong link sometimes identified between women and nature in the sense of their common subjection: 'Once we understand the historical connections between women and nature and their subsequent oppression, we cannot help but take a stand on war against nature' (ibid.). This latter comment points to connections between the exploitation of women and of nature that go beyond their merely being subject to the generalized gaze of patriarchy.

Plant is suggesting that historical study of their exploitation leads to the conclusion that patriarchy has posited a particular identity between the two that produces and reproduces their common subjection. In this sense, argue the ecofeminists, the struggle for women's liberation must be a struggle for nature as well and, likewise, the despoiling of nature should not be viewed as separate from the exploitation of women. Both have their roots in patriarchy: 'We believe that a culture against nature is a culture against women' (King, 1983, p. 11).

Thus the dualism against which theorists such as Plumwood argue is not only the dualism of men and women but also of humans and nature: 'The dominant position that is deeply entrenched in Western culture constructs a great gulf or dualism between humans on the one side and animals and nature generally on the other' (Plumwood, 2006, p. 56). Plumwood is as critical of deep ecologists who would oppose

human beings and nature as she is of essentialist ecofeminists who would oppose men and women on the basis of immutably gendered characteristics. To this degree her theory of 'hybridity' has the same function as the radical democratization of relations between human beings and nature that we saw Bruno Latour arguing for towards the end of Chapter 2. It is wrong, she says, to see concern for human beings as 'shallow' and concern for nature as 'deep' (*ibid.*, p. 62). The problem with deep ecology, she says, is not its focus on nature but 'the way it goes on to marginalize the human side, and the many hybrid forms of environmental activism that are concerned with environmental justice and with situating human life ecologically' (*ibid.*, p. 63). Likewise it would be wrong to think that all concern for non-human life is somehow 'deep': 'Some non-human concerns can be decidedly shallow,' she writes, 'for example those that automatically privilege human pets like cats and dogs over other animals' (*ibid.*). In sum, the double task of hybridity is, first, to 'ecologize' the human being (to locate human beings in their preconditional ecological context), and second, to resituate human beings in ethical terms (*ibid.*, p. 64).

Those who suggest a strong link argue that patriarchy confers similar characteristics on nature and on women and then systematically devalues them. Thus both are seen as irrational, uncertain, hard to control. Janet Biehl writes:

In Western culture, men have traditionally justified their domination of women by conceptualising them as 'closer to nature' than themselves. Women have been ideologically dehumanised and derationalised by men; called more chaotic, more mysterious in motivation, more emotional, more moist, even more polluted.

(Biehl, 1988, p. 12)

Just when this began to occur is a matter of dispute among ecofeminists. Basically, the debate is between two groups – 'those who locate the problem for both women and nature in their place as part of a set of dualisms which have their origin in classical philosophy and which can be traced through a complex history to the present' and those who would rather refer to 'the rise of mechanistic science during the Enlightenment and pre-Enlightenment period' (Plumwood, 1986, p. 121). Indeed, because the first group finds no necessary relationship between the subjection of women and that of nature it is perhaps wrong to refer to them as ecofeminists.

We have already identified the ambiguous relationship that the green movement as a whole has with Enlightenment traditions, and it is

entirely consistent that some ecofeminists should see a link between the Baconian impulse to dominate nature and the subjection of women – especially once similar characteristics have been conferred on both. The modern scientific project, which has its roots in Francis Bacon, is held to be a universalizing project of reduction, fragmentation and violent control. ‘Difference’ ecofeminists will counter this project with the feminine principles of diversity, holism, interconnectedness and non-violence. ‘Deconstructive’ ecofeminists will argue that the Enlightenment further rigidified a set of dualisms that were in place long before the Enlightenment period began, and which need to be transcended rather than re-evaluated. The problem with the ‘difference’ position in this context is that its adherents tend to paint too rosy a picture of the pre-Enlightenment period. Organicism may have given way to mechanicism, but the organicists still found reason to persecute witches. It seems that what can be said is that the mechanistic view of nature reinforced the subjection of women, but that this subjection has its roots somewhere else.

Indeed, as Janet Biehl has counterfactually suggested: ‘Societies have existed that . . . could revere nature (such as ancient Egypt) and yet this “reverence” did not inhibit the development of full-blown patricentric hierarchy’ (1988, p. 13). To this extent men do not need an array of thoughts justifying the subjection of nature in order to dominate women, although it seems likely that such thoughts have been used since the seventeenth century to reinforce that domination. In this way, ecofeminists who link the subjection of women and of nature cannot provide fundamental reasons for the fact of the domination of women by men, but they can point to the way in which, now, women and nature are held to possess similar characteristics and that these characteristics ‘just happen’ to be undervalued.

In linking the subjection of women and nature (Merchant, 1990), ecofeminists point out that the intellectual structures justifying both are the same. ‘Difference’ ecofeminists go on to suggest that preventing further destruction of the environment will involve being more ‘in tune’ with the non-human natural world, that women are habitually closer to nature than men, and that therefore women are best placed to provide role models for environmentally sensitive behaviour.

For some ecofeminists, the basis of this closeness to nature is biology: ‘Because of the reproductive cycle it is much harder for women to escape a sense of connection with the natural world’, says Elizabeth Dodson Gray (in Plumwood, 1986, p. 125), and Hazel Henderson remarks that ‘Biologically, most women in the world do still vividly experience their embeddedness in Nature, and can harbour few illusions

concerning their freedom and separatedness from the cycles of birth and death' (1983, p. 207). Maori women bury their afterbirth in the earth as a symbolic representation of the connectedness of women as life-givers, and the Earth as the source and fount of all life. Others, sympathetic to the link between ecology and feminism but not wishing to swallow biological essentialism, will suggest that women's lived experiences give them a head start so far as acquiring an ecological sensibility is concerned:

so far as political action is concerned, it does not matter whether sexed differences are ontological fact or historical accident. The case for women as historical actors in a time of environmental crisis rests not on universal essences but on how the majority of women actually work and think now.

(Salleh, 1997, p. 6)

Mary Mellor refers to this as 'materialist ecofeminism', the importance of which is that 'it does not rest on psychological or biologically essentialist explanations' (Mellor, 1997, p. 169). Instead, 'Women's identification with the "natural" is not evidence of some timeless unchanging essence, but of the material exploitation of women's work, often without reward' (ibid., p. 189). According to Mellor's version of materialist ecofeminism, women have a special relationship with what she calls 'biological' and 'ecological' time. She defines these as follows: 'Ecological time is the pace of ecological sustainability for non-human nature. Biological time represents the life-cycle and pace of bodily replenishment for human beings' (ibid.). In the biological realm, women undertake usually unacknowledged work related to the reproduction of human life, and in the ecological realm – and particularly in subsistence societies – they are often responsible for nurturing life from the land and for ensuring its sustainability.

For these two *material* reasons, women have a unique standpoint so far as the non-human natural world is concerned, and are exploited in quite specific ways. In particular, women's 'embodiedness and embeddedness' is both the source of a new kind of politics – one which recognizes the unavoidability and crucial nature of being 'encumbered' – and the origins of men's domination over them. As Mellor puts it, women's work in the reproductive and ecologically productive spheres has left 'social space and time largely in the hands of men' (1997, p. 189). They have used this to quite particular effect, to develop a politics and a practice of 'autonomy' which is possible only so long as someone else is doing the 'heteronomous' work involved in reproducing life itself:

The hallmark of modern capitalist patriarchy is its 'autonomy' in biological and ecological terms . . . Western 'man' is young, fit, ambitious, mobile and unencumbered by obligations. This is not the world that most women know. Their world is circumscribed by obligated labour performed on the basis of duty, love, violence or fear of loss of economic support.

(Mellor, 1997, p. 189)

This evidently bears upon the green movement's general aspiration to have us living more lightly on the Earth. As we saw in Chapter 2, deep ecologists argue for a change of consciousness with respect to our dealings with the non-human natural world. Warwick Fox wants a shift in priorities such that those who interfere with the environment should have to justify doing so, rather than having the onus of justification rest on the environment's defenders. A precondition for this, he argues, is an awareness of the 'soft' boundaries between ourselves and the non-human natural world. I pointed out at the time that in this connection deep ecologists are presented with a formidable problem of persuasion – most people simply do not think like that, and it is hard to see how they ever will.

Some ecofeminists, though, suggest that there are already millions of people thinking like that, or at least potentially on the brink of doing so – women themselves. On this reading, women's closeness to nature puts them in the green political vanguard, in touch with a world that Judith Plant describes and that many members of the green movement would like to see resurrected – a world in which 'rituals were carried out by miners: offerings to the gods of the soil and the subterranean world, ceremonial sacrifices, sexual abstinence and fasting were conducted and observed before violating what was considered to be the sacred earth' (n.d., p. 3).

One problem ecofeminism needs to confront in the context of the wider aims of the green movement is the reconciliation of the demand for positive evaluation of the activity of childbirth and the need to reduce population levels. Of course, there is no need for such an evaluation to imply a large number of actual births, but a culture that held childbirth in high esteem may find it hard to legitimize population control policies. But again, in the properly functioning sustainable society, people would learn to reach and maintain sustainable reproductive rates, much as members of a number of communities (particularly in Africa and Latin America) already do.

'Difference' ecofeminism, in particular, has not been without its critics and Janet Biehl, for one, believes that the linking of women with

nature and the subsequent subordination of both is precisely the reason why it is dangerous to try to use the link for emancipatory purposes:

[W]hen ecofeminists root women's personality traits in reproductive and sexual biology, they tend to give acceptance to those malecreated images that define women as primarily biological beings . . . [this] is to deliver women over to the male stereotypes that root women's character structure entirely in their biological being.

(Biehl, 1993, p. 55)

Plumwood, too, makes it absolutely clear why this sort of ecofeminism is seen in some quarters of the feminist movement as reactionary: 'The concept of nature . . . has been and remains a major tool in the armoury of conservatives intent on keeping women in their place', and:

Given this background, it is not surprising that many feminists regard with some suspicion a recent view, expressed by a growing number of writers in the ecofeminist camp, that there may be something to be said in favour of feminine connectedness with nature.

(Plumwood, 1988, p. 16; see also 1993, p. 20)

In similar vein, Mary Mellor makes the useful distinction between feminism and feminine values: 'Even where male green thinkers claim that a commitment to feminism is at the centre of their politics, this often slides into a discussion of *feminine values*' (Mellor, 1992b, p. 245; emphasis in original), and while it ought to be pointed out that the evidence in this chapter suggests that there are plenty of female writers who do the same thing, Mellor's general point is well taken: '[T]o espouse a feminine principle without addressing the power relations between men and women is to espouse an ecofeminine rather than an ecofeminist position' (*ibid.*, p. 246).

Janet Biehl's critique is principally aimed at deep ecologists who she sees as engaged on a project that will guarantee the domination of women by men, but her remarks are equally applicable to 'difference' ecofeminism. Women should not be asked, she writes, to 'think like a mountain' – in the context of women's struggle for selfhood, autonomy and acceptance as rational beings, this amounts to 'a blatant slap in the face' (Biehl, 1988, p. 14). She parodies deep ecologists (and 'difference' ecofeminists) who claim that 'male' values and characteristics are worthless: 'Never mind becoming rational; never mind the self; look

where it got men, after all; women were better-off than men all along without that tiresome individuality' (Biehl, 1988, p. 13).

The deep-ecological attempt to encourage us to virtues of modesty, passivity and humility with respect to the natural world (and to other human beings), it is argued, can only backfire in the context of women's liberation. From this point of view, the women's movement has precisely been about undoing modesty and humility (and refusing to bear a child every ten or twelve months) because these characteristics have worked in favour of patriarchy. In the context of patriarchy (i.e. now), women cannot afford to follow the deep-ecological programme, and to the degree that ecofeminism subscribes to deep-ecological parameters it does women no favours either: 'it is precisely humility, with its passive and receptive obedience to men, that women are trying to escape today' (Biehl, 1988, p. 14).

These worries seem well founded, in that at one level ecofeminism amounts to asking people in general to adopt 'female' ways of relating to the world in the knowledge that women are more likely to do so than men. If this happens, and if such ways of relating to the world and their devaluation are indeed part of the reason for women's subordination to men, then women's position can only get worse. 'Difference' ecofeminism therefore proposes a dangerous strategy (a strategy Plumwood calls 'uncritical reversal' (1993, p. 31)) – to use ideas that have already been turned against women in the belief that, if they are taken up and lived by everyone, a general improvement in both the human and non-human condition will result. If they are not taken up, then women will have 'sacrificed themselves to the environment', and this is a price some feminists are clearly not prepared to pay: '[In] the absence of a feminist perspective . . . there is a danger that green politics will not even produce a de-gendered proclamation of the "feminine principle" but an overt or covert celebration of the masculine' (Mellor, 1992b, p. 249).

'Deconstructive' ecofeminism, on the other hand, is left with problems of its own. The refusal to choose between the masculine and the feminine has the happy consequence of avoiding the pitfalls associated with basing a transformative politics on the latter, but it leaves the future (arguably) too open-ended. In place of either a masculine or a feminine rationality, Plumwood argues for an ecological rationality that 'recognises and accommodates the denied relationships of dependency and enables us to acknowledge our debt to the sustaining others of the earth' (Plumwood, 1993, p. 196). But what does this mean, and how will it be brought about? Until further work is done, the space beyond dualism is occupied by a fog of indeterminacy – liberating and simultaneously frustrating for its lack of signposts.

Conclusion

I said at the beginning of this chapter that the evidence produced in it should deepen our understanding of the distinctiveness of ecologism as a political ideology. I think it has. Ecologism cannot be ‘reduced’ to any of the ideologies discussed here, with the faintly possible exception of feminism, and none of these ideologies may be said successfully to have appropriated ecologism for itself. Unlike any other ideology, ecologism is concerned in a foundational way with the relationship between human beings and their natural environment. More specifically, the two principal and distinguishing themes of ecologism, its belief in the limits to material growth and its opposition to anthropocentrism, are nowhere to be found in liberalism, conservatism and socialism – and they are nuanced in ecofeminism, where anthropocentrism is replaced by androcentrism, for example. Our conclusion must be that ecologism is an ideology in its own right, partly because it offers a coherent (if not unassailable) critique of contemporary society and a prescription for improvement, and partly because this critique and prescription differ fundamentally from those offered by other modern political ideologies.