

5. Richard and Val Routley, “Human Chauvinism and Environmental Ethics,” in Environmental Philosophy, eds. Don Mannison, Michael McRobbie, and Richard Routley (Department of Philosophy, Research School of Social Sciences, the Australian National University, 1980); Val and Richard Routley, “Social Theories, Self-Management, and Environmental Problems,” in Ibid.

6. Obviously, I believe that those who see Leopold’s land ethic as a mere extension of conventional ethics are radically mistaken.


For a Radical Ecocentrism

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The need for social movements to redirect the trajectory of industrial society is urgent. An ineritable tendency toward expanding the domination over the rest of nature is built into the culture and politics of industrial society. The convergence of the various ideologies of nature implicit in political economy, industrialism, and reductive science provides a powerful support for industrial culture. To an ever-increasing degree, the rest of nature is transformed into resources and commodities by industrial societies. Many want to accelerate this process.

The expansion of industrialism is honored as “economic growth,” a process demanded by politicians and populace alike, appearing as if it is the only road to “prosperity.” This enchantment with economic growth sprawls across most of the political spectrum, uniting conservatives, moderates, liberals, and many progressives. The political realities of industrial societies create this unity. Under conditions of economic expansion, all sides can get more of what they want, as the fruits “trickle down” even to the most disadvantaged. In times of economic contraction, struggles over the distribution of social wealth intensify. Progressives call upon the state to expand public sector expenditures meeting considerable resistance from conservatives. Since increasing social discontent threatens the control of those in power, all factions unite in calling for economic growth. But such progress is cancerous from the perspective of the rest of nature.
Ecologically sensitive progressives point to ways in which economies can be restructured, arguing that certain changes benefit both humanity and its environment. For example, retrofitting houses with insulation both generates employment and lessens the demand for energy. While this is true and, therefore, worthy of support, such win-win proposals do not get to the root problem of industrialism. The social addiction to economic growth is one of the taproots of the tension between the ecological good and industrialism, and it will remain an addiction as long as the human good is conceived as an increase in material consumption. Changing our conception of the human good involves fundamentally transforming industrialism.

Recently, some streams within the nature and social traditions are creating a significant confluence. Some within the nature tradition now recognize that creating satisfactory relations with the rest of nature requires changing society, and some within the social tradition are realizing that the creation of a just society requires resolving the ecological crises of industrial society. Each stream sees that this requires radical social change— their confluence is radical environmentalism. Radical environmentalism has five main branches: human-centered environmentalism calling for radical social change, social ecology, ecological feminism, bioregionalism, and deep ecology. Human-centered radical environmentalism usually starts from the fact of ecological crisis and argues that human interests require radical social transformation. This approach appeals to those who have not yet seriously questioned the assumption of anthropocentrism. The limitations of such an approach become apparent when it tries to deal with questions about other species, wilderness, and the proper size of the human population. In any case, human-centered radical environmentalism is not ecocentric. Social ecology emphasizes the need to abolish society’s hierarchies in order to create the possibility of ecologically harmonious relations between society and the rest of nature. Ecological feminism, a part of the feminist movement, stresses the connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature. It sees that at least one basic cause of the crisis is rooted in patriarchy and the masculine worldview. Deep ecology grows out of a nature tradition extending back to John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. In this essay I want to show the value of the deep ecology movement for the project of transforming industrial society. It has significant contributions to make to what I believe is a rapidly growing international radical environmental movement. I shall also briefly consider some unresolved questions which this movement must ultimately resolve.

Of these perspectives in radical environmentalism, only human-centered environmentalism accepts anthropocentrism. The others are ecocentric. Each grows out of its own history of concerns and each continues to reflect a partiality rooted in its history. As the radical ecocentric movement matures, ideally the differences between these perspectives will become only differing emphases within a larger unity. There are some signs that this understanding of a deeper unity underlying diversity is developing. Marti Kheel, an ecological feminist, argues that the differences in the ways men and women now typically form their identities make a gender-neutral concept of the self suspect. This suggests that ecofeminism, in its ability to speak specifically to women and the ways that they currently form their identities, has a unique importance to women. But she sees that this does not lead to any fundamental opposition between ecological feminists and deep ecologists.

Such a unity must be based on clarity about the necessity for social change. Within the United States, at least, there is a recurrent fantasy that some kind of technological invention will suffice to resolve all our problems. One could sense this reaction sweep through the United States a few years ago when it appeared that the process of “cold” fusion would offer unlimited energy in the not too distant future. Almost no one pondered whether such a development would be good; its virtue was assumed. There was almost no awareness that access to unlimited energy by this society might be catastrophic for the good of humans and certainly would be so for other forms of life. Is giving a drunk an automobile that runs on air a good idea? Even now, as we become more enmeshed in problems created by technological “solutions,” we continue to yearn for the technological fix. Environmentalists are not immune to this fever.

Efforts to design with ecological sensitivity are good, but the lim-
its of this approach are severe. Fluorescent light bulbs and superinsulated houses are design innovations that offer light and shelter with reduced environmental impact. To think that real solutions lie in this sort of tinkering is naive, dangerously so if it directs attention away from the complex, necessary, and often frustrating path of social change. Langdon Winner crisply points out that the end of appropriate technology as a social movement [in the U.S.] can be precisely located on the evening of November 4, 1980, when Ronald Reagan was elected President. His regime ended the favorable climate for appropriate technology created by the Carter administration and the movement ended.8 The moral is that changing the direction of industrial society requires attending to the social and economic institutions of that society. Social struggle to restructure society must be part of the solution.

It should also be said, but perhaps not emphasized, that the changes needed are radical. Without discussing the Earth’s ills at length, it needs to be said that we, all of us, face very profound problems. We have a world that threatens significant climate change with attendant mass migrations of people in a nuclearized and politically unstable system of nation states. Massive species extinction is in progress now and will continue. Agricultural lands are being turned into deserts. We have done this with somewhat over five billion people. One-quarter of those people have life styles that are vastly more destructive to the ecology than the other three-quarters. The same one-quarter is responsible for two-thirds of the global warming and almost the entire threat to the ozone layer. If we had a stable population, the spread of the life style of the rich to the poor would create a great additional strain on the environment. But we do not have a stable population. The United Nations now projects population stabilization at around eleven billion.9 “For today’s rich-country consumption levels to be achieved by a whole world that size would mean multiplying today’s ecological impacts some 20 or 30 times over.”10 This simply cannot come to pass—some sort of break with our recent past is on its way.

Radical social change does not come about all at once. Michael Harrington’s phrase “visionary gradualism” aptly characterizes the perspective on social changes that we need.11 Social change must be guided by a vision of a place truly worth creating, but the changes only come about gradually, step-by-step, and require steady effort. The relevant time frame is not a few years or a decade, but generations. We should understand ourselves as living in a “transitional epoch” of several generations. A long view helps us know what should be done now.

What Deep Ecology Offers Social Progressives

The success of deep ecology or any other social movement aimed at restructuring humanity’s relations with the rest of nature depends on the latent dissatisfaction of life in industrial society. If almost everyone were getting happier and happier as a result of accumulating more and more things, then calls for radical change would have little prospect of being widely heeded. In fact, as discussed, people within industrial societies do not experience increasing levels of satisfaction as they accumulate more. People become addicted to getting new things, entranced with the process of acquiring. When economies contract, people become angry, scared, insecure, and nervous about any limitation on their consumption. Industrial life swings through moods of excitement, boredom, anger, and fear. It is not a recipe for human joy or excellence.

This pattern of experience endures, not because the pattern is inherently satisfactory, but because people do not notice it. Certainly there is an awareness of the series of individual experiences, but the larger pattern exists mainly on an unconscious level. It is as if a trance has been induced by mass media, and people aimlessly graze the malls armed with credit cards, seeking something, though they know not what. Lacking a clear vision of a better alternative, they continue down the consumerist path. Life within industrialism is, I believe, supersaturated with latent discontent. Social progressives seem to lack a vision of the good society that does not involve spreading consumer goods around more equally. The collapse of so-called socialism into a form of market economy has not helped in envisioning an alternative to the ethos of capitalism. Although it is hard now to discern what will arise out of Eastern Europe and the dissolution
of the Soviet Union, it seems that socialism, of the state capitalist variety, will be discarded in favor of the dream of shopping malls with parking lots big enough for all to come.

Perhaps, then, the most distinctive and important contribution of deep ecology to the prospect of radical change is its vision of a joyful alternative to consumerism. Environmentalism often casts itself as doomsayer, with nature as the avenging angel for industrialism’s excesses. From the perspective of the dutiful consumer, this version of environmentalism speaks only of deprivation and loss. Deep ecology, on the other hand, is explicit in offering a vision of an alternative way of living that is joyous and enlivening.

This seems paradoxical, because deep ecologists have been the strongest critics of anthropocentrism, so much so that they have often been accused of a mean-spirited misanthropy. Although some who accept the deep ecology platform may have such a misanthropic streak, deep ecology is actually vitally concerned with humans realizing their best potential.12 Arne Naess remarks, near the beginning of his major work on deep ecology [Ecosophy T], that his “discussion of the environmental crisis is motivated by the unrealized potential human beings have for varied experience in and of nature: the crisis contributes or could contribute to open our minds to sources of meaningful life which have largely gone unnoticed or have been depreciated.”13 Even though Naess’s Ecosophy T recommends that people transcend their isolation from the natural world and identify with the rest of nature, his view is, in some sense, centered on humans. The reason for this apparent paradox is that deep ecology is a recommendation about how humans should live, and it recommends that they identify with all life, that they live nonanthropocentrically. “The change of consciousness referred to consists of a transition to a more egalitarian attitude to life and the unfolding of life on Earth. This transition opens the doors to a richer and more satisfying life for the species Homo sapiens, but not by focusing on Homo sapiens.”14 Deep ecology’s conviction that this is a path toward a more joyful existence is important for any movement that would change society. “We can hope that the ecological movement will be more of a renewing and joy-creating movement.”15 This emphasis changes the fundamental message of radical ecocentrism from deprivation to one of a more satisfying way of being fully human.

A second major contribution of the deep ecology platform and any ecosophy that leads to it is the critique of human needs. Certainly deep ecologists are in the company of many other social theorists who distinguish between vital human needs and wants of lesser or trivial importance. One of the moral insights of social progressives is the evil of a society in which some have much and others have so little. Although the rich and the poor each have unmet needs, there is a fundamental difference between the relatively trivial dissatisfaction of the rich and the absolute deprivations of the poor. This sense of injustice, arising from an identification with the suffering of the downtrodden, was a strong element in the now dormant socialist project. “With an emphasis on this perspective, environmentalists might restore the cutting edge to socialism, restoring a sense of the absolute to perceptions of deprivation.”16

A third contribution is deep ecology’s [as Ecosophy T] focus on the process of identification. This is strategically critical in unraveling the knot of consumptive materialism. . . . One of the driving forces of consumerism is the loss of traditional ways of forming one’s identity and their replacement by material possessions. Some sense of self-identity is a vital need for humans. Deep ecology’s emphasis on an alternative mode of creating one’s identity through an expansion of identification goes to the very core of one of the engines driving industrialism. An expansion of personal identification to all humans is a basis for rejecting consumerism in a world of desperately unmet human needs. It also leads to rejecting militarism.

Deep ecology’s [as e.g., Ecosophy T] emphasis on the further expansion of identification carries an experientially based rejection of consumptive materialism. The message is not that we must “give up” some of what we want. Rather, the claim is that consumptive materialism could be lost without significant reduction in human happiness. The aim is a good quality of life, which is not equivalent to material consumption. The dominance of economic ways of talking and thinking about happiness fosters the illusion that consumption and happiness are equivalent. The experience of an expanded
identification, along with some critical reflection, shows that they are not. Such an expanded identification is perhaps more akin to an increase in vitality and sensitivity. Increased sensitivity is a more vital way of being, but it carries a price. If one identifies with the possibly never seen rainforest, then a mahogany table, for example, beautiful in texture, grain, and craftsmanship, becomes ugly and offensive as a part of the rainforest wherein other peoples and a multitude of species once abided. Aldo Leopold is correct when he notes that “One of the penalties of an ecological education is one lives... in a world of wounds.” Social progressives know a similar pain from their identification with the suffering of the poor of the world.

The expansion of identification and the ensuing reduction of the urge to consume would be helpful in alleviating some of the suffering in the Third World. If one accepts the reasonable hypothesis that overconsumption and militarism are two of the fundamental causes of the degradation of the environment, then deep ecology provides a most fundamental critique of each of these. As David Johns points out, the very concept of overconsumption changes when it is placed within the context of the deep ecology movement. Within any human-centered social perspective, overconsumption “is primarily seen as a social relationship, a problem of distribution between the wealthy and the poor, a problem of economic ownership.” On the other hand, when nonhuman nature is taken as a community and valued for its own unfolding, “then human consumption which disrupts it is wrong; it would constitute overconsumption.” Stemming the consumerist impulse in industrial countries would slow the transfer of wealth—both in the form of material and in human life for cheap labor—from the poor of the Third World to industrial nations. If industrialism were to slow down and reverse itself, there would be much more economic and cultural room for countries of the Third World to find their own unique ways of unfolding.

Finally, the first plank of the platform calls for the flourishing of all life, human and nonhuman. If the idea of letting every thing flourish is powerful when applied to nature, it is even more so applied to human societies—let every person flourish. This fundamental norm is continuous with the ideals of all progressive social movements, going beyond them by including nonhuman life. Implicit in this ideal is the goodness of each human developing to his or her fullest. It would be hard to overestimate the impact of this ideal of human development in progressive social change. It is at the very root of political democracy and calls for economic democracy. Socialism and anarchism stand resolutely for the right of each person to realize their best potential. So then, what is wrong with capitalism? Would there be anything wrong with it if it were successful in bringing home the bacon for everyone? Yes, at least from a Marxist perspective. Capitalism promotes a systematic and deepening inequality, both economically and, more profoundly, in terms of human dignity. For Marx, the increase of wages for the worker is “nothing but better payment for the slave, and would not conquer either for the worker or for labour their human status and dignity.” Naess, too, sees the evils of economic class, noting that most of the people in industrial counties are a “global upper class” and that the core of “class suppression” is the repression “of life fulfillment potentials in relation to fellow beings.” Imperialism and colonialism promote a systematic inequality among humans of differing countries and inequality within each of those countries. Racism promotes a systematic inequality of equals. Sexism promotes a relationship of domination and inequality between men and women. And notice that in each of these—capitalism, racism, and sexism—the “victors” are degraded in their “victory.” The racist and the sexist lose their full human potential as they enact the role of oppressor. So too with humanity and nature. The domination of nature presumes the moral irrelevance of the rest of nature, and this “victory” diminishes humans...

Problems for Deep Ecology
Two criticisms that some have made of deep ecology are that it counsels passivity and that it proposes a spiritual basis for radical ecocentrism. The first charge is simply wrong, as deep ecology is anything but passive in theory or practice. In fact, it is a platform that unites many radical ecocentrists in their numerous and various struggles. Deep ecologists have often encouraged and been active in a wide
range of environmental struggles. Bill Devall’s recent book, for example, counsels a broad spectrum of activities as ways of “practicing deep ecology.” He mentions, among others, the following actions for experiencing one’s bioregion: criteria to guide choices about what one consumes; use of Naess’s slogan, “simple in means, rich in ends,” to focus attention on quality of life; silence as a practice; rituals; councils of all beings; intentional communities; direct action, including monkey-wrenching and “ecotage,” as well as guidelines for taking direct action; political support for the politically oppressed peoples of the Third World; participation in Green movements; and much more. In fact, Devall claims that “a basic thrust of the deep, long-range ecology movement is transformation of the masses into a new kind of society.”

But there is still a problem. Some social activists are uneasy about deep ecology’s so-called spiritual approach to social change. To some extent, this charge is obviated when the distinction between the platform and the various justifications for it is emphasized. The platform is no more “spiritual” than other programs for change. On the other hand, some deep ecology writers have focused much attention on spiritual and psychological transformation. Devall, for instance, claims that the movement is “primarily a spiritual-religious movement.” Warwick Fox focuses his analysis on the psychological dimension of deep ecology, discussing several forms of identification without relating them to social and political questions.

The problems with spiritual or psychological approaches to social change are twofold. On the one hand, they risk becoming sectarian in activity and expression, drawing lines around the “true believers,” and excluding “heretics.” On the other hand, it simply defies credibility to think that a spiritual or psychological foundation can support a social movement of sufficient weight to transform society. For ordinary religious movements, this limitation is not fundamental, as their primary concern is with other worlds, not the social transformation of this world. But the deep ecology movement does aim to transform society, and it is not clear that spiritual conversions or transformational psychologies are foundations that can effectively support this goal in a broadly based social movement.

This uneasiness is strengthened by the fact that there has been relatively little emphasis on social issues by deep ecologists. Sylvan is fair in claiming that the deep ecology movement has not yet developed an adequate political theory. To some extent, this neglect of social issues can be attributed to the personal interests of deep ecology’s founders, rather than to any deficit in deep ecology itself. It can also be explained by the relative youth of the movement whose first task has been to provide a rationale for a deep and joyful concern for all of nature. The updating and publication in English of Naess’ book on deep ecology is a step toward clarifying some of the social and political dimensions of the deep ecology movement. Further developments along these lines can be expected.

As to the danger of sectarianism, many deep ecology writers explicitly attempt to be inclusive in presenting their views. This attempt, especially if emphasized, can be a check on the tendency, by no means exclusive to deep ecology, toward sectarianism. Naess is emphatic about the need to approach questions nondogmatically and to avoid sectarianism. “Devaluation of each other’s efforts within the total movement is an evil which must be avoided at all costs. No sectarianism!” Humans have a tendency to define themselves in opposition to something else. The devil is a useful persona for the true believer. This tendency seems to be exacerbated within oppositional movements, and the tendency of leftists to beat each other up in scholastic bickering is extreme. Although deep ecologists no doubt share this tendency with others, at least they have a theoretical basis for a self-definition that is inclusive instead of oppositional. Their positive valuation of diversity, both human and nonhuman, is explicit. This is a useful check on the tendency to needlessly create enemies—there are already enough real ones.

The Problem of Agency

The requirement of agency derives from Marx’s critique of utopian socialism. He criticized attempts at social change that appeal to “society at large” rather than to the proletariat, who had a definite interest in overthrowing capitalism. Marx may have been wrong in his hope that the industrial proletariat would be the agent to transform
capitalism, but his attention to the question of agency is important. The urgent question now is, who will dare to make radical ecocentric change? Insistence on this question is a contribution that theorists of social change can make to radical ecocentrism. This is just the sort of consideration that a social activist would continuously ponder, asking: Who would be my ally in this or that struggle? How can we make the movement broader and deeper? Who will act to create a solution? The problem of agency has not been a focus of deep ecology or bioregionalism, but it is arguably the "fundamental political question of the balance of this century and beyond."²⁸ How will such changes come about? Failure to focus on this question has been a deficit of the nature tradition. Failure to find an answer will be our common tragedy.

Perhaps there is no effective social agency for the needed transformations. Such a conclusion has practical implications. At least some activists in the Norwegian ecophilosophy movement have become convinced that industrial society cannot be effectively reformed, and that it will last only a few more decades. Therefore they decided to redirect their efforts. "After a few years, we stopped having as our aim the diversion of IGS [Industrial Growth Society] onto a socio-ecologically sound track. Instead, we started investing our activist energy into inspiring as many people as possible to experiment with a basis for a viable society to replace the one that is now step by step cracking up at its base."²⁹

If there is no effective human agency, then the agent of change is the rest of nature. Naess gently suggests this when he says that "significant deterioration of ecological conditions may well color the next few years in spite of the deepening ecological consciousness. The situation has to get worse before it gets better."³⁰ The sense that it may not be possible to find a social agent is not restricted to deep ecologists, Earth First!, or Norway. Herman Daly, a senior economist at the World Bank and an outstanding theorist of steady-state economics, in discussing how a transition to such a steady-state economy might occur, says:

It will probably take a Great Ecological Spasm to convince people that something is wrong with an economic theory that denies the very possibility of an economy exceeding its optimal scale. But even in that unhappy event, it is still necessary to have an alternative vision ready to present when crisis conditions provide a receptive public. Crisis conditions by themselves, however, will not provide a receptive public unless there is a spiritual basis providing moral resources for taking purposive action.³¹

Unfortunately for us, there may be no effective social agency for the transformation of industrialism.

But there are some reasons for hope. Morality might deepen, and its causality could become more effective than is now apparent. I remember driving west out of Philadelphia through the normal cluttered honky-tonk atmosphere of many American highways: car lots, fried chicken stores, neon lights offering cheap gasoline, liquor stores, and supermarkets hosed in cinder block buildings with no aesthetic connection to place. Place itself had been displaced. This scene repeats itself endlessly all over North America. But coming over a rise and descending into a valley, it was suddenly different. Spread out below were green fields coming forth with crops, well-kept homes and barns sparsely spread among the fields, and some people in a cart drawn by a horse. I had unexpectedly wandered into Amish country, and it had a beauty that, I imagine, was common in the last century. I was seeing a healthy agricultural community of small homesteads. The Amish, having a religiously grounded moral unity, preserve their own way of life, despite the pressures and enticements of the industrial society which surrounds them. With such unity, the agency of morality is great indeed.

If morality can be effective enough to allow the Amish to flourish in their way of life, then there may be significant parallels between the Abolitionist movement and radical ecocentrism. After all, despite the complexities of the history leading up to the Civil War, the Abolitionist movement is an example of the efficacy of moral agency. Roderick Nash, in exploring parallels between the Abolitionist movement and radical environmentalism, notes some significant similarities and draws a hopeful conclusion.³² Political compromise was
too limited for abolitionism, as it is for radical environmentalism. "Moral suasion" helped the Abolitionists, as it helps the radical environmentalists. The separatist option is limited because it leaves the problem behind. What was finally effective for the Abolitionist movement was, as we know, coercion. This is becoming part of the environmental movement as well, with the liberation of animals from laboratories, civil disobedience, Gandhian-style campaigns to save old-growth forests, and various forms of "ecotage" against the machines that would open the wilds to loggers. And the state has responded with undercover agents, arrests, and charges of "conspiracy," a pattern familiar to activists of the 1960s. Some radical ecocentrist have not only been bombed, they have been arrested. As Nash points out, the possibility of freedom for slaves once seemed as remote as an ecocentric society does today. Surely the recent changes in Eastern Europe and what was once the Soviet Union indicate that major social change, even if unlikely, can happen—and rapidly.

Radical ecocentrism intends fundamental changes both in the consciousness of industrial peoples and the economic structures of industrial society. The intention toward such transformation does not make it untenable as a foundation for a broad-based social movement, but it does raise the question of how consciousness changes. Marx recognized the necessity of fundamentally transforming the consciousness of the working class in order to realize communism. Marxism approaches this problem dialectically, insisting on a constant interrelation between theory and practice and anticipating a transformation of the working class through struggle against the capitalistic class. Struggle and new forms of society lead to new forms of consciousness. In this way, Marxism offers insight into the ways in which experience leads to changes in the working-class consciousness, which in turn increase the effectiveness of the working class in its struggle against capital. This increased effectiveness leads to further social change, setting conditions for further transformations of workers, and so on. The problem for radical ecocentrism is to identify the kinds of people within the present social order who might be likely to effect the needed changes.

How can the needed consciousness arise? Clearly it does arise sometimes in some people, but it is not always clear why, even to the person affected. John Cobb remarks that "it is an exaggeration to say that I chose to become an environmentalist. On the contrary, as I became aware of the situation in new ways, I discovered that I had become an environmentalist." The prospects for fundamental change exist only if such forms of consciousness become more general. But how can this happen?

If there is a developmental dialectic between the environmental activism and radical ecological consciousness, such that an increase in one tends to foster growth in the other, then there is hope for the future effectiveness of radical ecocentrism. It seems almost certain that more and more people will become aware of increasingly severe environmental problems, if only because they are personally touched by them. At least some people will act on that awareness through various forms of social protest. As citizens become involved in environmental problems of direct concern to them, they find that other issues are connected and also require attention. Resistance to a proposed incinerator or concern about toxic wastes in the community's drinking water can lead rather directly to larger questions about the production of garbage or industrial processes that generate toxic wastes. Such concerns can easily develop into doubts about the larger production and distribution systems that generate both garbage and hazardous wastes. It is a small step from here to a view of the whole mode of industrial production as the problem. This opens the door to the radical ecocentric platform. Of course not every person who becomes involved in a local problem will be led to radical ecocentrism, but the potential is there. People can make connections between their problems and larger issues because the connections are really there.

Similarly, workers' concerns about their health lead unions to demand the right to know what their members are exposed to on the job. They might then demand the right to refuse to work, without the loss of wages, when workers would be exposed to hazardous substances. Community activists might organize for similar rights to know and refuse in their community. When labor and community activists lend support to each other on these issues, there arises
a powerful basis for effective movements to confront and change current modes of production.35

Interestingly, such movements can be particularly effective when they follow a two-pronged strategy of political action to force governmental regulation of hazardous substances and community action to compel the enforcement of these regulations.36 This strategy leads to the possibility that the contested action might be prevented entirely. The fact that there are problems in getting approval for incinerators, dump sites, and nuclear power stations exemplifies the effectiveness of a combination of governmental regulations—necessitated by environmental political pressure—and community activism at the proposed sites. As Andrew Szasz notes, such activism “pits people against capital and state regulators, provides the empowering experience of collective action, and radicalizes participants.”37 Such a model of the dialectic between activism and consciousness gives grounds for hopes of success both in specific struggles and in the spread of a radical ecocentric consciousness—not certainty, but hope.

On a more national scale, the Green movement within the United States is a seed of radical ecocentrism which might blossom into a significant social and political force. Their recently adopted program spans many areas, including positions and policies on arts and education, economics, direct action, energy, agriculture, and biological diversity.38 This program was only developed after long discussion within local chapters and between those chapters, and it reflects consensus in the movement. Throughout the program, ecocentric values are affirmed, including the respect for nature, plants, animals, and species diversity, and there are calls for the expansion of wilderness and the preservation of native cultures. These values are combined with an understanding of the bankruptcy of both capitalistic and state socialistic regimes and an advocacy of decentralized and regionalized economies. They call for public control of banking and energy but intend such control to be held by a “decentralized public sector.” Such public control would not prohibit individuals, small cooperatives, and small companies from free economic activity. Rather it seeks to resubmerge local economies into a social context that puts human development and ecology before profit. Thus the

Greens seek to reverse the dominance of the economy over all other aspects of society, which is a central trait of industrialism. The emergence of the Green movement in the United States will, no doubt, continue to face difficulties similar to those of Europe, but there is hope in the fact that such movements have achieved the degree of success they have in what is, in proper perspective, a very short time.

The importance of feminism in helping to create the social agency for change is vast. As Ynestra King argues, “potentially, feminism creates a concrete global community of interests among particularly life-oriented people of the world: women.”39 However, as she notes, feminism does not, necessarily, lead to an ecological feminism. It is possible for feminism to accept the project of domination over nature, which is, she says, the position of many socialist-feminists. What is needed is a specifically ecological feminism that can “integrate intuitive, spiritual, and rational forms of knowledge, embracing both science and magic insofar as they enable us to transform the nature-culture distinction and to envision and create a free, ecological society.”40 If ecological feminists were to be effective in shifting the direction of feminism in an ecological direction, the hopes for an effective radical ecocentrism would increase enormously.

Anticipating the development of radical ecocentrism into a major political force, we should note three contributions from radical social theory. First, the value of equality within society is extremely important, both as an element of social justice and as an antidote to the social demand for economic expansion. If material equality becomes recognized as a social good, then the process of trying to achieve status through material possession would be weakened. In a society where having more than others is regarded as rude and tasteless, rather than as a mark of merit or status, demands for economic growth would be muted.

Second, until such social equality is attained, there will be a tendency for divisive conflict between social progressives and radical ecocentrists. There is a latent fracture line between social progressives and ecocentrists when environmental reform involves economic costs. In such situations, the distribution of the burdens of such reforms will be a politically important question. When such reforms
seem unavoidable, the rich will seek to place their costs on the backs of the poor. Social progressives will resist this, perceiving its fundamental injustice. But where will the radical ecocentrists stand? They may be tempted to endorse the reform, despite the fact that it increases social inequality, because it might abate some serious environmental problem.

To decide where they should stand when this type of immediate reform increases inequality, they must understand the real causes of the destruction of nature. If they understand that capitalism and industrialism must be undone, then the dangers of expedient alliances with the wealthy will be clear. Minor reforms are to be welcomed, to be sure, but not if they are carried out at the expense of the poor. To accede to such socially regressive reforms, even if environmentally desirable, corrodes the possibility of political alliances between radical ecocentrists and social progressives. If radical ecocentrists do not stand consistently on the side of the poor, they will lose one of their major allies for the changes that really need to be made. Only a clear understanding of industrialism's determinative role in the rape of the Earth can foster resistance to this division. To change industrialism, radical ecocentrism must make common cause with the oppressed of the world.

Finally, just as humanity and nature need to be understood within a holistic perspective, so too does modern social reality require a holistic understanding. The various forms of oppression include economic exploitation, racism, sexism, patriarchy, heterosexism, nationalism, authoritarianism, and the domination over nature; each exists in overt and subtle forms. Each of these forms of oppression requires struggle, but struggle against only one probably cannot be effective. The systemic integration of modern society makes them intertwined. Concern for any oppression requires concern for all oppression. This implies an objective basis for a broad-based political unity, and in this there is hope.

The real problem is the behemoth of industrialism ever expanding its grip, around the globe, beneath the earth, and into the skies. The seeds of an effective and radical ecocentrism live in those who somehow awaken to the exhilaration of being human in harmony with the rest of nature. Some may choose to stand for the forests, and that is good. Others, however, must reach out to the oppressed of the world and build bridges between the poor who live within the industrial world and those at the periphery. This requires political organization and action. It is another essential path.

Although grounds for despair are all around, there are also signs of hope. The environmental movement has broadened and deepened with astonishing rapidity. The Green movement is a significant presence in the national politics of many countries. Environmental groups and use support direct action, such as Earth First!, Sea Shepherd, and Greenpeace often have significant support from the general public. Feminism, both in theory and in practice, has become an important force for social change, and ecological feminism will probably increase in importance within feminism.

It is hard to know now whether such movements can gain sufficient strength in numbers to force a reversal of the structure of industrialism. We do not know how much time we have. We may be in a transitional epoch and not the closing hours of industrialism—no one really knows. If there is time, then building an effective radical ecocentric movement founded on the desire for community life, on a rejection of social domination and sexual oppression, on an empathy for other animals, and on a love for all of nature may be able to effectively challenge and restructure industrialism.

We have recently taken a few steps back from the nuclear abyss. Should demilitarism spread, as it can if citizens continue to press for a real peace, this will release massive social resources for social and ecological reconstruction. Numerous projects must be funded, including reforestation, stopping desertification, controlling and reversing population growth, developing energy efficiency and eventually ceasing the use of fossil fuels, stopping the loss of rainforests, expanding wilderness, ending the human extinction of animal and plant species, protecting the ozone shield, dealing with climate change, and many other tasks. Since the world military budget is some $900 billion each year, the financial resources are there if we can demilitarize society. The point is not that it is easy, but that it is possible. Peace action remains critical.
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The struggle will extend beyond any of our lifetimes, and it is important to live now in a way that enables one’s spirit to flourish. Humility, humor, and compassion are necessary to stay on the path. It is important to remember that mistakes are part of the way and results are often ambiguous. While the search for purity is admirable, its attainment is impossible and the fruits of action are uncertain. The point is the action, not its fruit. Such an understanding can sustain us through the hard times with a joy in all existence and an appreciation of our fellow travelers. As Norman Cousins put it, none of us “knows enough to be a pessimist.”

Notes


3. I do not mean to characterize the beliefs of these authors, as they do not directly address the question of anthropocentrism. Dryzek uses an anthropocentric perspective, but he does not claim that it is adequate. He uses it as a minimal assumption and adopts it because such an assumption is embedded in the perspectives which he wishes to meet on their own ground, *Rational Ecology*, 35.

4. Murray Bookchin has generated numerous books and articles in his long and consistent advocacy of social ecology, an ecologically informed variant of anarchism. The main work is *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto: Cheshire Books, 1982). His most recent statements of his position are *Remaking

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6. The human-centered environmentalists rarely argue for their anthropocentrism. Social ecologists focus on social hierarchy, ecological feminists focus on gender-rooted causes, and deep ecologists emphasize anthropocentrism.

7. See Marti Kheel, “Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference,” *The Trumpeter* 8, 2 (Spring 1991): especially 70. See also Karen Warren’s discussion of the “boundary conditions” of ecofeminist ethics. She includes “descriptions and prescriptions of social reality that do not maintain, perpetuate, or attempt to justify social ‘isms of domination’ and the power-over-relationships used to keep them intact.” “Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology,” *Hypatia* 6, 1 (Spring 1991): 181. Although she does not mention it, this would clearly include deep ecology within ecofeminist ethics. I think the perception of unity will spread to most radical environmentalists as the movement develops further.


12. Naess is clear that his view is not misanthropic. His negative reaction towards the increase of human population is not to foster any animosity towards humans as such — on the contrary, human fulfillment seems to demand and need free nature. Arne Naess, *Ecology, Con-


15. Naess, Ecology, 91, emphasis in original. He also states: “Human nature may be such that with increased maturity a human need increases to protect the richness and diversity of life for its own sake. Consequently, what is useless in a narrow way may be useful in a wider sense, namely satisfying a human need.” Naess, Ecology, 177, emphasis in original.


24. See Warwick Fox, Towards a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism (Boston: Shambhala, 1990). I should note that Fox’s concern in this book is with what is philosophically distinctive about deep ecology, 43. Although he recognizes the political dimensions of deep ecology, that is not the subject of his book.


27. Tucker, Marx-Engels Reader, 498.


29. Sigmund Kvaloy, “Norwegian Ecophilosophy and Ecopolitics and Their Influence from Buddhism,” in Buddhist Perspectives on the Ecocrisis, edited by Klas Sandell (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1987), 62. Dave Foreman, a founder of the Earth First! movement, has argued that the movement is a holding action to save species and old-growth forests until industrialism collapses.


33. See Christopher Manes, Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1990) for a sympathetic and up-to-date account of the activities of radical ecocentrists.


35. Such was the outcome of the Third New York State Environment and Labor Conference, November 1991, which had delegates from a wide spectrum of labor and community groups.


38. Copies of the program are available for $4.00 from The Greens Clearinghouse, PO Box 30208, Kansas City, MO 64112, 816–931–9366.


42. See Michael Albert, Leslie Cagan, Noam Chomsky, Robin Hahnel, Mel King, Lydia Sargent, and Holly Sklar, Liberating Theory (Boston: