resurface: How far should compromise be taken?; How should elections be contested?; Is election a realistic possibility anyway? Intermediate strategies do present themselves, such as building up green communities through the local money scheme described earlier (perhaps focused on unemployment centres), but all thoughts of green class action seem vitiated by the fact that no unified sense of such a class is presently in sight.

Conclusion

Discussion of any aspect of green politics is always dogged by the necessity to distinguish between its dark-green and light-green, or environmental, manifestations. The issue of green social change is no exception. From a light-green point of view, for instance, the reflections which took place under the heading 'class' will probably seem superfluous. It appears self-evident that a parliamentary presence, or pressure through the lobby system, can bring about a cleaner, more sustainable environment. It appears self-evident that we can lead more environment-friendly lives by buying the right things and refusing to buy the wrong ones. It also appears self-evident that sustainable communities are vital as sources of inspiration for the rest of us to live more lightly on the Earth.

But from ecologism's point of view all of these strategies must be measured in terms of the radical green critique of present practices developed in Chapter 3, and the kind of life it is suggested we need to lead to overcome them. Bringing about that kind of sustainable society is an infinitely more difficult task than simply putting environmentalism on the political agenda. So far, that is what the strategies adopted have done, and taking radical green politics seriously - rather than some attenuated environmentalist version of it - might involve a move beyond those strategies.

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. This is what I propose to do in the present chapter. In so doing, it is my intention to deepen our understanding of what marks ecologism off from these other ideologies. I regard attempts by liberals, conservatives and socialists to appropriate ecological thought for themselves to be chimerical, for 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. Where broad comparisons have been carried out (for example, Hay, 1988; March, 1994, Ch. 5; Garner, 1996, Ch. 3) 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 ecocentrism 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.

St 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— Hayward (1995), Eckersley herself (1996), Wissenburg (1998a), B. Barry (1999) and Miller (1999), for example— 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 liberalim 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. So, ‘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 ecology 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 ecology -- and to the question from Mark Sagoff that he raises 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 ecology (e.g. B. 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 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. So 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' (Sagoff, 1988, p. 167). 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. It is an even shorter step to the conclusion that this advice applies to environmentalists too, or at least to those environmentalists whose political prospectus is driven by a view of the good. We might even say that, by this point, Sagoff wants to say not only that environmentalists can be liberals, but that they should be 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 even less compatible than some other political ideologies with an end-orientated conception of political and social life such as ecology. So 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 as 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 ecology, he writes that,

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 worldwide 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 ‘green-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). The former type, according to most commentators, is broadly inimical to the modern ecological project, while the latter has resources that can 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 human-kind 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 more ecologically-friendly reading of Locke can 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, 1966: 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 consideration?’ 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 that 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 fails 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, 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 might 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 can 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 present 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, looks 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 savings principle in their respective theories of justice—and... (some form of) obligations to future generations is a condition sine qua non of any liberal theory of justice' (Wissenburg, 1999a, p. 134). Once again, the nature of these obligations is crucial, but Wissenburg believes it 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, 1999a, 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, can 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 animals or future generation human beings have rights or not, 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 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. 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 – a bridge too far for liberalism. We must acknowledge the uses to which rights-talk can 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 distinguishes sharply between the human and ‘natural’ realms, both descriptively and prescriptively. 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, 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 because of 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).

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’s 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 Thatcher liberal conservatism but now an advocate of a social democratic conservatism, to appropriate political ecology for the conservative cause (Gray, 1993b). 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,

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 untied 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.

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 defenses 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 thoroughly naturalism that recognizes the implications of our being human animals.

So the ecocentrism of radical greenery sets it apart from conservatism just as it sets it apart from all other modern political ideologies. The only
Ecologists are future generations. One thing the present 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. Conservation 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 imaginings. (Political ecologists might do well to bear in mind, though, Burke's apothegm 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 stocks 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 mailedness'. The anti-Utopian's principal target, says Krishan Kumar, is hubris (Kumar, 1987, p. 103), and so is the political ecologist's. If Utopians uncompromisingly believe that 'there are no fundamental barriers or obstacles to man's earthly perfection and that scarcity can be overcome' (Kumar, 1991, p. 297), 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 as 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 conservativism 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), and 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 exclude
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. So 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 gen-
erations, 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 as 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 socialism needed,
so the argument goes, was a challenge to its hegemony towards the left-
hand end of the political spectrum. Early responses to the environmental
movement from the socialist left were certainly hostile and often focussed
on its middle-class nature, rather than illustrating 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 threat to
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. Jonathan Porritt and Nicholas Winnen, 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 wonky ideologues who have long since lost touch with
the real world’ (1988, p. 256). Sandy Irvine and Alec Penton pointedly
characterize socialism as ‘fair shares in extinction’ (1988, p. 142).
Elsewhere, though, and particularly in the work of Raymond Williams
(r.d.), Boris Frankel (1987), James O’Connor (1990), Peter Dickens
(1992) and Ted Benton (1993 and 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. Others, such as Joe
Weston (1986), David Harvey (1993) and David Pepper (1993a and
1993b), have remained more or less unreconstructed after their
engagement with green thought. This is not to say that they do not take
ecological problems seriously – they most certainly do – but the favored
strategy of ‘unreconstructionists’ is to subsume the ecological point in a
socialist framework, leaving the latter much as it was at the outset.
Witness David Harvey who calls, first, for a ‘creative rather than a
destructive tension’ between socialist and ecological politics, but then
gerates the game away by looking for a ‘distinctly “ecological” angle to progressive socialist politics’ (Harvey, 1993, p. 4). It is with these
varied contributions that this section of the chapter is in part engaged.

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 the green movement considers itself to be 'beyond left and right' is because it believes the 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 Winmore, 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 most often attacked 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, that 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 'capitalism 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: 'world capitalism itself has created the conditions for an ecological socialist movement' (O'Connor, 1991, p. 5).

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-destroy 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 Bonnet, 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. It is from an environmental perspective the socialist view of capitalism is correct, then ecology'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: 'As 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 like 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 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 and 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 (ecosocialists 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 unbounded impression that there is an ‘untouched’ nature alongside the bits already corrupted by human beings, and it is this untouched nature that receives the movement’s greatest attention. Pepper writes that ‘There 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 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 theorise 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 last point needs some explanation. Joe Weston argues that the green movement as presently constituted is an expression of the ennui of a particular section of the middle class – 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 origin and recognizes that ‘rather than conserving the environment in which most people live, the inner city and the country town need destroying’ (Weston, 1986, pp. 14–15).

A third faultline between socialists and political ecologists can 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 reaction 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). David Harvey, too, believes 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 (unsubtle) 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', etc. 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 refute 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 recognize 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). But then it turns out that this is not a traditional socialist belief after all, for Williams suggests that: 'We have to build on the socialist argument that productive growth, as such, is not the abolition of poverty' (ibid., p. 15). Williams seems to be saying both that socialism does hold the belief that the relief of poverty requires more production and, then, that it does not.

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. Certainly the now-jeluct British journal Marxism Today, for example, would consider his position to be heretical: 'the question of reindustrialisation and growth distinguishes the Ecology Party, and green politics generally, quite sharply from the Left' (quoted in Porritt, 1984b, p. 25). Similarly Frank Richards restates the classic left position when he writes that 'The number of people which can be supported by an area of land is not given by nature, but by the sort of society in which they are organised' (1989, p. 21).

Raymond Williams, then, appears above to be rereading socialism, and when he refers to 'the pressure point on the whole existing capitalist mode of production' as 'the problem of resources' (n.d., p. 161) he leaves us in no doubt. 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 a stressing of 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 (even by David 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: 'It 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'. Bahro, 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 of the Labour Party is more
specific: 'the future of socialism may lie more with William Morris than with Herbert Morrison' (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' (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 dangerous 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're 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 distorting 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 like 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 Rele 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 criticise it for its inequitarian 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 refuged 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 seems to be built around three principal sets of thoughts. In the first place, such ecofeminists usually argue for the existence of values and ways of behaving that are primarily female in the sense of more fundamentally possessed by or exhibited by women rather than men. These characteristics may be 'socially' or 'biologically' produced, and considerable importance can be 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 idea 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', wrote Andrée Collard and Joyce Contrucci (1988, p. 137). The third idea – related to and tying up the first two – is that women are closer to men to nature and are therefore potentially in the vanguard as 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 redefining of ecofeminism; Valerie 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 Valerie 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 economies 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, 1985; pp. 68–9), and a disgust 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. Valerie Plumwood points out (1988, p. 21) that 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. Isn't it 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 with respect to 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. But the generalized assertion that female traits are positive allows us no discriminatory purchase.

A related way of approaching this question might 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, for example, 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 – most recently in a sophisticated argument locating her feminist strategy within a general attack on dualistic thinking (Plumwood, 1993). There 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 chal-

In an earlier form this was presented as a ‘degendered’ model for the human 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 (what would such ‘independent considerations’ look like? What would it mean to be ‘fully human’?) and its implications cannot be followed through here. Sufficient 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 can be identified as either male or female, and that the female ones are those that most obviously need presently 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 for example, Plumwood, 1993, p. 39). 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 her as a ‘feminist green politics’ (1992, 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 can 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 Reuther: ‘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, 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).

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 deration- alised 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. 12). 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 universalising project of reduction, fragmentation and violent control. ‘Difference’ ecofeminists will counter this project with the feminizing 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 organists 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 patriarchal 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 can not 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), ecocritics point out that the intellectual structures justifying both are the same. ‘Difference’ ecocritics 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 ecocritics, 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 willing to swallow biological essentialism, will suggest that women’s lived experiences give them a head start as far as acquiring an ecological sensibility is concerned:

[To the extent that women’s lives have been lived in ways which are less directly oppositional to nature than those of men, and have involved different and less oppositional practices, qualities of care and kinds of selfhood, an ecological feminist position could and should privilege some of the experiences and practices of women over those of men as a source of change without being committed to any form of naturalism.]

(Plumwood, 1993, p. 35; my emphasis)

This view is broadly endorsed by Ariel Salleh, who writes that

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., p. 189). 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 as 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’ (ibid., p. 189). They have used this to quite particular effect, to develop a politics and a practice of ‘autonomy’ which is only possible 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 ecosocialists, 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’ (v.d., p. 3).

One problem that ecosocialism 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 might find it hard to legitimize population control policies. For 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’ ecosocialism, 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:

‘When ecosocialists root women’s personality traits in reproductive and sexual biology, they tend to give acceptance to those male-created 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 ecosocialism 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 ecosocialist camp, that there may be something to be said in favour of feminine connectedness with nature.

(Plumwood, 1988, p. 16; see also 1593, 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), 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: ‘To espouse a feminine principle without addressing the power relations between men and women is to espouse an ecosocialism rather than an ecosocialist position’ (Mellor, 1992b, p. 246).

Janet Biehl’s critique is principally aimed at deep ecosocialists, whom she sees as engaged in a project that will guarantee the domination of women by men, but her remarks are equally applicable to ‘difference’ ecosocialism. 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’ ecosocialists) 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 ecosocialism 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 ecosocialism 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 submission to men, then women’s position can only get worse. ‘Difference’ ecosocialism...
therefore proposes a dangerous strategy (a strategy that Plumwood calls 'uncritical reversal'; Plumwood, 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, then 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).

'Reconstructive' 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 can 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.

We have established the differences between ecologism and other major political ideologies, and the incompatibility between what I have called environmentalism and ecologism is now clear. Ecologism seeks radically to call into question a whole series of political, economic and social practices in a way that environmentalism does not. Ecologism envisages a post-industrial future that is quite distinct from that with which we are most generally acquainted. While most post-industrial futures revolve around high-growth, high-technology, expanding services, greater leisure, and satisfaction conceived in material terms, ecologism's post-industrial society questions growth and technology, and suggests that the Good Life will involve more work and fewer material objects. Fundamentally, ecologism takes seriously the universal condition of the finitude of the planet and asks what kinds of political, economic and social practices are (a) possible and (b) desirable within that framework. Environmentalism, typically, does no such thing.

In terms of human relationships with the non-human natural world, ecologism asks that the onus of justification be shifted from those who counsel as little inference as possible with the non-human natural world to those who believe that interference is essentially non-problematic. Environmentalists will usually be concerned about intervention only as far as it might affect human beings; ecologists will argue that the strong anthropocentrism that this betrays is far more a part of our current problems than a solution to them.

Practical considerations of limits to growth and ethical concerns about the non-human natural world combine to produce, in ecologism, a political ideology in its own right. We can call it an ideology (in the functional sense) because it has, first, a description of the political and social world – a pair of green spectacles – which helps us to find our way around it. It also has a programme for political change and, crucially, it has a picture of the kind of society that ecologists think we ought to