

# Chapter Ecologism

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## Origins and development

The term ‘ecology’ was coined by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866. Derived from the Greek oikos, meaning household or habitat, he used it to refer to ‘the investigations of the total relations of the animal both to its organic and its inorganic environment’. Since the early years of the twentieth century, ecology has been recognized as a branch of biology that studies the relationship amongst living organisms and their environment. It has, however, increasingly been converted into a political term by the use made of it, especially since the 1960s, by the growing green movement. Considerable confusion nevertheless surrounds the title of this ‘new’ ideology.

‘Green’ has been used since the 1950s to indicate sympathy for environmental issues or projects, and since the late 1970s it has been adopted by a growing number of environmental parties, the first being the German Greens (Die Grünen). However, the emergence of green parties has meant that the term has been linked to the specific ideas and policies of such parties, rather than the principles of the larger environmental movement. ‘Environmentalism’, also used since the 1950s, refers to ideas and theories that are characterized by the central belief that human life can only be understood in the context of the natural world. As such, it covers a wide variety of beliefs – scientific, religious, economic and political – rather than a particular set of policies, such as those endorsed by the contemporary green movement. However, the drawback of ‘environmentalism’ is that it is sometimes used to refer to a moderate or reformist approach to the environment that responds to ecological crises but without fundamentally questioning conventional assumptions about the natural world. The virtue of ‘ecologism’ is that, in stressing the central importance of ecology, it highlights an approach to political understanding that is qualitatively different from the conventional ones. In calling for radical socio-political change and a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between human beings and the natural world, ecologism has developed into an ideology in its own right.

Although modern environmental or green politics did not emerge until the 1960s, ecological ideas can be traced back to much earlier times. Many have suggested that the principles of contemporary ecologism owe much to ancient pagan religions, which stressed the concept of an Earth Mother, and also to eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. However, to a large extent ecologism was, and remains, a reaction against the process of industrialization. This was evident in the nineteenth century when the spread of urban and industrial life created a profound nostalgia for an idealized rural existence, as conveyed by novelists such as Thomas Hardy and political thinkers such as the UK libertarian socialist William Morris (1834–96) and Peter Kropotkin (see p. 203). This reaction was often strongest in those countries that had

experienced the most rapid and dramatic process of industrialization. By the late nineteenth century, for example, in little more than thirty years Germany had become an industrial power capable of challenging the economic might of the UK and the United States. This experience deeply scarred German political culture, creating powerful myths about the purity and dignity of peasant life and giving rise to a strong 'back to nature' movement amongst German youth. Such romantic pastoralism was to be exploited in the twentieth century by nationalists and fascists.

The growth of ecologism since the late twentieth century has been provoked by the further and more intense advance of industrialization and urbanization. Environmental concern has become more acute because of the fear that economic growth is endangering both the survival of the human race and the very planet it lives upon. Such anxieties have been expressed in a growing body of literature. Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* (1962), a critique of the damage done to wildlife and the human world by the increased use of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals, is often considered to have been the first book to draw attention to a developing ecological crisis. Other important early works included Ehrlich and Harriman's *How to be a Survivor* (1971), and Goldsmith et al.'s *Blueprint for Survival* (1972), the unofficial UN report *Only One Earth* (1972) and the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* (1972). At the same time, a new generation of activist pressure groups have developed – for example, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth – which highlight environmental issues such as the dangers of nuclear power, pollution and the dwindling reserves of fossil fuels. Together with established and much larger groups, such as the Worldwide Fund for Nature, this has led to the emergence of a well-publicized and increasingly powerful environmental movement. From the 1980s onwards, environmental questions have been kept high on the political agenda by green parties, which now exist in most industrialized countries.

Environmental politics has clearly drawn attention to issues such as pollution, conservation, acid rain, the greenhouse effect and global warming, but ecologists refuse to accept that they merely constitute another single-issue lobby group. In the first place, the environmental movement has addressed a far broader range of issues. The Greens in Germany, for instance, have campaigned on the role of women, defence and disarmament, the welfare state and unemployment, and the need for a re-examination of Germany's Nazi past, as well as on narrower environmental issues. More significantly, ecologists have developed a radically new set of concepts and values with which to understand and explain the world. Ecologism stands apart from traditional political creeds because it starts from an examination of what they have tended to ignore: the inter-relationships that bind humans to all living organisms and, more broadly, to the 'web of life' (Capra, 1996). For this reason, it is difficult or even impossible to slot ecologism into the established left–right political divide or to understand it in terms of established doctrines and philosophies. As the German Green slogan puts it: 'neither left nor right, but ahead'.

### **Return to nature – central themes**

Ecologists have criticized the most basic assumption upon which conventional political thought is based. Traditional doctrines and ideologies are 'anthropocentric', or human-centred. They commit, ecologists believe, the sad, even comic mistake of believing that human beings are the centrepiece of existence. David Ehrenfeld (1978) called this the 'arrogance of humanism'. For example, the categories in which conventional thought analyses the world are those of human

beings and their groups – for instance, the individual, social class, gender, nation and humanity. Moreover, its abiding values are ones which reflect human needs and interests, such as liberty, equality, justice and order. Ecologists argue that this exclusive concern with human beings has distorted and damaged the relationship between the human species and its natural environment. Instead of preserving and respecting the Earth and the diverse species that live upon it, human beings have sought to become, in the words of John Locke (see p. 39), ‘the masters and possessors of nature’. Nature, in this view, has to be ‘conquered’, ‘battled against’ or ‘risen above’.

Ecologism represents a new style of politics. It starts not from a conception of ‘humanity’ or human needs, but from a vision of nature as a network of precious but fragile relationships between living species – including the human species – and the natural environment. Humankind no longer occupies centre stage, but is regarded as an inseparable part of nature. Human beings are therefore required to practise humility, moderation and gentleness, and to abandon the misguided dream that science and technology can solve all their problems. In order to give expression to this vision, ecologists have been forced to search for new concepts in the realm of science or rediscover ancient ones from the realms of religion and mythology. The central themes of ecologism are the following:

- Ecology
- Holism
- Sustainability
- Environmental ethics
- Self-actualization

### *Ecology*

The central principle of all forms of green thought is ecology. Ecology means the study of organisms ‘at home’ or ‘in their habitats’, and developed as a distinct branch of biology out of a growing recognition that plants and animals are sustained by self-regulating natural systems – ecosystems – composed of both living and non-living elements. Simple examples of an ecosystem are a field, a forest, a pond or even a puddle. In a pond, for instance, the sediment lying at the bottom contains nutrients that support various kinds of plant life. These plants provide oxygen and food, which sustain the fish and insects living in the pond. When the plants and animals die their bodies decompose, releasing nutrients back into the sediment in what is a continuous process of recycling. All ecosystems tend towards a state of harmony or balance through a system of self-regulation. Food and other resources are recycled and the population size of animals, insects and plants adjusts naturally to the available food supply. However, such ecosystems are not ‘closed’ or entirely self-sustaining; each interreacts with other ecosystems. A lake may constitute an ecosystem, but it also needs to be fed with fresh water from tributaries and receive warmth and energy from the sun. In turn, the lake provides water and food for species living along its shores, including human communities. The natural world is therefore made up of a complex web of ecosystems, the largest of which is the global ecosystem, commonly called the ‘ecosphere’ or ‘biosphere’.

The development of scientific ecology radically altered our understanding of the natural world and the place of human beings within it. Ecology conflicts quite dramatically with the notion of humankind as 'the master' of nature, and instead suggests that a delicate network of interrelationships

Perspectives on ...

Nature

Liberals see nature as a resource to satisfy human needs, and thus rarely question human dominion over nature. Lacking value in itself, nature is invested with value only when it is transformed by human labour, or when it is harnessed to human ends.

Conservatives often portray nature as threatening even cruel, characterized by an amoral struggle and harshness that also shapes human existence. Humans may be seen as part of nature within a 'great chain of being', their superiority nevertheless being enshrined in their status as custodians of nature.

Socialists, like liberals, have viewed and treated nature as merely a resource. However a romantic or pastoral tradition within socialism has also extolled the beauty, harmony and richness of nature, and looks to human fulfilment through a closeness to nature.

Anarchists have often embraced a view of nature that stresses unregulated harmony and growth. Nature therefore offers a model of simplicity and balance, which humans would be wise to apply to social organization in the form of social ecology.

Fascists have often adopted a dark and mystical view of nature that stresses the power of instinct and primal life forces, nature being able to purge humans of their decadent intellectualism. Nature is characterized by brutal struggle and cyclical regeneration.

Feminists generally hold nature to be creative and benign. By virtue of their fertility and disposition to nurture, women are often thought to be close to nature and in tune with natural forces, while men, creatures of culture, are out of step or in conflict with nature.

Ecologists, particularly deep ecologists, regard nature as an interconnected whole, embracing humans and non-humans as well as the inanimate world. Nature is sometimes seen as a source of knowledge and 'right living', human fulfilment coming from a closeness to and respect for nature, not from the attempt to dominate it.

Religious fundamentalists view nature as an expression of divine creation: what is 'natural' is thus God-given. While this may imply a duty of respect towards nature, it may also suggest that nature was created specifically to satisfy human ends.

that had hitherto been ignored sustains each human community, indeed the entire human species. Ecologists argue that humankind currently faces the prospect of environmental disaster precisely because, in its passionate and blinkered pursuit of material wealth, it has, quite simply, upset the

'balance of nature' and endangered the very ecosystems that make human life possible. This has happened in a broad variety of ways. These include the exponential growth in the world's human population; the depletion of finite and irreplaceable fuel resources such as coal, oil and natural gas; the eradication of tropical rain forests that help clean the air and regulate the Earth's climate; the pollution of rivers, lakes and forests and the air itself; the use of chemical, hormonal and other additives to foodstuffs; and the threat to biodiversity that has resulted from the thousandfold increase in species extinction that has coincided with the dominance of the human species.

Ecologism provides a radically different vision of nature and the place of human beings within it, one that is 'ecocentric' or nature-centred rather than anthropocentric. However, green or environmental thinkers have applied ecological ideas in different ways and sometimes drawn quite different conclusions. The most important distinction in the environmental movement is between what the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1973) termed 'shallow ecology' and 'deep ecology'. The 'shallow' perspective accepts the lessons of ecology but harnesses them to human needs and ends. In other words, it preaches that if we conserve and cherish the natural world, it will continue to sustain human life. This view is reflected in a particular concern with issues such as controlling population growth, cutting back on the use of finite, non-renewable resources and reducing pollution.

'Deep' ecologists dismiss shallow ecologism as a thinly concealed form of anthropocentrism, arguing that its central objective is to maintain the health and prosperity of people who live in developed countries. The 'deep' perspective completely rejects any lingering belief that the human species is in some way superior to, or more important than, any other species, or indeed nature itself. It advances the more challenging idea that the purpose of human life is to help sustain nature, not the other way around. What Naess (1989) called 'ecosophy' thus represents a fundamentally new world-view based upon philosophical ecology, as well as an entirely novel moral vision. For their part, shallow ecologists, or, as they prefer, 'humanistic' ecologists, criticize deep ecology for subscribing to 'irrational' or mystical doctrines and for advocating starkly unrealistic solutions that are, in any event, likely to have little appeal to human populations. The alternative idea of 'social ecology' is considered later in the chapter in connection with eco-anarchism.

Tensions within <b>Ecologism</b>	
<b>'Deep' ecologism</b>	<b>v. 'Shallow' ecologism</b>
ecologism	– environmentalism
ecocentrism	– 'light' anthropocentrism
mysticism	– science
nature	– humankind
radical holism	– reluctant holism
value-in-nature	– instrumental value
biocentric equality	– conserve non-human nature
animal rights	– animal welfare
anti-growth	– sustainable growth
ecological consciousness	– personal development

### *Holism*

Traditional political ideologies have never looked seriously at the relationship between humankind and nature. They have typically assumed that human beings are the masters of the natural world, and have therefore regarded nature as little more than an economic resource. In that sense, they have been part of the problem and not part of the solution. In *The Turning Point* (1982), Fritjof Capra traced the origin of such ideas to the scientists and philosophers, such as René Descartes (1596–1650) and Isaac Newton (1642–1727). The world had previously been seen as organic; however, these seventeenth-century philosophers portrayed it as a machine, whose parts could be analysed and understood through the newly discovered scientific method, which involved testing hypotheses against 'the facts' by careful, reproducible experiments. Science enabled remarkable advances to be made in human knowledge and provided the basis for the development of modern industry and technology. So impressive were the fruits of science that intellectual inquiry in the modern world has come to be dominated by scientism, the belief that scientific method provides the only reliable means of establishing truth. However, Capra argued that orthodox science, what he referred to as the 'Cartesian–Newtonian paradigm', amounts to the philosophical basis of the contemporary environmental crisis. Science treats nature as a machine, implying that, like any other machine, it can be tinkered with, repaired, improved upon or even replaced. If human beings are to learn that they are part of the natural world rather than its masters, Capra suggested that this fixation with the 'Newtonian world-machine' must be overthrown and replaced by a new paradigm.

In searching for this new paradigm, ecological thinkers have been attracted to a variety of ideas and theories, drawn from both modern science and ancient myths and religions. However, the unifying theme amongst these ideas is the notion of holism. The term 'holism' was coined in 1926 by Jan Smuts, a Boer general and twice prime minister of South Africa. He used it to describe the idea that the natural world could only be understood as a whole and not through its individual parts. Smuts believed that science commits the sin of reductionism: it reduces everything it studies to separate parts and tries to understand each part in itself. In contrast, holism is based upon the belief that 'the whole' is more important than its individual 'parts'; indeed, it suggests that each part only has meaning in relation to other parts, and ultimately in

relation to the whole. In medical science, for example, disease has traditionally been understood and treated as a defect of a particular organ or even of specific cells within the body, not as an imbalance within the life of the patient as a whole. Attention has therefore been paid to the treatment of physical symptoms while psychological, social or environmental factors have tended to be ignored.

Although many see science as the culprit in teaching humans how to plunder the riches of nature more effectively, others have suggested that modern science may perhaps offer a new paradigm for human thought. Capra, for example, argued that the Cartesian–Newtonian view of the world has now been abandoned by many scientists, particularly by physicists like him. During the twentieth century, with the development of ‘new physics’, physics moved a long way beyond the mechanistic and reductionist ideas of Newton. The breakthrough was achieved at the beginning of the twentieth century by the German-born US physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955), whose theory of relativity fundamentally challenged the traditional concepts of time and space. Einstein's work was taken further by quantum theory, developed by physicists such as Niels Bohr (1885–1952) and Verner Heisenberg (1901–76). New physics emerged out of advances in subatomic research and has come to abandon the idea of absolute or objective knowledge. In its place, Heisenberg proposed the ‘uncertainty principle’. The physical world is understood not as a collection of individual molecules, atoms or even particles, but as a system, or, more accurately, a network of systems.

A systems view of the world concentrates not upon individual building blocks, but upon the principles of organization within the system. It therefore stresses the relationships within the system and the integration of its various elements within the whole. Such a view has very radical implications. Objective knowledge, for example, is impossible because the very act of observing alters what is being observed. The scientist is not separate from his or her experiment but is intrinsically related to it; subject and object are therefore one. Similarly, the concepts of cause and effect have had to be revised because changes are seen to develop within a system out of a network of factors, rather than as a consequence of a single, linear cause. Capra suggested that such a systems view of life has already revolutionized physics, is in the process of changing other sciences, and can equally well be applied to the study of social, political or environmental questions. In short new physics could provide a paradigm capable of replacing the now redundant mechanistic and reductionist world-view.

An alternative and particularly fertile source of new concepts and theories has been religion. In *The Tao of Physics* (1975), Capra drew attention to important parallels between the ideas of modern physics and those of eastern mysticism. He argued that religions such as Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism, particularly Zen Buddhism, have long preached the unity or oneness of all things, a discovery that western science has only made in the twentieth century. Many in the green movement have been attracted by eastern mysticism, seeing in it both a philosophy that gives expression to ecological wisdom and a way of life that encourages compassion for fellow human beings, other species and the natural world. Other writers believe that ecological principles are embodied in monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, which regard both humankind and nature as products of divine creation. In such circumstances, human beings are viewed as God's stewards on Earth, being invested thereby with a duty to cherish and preserve the planet.

However, perhaps the most influential concept for modern greens has been developed by looking back to pre-Christian spiritual ideas. Primitive religions often drew no distinction between human and other forms of life, and, for that matter, little distinction between living and non-living objects. All things are alive, stones, rivers, mountains and even the Earth itself, often conceived of as 'Mother Earth'. The idea of an Earth Mother has been particularly important for ecologists trying to articulate a new relationship between human beings and the natural world, especially so for those sympathetic to ecofeminism, examined later in the chapter. In *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979) James Lovelock developed the idea that the planet itself is alive and gave it the name 'Gaia', after the Greek goddess of the Earth. Lovelock (see p. 275) defined Gaia as 'Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans and soil' and argued that Gaia constitutes a living organism that acts to maintain its own existence. Lovelock claimed this on the basis that the Earth exhibits precisely the kind of self-regulating behaviour that characterizes other forms of life. Gaia has achieved 'homeostasis, a state of dynamic balance, despite dramatic changes that have taken place in the solar system. The most dramatic evidence for this is the fact that although the sun has warmed up by more than 25 per cent since life began, the temperature on Earth and the composition of its atmosphere have remained virtually unchanged. A quite small change in the proportion of oxygen in the atmosphere, or in the Earth's average temperature, would endanger all forms of life on the planet. In his essay 'Man and Gaia' (1988, p. 63), Lovelock warned that 'To destroy such a large chunk of the living ecosystem when we do not properly understand how it all works is like pulling apart the control system of a modern aircraft while in mid-flight.'

The idea of Gaia has developed into an 'ecological ideology' that conveys the powerful message that human beings must respect the health of the planet and act to conserve its beauty and resources. It also contains a revolutionary vision of the relationship between the animate and inanimate world. Lovelock suggested that the Earth itself is alive and sees the living and the non-living world as one. He points out, for example, that much of the soil and rock on Earth are made up of reprocessed plants, insects and other forms of life, and that in turn they provide support for the plants and species living today. However, the Gaia philosophy does not always correspond to the concerns of the environmental movement. Shallow ecologists have typically wished to change policies and attitudes in order to ensure the continued survival of the human species. Gaia, on the other hand, is non-human, and the Gaia theory suggests that the health of the planet matters more than that of any individual species presently living upon it. Lovelock has suggested that those species that have prospered have been ones that have helped Gaia to regulate its own existence, while any species that poses a threat to the delicate balance of Gaia, as humans currently do, is likely to be extinguished.

James Lovelock (born 1919)

Canadian atmospheric chemist, inventor and environmental theorist. An independent scientist who lives in Cornwall, Lovelock cooperated with NASA in their space programme, advising on ways of looking for life on Mars.

Lovelock's influence on the green movement stems from his portrayal of the Earth's biosphere as a complex, self-regulating, living 'being', which he named Gaia (at the suggestion of the novelist William Golding). Although the Gaia hypothesis extends the ecological idea by applying it to the



Earth as an ecosystem and offers a holistic approach to nature, Lovelock supports technology and industrialization and is an opponent of 'back to nature' mysticism and ideas such as Earth worship. His major writings include *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979) and *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of our Living Earth* (1989).

### *Sustainability*

Ecologists argue that the ingrained assumption of conventional political creeds, articulated by virtually all mainstream political parties ('grey parties'), is that human life has unlimited possibilities for material growth and prosperity. People in many parts of the world enjoy a standard of living that would have been unimaginable fifty or a hundred years ago. Science and technology constantly solve old problems such as poverty and disease, and open up new possibilities through television and videos, computers and robots, air travel and even space travel. From an ecocentric perspective, however, the promise of unlimited prosperity and material affluence, 'growth mania' as Herman Daly (1974) called it, is not only misguided but also a fundamental cause of environmental disaster. Indeed green thinkers commonly lump capitalism and communism together and portray them both as examples of 'industrialism'. Green economics therefore requires orthodox assumptions about the nature and purpose of economic activity to be rethought, particularly in relation to our view of the Earth and the resources it contains.

A particularly influential metaphor for the environmental movement has been the idea of 'spaceship Earth', because this emphasizes the notion of limited and exhaustible wealth. The idea that Earth should be thought of as a spaceship was first suggested by Kenneth Boulding (1966). From the perspective of deep ecology, the drawback of this theory is that it embodies the anthropocentric assumption that the planet exists to serve human needs: the Earth is a vessel, our vessel. Nevertheless, the concept of spaceship Earth does serve to redress the conventional belief in unlimited resources and unbounded possibilities. Boulding argued that human beings have traditionally acted as though they live in a 'cowboy economy', an economy with unlimited opportunities, like the American west during the frontier period. Boulding suggested that this encourages, as it did in the

### Industrialism

The term industrialism, as used by environmental theorists, relates to a 'super-ideology' that encompasses capitalism and socialism, left-wing and right-wing thought. As an economic system, industrialism is characterized by large-scale production, the accumulation of capital and relentless growth. As a philosophy, it is dedicated to materialism, utilitarian values, absolute faith in science and a worship of technology. Many ecologists thus see industrialism as 'the problem'. Ecosocialists, however, blame capitalism rather than industrialism (which ignores important issues such as the role of ownership, profit and the market), while ecofeminists argue that industrialism has its origins in patriarchy.

American west, 'reckless, exploitative, and violent behaviour'. However a spaceship is a capsule, and therefore possesses finite resources. In the future 'spaceman economy', human beings will

have to live within limits and pay closer attention to the spaceship that is propelling them through space.

Living in a spaceship requires an understanding of the ecological processes that sustain life. Most importantly, human beings must recognize that spaceship Earth is a closed system. Open systems receive energy or inputs from outside, for example all ecosystems on Earth – ponds, forests, lakes and seas – are sustained by the sun. Such open systems are self-regulating, and tend to establish a natural balance or a steady state. However, closed systems, as the Earth itself becomes when it is thought of as a spaceship, show evidence of ‘entropy’. Entropy is a measure of the degree of disorder or disintegration within a system. All closed systems tend to decay or disintegrate because they are not sustained by external inputs. They rely on their own resources and these become exhausted and cannot be renewed. Ultimately, however wisely and carefully human beings behave, the Earth, the sun, and indeed all planets and stars, will be exhausted and die. For example, energy cannot be recycled indefinitely; each time energy is transformed some of it is lost, until finally none remains. When the ‘entropy law’ is applied to social and economic issues it produces very radical conclusions.

No issue reflects the law of entropy more clearly than the ‘energy crisis’. Industrialization and mass affluence have been made possible by the exploitation of coal, gas and oil reserves, which have provided fuel for power stations, factories, motor cars, aeroplanes and so on. These fuels are fossil fuels, formed by the decomposition or compaction of organisms that died in prehistoric times. They are also non-renewable, once used up they cannot be replaced. In *Small is Beautiful* (1973), E. F. Schumacher argued that human beings have made the mistake of regarding energy as an ‘income’ that is being constantly topped-up each week or each month, rather than as ‘natural capital’ that they are forced to live off. This mistake has allowed energy demands to soar, especially in the industrialized West, at a time when finite fuel resources are close to depletion and very unlikely to last to the end of the next century. As the spaceship draws to the close of the ‘fossil fuel age’ it approaches disintegration because as yet, there are no alternative sources of energy to compensate for the loss of coal, oil and gas. Conserving what remains of our fossil fuel stocks means driving fewer cars, using less electricity and, in short, accepting a more meagre standard of living.

Ecological economics is not only about warnings and threats, it is also about solutions. Entropy may be an inevitable process; however its effects can be slowed down or delayed considerably if governments and private firms (Ernst Friedrich) Schumacher (1911–1977)

German-born UK economist and environmental theorist. Schumacher moved to Britain in 1930 as an Oxford Rhodes scholar, going on to gain practical experience in business, farming and journalism, before re-entering academic life. He was an economic adviser to the British Control Commission in Germany (1946–50) and the National Coal Board (1950–70).

Schumacher's seminal *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (1973) championed the cause of human-scale production, and advanced a ‘Buddhist’ economic philosophy (economics ‘as if people mattered’) that stresses the importance of morality and ‘right livelihood’. Though an opponent of industrial giantism, Schumacher believed in ‘appropriate’ scale production, and was a keen advocate of ‘intermediate’ technology.

**citizens** respect ecological principles. Ecologists argue that the human species will only survive and prosper if it recognizes that it is only one element of a complex biosphere, and that only a healthy, balanced biosphere will sustain human life. Policies and actions must therefore be judged by the principle of 'sustainability', the capacity of a system, in this case the biosphere itself, to maintain its health and continue in existence. Sustainability sets clear limits upon human ambitions and material dreams because it requires that production does as little damage as possible to the fragile global ecosystem. For example, a sustainable energy policy must be based upon a dramatic reduction in the use of fossil fuels and a search for alternative, renewable energy sources such as solar energy, wind power and wave power. These are by their very nature sustainable and can be treated as 'income' rather than 'natural capital'. Greens have therefore suggested that the 'fossil fuel age' must give way to a coming 'solar age', and have encouraged governments to step up the research and development of renewable energy sources.

Sustainability, however, requires not merely the more enlightened use of natural resources, but also an alternative approach to economic activity. This is precisely what Schumacher (1973) sought to offer in his idea of 'Buddhist economics'. For Schumacher, Buddhist economics is based upon the principle of 'right livelihood' and stands in stark contrast to conventional economic theories, which assume that individuals are nothing more than 'utility maximizers'. Buddhists believe that, in addition to generating goods and services, production facilitates personal growth by developing skills and talents, and helps to overcome egocentrism by forging social bonds and encouraging people to work together. Such a view moves economics a long way from its present obsession with wealth creation, an obsession that, ecologists believe, has paid little regard to either nature or the spiritual quality of human life. The principal goal of Buddhism – spiritual liberation – is not, however, irreconcilable with material prosperity. 'It is not wealth that stands in the way of liberation', Schumacher (1973, p. 47) pointed out, 'but the attachment to wealth; not the enjoyment of pleasurable things but the craving for them'. The environmental movement therefore hopes that in future economics can be used to serve humanity, rather than enslave it.

There is considerable debate about what this implies in practice. So-called 'light greens', referred to in Germany as the Realos (realists), approve of the idea of 'sustainable growth': in effect, getting richer but at a slower pace. This holds that the desire for material prosperity can be balanced against its environmental costs. One way in which this could be achieved would be through changes to the tax system, either to penalize and discourage pollution or to reduce the use of finite resources. Schumacher's version of this position stressed the value of 'technology with a human face' and advocated a system of small-scale or 'human-scale' production to replace what he believed to be the dehumanizing world of large cities and mass production. However, 'dark greens', in Germany the Fundis (fundamentalists), argue that such views are simply not radical enough. From their perspective, the notion of sustainable growth simply pays lip service to environmental fears whilst allowing human beings to carry on as if nothing is wrong. If, as the dark greens insist, the origin of the ecological crisis lies in materialism, consumerism and a fixation with economic growth, the solution lies in 'zero growth' and the construction of a 'post-industrial age' in which people live in small rural communities and rely upon craft skills. This means a fundamental and comprehensive rejection of industry and modern technology, literally a 'return to nature'.

### *Environmental ethics*

Ecological politics, in all its forms, is concerned with extending moral thinking in a number of novel directions. This is because conventional ethical systems are clearly anthropocentric. Utilitarianism, for example, evaluates 'good' and 'evil' in terms of the pleasure and pain that human beings experience. As 'utility maximizers', humans act – and should act – in whatever way will gain them the greatest happiness or the least unhappiness. If the non-human world – other species, as well as trees, plants, the land and so on – has any value at all, it is a strictly instrumental value, a means of achieving human ends or satisfying human interests. The same is true of the labour theories of value developed by thinkers such as John Locke, David Ricardo (1772–1823) and Karl Marx (see p. 126). In these, the non-human world is invested with value only to the extent that it is 'mixed' with human labour, or because interaction between human beings and nature through labour promotes the development of human skills and sensibilities.

One ethical issue that even humanist or shallow ecologists extensively grapple with is the question of our moral obligations towards future generations. It is in the nature of environmental matters that many of the consequences of our actions will not be felt until decades or even centuries to come. Why should we care about the depletion of fossil fuels if we are not going to be around when they run out? Why worry about the accumulation of nuclear waste if the generations that will have to deal with it have yet to be born? Clearly, a concern with our own interests and perhaps those of our immediate family and friends only stretches a little way into the future. Ecologists are therefore forced to extend the notion of human interests to encompass the human species as a whole, making no distinction between the present generation and future generations, the living and the still to be born. Such 'futurity' may be justified in different ways. Ecoconservatives, for instance, may link it to tradition and continuity, to the notion that the present generation is merely the 'custodian' of the wealth that has been generated by past generations and so should conserve it for the benefit of future generations. Ecosocialists, on the other hand, may hold that a concern for future generations merely reflects the fact that compassion and a love for humanity extend through time, just as they cut across national, ethnic, gender and other boundaries.

An alternative approach to environmental ethics involves applying moral standards and values developed in relation to human beings to other species and organisms. The most familiar attempt to do this is in the form of 'animal rights'. Peter Singer's (1976) case for animal welfare had considerable impact on the growing animal liberation movement. Singer argued that an altruistic concern for the well-being of other species derives from the fact that as sentient beings they are capable of suffering. As a utilitarian, he pointed out that animals, like humans, have an interest in avoiding physical pain, and he therefore condemned any attempt to place the interests of humans above those of animals as 'speciesism', an arbitrary and irrational prejudice not unlike sexism or racism. However, altruistic concern for other species does not imply equal treatment, and Singer's argument does not apply to non-sentient life forms such as trees, rocks and rivers, which do not possess value.

The more radical idea that humans and animals can enjoy the same moral status was advanced by the US philosopher, Tom Regan, in *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), on the ground that all creatures that are 'the subject of a life' qualify for rights. Such a position makes it very difficult,

and perhaps impossible, to draw a clear distinction between the animal and human worlds. Nevertheless, Regan acknowledged that as some rights are invested in human beings by virtue of the fact that they are capable of rational thought and moral autonomy, they can only be applied selectively to animals, notably to 'normal mammalian animals aged one or more'. However, this individualist, rights-based approach to environmental ethics fails to satisfy deep ecologists, who have attempted to advance a more holistic or all-encompassing moral vision.

The moral stance of deep ecology is that nature has value in its own right, that is, intrinsic value. From this perspective, environmental ethics have nothing to do with human-instrumentality and cannot be articulated simply through the extension of human values to the non-human world. Goodin (1992), for instance, attempted to develop a 'green theory of value', which holds that resources should be valued precisely because they result from natural processes rather than from human activities. However, since this value stems from the fact that the natural landscape helps people to see 'some sense and pattern in their lives' and to appreciate 'something larger' than themselves, it embodies a residual humanism that fails to satisfy some deep ecologists. A classic statement of their more radical position is articulated in Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* ([1948] 1968, p. 225) in the form of the 'land ethic': '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.' Nature itself is thus portrayed as an ethical community, meaning that human beings are nothing more than 'plain citizens' who have no more rights and are no more deserving of respect than any other member of the community. Such a moral stance implies 'biocentric equality', the principle that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere are of equal moral worth, each of them being part of an interrelated whole. Arne Naess (1989) expressed this as an 'equal right to live and bloom'. Critics of deep ecology nevertheless argue either that this position is based on an unrealistic, indeed Arcadian view of nature that ignores, for instance, the food chain and the struggle for survival, or that this value-in-nature stance fails to recognize that morality is a human invention and that what makes nature 'natural' is precisely that it is amoral.

### *Self-actualization*

Since one of the consistent themes of ecologism is a rejection of human self-interestedness and material greed, it has sought to develop an alternative philosophy that links personal fulfilment to a balance with nature. The growth of concern about environmental issues since the 1960s is commonly associated with the phenomenon of postmaterialism (Inglehart, 1977). Postmaterialism is a theory that explains the nature of political concerns and values in terms of levels of economic development.

It is loosely based upon Abraham Maslow's (1908–70) 'hierarchy of needs', which places the need for esteem and self-actualization above material or economic needs. Postmaterialism holds that while conditions of material scarcity breed egoistical and acquisitive attitudes, conditions of widespread prosperity allow individuals to express more interest in postmaterial or 'quality of life' issues. These are typically concerned with morality, political justice and personal fulfilment, and include feminism, world peace, racial harmony, ecology and animal rights. In this sense, ecologism can be seen as one of the 'new' social movements that sprang up in the second half of the twentieth century, broadly committed to a new left agenda that rejected the hierarchical, materialist and patriarchal values of conventional society.

However, to a greater extent than any of the other new social movements, ecologism has indulged in radical and innovative thinking about the nature of human sensibilities and self-realization. All ecologists, for example, would have some sympathy with the view that human development has become dangerously unbalanced: human beings are blessed with massive know-how and material wealth, but possess precious little 'know-why'. Humankind has acquired the ability to fulfil its material ambitions but not the wisdom to question whether these ambitions are sensible, or even sane. As Schumacher (1973) warned, 'Man is now too clever to survive without wisdom.' However, some shallow or humanistic ecologists have serious misgivings when this quest for wisdom draws ecologism into the realms of religious mysticism or New Age ideas. Murray Bookchin (see p. 287), for instance, portrayed such tendencies as a form of 'anti-humanism', arguing that in creating a mythologized 'Nature', they represent a failure of human self-confidence and almost entirely neglect social concerns. Many greens, particularly those who subscribe to deep ecology, have nevertheless embraced world-views that are quite different from those that have traditionally dominated political thought in the developed West. This, they argue, is the basis of the 'paradigm shift' that ecologism aims to bring about, and without which it is doomed to repeat the mistakes of the 'old' politics because it cannot move beyond its concepts and assumptions.

Deep ecologists are usually happy to acknowledge that there is, in a sense, a spiritual dimension to their view of politics. A closeness to nature is not merely a theoretical stance or an ethical position; it is, at heart, a human experience, the achievement of 'environmental consciousness' or the 'ecological self'. The Australian philosopher Warwick Fox (1990) claimed to go beyond deep ecology in embracing 'transpersonal ecology', the essence of which is the realization that 'things are', that human beings and all other entities are part of a single unfolding reality. For Naess, self-realization is attained through a broader and deeper 'identification with others'. Such ideas have often been shaped by eastern religions, most profoundly by Buddhism, which has been portrayed as an ecological philosophy in its own right. One of the key doctrines of Buddhism is the idea of 'no self', the notion that the individual ego is a myth or delusion and that awakening or enlightenment involves transcending the self and recognizing that each person is linked to all other living things, and indeed to the universe itself.

This can be developed into a kind of holistic individualism, in which freedom comes to be equated with the experience of 'being' and the realization of organic wholeness. Such ideas were advanced by the German psychoanalyst and social philosopher Eric Fromm (1900–80) in *To Have or To Be* (1979). Fromm portrayed 'having' as an attitude of mind that seeks fulfilment in acquisition and control, and is clearly reflected in consumerism and the materialistic society. In contrast, 'being' derives satisfaction from experience and sharing, and leads to personal growth and spiritual awareness. However, as Fromm pointed out, a 'being-orientated' existence requires not only radical socio-political change but nothing less than the transformation of humankind.

## **Nature and politics**

Deep ecologists typically dismiss conventional political creeds as merely different versions of anthropocentrism, each embodying an anti-nature bias. They claim to have developed an entirely new ideological paradigm (although many reject the term 'ideology' because of its association with human-centred thinking), developed through the radical application of

ecological and holistic principles. Nevertheless, other ecological or environmental thinkers have drawn inspiration, to a greater or lesser extent, from established political traditions. Such a stance is based upon the belief that these traditions contain values and doctrines that are capable of accommodating a positive view of non-human nature, and of shedding light on why the ecological crisis has come about and how it can be tackled. In this sense, ecologism, like nationalism and feminism, can be regarded as a cross-cutting ideology. At different times, conservatives, fascists, socialists, anarchists, feminists and liberals have claimed a special sympathy with the environment. However, they have enlisted ecological ideas in support of very different political goals. The most significant sub-traditions within ecologism are the following:

- Right-wing ecologism
- Ecosocialism
- Eco-anarchism
- Ecofeminism

### *Right-wing ecologism*

Although modern green politics is associated with causes and concerns that are generally viewed as left wing – such as belief in decentralization and direct action and opposition to hierarchy and materialism – the earliest manifestations of political ecology had an essentially right-wing orientation (Bramwell, 1989). This was most dramatically demonstrated by the emergence of a form of fascist ecologism during the Nazi period in Germany. Its principal exponent was Walter Darré, who was minister of agriculture under Hitler, 1933–42, and also held the post of Nazi peasant leader. The experience of rapid industrialization in late nineteenth-century Germany had created a strong ‘back to the land’ movement, which was especially attractive to students and young people. The German Youth Movement developed out of the Wandervoegel, bands of German students who took to the forests and mountains to escape from the alienation of urban life. Darré's own ideas were a mixture of Nordic racialism (see p. 231) and the idealization of peasant or rural life, fused into an agrarian philosophy of ‘Blood and Soil’ that overlapped at several points with national socialism. Nazism, for instance, was associated with a form of vitalism, which places heavy emphasis on the role of the ‘life force’ and so is at odds with any form of materialism. As peasant leader, Darré was responsible for introducing the hereditary farm law, which gave owners of small and medium-size farms complete security of tenure, and also for setting up the National Food Estate to market agricultural produce with the intention of keeping food prices high and maintaining rural prosperity.

Despite his links with the Nazis, Darré's ideas have much in common with the modern green movement. In the first place, he was convinced that only a life lived close to nature and on the land could be truly fulfilling, and he therefore wished to recreate a peasant Germany. Such ideas have been echoed by modern ecologists such as Edward Goldsmith (1988). Moreover, Darré became a powerful advocate of organic farming, which uses only natural fertilizers such as animal manure. Darré believed in an organic cycle of animal–soil–food–humans, which he discovered in the works of the Austrian philosopher and educationalist Rudolph Steiner (1861–1925) and the anthroposophy movement. Organic farming reflects ecological principles and has become a major plank in the idea of environmentally-friendly agriculture. During the Third Reich, Darré's peasant ideology helped the Nazis to secure committed support in the German



countryside. However, though a scientific racist, Darré himself was never a Nazi and publicly distanced himself from the Führerprinzip, or leader principle, and also from talk of expansion and empire. In reality the Nazi regime did little to fulfil Darré's dreams of a sturdy, peasant Germany. Despite Hitler's attachment to the idea of 'Blood and Soil', his obsession with military expansion intensified the process of industrialization in Germany and brought poverty to the countryside.

On the 'soft' right, conservatives have also evinced sympathy for environmental issues. Ecoconservatism reflects a romantic and nostalgic attachment to a rural way of life threatened by the growth of towns and cities. It is clearly a reaction against industrialization and the idea of 'progress'. It does not envisage the construction of a post-industrial society, founded upon the principles of cooperation and ecology, but a return to or the maintenance of a more familiar pre-industrial one. Such environmental sensibilities typically focus upon the issue of conservation and upon attempts to protect the natural heritage – woodlands, forests and so on – as well as the architectural and social heritage. The conservation of nature is therefore linked to a defence of traditional values and institutions. Ecology can therefore come to stand for a return to the feudal past, with the land in the hands of a small minority and political control imposed from above. For example, Edward Goldsmith, the father of British environmentalism, has argued that an ecological society would involve the resurrection of traditional order within the family and the community – in effect, the establishment of strong authoritarian government.

### *Ecosocialism*

There is a distinct socialist strand within the green movement, and this is particularly pronounced amongst the German Greens, many of whose leaders have been former members of far-left groups. Ecosocialism often draws upon Marxist analysis, and has usually sought to distance itself from the quasi-religious ideas that are influential elsewhere in the environmental movement. For example, Rudolph Bahro (1982), a leading German ecosocialist, argued that capitalism is the root cause of environmental problems. The natural world has been despoiled by industrialization, but this is merely a consequence of capitalism's search for profit. Capitalism is thus characterized not only by class conflict but also by the destruction of the natural environment. Both human labour and the natural world are exploited because they are treated simply as economic resources. Any attempt to improve the environment must therefore involve a radical process of social change, some would say a social revolution. However, Marx's own position in relation to the natural world is a matter of some controversy. While some see his belief in the progressive development of productive forces as a classic statement of industrialism, others have argued that the depiction of labour in his early writings as the 'humanization' of nature and the 'naturalization' of human beings, has an unmistakable ecological character.

The core theme of ecosocialism is the idea that capitalism is the enemy of the environment, whilst socialism is its friend. However, as with socialist feminism, such a formula embodies tension between two elements, this time between 'red' and 'green' priorities. If environmental catastrophe is nothing more than a by-product of capitalism, environmental problems are best tackled by abolishing capitalism, or at least taming it. Therefore, ecologists should not form separate green parties or set up narrow environmental organizations, but work within the larger socialist movement and address the real issue: the economic system. On the other hand,



socialism has also been seen as another 'pro-production' political creed: it espouses exploiting the wealth of the planet, albeit for the good of humanity, rather than just the capitalist class. Socialist parties have been slow to adopt environmental policies because they, like other 'grey' parties, continue to base their electoral appeal upon the promise of economic growth. As a result, ecologists have often been reluctant to subordinate the green to the red, hence the proclamation by the German Greens that they are 'neither left nor right'. Indeed, ecosocialists such as Bahro (1984) have come to the conclusion that the ecological crisis is so pressing that it must take precedence over the class struggle.

Ecosocialists argue that socialism is naturally ecological. If wealth is owned in common it will be used in the interests of all, which means in the long-term interests of humanity. However, it is unlikely that ecological problems can be solved simply by a change in the ownership of wealth. This was abundantly demonstrated by the experience of state socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which produced some of the world's most intractable environmental problems. In the 1960s, for example, the two principal rivers that fed the Aral Sea in Soviet Central Asia were rerouted in order to irrigate cotton and rice fields. As a result, the Aral Sea, once the fourth biggest lake in the world, has shrunk to half its original size and its shores have receded in some places by 100 kilometres, leaving a salty, polluted desert. The best publicized environmental disaster in Eastern Europe was the Chernobyl nuclear explosion in the Ukraine in 1986, the scale of which at least forced the Soviet regime into greater openness about environmental problems in general. In the postcommunist era, environmental protest groups have sprung up throughout the successor states to the Soviet Union. However, it is noticeable that, unlike the green movement in the West, these groups rarely espouse ecosocialism and are more usually linked to conservative or reactionary political doctrines.

### *Eco-anarchism*

Perhaps the ideology that has the best claim to being environmentally sensitive is anarchism. Some months before the publication of Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring*, Murray Bookchin brought out *Our Synthetic Environment* ([1962] 1975). Many in the green movement also acknowledge a debt to nineteenth-century anarcho-communists, particularly Peter Kropotkin. Bookchin (1977) has suggested that there is a clear correspondence between the ideas of anarchism and the principles of ecology, articulated in the idea of 'social ecology', the belief that ecological balance is the surest foundation for social stability. Anarchists believe in a stateless society, in which harmony develops out of mutual respect and social solidarity amongst human beings. The richness of such a society is founded upon its variety and diversity. Ecologists also believe that balance or harmony spontaneously develops within nature, in the form of ecosystems, and that these, like anarchist communities, require no external authority or control. The anarchist rejection of government within human society thus parallels the ecologists' warnings about human 'rule' within the natural world. Bookchin therefore likened an anarchist community to an ecosystem, and suggested that both are distinguished by respect for the principles of diversity, balance and harmony.

Anarchists have also advocated the construction of decentralized societies, organized as a collection of communes or villages. Life in such communities would be lived close to nature, each community attempting to achieve a high degree of self-sufficiency. Such communities

would be economically diverse; they would produce food and a wide range of goods and services, and therefore contain agriculture, craftwork and small-scale industry. Self-sufficiency would make each community dependent upon its natural environment, spontaneously generating an understanding of organic relationships and ecology. In Bookchin's view, decentralization

Murray Bookchin (born 1921)

US anarchist social philosopher and environmental thinker. Bookchin was a radical activist in the American labour movement of the 1930s, and was one of the very earliest social thinkers to take environmental issues seriously. He is professor emeritus of the Institute of Social Ecology in Vermont.

Bookchin's contribution to anarchism is linked to an emphasis on the potential for non-hierarchical cooperation within conditions of post-scarcity, and on ways of promoting decentralization and community within modern societies. As the leading proponent of 'social ecology', he propounds the view that ecological principles can be applied to social organization and argues that the environmental crisis is a result of the breakdown of the organic fabric of both society and nature. Bookchin's major works include *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971), *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982) and *Remaking Society* (1989).

would lead to 'a more intelligent and more loving use of the environment'. A society regulated by spontaneous sympathy amongst human beings is therefore likely to encourage an ecological balance between human beings and the natural world.

Without doubt, the conception that many ecologists have of a post-industrial society has been influenced by the writings of Kropotkin and William Morris. The green movement has also adopted ideas such as decentralization, participatory democracy and direct action from anarchist thought. However, even when anarchism is embraced as providing a vision of an ecologically sound future, it is seldom accepted as a means of getting there. Anarchists believe that progress will only be possible when government and all forms of political authority are overthrown. In contrast, many in the green movement see government as an agency through which collective action can be organized and therefore as the most likely means through which the environmental crisis can be addressed, at least in the short term. They fear that dismantling or even weakening government may simply give free rein to those forces that generated industrialization and blighted the natural environment in the first place.

### *Ecofeminism*

The idea that feminism offers a distinctive and valuable approach to green issues has grown to such a point that ecofeminism has developed into one of the major philosophical schools of environmentalist thought. Its basic theme is that ecological destruction has its origins in patriarchy: nature is under threat not from humankind but from men and the institutions of male power. Feminists who adopt an androgynous or sexless view of human nature argue that patriarchy has distorted the instincts and sensibilities of men by divorcing them from the 'private' world of nurturing, home making and personal relationships. The sexual division of labour thus inclines men to subordinate both women and nature, seeing themselves as 'masters'

of both. From this point of view, ecofeminism can be classified as a particular form of social ecology. However, many ecofeminists subscribe to essentialism, in that their theories are based upon the belief that there are fundamental and ineradicable differences between women and men.

Such a position is adopted, for instance, by Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* (1979). Daly argued that women would liberate themselves from patriarchal culture if they aligned themselves with 'female nature'. The notion of an intrinsic link between women and nature is not a new one. Pre-Christian religions and 'primitive' cultures often portrayed the Earth or natural forces as a Goddess, an idea resurrected in some respects in the Gaia hypothesis. Modern ecofeminists, however, highlight the biological basis for women's closeness to nature, in particular the fact that they bear children and suckle babies. The fact that women cannot live separate from natural rhythms and processes in turn structures their politico-cultural orientation. Traditional 'female' values therefore include reciprocity, cooperation and nurturing, values that have a 'soft' or ecological character. The idea that nature is a resource to be exploited or a force to be subdued is more abhorrent to women than men, because they recognize that nature operates in and through them and intuitively sense that personal fulfilment stems from acting with nature rather than against it. The overthrow of patriarchy therefore promises to bring with it an entirely new relationship between human society and the natural world.

If there is an essential or 'natural' bond between women and nature, the relationship between men and nature is quite different. While women are creatures of nature, men are creatures of culture: their world is synthetic or man-made, a product of human ingenuity rather than natural creativity. In the male world, then, intellect is ranked above intuition, materialism is valued over spirituality, and mechanical relationships are emphasized over holistic ones. In politico-cultural terms, this is reflected in a belief in self-striving, competition and hierarchy. The implications of this for the natural world are clear. Patriarchy, in this view, establishes the supremacy of culture over nature, the latter being nothing more than a force to be subdued, exploited or risen above. Ecological destruction and gender inequality are therefore part of the same process in which 'cultured' men rule over 'natural' women.

## **Ecologism in the twenty-first century**

The prospects for ecologism in the twenty-first century would appear to be firmly linked to the state of the environmental crisis and the general level of understanding about environmental issues and problems. As evidence of the blighting of nature increases – through changing weather patterns resulting from global warming, reduced levels of male fertility caused by pollution, the eradication of animal and plant species, and so on – the search for an alternative to growth-obsessed industrialism will surely intensify. The fluctuating fortunes of green parties and single-issue environmentalist groups provide no reliable indication of the strength of ecological ideas and values. One of the problems confronting green parties is that their mainstream and much larger rivals have taken up 'eco-friendly' positions that were once exclusively theirs. Similarly, the membership and activist base of single-issue environmental groups does not reflect the number of fellow-travellers in society at large nor the wider adoption of ecological practices such as recycling and the use of organic foods. It is also notable that environmental groups and ecological activists have been prominent within the emergent anti-globalization movement. From this perspective, humankind will have little choice in the twenty-first century but to reverse the

policies and practices that have brought both the human species and the natural world close to destruction.

A number of problems confront ecological theory, however. In the first place, it is difficult to see how ecologism can become a global ideology. As far as developing-world states are concerned, its strictures appear to deny them the opportunity to catch up with the West. Western states developed through large-scale industrialization, the exploitation of finite resources and a willingness to pollute the natural world, practices they now seek to deny to the developing world. However, the industrialized West is no more likely than the developing world fully to adopt ecological priorities since this would mean that it, as the major consumer of energy and resources would have to forego the prosperity it already enjoys. Second, industrialism and its underpinning values, such as competitive individualism and consumerism, have become more deeply entrenched as a result of economic globalization. Globalization, in this sense, can be seen as a form of hyper-industrialism. The link between ecologism and the anti-globalization movement, in other words, is no coincidence. Third, difficulties surround the anti-growth message of ecologism. The politics of sustainable or zero growth may either be so unattractive to populations that it is electorally impossible, or misconceived, as Bramwell argued in *The Fading of the Greens* (1994), because the environmental crisis can only be tackled by advanced and materially prosperous societies. Fourth, greenism may simply be an urban fad, a form of post-industrial romanticism. This suggests that environmental awareness is merely a temporary reaction to industrial progress and is likely to be restricted to the young and the materially affluent.

Perhaps the most daunting challenge facing ecologism is the very scale of the changes it calls for. Ecologism, at least in the guise of deep ecology, is more radical than socialism, fascism, feminism or any of the other political creeds examined in this book. It does not merely demand the transformation of the economic system or the reordering of power relations within the political system, it seeks to establish nothing less than a new mode of being, a different way of experiencing and understanding existence. What is more, its theories, values and sensibilities are entirely at odds with those that have traditionally dominated industrialized societies. The problem of ecologism is therefore that it is based upon a philosophy that is deeply alien to the culture that it must influence if it is to be successful. However, this may also be the source of its appeal.

### **Further reading**

Baxter, B., *Ecologism: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). A clear and comprehensive survey of the main components of ecologism that considers its moral, political and economic implications.

Bramwell, A., *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989). A highly influential study of the intellectual and political history of the ecological movement; detailed and provocative.

Capra, F. *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter* (London: Flamingo, 1997). A bold attempt to develop a new foundation for ecological politics that uses deep ecology as its theoretical paradigm.

Dobson, A., *Green Political Thought*, 3rd edn (London: HarperCollins, 2000). An accessible and very useful account of the ideas behind green politics; sometimes seen as the classic text on the subject.

Dobson, A., *The Green Reader* (London: André Deutsch, 1991). An excellent collection of short extracts from important texts by ecological thinkers; a good basis for further reading.

Eckersley, R., *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach* (London: UCL Press, 1992). A detailed and comprehensive examination of the impact of environmentalist ideas on contemporary political thought.

Marshall, P., *Nature's Web: Rethinking Our Place on Earth* (London: Cassell, 1995). A history of ecological ideas that serves as a compendium of the various approaches to nature in different periods and from different cultures.