Dark Green or Deep (Ecocentric) Ethics

By Patrick Curry

Editor's Note: Reprinted below is the full text of Chapter 8 of the book entitled *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction* by Patrick Curry (revised edition published by Polity Press, 2011. 332 pp.); ISBN-13:978-0-7456-5126-2. The reason that chapter is posted at this web site is because it provides an overview of the different strains or varieties of ecocentric (literally Earth centered) writings which place the Earth rather than the human species at the centre of all value and creativity. I believe that students of environmental ethics would benefit from learning about the broader context of Earth-centered thinking. Toward that end I hope that this chapter will be helpful.

New Introductory text for Chapter 8

What follows is a copy of Chapter 8 of the revised edition of my book **Ecological Ethics: An Introduction** *(Polity Press, 2011). This chapter is the fullest treatment in the book of ecocentric ethics as such, and includes some discussion of Leopold's Land Ethic, Gaia Theory, Deep Ecology, Left Biocentrism and the Earth Manifesto as well as Earth Charter. It can speak for itself but let me add two things.*

The first is that ethics is inherent to all relationships. So if we are in relationships with the natural world and its non-human places and inhabitants – and of course, we are, continually – then ethics is not a niche or an optional extra. Nor can it be left to 'experts'. We are all responsible for it.

The second point is that although I am critical of Deep Ecology in some important respects, my intention was to retain (maybe rescue) what is good about it and incorporate that into what I feel is a stronger and truer perspective, ecocentrism.

Inevitably, this chapter assumes some points from earlier in the book, but I don't think that will create too many problems. The reader might want to know, however, that other chapters discuss ethics and value, shallow and intermediate green ethics, the treatment of animals, green citizenship, ecofeminism, moral pluralism and post-secularism and human overpopulation – all in relation to ecocentric ethics. There is also a long chapter that tests it, so to speak, against a range of contentious issues including nuclear power and wind farms, geo-engineering, the food system, carbon trading and ecosystem services, aspects of capitalism and alternative movements.

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-- Patrick Curry, January 2014.

Chapter 8: Dark Green or Deep (Ecocentric) Ethics

A Suggested Definition

Ecocentric (literally, Earth-centred) ethics, like biocentrism, is non-anthropocentric. However, it differs in that ecocentric or dark green ethics takes as objects of ethical concern ***holistic*** entities (although that can and usually does include individuals); and those entities include integral components that are non-living as well as animate.

An ecocentric, dark green or deep ecological ethics, I suggest, must be able to satisfy at least these criteria:

1 *It must be able to recognize the value, and therefore support the ethical defence, of the integrity of species and of ecosystemic places, as well as human and non-human organisms*. So it is holistic, although not in the sense of excluding considerations of individual value.
2 Within nature-as-value, it must (a) *allow for conflicts between the interests of human and non-human nature*; (b) *allow purely human interests, on occasion, to lose*. (It is hardly a level playing-field otherwise.)

Thus, dark green ethics rejects both the Sole and the Greater Value Assumptions in favour of the idea that some or all natural beings, in the broadest sense, have independent moral status.[1] Ecological problems are not solely defined by reference to human beings (although they can be so defined), other natural entities deserve protection regardless of their use or value to humans, and nature has intrinsic value (although there is room for differences about exactly what that means) which may, in specific instances, predominate over human value. All deep or dark green ethics subscribes to the position that 'the ecological community forms the ethical community' (Sylvan and Bennett 1994: 91), and although we shall look at Sylvan's Deep-Green Theory separately later on, it is fair to borrow his description of it for ecocentric ethics as such: it 'find[s] all standard ethics mired in heavy prejudice, a prejudice in favour of things human and against things non-human' (ibid. 139–40). Note, however, that the truth of that observation depends on what ethics are considered standard; standard modern ethics are, certainly, but not necessarily virtue ethics.

Of the possible objections to the definition above, let me briefly address three. One is that the concept of ecological integrity (or a natural or healthy condition) is now considered to be more complex and contingent than when it was assumed that every ecosystem naturally arrived at a 'climax state'. That is true, but it does not invalidate the sense of integrity 'in terms of the capacity of the Earth's ecosystems to continue functioning so that the environmental services are maintained upon which the wellbeing of humans and all life depend' (Mackey 2004: 79).[2] (Note, however, the inaptness of the term 'environmental services' when what is serving and what is being served are, in actuality, inseparable; and the danger of a narrow definition of 'well-being' by those for whom a broad one would be inconvenient.)

The second possible objection can be disposed of quickly: 'Who sides with non-human nature if not people? So how can an ethic be ecocentric?' Of course this is an ethic *for* humans; but that does not mean humans can or must side only *with* humans. (The parallel with the confusion between anthropocentric and anthropogenic is precise.)

The third is the pious and highly convenient opinion that 'everything green that matters can be taken care of by looking out for our own human interests.' I hope no one who has got this far can still take such wishful thinking seriously. And if 'saving' what can still be saved, including ourselves, requires measures protecting nature's interests as such, ask yourself this: to what extent do we see each of the following kinds of measures enacted: ones which (1) solely benefit humans, (2) benefit humans in ways which could indirectly benefit others as well, (3) directly benefit both humans and non-humans, or (4) solely benefit non-humans. To grasp the extent to which the things we do are skewed in favour of our self-interest, as we usually see it, ask yourself what the ratio is between measures of the first kind and of the fourth. A thousand to one? A million to one? Let us just say that moving towards more measures of the last three kinds, at least, would be a very good thing.

Ecocentric ethics is our principal concern in this book, partly because the perspective it offers cannot be replaced by the light or mid-green kinds. It is a deep-green ethic that helps us realise the enormity of the crime when an old-growth forest is razed for pulp, a mountain-top is levelled for coal, a seabed is covered in oily slime, or the very last few members of a species die – obscure, perhaps, but unique and irreplaceable, and not insignificant to themselves – as a result of human greed or selfishness.

The other reason for giving ecocentrism pride of place is that the urgency of its contemporary relevance seems matched only by the extent to which it has been ignored or disparaged.[3] So let us turn, in more detail and depth, to its principal varieties.

The Land Ethic

The Land Ethic was formulated by the wildlife biologist and conservationist Aldo Leopold (1887–1948) in *A Sand County Almanac with Essays on Conservation from Round River* (1948). More a work of mature reflection than academic philosophy, this became perhaps the single most influential statement (certainly so in America) of ecocentric ethics. That has been assisted by its further development by J. Baird Callicott (1987, 1989).

A number of Leopold's pithier maxims have, with good reason, taken root in green ethical discourse. Let us review them, with some comments. One is that '*A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise*' (1970: 262). The 'biotic community' is potentially misleading here; it is not, like biocentrism, limited to biota or organisms. As Leopold also wrote, 'The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land' (ibid. 239). It does not require much of a leap of imagination to extend this idea to include an *ocean ethic*, as of course it should.[4] The logical conclusion would then be an *Earth ethic*.

The virtues of this formulation are considerable. First, it is fully ethical in the sense of specifying what is good/bad and right/wrong, and (in its intention) consequentially so. As Leopold realized, an essential part of an ethic is limiting what can and cannot be done – in this case, ecologically. Note that a limitation on human freedom is the very thing most often and bitterly rejected by adherents of anthropocentric ethics and instrumental value, for whom nature is, and must be kept as, an ethically inconsiderable resource for humans to do with whatever they wish. Such defensive

hostility is a backhanded compliment to the merits of Leopold's suggestion.

Second, its focus is an unambiguously ecocentric one which does not restrict ethical consideration to either the animate (thus excluding ecosystemic places) or individuals (thus excluding wholes and relations). Leopold recognized the Earth itself as possessing 'a certain kind and degree of life' (1991: 95), and infers from his grasp of ecology how it is not only context but creator. Unlike any of the ethics we have so far discussed, the Land Ethic thus qualifies as a dark green or deep one.[5] Third, its clarity and simplicity are also very helpful in getting the message across – no small matter.

To 'enlarge' the community in such a way reframes all ethical discourse. As Leopold noted, 'a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conquerer of the land-community to *plain member and citizen of it*' (1970: 240; although 'peculiar member' might be more apt). What a radical change that is, or would be!

No ethical position is without its problems, of course. A potentially serious one here arises from Leopold's holism, namely that individual interests could be unduly overridden in the interest of (someone's particular version of) the collective whole. This has invited the somewhat overheated charge of 'environmental fascism' from Tom Regan, the defender of individual animal rights (1984: 362).[6] It is certainly true that there is a clear difference (axiological and ethical) between the emphases of the Land Ethic on the one hand and animal liberation and/or rights on the other. Indeed, that difference is one reason why the former qualifies more straightforwardly as dark green.

As Callicott has rightly pointed out, any distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' or 'self'and 'other' is strictly relative and never ultimate, except as a modernist fantasy: 'it is impossible to find a clear demarcation between oneself and one's environment. .. . The world is, indeed, one's extended body' (1989: 113).[7] But such holism is not necessarily collectivist in an authoritarian (let alone fascist) way. As Callicott also suggests, there is nothing in Leopold's work to suggest that the Land Ethic was intended to replace all other ethics; instead, it was to be added to the others, and contextualize them in a new way. Conflicts between the ecological good and that of any individual human where the latter must give way thus cannot be ruled out (we sometimes have that already, where the common good is restricted to its social version), but they do not necessarily follow from the Land Ethic as such.[8]

Another potential problem, more narrowly philosophical, is the one discussed earlier of trying to infer an ethical 'ought' from a factual 'is' – in this case, the injunction to value and protect nature from knowledge produced by the science of ecology. And it is true that Leopold often seems to be doing just this. But his goal was, and surely ours still is, not the hopeless enterprise of arriving at a philosophically (or scientifically) impeccable theory which will command the assent of all rational beings, etc. Rather, it is to articulate a reasonably coherent, consistent and clear set of ethical principles, informed by and conveying ecocentric values, which will lend themselves to incorporation into people's attitudes and ways of life.

This is a political, social and cultural programme, not a purely logical one. Nor should it try to be all-encompassing, dominating or replacing all other considerations. A normative ecological imperative such as the Land Ethic – or any of the others discussed here – can only hope to acquire suffcient influence in the world to *check* anthropocentrism, instrumentalism and utilitarianism; not to eliminate greed, stupidity and hate in relation to our home and fellow creatures, but to significantly reduce their scope.[9]

Who, it might also be objected, is to say what a particular biotic community's 'integrity, beauty and stability' consists of? It is not self-evident, especially given (as earlier mentioned) that contemporary ecological science has changed since Leopold's day and no longer perceives 'climax' states, for example, but more complex successions. But the answer to this fear is implicit in the question. The Land Ethic introduces no new demands or problems here. Decisions about what matters most in any given situation are already taken everywhere, all the time. And such decisions are always axiological and political; they have *never* been purely scientific. Science requires judgement as much as any other human enterprise, and that judgement necessarily involves values, emotions and ideas that have not themselves been arrived at 'scientifically'.[10] We may update Leopold's definition of an ecosystem which, 'now meaning something more akin to a locale, has integrity and stability to the degree that it is capable of sustaining biological processes' (Des Jardins 2001: 201) and that is indeed helpful, but such refinements cannot ever relieve us of the responsibility of making decisions on ethical grounds.

It is also to the point that Leopold's own understanding of ecology involved grasping (unlike so many of the techno-managerial 'ecologists' of today) that the immense complexity of ecosystems is matched by our own relative ignorance. The upshot is the advice, when dealing with the natural world, to proceed with respect, caution and, whenever possible, a light touch – what we earlier identified as the precautionary principle. Working with rather than overruling evolutionary changes, encouraging native species, and preferring biological to artefactual (engineering) solutions would be good examples (ibid. 198). Cross-species gene transfers, before releasing the resulting organisms to interact with those in the wild, would definitely not; nor would 'relocating' habitats.[11]

Such an emphasis is part of what Leopold had in mind when he recommended that we learn to '*think like a mountain*' (1970: 129–33): that is, to see things from (say) a mountain's perspective, with its time-scale and indeed priorities. This metaphor has been adopted by Deep Ecologists, who have given it a flavour at once mystical and literal-minded. But they have a point; it is anthropocentrism (especially in its Cartesian modernist form) that has restricted subjectivity and agency to human beings. Indeed, its extreme scientific expression has long been trying to eliminate this last stronghold, in a programme of perfect, if suicidal, consistency. Ecocentrism must counter that attempt with many subjectivities and perspectives, including non-human ones.[12]

Gaia Theory

Gaia Theory is the name that has replaced its original tag, 'the Gaia Hypothesis'.[13] It was suggested thirty-five years ago and subsequently developed, primarily by the independent scientist James Lovelock, although Lynn Margulis has also made important contributions.[14] The basic idea is that the Earth is more like a living organism than an inanimate machine, which is made up of highly complex interacting ecosystems binding together not only the continents, oceans and atmosphere, but also its living inhabitants; and like an organism, it is (within limits) self-renewing, adjusting to changing conditions through feedback loops in order to maintain relative stability, especially of the atmosphere and temperature. Gaia and its inhabitants co-evolve together in a web of relationships of which symbiosis (not, as in most evolutionary theory, competition) is the dominant kind.

'Gaia' is the name of the ancient Greek goddess of the Earth, which Lovelock adopted following a suggestion by the novelist William Golding. It has aroused a great deal of hostility among scientists who, significantly, seem to feel that animism (the world, and/or its parts, as alive) is still the Enemy; on the other hand, it has also conferred on the theory an accessible and, to others, attractive handle. And the description of the Earth as a super-organism is controversial even among its supporters, some of whom prefer an emphasis on systems theory, with its stress on physical states changing over time, weather patterns, etc.[15] The basic objection seems to be that Gaia Theory merely offers a new (or old) metaphor without specifying any 'mechanisms'. However, the basis of the objection is itself metaphorical, despite assuming its own 'objective' validity: namely the *metaphor*, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, of the world and all its parts as a machine.[16]

Gaia Theory started out as a scientific theory but it has had, and will continue to have, a significant impact in other contexts; so it is fair, and important, to ask what kind of *ethics* follows from it.[17] The inclusion of inanimate elements, integral to animate life – or rather, as at least equally integral to the life of the Earth as its organisms – points toward ecocentrism. So too does the holist emphasis, which is perhaps stronger in this ethic than in any other considered here. But as with the Land Ethic, that emphasis is double-edged. Positively, there are urgent ecological problems which at first seem difficult to bring under the umbrella (so clearly vital in most other respects) of place, specific ecosystems and localism. Although they will not succeed without local, regional and and national participation, the issues of fluorocarbons and the ozone layer, and carbon dioxide emissions and global warming, require international scientific cooperation in order to collect and evaluate evidence, and demand international political cooperation for their resolution.[18] They also present a kind of quasi-universal challenge to much of life as such. Note too the salutary point that humans constitute only one player, albeit currently a major one, in the Gaian drama; even if we succeed in making the planet uninhabitable for ourselves, we will undoubtedly be survived by other forms of life, and by Gaia herself. A likelier scenario is that humanity will survive, but in extremely difficult circumstances in a biotically degraded world.

In doing so, however, we would take many other forms of life with us, entirely non-voluntarily, and cause unimaginable suffering to them as well as to other humans. And nothing in Gaia Theory actually specifies – as I believe a fully ecocentric theory should – that this matters ethically. In fact, rather like Hardin's lifeboat ethics (with which it shares a certain sensibility), the theory could be interpreted entirely within an anthropocentric and shallow ethical frame: we should stop destabilizing Gaia simply because that is dangerous to us. Of course, to the extent that we succeeded in stopping or suffciently slowing that process, many species would thereby also be saved. But it is quite possible to imagine a world that is stable for most humans, in Gaian terms, but is highly impoverished in terms of 'biodiversity', dominated by a few hardy 'weedy species'.[19] It is also true that Gaia Theory *could* be interpreted eco-centrically with respect to other life-forms and specific, unique places; but the fact that that would seem to be optional is a weakness.

Gaian holism also presents, it seems to me, a danger of collectivist political authoritarianism. For example, the leap to the Gaian level is sometimes taken without much evident ethical concern for the mere organisms, including human, 'down here'. That level, as far as most personal experience is concerned, is highly abstract; like 'God', 'the nation', 'the people', etc., it therefore leaves an uncomfortable amount of

leeway for it to be appropriated for very different political purposes, and taken in some highly questionable directions. And the fact that such abstraction is 'scientific' (at least as far as its principal advocates are concerned), far from undercutting the point just made, simply adds another dimension to its potential rhetorical power.

Finally, Lovelock has rightly condemned 'the three C's' – cars, cows and chainsaws – on account of their direct contribution to potentially ruinous climate change; but he cavalierly countenances nuclear energy as no threat; indeed, as a solution. Fastening single-mindedly on Gaian criteria, however, overlooks the ethical significance of other considerations: the potential for nuclear accidents or terrorist strikes resulting in massive long-term environmental pollution and ecological damage (by the standards of organic life) together with lingering deaths and disease (both human and otherwise); the corrosive political effects of the dangerous hypertechnology, enormous expense, unaccountability and secrecy that nuclear power always entails; and so on. These are not ethically neglible considerations, but they find no firm foothold here.

Oddly, Lovelock also overlooks the probability that in addition to these problems, a resurgent nuclear industry would almost certainly continue to be used as an excuse to avoid the energy conservation and efficiency measures, on the demand side, and cheaper, more efficient renewable technologies (wind, wave and solar power), on the supply side, that really do offer a non-life-threatening solution.

I have already praised holism elsewhere and described the individualism of intermediate ecological ethics (for example, animal liberation/rights) as a limitation. Is it therefore inconsistent to criticize Gaia Theory for ignoring the importance of individuals? No. Ecological holism *is* needed; but it is only safe, so to speak, in the hands of those who understand that when it is necessary to wrong certain individuals (that is, overrule their self-perceived interests) in order to defend the common good (upon which *all* depend), it *is* necessary, but that does not 'justify' it as unproblematically ethical.[20] In short, ethically speaking, Gaia Theory certainly has powerfully positive ecocentric potential, not least for an ethic of 'global medicine' (although it will take more than a science of 'planetary biology' to realize that goal).[21] Its current limitations, however, seem to indicate that it would need supplementing.

Deep Ecology

Deep Ecology is both a metaphysical philosophy and a social/ cultural movement with political implications. It began as essentially an attempt to work out the principles of ecological activism, rather than as a strictly academic theory. Within the world of contemporary ecological discourse generally, it remains one of the most influential approaches, particularly in America. It was inspired by the work of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, beginning with his paper of 1973, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements'. Bill Devall and George Sessions (1985) have also contributed importantly to its development.[22] The formal basis of Deep Ecology are the *eight Platform Principles* formulated by Naess and Sessions:

1 The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of non-human life-forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes.
2 Richness and diversity of life-forms are values in themselves and contribute to the

flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.

3 Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.

4 Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

5 The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.

6 Significant change of life conditions for the better requires change in policies. These a ffect basic economic, technological and ideological structures.

7 The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of intrinsic value) rather than adhering to a high standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

8 Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.[23]

Some of this ground we have discussed in other but related contexts: the distinction between Shallow Ecology or 'environmentalism' and Deep Ecology (which, indeed, derives from Naess); ecological holism; and the idea of intrinsic value. Subject to what has already been discussed, these important aspects of Deep Ecology need no further comment. One peculiarity, however, is that the Platform Principles make no explicit reference to the Earth as such, emphasizing instead life-forms. That means Deep Ecology could well be identified as a biocentric mid-green or intermediate ethic. However, I am going to argue that the import of Deep Ecology is ecocentric nonetheless, both in the intentions of its founders and (more importantly) how it has been commonly understood. Within the Deep Ecology movement, the terms 'biocentric' and 'ecocentric' tend to be used interchangeably, and it is significant that the main activist movement Deep Ecology inspired was called 'Earth First!' The common adoption by Deep Ecologists of Leopold's injunction to 'think like a mountain' points to the same conclusion.

Another complication is more serious. Together with Sessions, Naess has outlined a particular instance of a Deep Ecological theory, Ecosophy T, which emphasizes two further principles.[24] In theory, these do not replace the original eight, and remain optional for supporters of Deep Ecology. (As we shall see, the Left Bio group, for example, accept the eight but tend to reject Ecosophy T.) However, Naess himself and others have laid considerable stress on them, and as Kohak perceptively notes, that stress has been accompanied by a perceptible drift in Naess's work since 1973 from a 'Deep Ecology' to a 'Depth Ecology' – as in, depth psychology – that has contributed to the importance of these two principles for the Deep Ecology movement (Kohak 2004: 117).[25] Yet they are also, as we shall see, its most problematic elements. The two principles concerned are as follows.

Self-realization (with an upper-case S). The idea here is that the nature of entities is *constituted* by the relations between them, rather than entities being preformed and then establishing relations, or such relations being simply one-way: in Naess's words, a 'relational, total-field image' rather than a 'man-in-the-environment' image. So far so good, but this total field is then conceptualized as one's real Self, as distinct from one's illusory ego-self, and a normative imperative derived: to realize one's Self, i.e., to perceive that that is one's true nature, and to identify with it. (This is a psycho-spiritual process that can be ongoing and take place by degrees.) The hope is that since one's own nature is identical with nature's nature, so to speak, then one would no more harm the natural world unnecessarily than one would harm oneself; and

ethics, at least as any kind of rules or imperatives, becomes redundant.

Biocentric egalitarianism. Naess paraphrases this idea as 'the equal right' of life-forms 'to live and blossom'. (It turns out this means ecospherical, or simply ecocentric, egalitarianism.) This seems to be a particular development of ecocentrism which emphasizes not only the value of nature, both human and non-human, but the equality of entities – analogous to human equality despite social class – as instances of such value.

Now some of the criticisms levelled against Deep Ecology do not pass muster. This applies particularly to the vitriolic attacks of Murray Bookchin.[26] For example, Deep Ecology is certainly not necessarily misanthropic (let alone fascist); it simply denies that humans alone have intrinsic value. A more ambiguous question is whether it is inherently quietist, that is, passively anti-political, insofar as an emphasis on states of consciousness (to which we shall return) is a dominant theme; however, as the Platform Principles make clear, political action is, at least in principle, also encouraged.

Together with the work of the writer Edward Abbey, who coined the term 'monkey-wrenching' (i.e. throwing what we in the UK call a 'spanner' in the ecocidal works). Deep Ecology has also inspired some engaged and effective direct activism in defence of nature. Earth First! itself, so far as I know, no longer exists, and the extent to which the direct action with which it was associated has been effective is debatable. However, it very valuably enlarged the debate about what was, and is, really valuable. It also succeeded in revealing the values of some of its critics, like the President of the American *Wildlife* Federation, who apparently stated in 1987 that he saw 'no fundamental difference between destroying a river and destroying a bulldozer'.

In any case, let's be clear (as Abbey was): *sabotage* – the destruction of inanimate objects or property – is not identical to *terrorism*, which is violence against living beings. The same applies to *ecotage* as against *ecoterrorism*.[27] Bron Taylor describes deep ecologists as adherents of 'dark green religion' (something we shall take up in Chapter 11). His considered conclusion is that 'the main themes of dark green religion – which include the idea that all living things have intrinsic value – do not easily lend themselves to indifference toward human suffering, let alone to virulent streams of religious, ethnic, or territory-based hatred' (2010: 218).

Some social ecologists and ecofeminists have charged Deep Ecologists with failing to recognize that contributions of people to ecological destruction are not the same, but wildly unequal (e.g., that of an oil corporation president versus that of an impoverished child in the global South), and likewise those who suffer its consequences. This point is certainly valid and we should not lose sight of it. But it is also true that there is a common hierarchy of value, which is the essence of anthropocentrism, in which any human being, *simply as such*, has more value than any non-human being. This is the sense in which 'human chauvinism' or 'speciesism' is as much a vice as racism or sexism.

There has also been intellectual criticism such as that of John Benson, who maintains that the identification with Self demanded by Deep Ecology has three possible senses, all of them unsatisfactory (2000: 126). One is empathy, but this is apparently limited in its objects to other intelligent and/or sentient animals, since it 'cannot carry over to plants and mountains'. Here Benson simply assumes, without feeling the need for argument, an individualistic sentience-chauvinism. Second, 'the [natural] object is thought of as partly constitutive of who one is', giving rise to the same kind of concern one feels for oneself. However, 'It is of the essence of such relationships that they are to particular places and beings', and such empathy will

therefore not 'take us as far in concern for natural beings as Naess wishes to go'. Here Benson has touched on something important, for it may be that (as I shall argue later) that is as far as anyone *needs* to go, or *can* go, in any kind of ecological context; in which case, Deep Ecologists' calls for a cosmic or cosmological consciousness are mistaken. Third, he points to close human relationships, such that the other person's good is felt to be one's own good. Once again, however – and characteristically of writers even on environmental ethics – Benson dares not venture very far from the modernist anthropocentric redoubt: such empathy, it seems, cannot extend to 'mountains and rivers'. Why not? The work of Anthony Weston (1994) and David Abram (1996) is evidence to the contrary. (Or rather, one kind of evidence, namely convincing arguments. The other kind, equally necessary and usually more vivid, is sympathetic personal experience of the natural world beyond the confines of any book, no matter how good.)

Nonetheless, the problems with Ecosophy T that remain are severe. I shall take the two 'basic principles' above in reverse order. Biocentric egalitarianism can be dealt with quickly. Ecocentrism is both possible and needed, or so I maintain; but this particular version of it is neither.[28] It is both intellectually and metaphysically implausible – why should value in nature be distributed equally or evenly? (Ironically, there is a mechanistic quality to that very assumption.)

It is also hopelessly impracticable as a guide to action: you cannot ask anyone (let alone everyone) to live as if literally every life-form – a lethal virus, say – has equal value to all others, including her- or himself; and it offers no guidance, indeed it allows no way, to resolve inevitable conflicts. Perhaps this is why Naess, under pressure, retreated to the assertion that it was intended 'simply as a statement of non-anthropocentrism', and added the words 'in principle' to its formulation (1989: 28).[29] But in thus trying to correct what was badly formulated from the start, this simply relieves the point of any force at all. What is needed is a coherent and defensible ecocentrism.

Self-realization

This idea fares still worse.[30] Naess frequently stated that he has been influenced by Buddhism, but talk of a Big Self and its 'realisation' flatly contradicts the fundamental Buddhist denial of any ultimate reality to a self, whether big or little; it is much more in keeping with the very different metaphysics of Advaita Vedanta or neo-Platonism.[31] Furthermore, metaphysical enlightenment and spiritual purity as a supreme value may offer individual salvation, but only at the price of abandoning the rest of the natural world: not exactly the Bodhisattva ideal![32] As Deane Curtin shows, a much more promising (and valid) Buddhist approach than 'Self-realization' is '*co*-realization', based on the thirteenth-century Zen master Dōgen-zenji: 'If the Self simply extends itself to new realms of identification, values appear to be created relative to the state of the Self. But when we *and* the "myriad beings" go forth to corealize, this is a way of *being in the world*, not a mental construction' (2000: 263) Indeed, although Curtin is too tactful to say so, keeping realization as a mental or spiritual process is itself anthropocentric. As Plumwood (2006a) has convincingly showed, an emphasis on cognition, mind and/or spirit in a way that presupposes their superior status (as Naess and Sessions do; otherwise why proclaim its central importance?) is part-and-parcel of the programme to reserve these attributes, and attached privileges, for humanity alone. The emphasis on Self-realization as the 'real

work' courts idealism and dangerously neglects 'external' consequences and effects. Nature, after all, is just as much 'outer' as it is 'inner'.[33]

Ecosophy T holds that people will 'naturally' do the right thing(s) when their apprehension of the natural world is correct, as a result of ever-wider identification of oneself with that world and its fellow inhabitants. This is to ask too much of metaphysics or spirituality. There is no one 'solution' to a problem as complex and deep as ecocide; nothing follows automatically from anything else, and at no point are there any guarantees, as some Deep Ecologists seem to imply..

Significantly, Naess maintains that 'If Deep Ecology is deep it must relate to our fundamental beliefs, not just to ethics' (1989: 20). This simply assumes that ethics cannot be deep or fundamental, because it consist only of following rules or applying principles. But as we have seen, those are neither the only nor the most promising kinds of ethics. Unaware of virtue ethics, it seems, some Deep Ecologists confuse moral*ity* with moral*ism*, and see ethics as a kind of optional add-on at best. They fail to see that deep ecological insights *and* rules alike can only succeed to the extent that they become an integral part of the political, social and cultural processes of 'being in the world' as active – and in this case, green – citizens.[34] When Naess (1989: 20) asserts that 'Ethics follow from how we experience the world', and David Rothenberg asks, 'But just how should we experience the world?', that question is as ethical as it is unavoidable.

In sharp contrast, the pure identity via a Big Self that Ecophists seek terminates in solipcism (absolute egoism and subjective idealism). It also contradicts Naess's own stress elsewhere on relations and pluralism. In practice, too, otherness – recognizing, respecting and valuing differences – is as valid and integral to our relationship with nature as commonality.[35] As we saw in the earlier discussion of ecocentrism, human beings have certain distinctive characteristics vis-à-vis non-human nature, even though these confer no special privileges or superiority (or should not), and are ultimately themselves the work of nature too. To deny difference as such in favour of 'oneness' is dangerous, because that is to deny relations and therefore ethics. It is also to invite a misanthropic ecocentrism which either demands the sacrifice of human distinctiveness as the price of entry to an abstract and collectivized nature, or tries to exclude a demonized humanity from nature. Either way, that programme would amount to an ethical disaster (if it 'succeeded'), or a political disaster (if it failed), opening the door to a reactionary reassertion of anthropocentrism.

'Self-realization' also falsifies an important part of our lives as natural beings who experience themselves as distinct from other natural beings and vice versa. To quote Evernden, 'Wildness is not "ours" – indeed it is the one thing that can never be ours. It is self-willed, independent, and indifferent to our dictates and judgements' (1992: 120). Bill McKibben (1990) has suggested that nature is coming to an end with the effects of human meddling, if not exactly control, becoming unavoidable everywhere on the planet. His definition of nature may be questioned, but the undeniable poignancy involved draws its force from deep regret at the passing of what is *not* 'us'.

This point is also perceptible in other, more mundane, ways. Was it delightful watching two foxes play, as I did recently, because they were somehow my Self? No. It was delightful because they had nothing to do with me, in any meaningful sense of the word. They were quite unconcerned with me, my will or my desires; they were, in fact, much more important to each other.

Actually, 'Self-realization' is covertly anthropocentric, thus undermining Deep Ecology's own ecocentrism. As Plumwood has shown, it entails a kind of chauvinism

in favour of those beings evidently capable of Self-realization, for which humans are (in their own opinion) the obvious candidates. It denies the agency and autonomy of nonhuman beings and places – hardly an ecological move! – while opening the door to 'an enlargement and extension of egoism' (1995: 160). The New Age version of spiritual Self-realization, selling ancient wisdom to the middle classes, has proven to be highly compatible with the commodification and market capitalism that from one of the chief motors of ecocide.[36]

Plumwood points out that Deep Ecologists have suggested 'that once one has realised that one is indistinguishable from the rainforest, its needs would become one's own. But there is nothing to guarantee this – one could equally well take one's own needs for its' (1995: 160). Indeed, where there is a strong cultural tradition of conflating the social and natural worlds, as with Confucianism, that seems to be exactly what happens: human self-improvement 'cannot' conflict with what is regarded as the good of nature.[37] (I would add that, as a matter of fact, people *do* harm themselves, to varying extents, not infrequently. So even if the metaphysics worked, so to speak, it would not necessarily deliver the desired result.)

In short, Ecosophy T's unity within an enlarged Self 'implies reduction to the personal, a dismissal of ethics, and a limitation of the political to the intra-human….[T]he key concept for understanding why people become active on behalf of nonhuman nature is not identification or unity but *solidarity*, the most fundamental of political relationships' (Plumwood 2006b: 65, 70; my emphasis). Sylvan too was right: 'The very pedigree of the directive' – to maximize Self-realization – 'should have alerted suspicion. It emerges direct from the humanistic Enlightenment; it is linked to the modern celebration of the individual human, freed from service to higher demands, and also typically from ecological constraints' (Sylvan and Bennett 1994: 154).

An ambitious version of Deep Ecology has been developed by Fox (1995) under the name of ***transpersonal ecology***, with the intention of improving the original while meeting, or undercutting, the criticisms of feminism and socialism. Unfortunately, his emphasis on replacing a sense of personal self with an 'ontologically' or 'cosmologically' based Self suffers from the defects just noted. Here too, ecofeminists have been astute critics. Ariel Salleh (1993) notes that Fox's attitude is totalizing in a way that resonates with the anthropocentrism it is supposed to be correcting – and with the ***androcentrism*** (male-centredness), including its own, that it fails to address.[38] Plumwood (1995, 1993) points out that such a degree of bloodless abstraction ('Being', 'the cosmos', etc.) is an integral part of the anthropocentric, rationalist and masculinist ideology of power over nature. By the same token, it is hostile to just the kind of intimate daily relationship with sensuous natural particulars, and the value of them, that is so important to recover.[39] It is passionate attachments to *particular* places, things and non-humans that move people, and motivate people to defend them. As she says, 'It is a short step from the accounts of the ecological [S]elf as the overcoming of "selfish" attachment and particularity . . . to demanding detachment from epistemological location' (2002: 255, n. 19). That step in turn opens the door to the poisoned chalice of techno-scientific 'solutions' to ecological problems; and at least one influential Deep Ecologist, Sessions (1995), has apparently taken it, sanctioning genetic bioengineering.

Fox argues that 'We can make no firm ontological divide in the field of existence…there is no bifurcation in reality between the human and the non-human realms…to the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological

consciousness' (1984: 196). But this is to overstate, and thus distort, the case. The point is not there are *no* boundaries, limits or distinctions (we experience these all the time, and they are a part of life it is futile to try to deny). It is rather that they are only *relatively*, not absolutely, real. This is actually another Buddhist point: not the absolute denial of ego, any more than the assertion of its absolute reality, but a Middle Way: the relative, contingent, impermanent nature of Self. (To say that there is a cosmic spirituality superior to mere things – or indeed, ultimately even different from messy mundane reality – is to assert that there is an 'emptiness' different or apart from 'form', which is about as close to Buddhist 'theological' heresy as is possible.)[40]

This critique overlaps with the one by ecofeminists. We have already reviewed the problems highlighted by Plumwood, and in the course of a long-running debate between Fox (1989) and Salleh (1984, 1992), the latter severely (and in my view, rightly) criticised transpersonal ecology for its supervaluation of an abstract and wholly spiritual Being, so to speak, as distinct from particular beings. Salleh pointed out that such a practice has a long androcentric as well anthropocentric pedigree, preserving and extending both masculine privilege and ecological destruction (in a way we shall examine further in the next chapter).

Like Naess, Fox also presents transpersonal ecology as a way of bypassing the axiological issue of value-in-nature and rendering ethics superfluous. He quotes John Seed approvingly: '*It is only by identification with the whole process that correct values will emerge.* Otherwise we see it as self-sacrifice or effort' (Fox 1986: 63; emphasis in original). I have already indicated how such a position depends on ignoring green virtue ethics, but in any case I am not sure why self-sacrifice, let alone effort, should be so problematic (as distinct from merely unfashionable); they surely have a part to play. Rules and duties do have their limitations. But such Deep/Transpersonal Ecologists are vulnerable to Gandhi's pointed remark about trying to devise 'a system so perfect that no one will have to be good.'[41] I'm afraid people will always have to try to be good, or at least not to do bad, as well as be actively encouraged to do good, and discouraged from doing bad.

I have spent some time trying to show exactly why, in terms of what the world needs and what Deep Ecology has to offer, Ecosophy T (that is, Naess and Sessions's own version of a Deep Ecological theory) is a bad idea, a distraction at very best. But the ethical heart of Deep Ecology itself, so to speak, is in the right place, and in a world so saturated with anthropocentrism, justifying the domination and exploitation of nature, it continues to offer a lifeline to those seeking an ecocentric alternative. This could perhaps be strengthened by a renewed emphasis on the Platform Principles.

These were condensed and reformulated by Rowe in a way which avoids some of the drawbacks just described, and is well worth mentioning:

> 1 The well-being and flourishing of the living Earth and its many organic/inorganic parts have value in themselves…. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
> 2 Richness and diversity of Earth's ecosystems, as well as the organic forms that they nurture and support, contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
> 3 Humans have no right to reduce the diversity of Earth's ecosystems and their vital constituents, organic and inorganic.
> 4 The flourishing of human life and culture is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The creative flourishing of Earth and its multitudinous parts, organic and inorganic, requires such a decrease. (1997: 151)

However, even this version, excellent in what it does say, neglects to mention the critical importance of structural social and political change, as well as reducing consumption, and of becoming actively involved in bringing about such changes.

Deep Green Theory

Richard Sylvan (*né* Routley) developed a version of Deep Ecology called 'deep green theory' (DGT), which is perhaps one of the most promising yet.[42] DGT shares the key value-orientation of Deep Ecology: ' "thinking like a mountain" instead of thinking like a cash register' (Sylvan and Bennett 1994: 182). It is a fully ecocentric ethic, as defined earlier, in which (as already mentioned) the ecological community is identical with the ethical community (ibid. 91). Its holism is benign, not that of a forced collectivity, and its emphasis is on the common good of communities, including that of individuals – up to the point where their activities threaten the former, upon which *all* depend. DGT also shares the more specific import of the four reformulated points of Deep Ecology just quoted. Unlike Naess and Session's version of Deep Ecology, however, it is a fully and overtly *ethical* theory, with these characteristics:

- All established or traditional ethics are recognized as inadequate, ecologically speaking. (We have already qualified this point, however, on account of virtue ethics.)
- The human chauvinism of both the Sole Value Assumption and the Greater Value Assumption is rejected, so the intrinsic value of natural items can, in particular situations, override strictly human interests.
- The human/non-human distinction is *not ethically significant*; in fact, no single species, class or characteristic (whether sentience, life or whatever) serves either to justify special ethical treatment, or to deny it. This eco-impartiality, however, does not entail trying to adhere to equal value or treatment in specific situations. Nor does it try to rule out human use of the environment – 'only too much use and use of too much' (ibid. 147). It follows, for example, that sustainable indigenous inhabitation and use of remaining wildernesses is perfectly acceptable, and indeed potentially a key to their preservation; but indigenous industrial development and/or commercial exploitation, unrestrained by ecological considerations, is *not*.[43] Similarly, broadly sustainable hunting for the pot is one thing; the 'bush-meat' trade in Africa that is now threatening whole species, for profit, is something very different. (The ecological effects of development/exploitation are not affected by who its agents are, and, to that important extent, charges of elitism or ethnocentrism are therefore beside the point.[44] But an ecocentric perspective, such as that of DGT, is required in order to recognize this fact.)
- 'What is required now is that reasons be given *for* interfering with the environment, rather than reasons for not doing so' (Sylvan and Bennett 1994: 147) – a point that becomes more urgently true with every passing year. Or, as Midgley puts it, from an eco-centric point of view, 'the burden of proof is not on someone who wants to preserve mahogany trees from extinction. It is on the person who proposes to destroy them' (1997: 96).
- 'The implementation of environmental ethics is a top-down and bottom-up and inside out issue.... Achieving individual change . . . is a start, but it is not enough. Institutional change is also required. It is not enough that individuals may want to

> change practices in their own lives. The community in which they live must meet their needs by offering environmentally sound alternatives' (Sylvan and Bennett 1994: 180).

These points have specific and important economic and fiscal implications, such as replacing profit maximization with ***satisization*** (i.e., sufficiency) and so-called free markets with fair. Sylvan and Bennett's political analysis, including an ecocentric programme for change, is wide-ranging and astute. Here the contrast with Naess and Session's Ecosophy T is striking. Nonetheless, Sylvan, accepting the eight-point Platform, viewed DGT as part of the Deep Ecology movement.

There is considerable detail in Sylvan and Bennett's work about the political, cultural and educational ways in which DGT could – and to become influential, must – be realized as ethical virtue in the practices of green citizenship. They recognize, rightly, that you should not have to be a saint to be ecologically virtuous, but that an ecological society in which such virtue is normal will only come about through a great deal of hard individual and collective work. It will not result from metaphysical enlightenment alone, although a spiritual practice can certainly be part of such work. But this is not the place to go into detail, so I urge readers to seek out their book.

They also point out that, as I have already implied, there are circumstances in which arguments of a shallow and intermediate type may well be appropriate to invoke; deep green ethics is not meant to cancel these out or replace them, but to reach the places they cannot. The same applies to individual and rights-based approaches. Conversely, however, the absence of deep green ethics makes the current vogue for largely cosmetic measures like 'environmental modernization' – what Bahro aptly called 'cleaning the teeth of the dragon' – all too easy.[45]

There is one major point about which I think Sylvan was mistaken, and that is his rejection of reverence for nature in favour of mere 'respect'. For the reasons mentioned earlier in connection with Plumwood's criticism of transpersonal ecology, ecocentrism cannot afford to sacrifice emotional, spiritual and cultural valuing of specific wild places, or, even more importantly, the wild *in* places. As a philosopher (and, perhaps, as a male philosopher), Sylvan's own attachment to rationalism is understandable; but here, ironically, it weakens his own case. We shall return to this point later.

It is puzzling why, given that Sylvan's work is of high quality, original and uncompromising, he is so neglected in ethical-ecological discourse. Perhaps the problem is that last point. In any case, the little criticism he has received so far (such as that of Grey 2000) has been thin and unconvincing. The 'weaknesses' Grey identifies will arguably be true of *any* normative ethical discourse, and, ironically, Grey's own narrowly academic rationalism rules out one serious criticism that could be made of Sylvan: that his own severely intellectual style of writing limited, even contradicted, the import of his message.

Left Biocentrism

This is a green philosophy and activist movement (both are equally emphasized) which initially grew out of the work of an activist and writer in Canada, David Orton.[46] His website 'The Green Web',[47] led to an internet discussion group, now the 'Left Bio' list, whose members agreed a primer of points in collective discussions

culminating in March 1998. Now, general agreement is the basis for membership, and there is considerable and lively discussion of the problems facing those trying to build an ecocentric movement. (The 'bio' of the name is ambiguous, often being used to mean 'eco'.)

This collective character is one of the distinctive aspects of Left Biocentrism, both internally, as a group, and as a movement that explicitly identifies itself as working within the larger Deep Ecology movement, accepts both its ecocentric values and the eight-point Platform, and speaks respectfully of Naess. At the same time, the Left Bio emphasis is quite distinct. Its other main inspiration, the 'Left' part, is that of social justice, political radicalism (both socialist and anarchist) and revolutionary idealism, and its other influences include the ecocentric philosopher-activists Judy Davis, Richard Sylvan, Rudolf Bahro and Andrew McLaughlin.

Rather than believing an ecological society can come entirely from individual change, psycho-spiritual or otherwise, Left Bios recognize that our problems – and therefore any real solution to them – are structural or systemic. Without diminishing the necessity of personal responsibility and initiative, they see that our current collective addiction to overconsumption, overpopulation and technical fixes is a context of irresponsibility that undercuts individual efforts.[48] A truly sustainable society requires social and political structures that actively encourage ecologically virtuous practices by enough individuals, and discourage the contrary, to make a real difference.

As to whether such a society could be achieved 'within' a capitalist framework, there are obviously large questions attached to what is defined as capitalist; but even so, this remains a difficult question.[49] In any case, from a Left Bio perspective, capitalism and socialism are two sides of the same coin: two different aspects of, and responses to, the same process, whose proper name is ***industrialism***.[50] The properly socialist end of the spectrum is the more humane and intelligent (potentially, at least!), and is therefore to that extent preferable, but both are anthropocentric, sharing the same blind spot regarding nature. Adherents of Left Bio retain that preference but no longer believe that all 'our' problems are resolvable within an anthropocentric ambit – or that human problems are the only ones that matter.

A Left Bio perspective is also aware that saving biotic systems will result in harm to humans that is unequally distributed, those with the least resources suffering most. It therefore urges that the latter be actively considered in any transition to an ecologically steady-state society. That point, however, must not be used as an excuse to duck the whole issue.[51] (We shall return to this and related matters in more detail in Chapter 13.)

By the same token – and this is another significant departure from its other main source, the traditions of social democracy, socialism and anarchism – Left Biocentrism is keenly aware of the ecological limits of anthropocentric social justice. It is certainly not that social justice is unimportant or irrelevant, just that they 'are not the *whole* answer, and probably not the primary reason we humans are so far out of balance with what might be sustainable'.[52] (After all, some human societies destroyed their and others' environments long before capitalism.) Concerns with class, gender and race, while urgent, are therefore viewed in the context of *ecological* justice. The goal, as Orton puts it, is 'solidarity with all life, not just human life'. In this view, nature, not labour power, is the principal source of wealth, and that wealth is shared with other life-forms. It is a true commons – even, as such, sacred – and therefore 'not

to be privatised': NOT FOR SALE.[53]

As that last point implies, most Left Bios also reject the secularism and/or atheism of traditional leftism. But they are also critical of both traditional religions, on the one hand, and fully privatized spirituality on the other. Instead, Left Biocentrism affirms a 'collective spirituality' based on the ultimate value of the Earth and its life-forms. The connection with politics is the power of such a perception, both individually and shared, to inspire and sustain a defence of the Earth and its life. It is fair to say, however, that this subject remains one of occasional heated exchanges on the list. (We shall return to it in Chapter 10.)

The Left Biocentrism Primer

Here is the text which Left Bios have agreed:

1 Left biocentrism is a left focus or theoretical tendency within the Deep Ecology movement, which is subversive of the existing industrial society. It accepts and promotes the eight-point Deep Ecology Platform drawn up by Arne Naess and George Sessions. Left biocentrism holds up as an ideal, identification, solidarity, and compassion with all life. 'Left' as used in left biocentrism, means anti-industrial and anti-capitalist, but not necessarily socialist. The expressions 'left biocentrism' or 'left ecocentrism' are used interchangeably.

2 Left biocentrism accepts the view that the Earth belongs to no one. While raising a number of criticisms, left biocentrism is meant to strengthen, not undermine, the Deep Ecology movement which identifies with all life.

3 Left biocentrism says that individuals must take responsibility for their actions and be socially accountable. Part of being individually responsible is to practise voluntary simplicity, so as to minimize one's own impact upon the Earth.

4 Left biocentrists are concerned with social justice and class issues, but within a context of ecology. To move to a Deep Ecology world, the human species must be mobilized, and a concern for social justice is a necessary part of this mobilization. Left biocentrism is for the redistribution of wealth, nationally and internationally.

5 Left biocentrism opposes economic growth and consumerism. Human societies must live within ecological limits so that all other species may continue to flourish. We believe that bioregionalism, not globalism, is necessary for sustainability. The perspective of the German green philosopher Rudolf Bahro is accepted that, for worldwide sustainability, industrialized countries need to reduce their impact upon the Earth to about one tenth of what it is at the present time. It is also incumbent upon non-industrialized nations to become sustainable and it is necessary for industrialized nations to help on this path.

6 Left biocentrism holds that individual and collective spiritual transformation is important to bring about major social change, and to break with industrial society. We need inward transformation, so that the interests of all species override the short-term self-interest of the individual, the family, the community, and the nation.

7 Left biocentrism believes that Deep Ecology must be applied to actual environmental issues and struggles, no matter how socially sensitive, e.g., population reduction, aboriginal issues, workers' struggles, etc.

8 Social ecology, ecofeminism and eco-Marxism, while raising important questions, are all human-centred and consider human-to-human relations within society to be more important and, in the final analysis, determine society's relationship to the natural world. Left biocentrism believes that an egalitarian, nonsexist, non-discriminating society, a highly desirable goal, can still be exploitive towards the Earth.

9 Left biocentrists are 'movement greens' in basic orientation. They are critical of existing

Green political parties, which have come to an accommodation with industrial society and have no accountability to the Deep Ecology movement.

10 To be politically relevant, Deep Ecology needs to incorporate the perspective advanced by left biocentrism.

Ecocentrism and the Left

The explicitly ethical, social and political focus of Left Biocentrism corrects perhaps the single most serious blind spot of other and hitherto better-known versions of the Deep Ecology movement. Left Biocentrism is also well placed, by virtue of its dual ancestry, to put ecology onto the progressive political agenda, where it is now glaringly absent. Extraordinary as it may seem, feminists, anti-racists and socialists are almost as likely as those on the neo-liberal and anti-democratic right to ignore the claims of even mid-range ecological ethics, let alone a fully ecocentric one.

This fact is sadly evident in the programmes of many, probably most of today's green parties, where the green values are strictly shallow: that is, advocated insofar as they further human interests, and not when they conflict with them. Recall, in this connection, Bahro's words quoted above when he resigned from the German Greens. That was the moment, by the same token, when the Greens gained a certain political world in exchange for their soul. Not so many years later, the Green minister Joschka Fischer could say with a straight face that 'A politics of ecological reconstruction is dependent on the mobilisation of enormous sums of money, [which] requires, therefore, a flourishing economy and a financially strong state…' (quoted in Sarkar 1999: 161). He said nothing about the unsustainable impact of those things on the ecosystems that they depend on which, even in purely anthropocentric terms, is self-defeating.

I am generalising, of course, and there are individuals who are honourable exceptions. The general rule, however, is further confirmed by the apparently enlightened and progressive government of Brazil, under 'Lula' da Silva, under whose leftist government the destruction of the Amazonian rainforest has advanced apace (2003 was one of the worst years ever, although 2009 saw the lowest rate of increase in two decades: something we are apparently supposed to celebrate, although the deforestation itself grinds on.) The main driver is forced conversion to cattle ranching for meat and agricultural production, mainly soya, including GM soya, for foreign markets. The Amazonian forest produces more than 20% of the world's oxygen, but apparently global lungs are optional for ambitious socialists in power. Lula has also personally pushed through the giant Belo Monte Dam which is poised to drown about 500 square kilometers of rainforest, terminating not only all its life-forms but jeopardising the lives and livelihoods of tens of thousands of indigenous people there.

Perhaps none of this should be surprising, considering the anthropocentric and modernist (both statist and technological) lineage of Marxism and the socialism it has influenced.[54] To say so is to stray into an often bitter debate between a very few people. The implications are important enough to detain us, however. To begin with, it must be said that advocates of a 'green' Marx – as distinct from green*ing* socialism – indulge in an awful lot of special pleading. The dominance of the Promethean anthropocentric strain in Marxism must be admitted in exactly the same way as the exploitation licensed by the dominant Christian reading of Genesis must: they may be

formally 'wrong' but they are the ones that have made the running, and that (especially for a 'materialist' analysis!) is the main point.

Nor is it entirely wrong even in formal terms. Marx's concern was entirely for human beings, and both his analysis and prescription were intra-human. So too is the rhetoric: for example, Engels's assurance (in *Anti-Dühring*) that under communism, 'man for the first time becomes the real conscious master of Nature'. Ecologically speaking, that is an unappealing prospect. ('Conscious' is merely an empty promise, while 'mastery' is deeply worrying.) As Teresa Brennan points out, 'from the traditional Marxist standpoint, the centralization of production was the necessary if not sufficient condition of revolution: accordingly, any revolutionary program and any revolutionary party had to advocate both industrial development and centralization.' She adds, in a point we shall take up below, that '[t]his advocacy is directly at odds with Gandhi's view that "industrial centralization" is precisely what is destructive to true human progress' (2003: 153).

Even the few Marxist thinkers who have engaged with the ecological challenge show limited ability to adapt.[55] Joel Kovel, for example, says that 'Marx sees no need to differentiate use-value from any notion of intrinsic value to nature. In other words, a term belonging to economic discourse suffices to embrace the entirety of nature means' (p. 306, n. 28) – something with which Kovel apparently has no problem. A generous interpretation would be that by accepting natural limits to growth, he is greening Marxism; but the limits to growth thesis, being solely concerned with human well-being, is not itself ecocentric; and by collapsing the independent intrinsic value of nature into its use-value for humans, full-blown anthropocentrism has been re-admitted by the back door.[56]

Other signs for ecocentric politics to be wary of include an overriding concern with capturing state power (have we learned nothing from the seeds of Stalinism in Leninist vanguardism, to say nothing of the Cambodian and Iranian bloodbaths?), and with hanging onto a reformed, kinder, greener industrialism. These are ambitions which the Marxist left seemingly cannot give up, despite the rather obvious lesson of history that by the time you have your hands on the levers of direct power, you will have become the people you were trying to replace.[57]

In short, 'The ecocentric Left' – of which Left Bio is the best example I know – 'is not anti-Marxist but accepts the limitations of Marx and Marxism from an ecological perspective' (Orton 2005). It also accepts that Marxist concerns and insights are often not only valid but urgent. Nor does it deny that sexism and racism need combating along with economic injustice. But these issues must be placed *within an ecocentric context*. Ultimately, as Rowe (2002: 7) says, 'Neither philosophical liberalism championing liberty nor philosophical socialism championing equality will save us from ourselves. Human history will end in ecology, or nothing.'

Here are a few additional points to consider, especially for those who still think the left's traditional concern with ethics and justice in particular can or should be kept within a purely human ambit. First, at present, it is estimated that humans – roughly 0.5 per cent of the total biomass of the Earth – are consuming, directly or indirectly, between 24 and 39 per cent of the total net product of its terrestrial and aquatic photosynthetic energy (along with about 50 per cent of the accessible runoff of fresh water).[58] This is truly anthropocentrism in action: a single species has already appropriated for its sole use at least a quarter of the planet's energy, upon which *all* life depends. In other words, humanity is behaving just like the biological equivalent – and *ethical*, assuming humans have any choice (which most of us, including those on the left, would like to think) – of a capitalist upper class, master race or patriarchy.

Is there nothing here for a progressive political agenda to address?

Second, it is possible to imagine a world devoid of most species which do not directly or indirectly serve human interests, and of any places which qualify as wild, but in which (although this is harder to imagine) any significant degrees of racism, sexism and inequality also do not exist; a world, in other words, in which the progressive anthropocentric agenda has largely been realized but is nonetheless ecologically severely impoverished at best, and a disaster at worst. But that outcome would (will?) take down any politically progressive agenda with it – not only ultimately, because of our dependence as organisms on ecological dynamics, but well before then, because of the social and political effects of the social stress and disorder, to outright war, resulting from competition, within as well as between countries, for increasingly scarce resources.

Third, when there are direct conflicts between jobs and the economy on the one hand and threatened non-human nature (e.g., old-growth forest) on the other, we know from historical experience how rarely the latter wins, and how tenuous those few victories are: 'the long defeat', indeed.[59] And in this context, the perceived interests of unionized or collectivized labour put it on the same side as capital.[60]

Finally, the unpalatable fact remains (as Sandy Irvine [2001] once put it) that from the Earth's point of view, the effects of an armoured personnel carrier and an ambulance are indistinguishable. However preferable the latter may be – and it *is* – both remain with an anthropocentric ambit that urgently needs an additional, wider and deeper perspective. Orwell touched on that perspective in the homely, ordinary, and egalitarian sort of way that is available to most of us, in his 'Some Thoughts on the Common Toad', written in 1946:

> Is it wicked to take a pleasure in spring and other seasonal changes? To put it more precisely, is it politically reprehensible, while we are all groaning, or at any rate ought to be groaning, under the shackles of the capitalist system, to point out that life is frequently more worth living because of a blackbird's song, a yellow elm tree in October, or some other natural phenomenon which does not cost money and does not have what the editors of left-wing newspapers call a class angle? There is not doubt that many people think so…

But Orwell's point is not a right-wing one, either. He concludes:

> spring is here, even in London N.1, and they can't stop you enjoying it….The atom bombs are piling up in the factories, the police are prowling through the cities, the lies are streaming from the loudspeakers, but the earth is still going round the sun, and neither the dictators nor the bureaucrats, deeply as they disapprove of the process, are able to prevent it.

I will suggest in Chapter 13 that ecocentrism, to become successfully realised, does require anti- (or non-)capitalism; an ecocentric society would be an egalitarian one. The reverse, however, does not follow. As Orton says, 'Implicit in the anti-capitalist view is that it is the ownership of wealth which is the main problem. But the natural world can be destroyed individually and communally, or by the capitalist or socialist state' (2005). The common good, upon which everything depends, includes but vastly exceeds humanity, and what Orton calls 'ecological honesty', as well as ethics, requires that we recognise that fact.

The Earth Manifesto

Two Canadian ecologists/naturalists loosely associated with the Left Bio network have recently produced another deep green manifesto with an even more explicitly ecocentric emphasis. They are Ted Mosquin and Stan Rowe. 'A Manifesto For Earth' (Mosquin & Rowe 2004). It sets out a worldview, with its corresponding ethic and broadly sketched programme, that shifts the focus 'from humanity to the Ecosphere', identified as that 'life-giving matrix' (including its nonorganic components) that is the source of *all* its organisms, sustains them, and to which they ultimately return.

They characterize the dominant contrary view as homocentric (i.e., anthropocentric), and point out that 'Humanity's 10,000-year-old experiment in mode-of-living at the expense of Nature, culminating in economic globalization, is failing. A primary reason is that we have placed the importance of our species above all else.' But like the other dark green ethics discussed here, this one is critical of human chauvinism, not humans as such.

There is a vital place for wonder here, and a sense of the sacred, but not for the off-planet spirituality that characterizes most theistic (and New Age) religions. Similarly, this Earth is not an abstract concept to be wilfully manipulated and 'managed', but a profoundly complex and intricate affair, whose local and regional particularities are of the essence. One can only work *with* them. 'The goal is restoration of Earth's diversity and beauty, with our prodigal species once again a cooperative, responsible, ethical member.' (The resonances with Gaia Theory, Land Ethic and Deep Ecology need no emphasis.)

The principles of the Earth Manifesto cannot be quoted in full here, but this is a basic outline, with excerpts and a few comments.

Core principles

1 *The Ecosphere is the Centre of Value for Humanity*. 'Comprehension of the ecological reality that people are Earthlings, shifts the center of values away from the homocentric to the ecocentric, from *Homo sapiens* to Planet Earth.' As the authors rightly point out, 'Without attention to the priority of Earth-as-context, biocentrism easily reverts to a chauvinistic homocentrism, for who among all animals is commonly assumed to be the wisest and best?'

2 *The Creativity and Productivity of Earth's Ecosystems Depend on their Integrity*. 'The evolutionary creativity and continued productivity of Earth and its regional ecosystems require the continuance of their key structures and ecological processes.'

3 *The Earth-centred Worldview is supported by Natural History*. (It is good to see natural history, as distinct from modern biology, restored to prominence.)

4 *Ecocentric Ethics is Grounded in Awareness of our Place in Nature*, which brings with it 'a sense of connectedness and reverence for the abundance and vitality of sustaining Nature'.

5 *An Ecocentric Worldview Values Diversity of Ecosystems and Cultures*. 'An ecocentric worldview values Earth's diversity in all its forms, the non-human as well as the human.' The corresponding ethic 'challenges today's economic globalization that ignores the ecological wisdom embedded in diverse cultures, and for short-term profit destroys them.'

6 *Ecocentric Ethics Supports Social Justice*. Social ecologists rightly attack inequalities that hurt relatively powerless humans but fail to consider 'the current rapid degradation of Earth's ecosystems that increases inter-human tensions while foreclosing possibilities for sustainable living and for the elimination of poverty'.

Action principles

7 *Defend and Preserve Earth's Creative Potential*. Barring cosmic collisions, 'Earth's evolving inventiveness will continue for millions of years, hampered only where humans have destroyed whole ecosystems by exterminating species or by toxifying sediments, water and air'. Therefore activities that do so – especially lethal technologies and industries, 'enriching special corporate interests, and satisfying human wants rather than needs' – 'need to be identified and publicly condemned'.
8 *Reduce Human Population Size*. 'A primary cause of ecosystem destruction and species extinctions is the burgeoning human population that already far exceeds ecologically sustainable levels.' Every additional human adds to the immense pressure on inherently limited resources (renewable as well as nonrenewable), especially in the overdeveloped world where consumption is highest.
9 *Reduce Human Consumption of Earth's Parts*. 'The chief threat to the Ecosphere's diversity, beauty and stability is the ever-increasing appropriation of the planet's goods for exclusive human uses. Such appropriation and over-use, often justified by population overgrowth, steals the livelihood of other organisms.' Our vital needs do not amount to a 'license to plunder and exterminate'.
10 *Promote Ecocentric Governance*. 'In present centers of power, who speaks for wolf? and who speaks for temperate rain forest? Such questions have more than metaphorical significance; they reveal the necessity of legally safeguarding the many vital nonhuman components of the Ecosphere.' New bodies of law, policy, and administration are required as 'embodiments of the ecocentric philosophy, ushering in ecocentric methods of governance'.
11 *Spread the Message*. 'Those who agree with the preceding principles have a duty to spread the word by education and leadership. The initial urgent task is to awaken all people to their functional dependence on Earth's ecosystems as well as their bonds to all other species.'

The Earth Charter

Completely independently, 'The Earth Charter' appeared in 2000.[61] It was a statement of sixteen ethical principles 'for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st Century'. These principles are intended to be widely (although not necessarily universally) shared, in order to provide a basis for 'defining sustainable development in terms of global ethics' (Lynn 2004: 2, 3). The Charter has been recognized by UNESCO and adopted by the IUCN/World Conservation Union. Its offshoots, which give the idea some legs, include Earth Charter Community Summits and initiatives, sustainable business awards, and the Earth Scouts.

The Charter begins with an ecocentric recognition of the Earth as our home, and therefore the protection of its vitality, diversity and beauty as 'a sacred trust'. It also points to the deteriorating global situation respecting both natural and human communities. It names the primary challenge of our times as forming a 'global partnership' to bring about '[f]undamental changes . . . in our values, institutions, and ways of living'. Finally, it calls for 'a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities'.

The principles, too lengthy for quotation here, are organised under four headings: (1) Respect and Care for the Community of Life, (2) Ecological Integrity, (3) Social

and Economic Justice, and (4) Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace.[62] It can hardly be doubted that they specify admirable and desirable ends in a comprehensive way; nor that the recommended means are appropriate. And such documents involve a lot of painstaking work which should be recognized and applauded. But there is a problem here which grows out of the very comprehensiveness and generality that the goal of 'widespread agreement' requires. It is difficult to believe that what approaches being a progressive wish-list which includes nature *and* social justice *and* peace *and* democracy *and* diversity will have much real impact in and on the world of concrete particulars. (Genuine world-government – and even that assumes a benign and competent world-government – might provide the conditions in which it could acquire such influence, including some teeth, but we remain very far from that.)

This problem has another serious aspect, which is that the Earth Charter fails to admit the possibility of conflict in actual cases – always possible, and virtually inevitable – between these various ideals, especially between the interests of human and non-human nature. It thus falls short of an ecocentric ethic as I have defined it above, and as compared with the Manifesto for Earth. And the overwhelmingly dominant ethical consensus is anthropocentric and/or light green at best: an imbalance that urgently needs redressing. So Mosquin and Rowe's more uncompromising stance, which firmly places human concerns within an ecocentric context, is preferable. This is not just a strategic point; we do all live on (or rather in, since it includes the breathable atmosphere), and depend on, the Earth. Despite its virtues, that is a truth which the Charter makes it too easy to ignore or fudge in practice; whereas the Manifesto, quite rightly, makes it that much harder.

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1 Sylvan and Bennett 1994: 90.
2 Cf. Pimentel et al. 2000.
3 Bender 2004 is clearly an important new analysis of ecocentrism.
4 Such as is being developed, in different ways, by people like Susan Bratton, Jane Lubchenko and Carl Safina (with thanks to Jack Stillwell for this point). On an ocean ethic, see the excellent Shaw and Francis 2008.
5 Sylvan and Bennett assign the Land Ethic to Intermediate Environmental Ethics, a decision with which I do not agree. (Leopold's moral extensionism is not, in itself, sufficient grounds.)
6 For an excellent discussion of 'ecofascism', see Orton 2000.
7 He was preceded by Bateson 1972, 1979.
8 See Curry 2000.
9 Those are the three Buddhist 'sins', which seem to me to be ecologically more relevant than the Christian ones.
10 See Smith 1988, 1997 and Latour 1993.
11 As for developing a genetically modified cow resistant to BSE – something which was reported in 2004 – that is simply and in every sense sad.
12 See Curry 2003; Viveiros de Castro 2002.
13 Lovelock 1979, 1988.
14 See the bibliography in Bunyard 1996.
15 E.g., Margulis, in Bunyard 1996: 54.
16 See Abram 1996. The objection also ignores the considerable subsequent work

modelling Gaia (e.g., ‘Daisyworld’).
17 See Rawles 1996.
18 With thanks to Clay Ramsay for points I have incorporated here.
19 See Quammen 1998, 1999.
20 As Machiavelli argued.
21 Margulis, in Bunyard 1996: 64; Lovelock 1991.
22 See also David Rothenberg, in Naess 1989.
23 Taken from Naess 1989: 29. These differ slightly (but not substantively) from the way they are stated in Devall and Sessions 1985.
24 Naess 1989: 28; Naess and Sessions 1984.
25 For a very different (and preferable) definition of depth ecology, see Abram 2005.
26 See Chase 1991 for a good summary.
27 See List 1993. See also Chapter 7, note 6.
28 See Sylvan and Bennett 1994: 99–102.
29 See also Fox 1995: 223–4.
30 See Sylvan and Bennett 1994: 102–4, 107–10; Katz 2000; and for a good discussion, James 2004: 76-82.
31 See Curry 2010a for a critique.
32 In Mahayana Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is one who is ready to transcend the world of suffering (*samsara*) for *nirvana* but chooses instead to stay, or return, in order to help others.
33 See Bateson 1972, 1979; Abram 1996. (Not idealism in the sense of having ideals, but in the philosophical sense of according the ‘spiritual’ world primacy over the ‘material’.)
34 See Barry 1999; Curry 2000.
35 See Plumwood 1995 and Curry 2010a.
36 See Abram 1996: 66–7.
37 Li 1998: 300.
38 Salleh adds that ‘There is surely a large portion of illusion and self-indulgence in the North’s comfortable middle-class pursuit of the cosmic “transpersonal Self”’ (1993: 229).
39 Cf. Abram 1996.
40 To be fair, this point has a Madhyamaka provenance which may not carry the same weight in all other Buddhist schools.
41 Perhaps apocryphal, but to the point nonetheless. I have also seen this remark attributed to T. S. Eliot.
42 With respect to David Bennett, whose role as Sylvan’s co-author I am sure was crucial, I shall treat DGT as primarily the work of Sylvan. It is certainly of a piece with his earlier writing.
43 Cf. McLaughlin 1993: 214.
44 Such as those of Guhu 1989.
45 I’m afraid I cannot now locate the reference for this remark.
46 Email greenweb@ca.inter.net (I would like to thank David Orton for his helpful comments on this section).
47 http://home.ca.inter.net/~greenweb/index.htm (extant at the time of writing).
48 Cf. Kohak 2000: 64.
49 For one well-informed answer in the negative, see Rees 2000.
50 McLaughlin 1993.
51 I am grateful to Penny Novack for the points in this paragraph.

52 Michael Novack, private communication.
53 David Orton, 'A Deep Ecology Talk' (4 July 2003).
54 See, e.g., McLaughlin 1993 and Eckersley 1992.
55 E.g. the depressingly orthodox and sectarian Foster 2009.
56 See Orton's indispensable analyses in his 'Ecological Marxism, Intrinsic Value, and Human-Centeredness' (Dec. 2005), http://home.ca.inter.net/~greenweb/Ecological_Marxism.html, 'Mixed Thoughts on Ecosocialism', MS (17.3.10), and 'A short talk on Left Biocentrism' (2008) http://home.ca.inter.net/~greenweb/A_short_talk_on_Left_Biocentrism.pdf
57 'The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which' (the concluding sentence of Orwell's *Animal Farm*).
58 Imhoff et al. 2004, Vitousek et al. 1986, Daily 1995, Haberk et al. 2008.
59 Galadriel's words to Frodo in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. (For a qualified ecocentric reading of the latter, see Curry 2004.)
60 As Rudolf Bahro always insisted, to the disquiet of the socialist left.
61 Earth Charter USA (2000). See the special issue of *Worldviews* 8: 1 (2004), especially Lynn 2004.
62 As with most other such statements discussed here, please see the original document, which is freely available – in this case, at www.earthcharter.org – for the full text.

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