

Chapter Five Ecology and Political Theory

Chapter 6 is concerned with explanatory social theory; this one is about the encounter of ecology with normative political theory. Radical greens claim that ecology constitutes a new perspective in political theory which leaves behind the older longstanding traditions. They argue that there is a green view of society and politics and that specific social and political arrangements can be argued for on green grounds. Just as there are conservative, liberal and socialist political theories and forms of social and political organization, so there is a green political theory and green forms of social and political organization.

The main issue in the encounter of ecology with political theory is whether ecology does undermine traditional political theories and constitutes a new theory itself. In the light of the rise of ecology are traditional political theories put into question or how should they be altered? Does ecology constitute a new paradigm through which environmental, social and political issues can be answered on green grounds? These are important questions because they determine which theoretical perspectives can help with fundamental environmental, social and political concerns. There are two issues: (1) the implications of ecology for traditional political theory and (2) the possibility of a green political theory.

1 Ecology as revolutionary for political theory. Ecologists do bring new insights to political theory. They bring in nature in two mould-breaking ways. First, they show that there are natural limits to social and political life. The latter has to be evaluated in terms of natural limits and not just on social desirability. Second, they argue that there is an intrinsic value in non-humans, who should be considered in moral evaluations. These points require political theory to include natural limits and non-humans. They are revolutionary for political theory in the same way that the feminist insistence on including the personal in political thinking is, because they imply the need for bringing in previously excluded issues of concern.

2 A green political theory? There are two main problems with the case that ecologists make for green political theory. First, it is true that some sorts of social and political arrangements are more conducive to ecological ends than others and so could be seen as green. However, these are fewer in number than many greens argue. Greens put down too broad a range of values as being green. Many of the values they propose - equality and diversity, for example - are not definitively green. Ecological stipulations do not necessarily imply egalitarian or pluralist arrangements. Some - decentralism and

non-interference, for instance - are problematic on green grounds. Second, there are a wide range of problems -for example on justice, equality and liberty - which environmental criteria are not equipped to solve. On such issues older political theories are more helpful.

In short, ecology does bring mould-breaking insights to political theory. But the capacity for ecology to support a political theory can be exaggerated. With radical greens I agree that ecology is revolutionary for political theory. Against them I do not think traditional political theory is redundant or that ecology can support a new political theory. Against sceptics, however, I think that some principles and social and political arrangements (e.g. centralized co-ordination and selective growth) are more adequate on green grounds than others and that ecology can, therefore, support a limited range of political theory principles. Let me explain some of these points, looking at ecology in relation to traditions in political theory such as conservatism, liberalism, authoritarianism and fascism, socialism and feminism.

Conservatism

Conservatism is a political philosophy which is averse to progressive change, oriented to the preservation of institutions and values and committed to tradition and authority. It is concerned with conservation of the best of the past and of hierarchy and the status quo. It should not be confused with the politics of, say, the British Conservative Party which, as well as containing conservative strands, also contains strong elements of radical *laissez-faire* liberal politics. It should also not be equated with the right in general. While in the West conservatives are often right wing, conservatism in the former Soviet Union, for example, is a label attached to Communists, with right-wing free marketeers who espouse liberal economics seen as the radical progressives.

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. This gives ecology a distinctively conservative edge, emphasizing conservation and adaptation to the existing order rather than intervention and change. Many greens hark back to the golden days of a pre-industrial past and use organic metaphors in ways also typical of conservative thought.

Naess (1989:ch. 1), for instance, argues that our ignorance about the long-term consequences of our actions for the ecosystem means that the burden of proof should rest with interventionists rather than ecologists. In the absence of convincing evidence that our encroachments on the

environment are not likely to be detrimental we should opt for a conservative stance of non-interference, accommodation and restraint. Naess echoes the holist and non-interventionist sentiments and conclusions of others like Lovelock (1979) when he argues that the awesome complexity and ability of nature to achieve balance and optimal conditions for sustaining life are sufficiently beyond our comprehension - yet to our benefit - that we are better advised to adapt to it rather than disturb it.

However, there is much in green thought which is distinctly radical and non-conservative (see Eckersley 1992:21-2 and Wells 1978). Many greens call for quite radical changes in economic priorities, political structures, social lifestyles and cultural value systems. There are also strong elements of democracy and egalitarianism in radical green thinking which are at odds with conservative emphases on authority and hierarchy. In addition, ecology brings new insights with its emphasis on natural limits and the moral standing of nonhumans. Ecology does have strong conservative elements. But there are ways in which ecology is opposed to many traditional conservative tenets and brings new issues and concerns to political theory that are not accounted for in conservatism.

Liberalism

Liberalism is a political philosophy committed to the rights and liberty of the individual. It contrasts with socialism or conservatism which are seen by liberals as being too tied to ideas about the obligations of individuals to the collective and the state rather than their freedom from such institutions. As with conservatism, it should not be equated with the politics of Liberal parties which, while often embedded in the liberal tradition, are also wedded to interventionist social democratic values which go against the liberal grain.

The inclusion of nature in the ethical community can be seen as an extension of liberalism in an ecological direction because it speaks in a typically liberal language of rights and obligations. What greens can say is that they are taking the liberal language of rights to its logical conclusions (see Callicott 1980 and Nash 1985 and 1989). Rights have been extended from propertied men to slaves, the propertyless and women and through the legal, political and social spheres of society. It is the next logical step for them to be extended to future as well as present generations and to animals and other living and non-living organisms (animals, plants and maybe even rocks, stones and sand). Humans, by virtue of our relationship to nature in a wider community, have ethical obligations to it. Ecologists discuss their concerns with concepts and preoccupations of longstanding concern from liberal political theory. Influential classic liberals have, in fact, explicitly preached environmentalist virtues. John Stuart Mill (1979) was an early advocate of

the stationary state economy and Jeremy Bentham (1960) of the extension of rights to animals as sentient beings.

However, 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. Liberal political economy is seen to underpin the commitment to economic expansion and accumulation and to the identification of wealth and material advancement with progress and improvement. Furthermore, the commitment to institutions of liberal democracy does not seem to fit well with strands in radical ecology which stress either decentralized participatory democracy or centralized authoritarian survivalism.

So while ecology could be seen as an extension of liberalism, there are other senses in which the two are contrary to one another. There are elements of liberalism in ecological political theory but ecology goes against liberalism as well as drawing on it. In this case ecology challenges traditional political theory. But, by drawing on it, it does not undermine it and shows that green political theory does not stand alone as a new political theory which breaks with the old traditions to support itself on environmental arguments alone.

Authoritarianism and fascism

Ecology is often seen as conflicting with liberalism where it requires coercive solutions to environmental problems. It not only goes against liberalism in attributing environmental problems to market freedom, and the pursuit of private gain but also in suggesting that liberal principles may need to be overridden to prevent environmental degradation and the loss of human freedoms in the future as a result of worsening natural necessities. Ecology is seen by many critics as an illiberal political theory which draws on authoritarian and even fascist doctrines.

Critics suggest that green demands require excessive restrictions on human freedom. Sustainability, according to greens, requires governments to impose stiff restrictions on levels of consumption, family size and individuals' freedom to pursue their preferred lifestyle. These sorts of restrictions strike at the heart of liberal concerns. They suggest centrally imposed, co-ordinated rationing and intrusions into the most private aspects of our lives.

Writers like Heilbroner (1974), Ophuls (1977) and Hardin (1977) who propose centralized or coercive solutions fear genuinely for human survival. Fired by notions such as the Club of Rome's 'exponential growth' they feel a need for urgently effective solutions. Given conditions in which individuals are

motivated by self-interest and the maximization of private gain, strong centralized state action is needed to enforce behaviour necessary for common survival. Individuals are too self-interested to pursue this by themselves. Even if human nature is transformable, the requirement for immediate action does not allow us to wait. Radical action is needed in the meantime and, in the absence of individuals' willingness to take it, has to be enacted by the state. A more liberal scenario would be preferable but pressing necessities require immediate state action to ensure survival and protect human freedom from worse future impositions on it due to disintegrating ecological necessities.

Some of the 'coercive' perspectives touch on arguments to do with population control and deal with distributions between developed and less developed countries and issues to do with immigration and race. It is in areas like this that coercive solutions are sometimes seen to be also fascist. Let me illustrate arguments put forward by some allegedly authoritarian or fascist environmentalists by looking at the proposals of ecologists like Hardin and others.

Hardin expresses many of the themes to do with private self-interest and commonly agreed coercion now to avoid worse ecological impositions in the future. He looks at population control and distributions between developed and less developed countries. His allegory on the 'tragedy of the commons' is a classic in the ecological literature (Hardin 1977).

Hardin argues that the 'tragedy of the commons' happens when herdsmen (sic) using common pasture decide individually to add animals to their herds to maximize their own gain. Each herdsman calculates that he will reap the full gains from grazing an extra animal because it will all be his but will be able to spread the consequences of the overgrazing caused by this because it affects property which is communal. On balance it is worth it for the individual. The tragedy is when all the herdsmen start to do the same thing and get locked into a spiral where each looks to their own individual interest and disregards the interests of society. The commons are, of course, subject to natural limits which do not allow them to carry the escalating level of use and they become overgrazed and eventually ruined because of the free pursuit of self-interest on common property. 'Freedom in a commons', Hardin argues, 'brings ruin to all' (1977:20) and this, of course, is an analogy for the planet-wide situation. This is where the population question comes in because Hardin argues that the commons are safe while the population of herdsmen and cattle are kept down by war, disease and so on. But it is when population growth begins to exceed the carrying capacity of the land that the problems start.

Hardin's metaphor could be used to come to different political conclusions and is very relevant to whether liberal or socialist perspectives are more adequate to a green perspective in political theory. From the left it could be a condemnation of private ownership, market freedom and self-interested economic rationality. If the herd as well as the land was owned commonly then the communal impact of overgrazing would receive greater attention. From the right it could be an argument for private ownership of the land as well the cattle so that private decisions would have a private rather than a common impact and people would be personally liable for their decisions. This would inhibit them from pursuing environmentally damaging practices if they were to bear the full brunt of its effects and would provide a self-interest motivation for protecting the environment.

Hardin himself advocates various solutions - private property and pollution and population controls - which involve impinging on peoples' freedoms. Mutual coercion, mutually imposed, is how he envisages it. But Hardin argues that these restrictions prevent us from imposing common ruin on ourselves and safeguard our future freedom to pursue our goals. Furthermore, coercion rather than exhortation is necessary because appeals to act conscientiously do not recognize the self-interest maximizing orientation of individuals at their ability to remain stubbornly unshaken by common interests in context where greatest value is placed on liberal individual freedoms.

Hardin's argument is powerfully evocative and many greens are convinced of the need for some measure of coercion, if only to a degree comparable to the coercions in law we already accept and in pursuit of longer-term freedoms. This is not least the case on the question of population control that most concerns Hardin. Irvine and Ponton (1988:18-23), for example, argue that:

Nature would eventually solve the problem of human numbers but in ways unacceptable to civilised thinking. The only alternative, therefore, is human self-restraint ... Freedom is divisible ... If we want to keep the rest of our freedoms, we must restrict the freedom to breed ... There could be payments for periods of non-pregnancy and non-birth ... tax benefits for families with fewer than two children; sterilisation bonuses; withdrawal of maternity and similar benefits after a second child; larger pensions for people with fewer than two children; free, easily available family planning; more funds for research into means of contraception, especially for men; an end to infertility research and treatment; a more realistic approach to abortion; the banning of surrogate motherhood and similar

practices ... In terms of foreign aid, the cruel truth is that help given to regimes actually opposed to population policies is counter-productive and should cease. They are the true enemies of life and do not merit support. So too are those religions which do not actively support birth control.

Proposals such as those for the ending of fertility research and surrogate motherhood raise an issue central to many environmental proposals but often overlooked: equality (for exceptions see J. Young (1989) and Jacobs (1991)). These proposals place the burden of population control disproportionately on one group: infertile women. Apart from this fact and the stridency of the final remarks quoted, though, what is most shocking and unsettling for many of us about what Irvine and Ponton advocate is in a cruel illiberal irony. This is that to rescue one thing we categorize as 'nature' - the external environment - they propose manipulation of another activity we feel should be immune to interference because it is regarded as natural and private - having children.

In another controversial allegory in which he proposes this time the 'lifeboat ethic', Hardin shows how environmentalism can be turned into authoritarian or fascist proposals. He conjures up a lifeboat carrying ten people on a sea full of others drowning. The boat only has supplies for the ten. Hardin argues that to let any extra people on board would lead to starvation and the death of them all because of insufficient supplies to go round. This is easily translated into arguments against food aid to the third world on the grounds that the earth cannot supply enough for everyone and that third world peoples will have to go without, not least because they are the ones supposedly responsible for 'overbreeding'. This is echoed in the quote from Irvine and Ponton above but is fiercely attacked by environmentalists like Trainer (1985) and Caldwell (1977). They argue that both environmental and third world problems have more to do with first world over-consumption than third world over-population. Either way it shows that environmentalist concerns with issues such as population growth and scarcity are easy prey for translation into the reinforcement of stereotypes and discrimination on the grounds of race (Pepper 1984: 204-14).

Critiques of aid link in with solutions to population control proposed by some greens which draw on Gala-influenced ecological ideas about the self-balancing capacity of the earth to stabilize and provide the optimal conditions for life. Aid, it is argued, removes natural checks on population growth by improving health and mortality and fertility rates. A report by the Environmental Fund (which includes environmentalists like Paul Ehrlich and Garrett Hardin) argues that: 'Improving the nutrition of poor women increases their fertility ... simply sending food assistance to hungry nations, or even

helping them grow more food isn't enough. It simply makes the problem worse' (Environmental Fund 1977, quoted in Pepper 1984:210). Similar Malthusian reasoning is expressed in the journal of the green group Earth First!: 'If radical environmentalists were to invent a disease to bring human population back to sanity, it would probably be something like AIDS ... the possible benefits of this to the environment are staggering' (quoted in Dobson 1990:64).

Hardin's views go on to advocacy of triage (criteria for selecting which third world countries should be eligible for aid and which not) and eugenics (improvement of the human species by encouraging breeding among its more intelligent members and sterilization of the unintelligent and irresponsible (Pepper 1984:211-12)). Such discussions are based on Hardin's arguments about ecological scarcity and over-population and it can be seen here how ecological thinking can have clear commonalities with fascist political theory.

Other supposedly quite moderate liberal greens propose tight immigration restrictions to protect communities from population growth (Porritt 1986:191; Goldsmith 1988:203). This is a recipe for parochial self-protection, implying that communities should separate themselves off to look after their own interests and leave others to it. It would be made worse in the autarkic self-sufficient communities advocated by many greens. Furthermore, it does not tackle the problem which is to do with overall population levels rather than their distribution between territories. Immigration controls do not solve the over-population problem but merely displace it onto someone else. They do not relate to over-population but provide a breeding ground for xenophobia and racism.

The emphasis of many greens on self-restraint, self-policing and re-education through the state or decentralized community, and the ultimate fallback of coercion and law should moral pressure fail, all smack of the totalitarian (see Goldsmith et al. 1972:14). And there is in some ecological writing a 'romantic quasi-mystical sentimentality' (Pepper 1984:207) and a metaphysical spiritual power given to the wilderness and 'Mother Earth' (see Lovelock 1979). This is reminiscent of non-rational semi-religious notions of race and destiny in Nazi philosophy. Like fascists, many greens are preoccupied with organic and holistic notions, naturalness and the natural rightness of hierarchy and the survival of the fittest (Pepper 1984:206).

All of this is of concern to critics of fascism and authoritarianism. In considerations of population, immigration and the third world and in the concepts and rhetoric of some green thinking there are racist and fascist potentialities. In proposals for restrictions on population, consumption and lifestyle a significant loss of human freedom seems to be implied.

Ophuls (1973, 1977) is a survivalist advocate of coercive solutions who tries to deal with liberal criticisms of such a position. He argues that some rights would have to be given up in a sustainable society, especially rights to use private property as capital. But he suggests that restrictions on such economic rights do not imply restrictions on political rights or liberal constitutionalism. Restraints on consumption and lifestyle can be self-imposed. In fact, it is the absence of greater ecological consciousness and lifestyles rather than its imposition which is likely to lead to tyranny. Escalating resource depletion, population growth and pollution will, in line with the expectations of the limits to growth thesis, necessitate eventual recourse to even greater totalitarian and authoritarian measures by political authorities if these problems are left untouched by early action and are allowed to reach crisis point. Alternatively, nature will exert its own tyranny when extreme lack of resources and pollution place restrictions on human lifestyles. The choice is not between restrictions on one hand or freedom on the other. It is between freedom of lifestyle now or freedom from external necessity in the future and between restrictions imposed by political choice in the present or involuntarily later. Ophuls also argues that the decentralized self-reliant local communities envisaged by greens would involve less centralized power and intervention rather than more. Furthermore, greens tend to favour a freedom of local communities to adopt whatever social and political systems they prefer, with a resulting free diversity of forms rather than their imposition from above.

Some of Ophuls's arguments are powerful, particularly that failure voluntarily to change our own behaviour now stores up the possibility of greater authoritarian action in the future. But his hopes for self-imposed changes are optimistic and understate the degree of centrally imposed restrictions that are necessary. Furthermore, small-scale autarkic local communities can be authoritarian in the degree of close community control they are able to impose, whether through coercion or simply the pressure of social norms. Larger, less easily monitored and controlled communities can be less effective in this respect. And a liberal tolerance of diverse forms of political organization in different communities may be illiberal because of the authoritarian regimes it could allow to exist.

So the strength of Ophuls's arguments is mixed. But the key point is that centrally imposed curtailments on peoples' freedoms now are likely to be less authoritarian than those that would be required at a later stage and so can obviate more authoritarian solutions in the future. Impositions on our freedom to pursue the lifestyle of our choice now will be nothing compared to threats to our ways of living, health and even survival if we do not make them. Greens can argue that restrictions on our freedom to pursue whatever lifestyle we choose are inevitable and that if we do not impose them politically ourselves they will be imposed in a more ferocious manner by nature. Libertarians are sensitive to the oppression of the state but at the

expense of a sensitivity to possible threats to freedom from non-state sources (such as economic power or ecological necessity) and to the capacity of state to be a friend as well as sometimes an enemy of freedom (in this case intervening to pre-empt environmental crises). They are also reluctant to consider that restrictions cannot only be mutually imposed but also mutually agreed through normal channels of democratic accountability. State action can be combined with liberal and democratic institutions.

So environmentalist concern can involve appeals to authoritarian or fascist ideas. On authoritarianism, however, many environmentalist proposals do not involve a qualitative shift from democratically agreed coercions we already agree to accept mutually in liberal societies. Furthermore, coercive action now is intended to pre-empt greater restrictions on freedom in the future whether imposed by political authority or natural necessity. Mutual impositions can also be subject to mutual agreement through normal channels of democratic accountability and liberal restraints. On fascism, environmentalist ideas can be compared in some cases to elements in fascist ideology. However, fascism is possible in, rather than necessary to, environmentalism. Many values in environmentalist thinking - the valuing of diversity and equality of species, for example - also go against the sort of totalitarian and racist aspirations of fascist ideology.

Marxism and socialism

Many ecologists argue that ecology is neither right nor left. Capitalism and socialism are seen as equally unecological because both accept the logic of industrial growth. Green thinking rejects that logic and goes beyond both. Porritt and Winner (1988:256), for instance, say, that there is a 'super-ideology' which unites capitalism and socialism in a common pursuit of economic and industrial growth (see also Porritt 1986:44). Socialists as much as capitalists, it is argued, are committed to growth and the development of productive forces. Ecological problems in Eastern bloc state socialism have been worse than in Western capitalism, Chernobyl being the most prominent instance. Western parliamentary socialism on the other hand has envisaged growth as creating the wealth needed to finance the relief of poverty, egalitarian distribution and the welfare state.

However, there are questions on which ecology does not break so decisively with socialism. Socialists have been keen to reinvigorate their own embattled ideology by aligning it with ecology whose fortunes are seen to be more on the rise than on the wane. But the reason for seeing some common ground between ecology and socialism cannot be reduced just to socialist expediency.

Socialist writers have attempted to explore the relationship between socialism and ecology with varying degrees of receptivity or hostility to green thinking. I will look in this section at the relation of ecology to Marxist and socialist perspectives in political theory. Does ecology challenge such perspectives or require them to be adapted? How much can it draw on them to further its own analysis? Does it completely undermine them and establish itself as a new and distinctive doctrine which can break with traditional political perspectives?

I will look first at positive things which could be said about Marxism and socialism in relation to ecology before turning, in a fourth section, to a more critical assessment of their adequacy on environmental grounds. There are three main ways in which Marxism and socialism could be looked at positively in relation to ecological thought. (1) Marx had interesting things to say about the relations between humans and nature which could be useful to a green political theory. (2) Socialist political economy is a useful contributor to the analysis of capitalist and market structures that contribute to environmental problems and of institutions of socialist economic organization that could facilitate their resolution. (3) There is a decentralized communitarian tradition in non-Marxist socialist thought which is comparable to some strands in radical ecological thinking.

1 Marx on humans and human nature A number of writers suggest that there are elements in the social theory of the early Marx which contribute to green political theory and an environmental theorization of the relations between society and nature. On this account, far from being undermined or surpassed by green political theory Marxism is a key contributor to it.

Dickens (1992) and Lee (1980) argue that Marx has (1) a dialectical understanding of the relations between society and nature; (2) a notion of human realization which stresses relations with nature; and (3) an analysis of capitalism which criticizes peoples' alienation from nature. All this points to the beginnings of an ecological perspective in Marx which can be used in green political theory.

Marx argues in his early writings that peoples' being is not simply psychologically internal but is constituted in their relationships with the wider social and natural world. People work on and transform their environments and the environment they are in affects what they become. More practically, people depend on nature for their material existence. Nature is 'man's inorganic body'. Marx felt that the powers and needs of humans, for intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic fulfillment, perception, interpretation, exploration and appropriation, are realized through interaction with their environment, social and natural. Without such interaction these powers are left unrealized or distorted. This is a dialectical conception which goes beyond

un-ecological frameworks in which humans and nature are divorced or opposites. Marx argues that among the forms of alienation suffered by people under capitalism one involves alienation from nature. Under capitalism nature is transformed into something 'other' to be exploited and valued for its utility and exchange value or as a property, possession or commodity. Overcoming alienation involves restoring our relationship to nature and rediscovering it as something of value in itself.

All this sounds promising for ecological analysis. It gives a useful picture of peoples' interconnections with nature and an antidote to the idea that we can alter and transform it without this having implications for us. In the picture of human realization through interaction with nature there is a reason for humans to look after and protect the natural world. These observations suggest that, far from being made redundant by ecological political theory or transcended by it, Marx ism may provide a basis for a more ecological social and political theory.

2 Socialist political economy. Socialist political economy suggests that environmental problems under capitalism are caused by its competitive and expansionary dynamic. Market rationality, the imperative to accumulate and the unbridled pursuit of profit produce externalities such as depletion and pollution. These do not matter in capitalist calculations which are focused on what comes up on the balance sheet. In the effort to compete and accumulate, natural resource, are over-exploited and polluting side-effects created. Market rationality is driven by short-term interests in profit which triumph over consideration of the consequences for resources or pollution in the distant future. Furthermore, environmental problems are not driven just by forces of production - industry and technology - but are also related to asymmetrical relations of production. Behind environmental problems are material interests and power relations. Capitalist owners are keen to pursue their material interests and, because they own the means of production, are dominant in power relations and able to do so. It is not just environmentally damaging technology which is at fault but also material interests in wealth accumulation and power structures deriving from ownership which allow technology to be used in pursuit of such ends.

Socialist political economy suggests the need for the dilution of the profit motive and market rationality in economic decision-making in pursuit of broader and more long-term social and environmental objectives. Such a change requires a shift in relations of production in which at present those with a material interest in accumulation have disproportionate power deriving from ownership. Long-term co-ordination in the common interest, as opposed to competitive self-interest in pursuit of private gain, would require collective ownership.

I argued in chapter 2 that states acting on behalf of the general interest through legislation and enforcement provide a more realistic prospect for environmental change than decentralization. I also argued that it is problematic to see market rationality or capitalist self-interests as coinciding with a general interest in environmental protection. Ecological imperatives imply the priority of general interests, intervention and planning over self-interests, *laissez-faire* and market capitalism. Such priorities find support in socialist political economy. My discussion in this chapter has also suggested that collective ownership of the means of production is more adequate to solving environmental problems than private capitalist ownership.

3 Decentralist socialism. Socialism has, throughout its history, been a rich and diverse tradition but one in which its decentralist and liberal variants have been squashed by reformist statism in the form of social democracy in the West and revolutionary statism in Eastern bloc Marxism-Leninism. Decentralist versions of socialism, personified by writers like William Morris, G. D. H. Cole, J. S. Mill, Proudhon, Robert Owen and the French utopian socialists, have been the subject of rescue and revival attempts in recent times by liberal and pluralist socialists. The significant point is that the autarkic, decentralized, simple, self-sufficient commune envisaged by many greens (and discussed in chapters 2 and 7) is similar to that advocated by these socialists. What is more, some of them, Morris and Mill for example, were well aware of and concerned about environmental problems and the possible consequences for the environment of unsustainable forms of growth. Mill, ahead of his time also on socialism and feminism, even wrote, as I have mentioned, on the steady-state economy.

So in Marx's theorization of nature, socialist political economy and decentralist socialism there is a grounding for ecological theory in socialist thought. There are questions of political values on which ecological imperatives do not specify an answer and this is another area in which traditional political theories like socialism remain relevant. Ecology by itself does not make a whole politics or social programme. Questions of justice and authority, for example, cannot always be answered by environmental requirements. Ecology needs political theory as well as vice versa because 'we are social/political animals as well as denizens of an organic biosphere' (Ryle 1988:20). Ecological imperatives require some forms of social and political response but cannot alone determine them across the board, and structures of a sustainable society have to be judged in terms of traditional as well as ecological perspectives. This is another respect in which socialism might be required by green political theory rather than being made redundant by it.

4 Ecological problems with socialism. Let me look now at the extent to which ecology challenges socialist theory or requires it to adapt. I have already discussed the merits and limitations of decentralization in chapter 2 and will

return to them in chapter 7. There are two further problems I will focus on here: (1) the usefulness of Marx for a theory of the environment; (2) the incorporation of natural limits and non-humans into socialist thought.

Marx's discussions of the environment are more ambivalent and complex than positive views of his ecological merits suggest. There are two problems: first, Marx's theory involves too heavy an emphasis on the human transformation of nature, and, second, it is concerned with humans at the expense of non-humans.

On the first, nature is seen as a medium for labour. Humans appropriate nature through labour and technological advancement. Through the transformation of nature human essence is realized, The relationship between humans and nature is certainly dialectical and double-sided with nature playing its part in transforming humans. But part of the dialectical process is also the humanization of nature by people. Human freedom is seen in overcoming the constraints of nature. Marx's philosophy of history and social transformation and his theory of human nature recognize a dialectical relationship between humans and nature but one in which humans realize and transform themselves and their successive historical forms of social organization in the transformation and exploitation of nature through labour and the development of productive forces.

Second, Marx's conceptualization of the human-nature relationship is based on human betterment and not the well-being of non-human entities or of nature itself. The significance of the human-nature relationship is that it is through this relationship that humans realize their essence. The theorization of nature as our inorganic body is not set up to provide a basis for care for nature but to show how transformation of it is part of the furtherance of human development. There is nothing here about the betterment or well-being of nonhuman entities. In fact animal activities are downgraded to being lowly or basic compared to human activities which are higher and more lofty and sophisticated. Common sentient being as a basis for comparing ethical treatment is not even considered.

The usefulness of Marx's dialectical conception is compromised and complicated by the view of the transformation of nature given in it and its orientation to the betterment of humans to the exclusion of concern for non-humans. The contradictions with ecological concerns complicate the usefulness of Marx's framework for a theory of environmental protection as much as they contribute to it. Given that the strength of Marx's approach is in its dialectical framework it may be better to pursue such a framework through other sources or original work on dialectics rather than in the texts of the early Marx which are too complicated and contradictory on ecological concerns.

The second area in which socialist theory could be criticized on ecological grounds is for ignoring, first, natural limits and, second, obligations to the non-human world. The first of these does not stand up. Much socialist political economy is concerned with productivity, growth and the development of productive forces and their use to escape scarcity and create wealth in order to tackle poverty. It often focuses on restructuring relations of production leaving the commitment to developing the forces of production unquestioned. However, more and more socialists now question these assumptions. Growth and technological advance are seen to be subject to natural limits and susceptible to environmental side-effects. Socialist political economy is now often centrally concerned with the environmental externalities associated with market rationality and capitalist relations of production. Proposals for alternative forms of economy are based on adaptation to physical finitude and restraint in the development of productive forces and environmental exploitation. Eco-socialists recognize that a change in ownership of the means of production alone will not resolve environmental problems as these also require changes in the productivist outlook and restrictions on expansion in the forces of production. Many, furthermore, propose widening agency from the productivist industrial working class to social movements outside the labour movement.

While socialists have shown a capacity to re-orient to concerns to do with natural limits and the problems of growth they have done so because of their anthropocentric concern for the well-being of humans. Socialists have been conscious of the implications of physical finitude and environmental externalities for humans. But they have been less concerned for non-humans and have drawn back from a genuinely environmental ethic. On 'the critique of the cornucopian and anthropocentric assumptions of modern political thought', Eckersley argues, eco-socialism 'has challenged the former but made no substantive inroads into the latter' (Eckersley 1992:120).

There is some truth in this but even here changes in eco-socialism are occurring. Benton (1993), for example, attempts a socialist theory of animal rights which goes beyond both cornucopian and anthropocentric assumptions but within a distinctively socialist perspective. Eco-socialism is sensitive to natural limits and weaker on obligations to non-humans. But on both it shows a capacity to revise its assumptions, even on the latter, where it has been slower, yet on which it can alter its conception of the relation of humans to animals on the basis of a socialist theory of equality and rights. Eckersley (1992:131) considers that while eco-socialism does not go beyond the human community this is not necessary to its outlook and can be remedied within a socialist framework.

Let me summarize on socialism. While Marx is well worth returning to for a political economy of capitalism I am not convinced of his usefulness for the interpretation of environment-society relations. Otherwise, though, green political theory does not make socialism redundant. Socialism is challenged by the need to incorporate natural limits and non-humans into its political thinking and these are adaptations socialists can and are making. Green political theory can also take a lot from socialist political economy. Furthermore, socialism is necessary to resolve non-environmental problems to do with issues such as authority, freedom and justice. Socialism is, in short, reconstructing itself in the light of green challenges and is of use to ecology. Ecology does not render it redundant. In fact it may find in it a good basis for eco-socialist alliances, theoretical and political.

Ecology and feminism

Another area in which ecologists are influenced by and find common areas of interest with traditions in political theory is in their relationship with feminism. In recent years some feminists have shifted from the main thrust of traditional feminism. They have moved away from an egalitarian and rights based emphasis on achieving equality in , man's world to a 'difference' concern with re-emphasizing the virtue, of the specifically feminine. For its advocates this means breaking with the terms of reference and undesirable values and characteristic. endemic in patriarchal institutions. To its critics it means returning to a celebration of all those submissive and privatized conceptions o femininity which have been at the very basis of women's oppression. This difference of emphasis and direction has laid out preoccupations and concerns which have defined the studies of some ecological thinkers. Many ecologists have been drawn to the insight, and concepts of feminism in their analysis of the relationship between humankind and nature.

Some eco-feminists argue that ecological sustainability requires placing greater value on balance and interrelationships, on biological and natural processes beyond human rationality and control and attitudes of caring, nurturing and humility. All of these correspond to personality traits and values traditionally associated with femininity. Eco-feminists conclude that women, or at least feminine values, have a special place in change towards greater ecological sustainability. Women are traditionally thought to have a greater sense of the worth of relationships and, as childbearers, to be closer to the rhythms of biological and natural processes. In their traditional domestic and maternal roles they are in day-to-day touch with tender, caring and nurturing concerns. Femininity is more conducive to ecological sustainability than the individualism, mechanistic instrumental rationality and dominating exploitative rationality of patriarchal masculinity.

Many feminists reject this approach for the manner in which it reproduces stereotypes of traditional femininity which have been at the root of women's oppression. It ties women to the servicing and care of men and children, equates womanhood with a dangerous and mysterious biological emotional irrationality to be controlled and mastered, and it subordinates women to roles of humility and submissiveness.

There are a couple of clarifications worth making about ecofeminism at this point, first on biology, second on men. First of all, eco-feminists do not necessarily seem to be saying that feminine values are biologically inherent to women and therefore fixed, immutable and confined to them. Femininity could be a socially constructed role which women are expected to live up to. In fact, that eco-feminists aspire to femininity becoming more generalized throughout the population as a whole suggests that they do not assume femininity is biologically determined and fixed. The biology and nature eco-feminists talk about is not the biology of genetic inheritance but of biological processes like childbearing, lactation, ovulation and menstruation. They do not generally endorse the psychology of genetically inherited personality traits or intelligence but are suggesting, rightly or wrongly, that by having special experience of childbearing women are closer to natural and biological processes of reproduction. This does not mean that men cannot have a 'feminine' sensibility but that the sexual division of labour combines with biological experience to make it more likely among women.

The second clarification to make is that eco-feminists, for good or ill, are not generally separatist, anti-men or anti-masculinity. On separatism they propose not that femininity should be expressed by women in a world of their own away from men but that the shared world of women and men should be more feminized. On men and masculinity, they seek a balance between masculinity and femininity in which men and women each share characteristics of both. They reject traits associated with masculinity such as aggressive individualism and domination but would find it difficult to reject the idea that women and men should not take from masculinity the values of being strong assertive and making demands. In the sense of both the clarifications I have mentioned eco-feminists appear to be different from some 'difference' feminists who sometimes have a biologist or separatist ring to their arguments.

So eco-feminists argue that the 'feminine' stress on relationships and caring and women's closeness to biological and natural processes of childbearing and birth make them better equipped for the relational ecological sensitivity necessary for greater sustainability. The greater generalization of feminine traits and values among the entire population, female and male, can foster a more ecological society.

Some eco-feminists argue, in a way that Bookchin (1980) does on hierarchy in human society in general, that there is a connection between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature. This may be because exploitative relationships in parallel spheres take place through similar hierarchical and dominating structures or, more strongly, because women and nature are actually connected in the same process of exploitation. On the weaker argument women and nature are simply both victims in different spheres of a society based on hierarchy and domination. More strongly, it can be argued that there is some greater connection in that structures of hierarchy and domination are sustained by the same patriarchal Enlightenment rationality which emphasizes 'masculine' values of mastery and rational control (Shiva 1988). Stronger still is the argument that women and nature share common characteristics or are constituted similarly in patriarchal myths and discourse (see Merchant 1990). Both nature and women are seen as having similar negative characteristics irrational, unpredictable, biological, mysterious and in need of control. Women and nature are not merely separate phenomena subordinate in parallel dualisms. They are subject to the same mechanistic patriarchal domination and constituted identically by it. Their exploitation is identical, and ecological and women's liberation are linked. This common identity of womanhood and nature could imply political alliances between the women's and green movements. Both, from this view, could benefit from the articulation of relational concerns and a greater value being placed on caring, nurturing and humility.

I have argued that eco-feminism does not necessarily see femininity as biologically determined nor, for good or ill, is it separatist or anti-men. It does provide a corrective to the devaluation of feminine values and traditionally female activities in patriarchal and some feminist discourses. There are two problems in eco-feminist thinking I can mention here. The first concerns the problem of identifying feminine traits and the second the tactical advisability of focusing on revaluing femininity.

A first criticism is that it is difficult to identify what feminine traits are when women often exhibit masculine traits and men feminine ones. To put it another way, it is difficult to find a consistent set of traits which women share and makes them distinct from men. The problem with this criticism goes back to the clarification made earlier on biology. It operates on the level of biological sex rather than social gender. Feminine personality traits are those socially associated with the social construction of femininity. They are not traits biologically inherent to women or that women always express and men do not. Feminine traits are not any less feminine if men sometimes exhibit them. This merely demonstrates that men may sometimes be feminine, and the traits remain those socially associated with femininity and particularly expected of women. It is not that women exhibit consistent traits that make them feminine but that they are traits conventionally defined as

feminine and expected of women. Most of us are fairly clear about what the core traits of femininity are on this understanding.

There is a more tactical or strategic question which many feminists, with some justification, point to. This is that the activities and traits ecological and difference feminists seek to see more positively valued - care, nurturing, humility etc. - are those which have been at the root of women's oppression for centuries, confining women to servicing and subservient roles in the private sphere. Re-emphasizing such traits is likely to get us back to a situation from which feminists have spent a lot of time trying to extricate women.

This is a strong criticism but there is an answer. Feminists can escape the reproduction of women's oppression yet still positively value feminine traits by focusing less on women's aptitude for them and more on the virtues of men expressing them. The focus can be on deconstructing masculinity and feminizing men rather than on women celebrating and expressing femininity. The latter strategy, pursued in a patriarchal society, is likely to reproduce and strengthen women's subordinate position. The former offers the possibility of promoting feminine values without merely reproducing women's confinement to traditional feminine roles.

This does not preclude women celebrating feminine values or taking strength, assertiveness and self-worth from traditional masculinity. But it does imply a tactical shift of emphasis towards changing men which can avoid a return to female submissiveness. This engages with a stumbling block facing the women's movement. Problems in the past have often been based around mobilizing women into making demands and progress outside traditional feminine spheres. An increasing problem is men's refusal to be moved from their traditional masculine sphere towards more feminine values and into traditionally feminine areas of work, such as domestic work and childcare in the private sphere and traditionally female occupations and concerns in the public. Women seeking equality in paid employment or public involvement have found that they carry a double burden because they have to combine their public roles with continuing responsibilities in the domestic sphere. These are as great as before because of the lack of movement by men towards playing a role there.

Whatever its difficulties, eco-feminism recognizes that traditionally feminine personality characteristics and activities have been devalued. This has been to the detriment both of women who have performed their tasks too single-handedly and subject to low esteem and of men who have not helped or benefited from 'feminine' work (childcare in particular). Traditional egalitarian and rights-based feminism might have been an unwitting accomplice in devaluing desirable values and characteristics and rejecting

potentially rewarding and fulfilling human activities as oppressive. Feminine values and activities, some feminists argue now, need to be more positively evaluated in future, for the benefit of women and men. Childcare and domestic work becomes impoverished when it is devalued and disproportionately loaded onto women. However, given more value and more equally shared, such tasks can be a source of fulfillment for women and men alike; similarly with feminine personality traits of tenderness caring, nurturing and concern for relationships. The absence of such traits from public life hinders ecological progress and the amelioration of conflict and inequity. In private life their greater concentration on one side of the sex divide hinders liberation and fulfilment for both men and women.

Feminism is another example of a tradition which ecology draws on rather than renders redundant. Ecology does not break off as a new paradigm with the ability to deal with environmental and social issues on green grounds alone. Just as it draws on ideas to do with obligations and rights from conservatism and liberalism and on socialist political economy, so feminist thinking is a resource for ecology rather than a tradition it transcends.

Ecology: new political theory or no political theory?

Andrew Dobson argues, when discussing O'Riordan's (1981:303-7) typology of global, centralized-authoritarian, authoritarian-commune and anarchist versions of environmentalism, that:

‘not all of these presentations can accurately be described as corresponding to the political ideology of ecologism ... the closest approximation ... to the centre of gravity of a Green sustainable society is the last one: the so called 'anarchist solution' . . . the Green sustainable society ... will not be reached by transnational global co-operation, it will not principally be organised through the institutions of the nation-state, and it is not authoritarian . . . it would therefore be quite wrong to see ecologism as an ideology (like nationalism?) that can be either right or left-wing ... its political prescriptions are fundamentally left-liberal, and if a text, a speech or an interview on the politics of the environment sounds different from that then it is not Green but something else’. (Dobson 1990:83-5)

Ryle on the other hand argues that:

‘Ecology’ . . . does not in itself determine in a positive sense the future development of social and economic reality. A society adapted to ecological constraints ... could take widely varying forms. This is ... implicit in the fact that very diverse 'sustainable societies' have been projected by different thinkers’.

One can imagine an authoritarian capitalist or post-capitalist society ... in which those at the top enjoyed ecologically profligate lifestyles ... protected by armed guards from the mass of the people, who would endure an impoverished and 'sustainable' material standard of living ... One can imagine a 'barrack socialism' in which an ecologically well-informed, bureaucratic elite directed the economy in accordance with environmental and resource constraints ... Ecological limits may limit political choices but they do not determine them. The green movement may attempt to assess every option against ecological criteria, and may claim that all its proposals are compatible with sustainability; but we should not make the mistake of thinking that no other proposals, and no other outcomes, could be compatible. We should not assume that 'ecology' can satisfactorily define the new politics we are trying to develop. (Ryle 1988:7-8)

Dobson is arguing that there can be a green political theory and that it is left-liberal anarchism. Ryle argues, however, that there cannot be a green political theory because ecological imperatives are open to different sorts of social and political arrangements. I would argue against Dobson that there cannot be a green political theory because while ecology implies some forms of social and political arrangements rather than others it also draws on older traditions to work out which are preferable on these grounds and to answer non-environmental questions to do with issues such as justice and liberty. Where different sorts of social and political arrangements are compatible with green objectives, traditional non-ecological criteria are needed to decide which are preferable. Ecology can be part of political theory but does not provide the basis for such a theory itself.

However, ecology is not completely open. I have argued that interventionism and central co-ordination are implied by ecological imperatives rather than markets, capitalism or decentralization. Environmental demands do imply some sorts of social and political arrangements rather than others. Nevertheless, Ryle is right to say that many questions cannot be answered by

ecology and, this being so, that a political theory cannot be constructed on green criteria alone.

Traditional political theories are challenged by ecology. Ecology requires that they are adapted to take into account natural limits and non-humans. It has further implications for political theory in that some social and political arrangements are implied rather than others by environmental requirements. However, ecology cannot provide a new paradigm through which a political theory can be constructed on green grounds. Dealing with environmental issues involve, drawing on old conservative, liberal, socialist and feminist analyses. Furthermore, there are non-environmentalist issues to which green criteria do not determine answers and which have to be answered by these old traditions. Ecology has to combine with other perspectives to put together a theory and politics on preferable regimes of economic, social and political organization.

Environmentalisms

Before the next chapter let me summarize the different sorts of environmentalist argument I have identified. In chapters 1 and 2 I suggested that one issue on which different environmentalist argument can be identified is to do with solutions to environmental problems (see table 5. 1).

Table 5.1 Solutions to environmental problems: technical or structural

<i>Type of environmentalism</i>	<i>Solution</i>
technocratic environmentalist	technical
structural environmentalist	structural

Many greens propose technocratic solutions based on the development of environmentally friendly technologies. These might be ‘cleaner’ or less polluting or can harness renewable (e.g. wind, solar power, tides) rather than non-renewable energy sources (e.g. coal, gas, oil). Other greens propose that underlying structural factors to do with social value systems and lifestyles are the basic problem to which technical solutions cannot be found. Ecological degradation will continue until we halt growth and wind down consumption and population levels.

In chapter 2 in particular I suggested another distinction within green arguments between those that rely strictly on environmental considerations for certain courses of action and those that rest their case also on independent social arguments for the intrinsic desirability of such courses (e.g. frugality, self-sufficiency) (see table 5.2).

Table 5.2 The sustainable society: reasons for proposing it

<i>Type of environmentalism</i>	<i>Arguments</i>
environmental	environmental
social	environmental and social

The latter category of arguments can lead to conclusions which coincide and support more specifically green arguments, but they are not themselves strictly green in content. I have suggested that environmental arguments should be distinguished from social arguments put forward by greens. Some green proposals (e.g. for lower levels of consumption and lower population levels) can be justified by recourse to environmental arguments alone. Others (e.g. the argument for decentralized self-sufficient communes) are not such clear-cut candidates for environmental justifications. Consequently green arguments for them rest more heavily on social arguments about intrinsic rewards and desirability which are not specifically green and should not be portrayed as such.

In chapter 3 I also distinguished between different green arguments on reasons why we should care about the environment (see table 5.3). Shallow ecologists argue for care for the environment on the grounds of its utility for human beings. In this sense it is humans and not the environment itself that they are really concerned about and this is what prompts some to regard people in this category as not really environmentalist at all. Deep ecologists argue that we should care about the environment because of its intrinsic value and entitlement to the same sorts of rights traditionally extended to human beings. These ecologists argue we should care about the environment for its own sake and irrespective of its usefulness for humans. Sentience advocates argue we should take special care to protect and respect all creatures who have the capacity to enjoy life and should also protect parts of the environment which have value for such creatures.

Table 5.3 Environmental ethics: reasons for caring about the environment

<i>Type of environmentalism</i>	<i>Reasons for caring</i>
Deep ecologist (eco-centric)	Intrinsic value of all environmental entities
Sentient ecologist (sentient-centric)	Intrinsic value of sentient beings. Extrinsic value of non-sentient beings.
Shallow ecologist (anthropocentric)	Intrinsic value of humans. Extrinsic value of non-humans

On the basis of sentient arguments such theorists extend obligations to animals as well as humans. On the basis of intrinsic value arguments deep ecologists extend them to more of the environment: sentient and non-sentient living entities (i.e. plants as well as animals) and in some cases non-living organisms as well (e.g. earth, water rocks etc.). How far the extension of rights goes depends on the characteristics according to which entities in the environment are seen to have intrinsic value. If merely being part of the community is what counts, then all things might be seen to have value and command respect. If capacity to flourish is what gives them intrinsic value then respect may extend to plants (and in differing quantities to different species of animal and plant according to their varying capacity to flourish) but not to non-living organisms like rocks.

The arguments I have advanced through this book in relation these various distinctions are deeper than light-green proposals in that I reject technical fixes (while recognizing green technological advances as part of the solution) and purely human-centred concerns. However, they do not go as far as deep ecology. While they advocate structural change and non-anthropocentrism they extend the ethical remit to sentient creatures only, and not to non-sentient and non-living aspects of the natural environment on an intrinsic value basis. My arguments also go against green political theory. This is because I have argued that ecology can contribute to political theory but cannot make a political theory itself. It revolutionises traditional political theory by bringing in natural limits and non-humans but also needs it to help solve environmental problems and deal with non-environmental issues to do with social and political organization. In so far as green political theory does have definite political implications, I am not convinced that they are of the decentralized sort that many green political theorists propose. This chapter has dealt with the relation of ecology to traditions in normative political theory. Let me now turn to ecological concerns in explanatory social theory.

Guide to further reading

Robyn Eckersley's *Environmentalism and Political Theory* (1992) is a likeable and open-minded discussion of the ecological credentials of different political theories. Garrett Hardin's 'The Tragedy of the Commons' (1977) is a classic and very important discussion which raises issues in liberal and socialist political philosophy in relation to ecological questions. Martin Ryle's brief and readable *Ecology and Socialism* (1988) is the best place to start an investigation of the relationship between the two traditions. A view by an influential figure on the new left is given in Raymond Williams's 'Socialism and Ecology' (1989) in his *Resources of Hope*. Joe Weston's collection *Red and Green* (1986) and Enzensburger's 'A Critique of Political Ecology' (1974) (in *New Left Review* 84 and his *Dreamers of the Absolute*) give traditional socialist views on the green movement. Rudolf Bahro's books *Socialism and*

Survival (1982) and *From Red to Green* (1984) trace, as the title of the second suggests, the shift of one prominent writer from Marxism to the green movement. Peter Dickens (1992) in chapter 3 of *Society and Nature* and Ted Benton in chapter 2 of *Natural Relations* (1993) discuss the ecological credentials of the early Marx. *The Ecologist* 22, 1, 1992 is a special issue on ecology and feminism which goes through many of the debates raised in the meeting of these two perspectives. Val Plumwood's 'Ecofeminism: An Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments' (1986) is a useful supplement to the *Australian Journal of Philosophy* 64. Dobson's *The Green Reader* (1991) includes extracts from an ecofeminist point of view by Shiva, Plant and Merchant which give a flavour of the perspective.