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AN OVERVIEW OF WESTERN ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY — I

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AN OVERVIEW OF WESTERN ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY — I¹⁾

by Richard Evanoff

Environmental philosophy is not a homogeneous “school” of philosophy, but rather a movement that includes diverse and sometimes opposing perspectives. There are, as one magazine has suggested about the environmental movement in general, many “shades of greens.”²⁾ In this article I intend to present a “reconnaissant view” of the major schools and positions of environmental philosophy, tracing out the general contours of the landscape rather than focusing on specific details. The movement is developing rapidly and any introduction of this length must of necessity be cursory and provisional. Moreover, while Asian traditions are currently making significant contributions to environmental thinking, I intend to restrict my attention here to Western traditions, particularly to developments in my own country, the United States. Readers who wish fuller accounts are directed to the sources listed in the notes.³⁾

Precursors of Ecological Thinking in the West

Environmental philosophy did not properly emerge as an intellectual discipline until several decades ago, but contemporary thinkers have nonetheless suggested that certain cultural and intellectual traditions of the past can be used as sources for a modern ecological perspective. There has been a considerable interest among contemporary environmental thinkers in primitive and prehistoric cultures, for example, on the assumption that precivilized human beings lived more in “harmony with nature.”⁴⁾ The animistic outlook of primitive cultures suggests a fusion of the sacred and the mundane; i.e., nature is regarded as holy. Moreover, precivilized societies were typically organized on a tribal basis, with little division of labor (particularly between males and females) and no hierarchical class struc-

tures. Many modern writers hold “civilization” responsible for fostering patterns of domination — of humans over humans (especially males over females) and of humans over nature. The shift from Paleolithic culture, which relied primarily on nomadic hunting and gathering, to Neolithic culture, which introduced agricultural techniques and village social structures, marks the beginning of human attempts to control and dominate nature.

Greek religious thought humanized — and denatured — the gods by representing them as human beings rather than as natural forces. Presocratic Greek philosophy sought to understand the cosmos in terms of human reason. The humanistic outlook of the Greeks is perhaps best summarized in Protagoras’s dictum that “man is the measure of all things.” Nonetheless the contemporary environmental philosopher George Sessions has suggested that the monistic tradition in Greek philosophy, including Anaximander, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and Empedocles, provides the basis for a decidedly ecological worldview. Sessions sees this monistic tradition continuing in the work of Baruch Spinoza and in the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead.⁵⁾ The monistic tradition stresses the concept of interrelatedness. No part is superior to any other part in the context of the whole.

The idea of the world as an “organic whole” is also found in Stoic thought, which pantheistically conceived of the divine as in the world. This idea was furthered by the founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus, who replaced Plato’s dualism between the ideal world of the forms and the mundane world of physical existence with a monistic philosophy in which everything that exists is seen as being infused with one Soul.⁶⁾ Plotinus regarded the world as a god, an idea with precedents in the Greek earth goddess, Gaia. Recently the British organic chemist, James Lovelock, has put forward what he calls the “Gaia Hypothesis” — the idea that the earth is a single living organism which can only survive by ecologically balancing its various interrelated parts.⁷⁾

Neoplatonic thought had a tremendous influence on medieval Christian mysticism, particularly through the writings of the theologian Pseudo-

Dionysius and the philosopher John Scotus Erigena. Whereas the mainstream of the Christian theological tradition, with its emphasis on creed, ritual, and ecclesiastical authority, was decidedly hierarchical and anti-ecological, there was also a mystical crosscurrent in Christian thought which nurtured more egalitarian and wholistic values. The early monastic movement, exemplified by Anthony, was an attempt to escape the corruption of cities in order to confront God directly in the wilderness. Although later monasticism was often degenerate, it nonetheless produced the “patron saint” of ecologists, Francis of Assisi, who sang hymns to “Brother Sun” and “Sister Moon” and advocated the love of all creation. The Western mystical tradition, with its emphasis on “oneness,” continued in the work of Meister Eckhart and the Rhineland mystics, the Spanish mystics John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, and the English mystics Julian of Norwich and the anonymous author of the *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The contemporary Catholic writer, Matthew Fox, draws extensively on medieval mysticism for his concept of “creation spirituality.”⁸⁾

The Neoplatonic influence remained strongest in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, however, which saw redemption not only in terms of the deification of humanity, but also as the complete sanctification of the earth.⁹⁾ In the West, the Neoplatonic influence was eventually eclipsed by the Aristotelian orientation of Scholasticism. By relegating religion to the realm of “faith,” Thomas Aquinas opened the way for a genuine science to develop in the realm of “reason.” Medieval naturalism, which exemplified itself in Petrarch’s decision to climb Mount Ventoux in 1336 for no other reason than to enjoy the scenery, led to a new aesthetic and scientific interest in nature. Renaissance artists such as Giotto and della Francesca began to experiment with accurately portraying the physical world in proper perspective, while scientists such as Kepler and Galileo sought to understand the workings of the cosmos by direct observation.

The new interest in science, however, not only undermined the authority of traditional religion but also advanced a purely materialistic conception of reality. The philosophers of the Enlightenment rejected miracles and the supernatural, believing that everything that existed could be ex-

plained scientifically. Nature was seen as operating exclusively in accordance with natural laws. Deism relegated the divine to a purely transcendental realm: God sets the world in motion and then abandons it to its own natural workings. Moreover, the Newtonian worldview described the universe in mechanistic terms: the world is like a clock and it can be understood only through empirical observation and human reason.

Romanticism was a reaction against the Enlightenment idea that nature can be reduced to the merely “mechanical.” Poets such as William Wordsworth and artists such as John Constable expressed an intuitive and aesthetic rather than a rational and empirical appreciation of nature. The philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, drawing on earlier traditions of the “noble savage,” argued that primitive humans living in a state of nature were primarily concerned with meeting their natural physical needs and were thus happier (and less violent) than modern individuals who struggle to attain luxury and status. Civilization is merely a veneer of politeness that alienates individuals from their natural selves.

The Romantic vision of nature did not prevail, however, and the mainstream of Western thought has tended from the beginning of the industrial revolution through our modern consumer society towards an increasingly materialistic and technological worldview. Nature has been desacralized; it is seen as existing solely for the purpose of providing for humanity’s material needs and comforts. Science is the new religious orthodoxy and technology its god. Both capitalism and Marxism have advocated unlimited economic growth and the ever-increasing subjugation of nature to human control. The fact that war, poverty, violence, and ecological devastation have all increased in the twentieth century has not yet shattered the faith of most people that the world is getting “better.” The dominant ideology is that further human “progress” is inevitable, that the quality of life can be “improved” by consuming more and more resources, and that technology is the “savior” that will rescue us from any future ecological damnation. One task of environmental philosophy is to challenge this ideology and to offer alternatives which will result in a genuine improvement in the quality of life by bringing humans into greater harmony with their natural envi-

ronment.

The Development of Ecological Thinking in America

The attitude of early Americans towards the environment was at best ambivalent.¹⁰⁾ The “New World” was at once a place of refuge for Europeans fleeing the corruption of civilization and an uncharted land filled with terrors and dangers. Unlike the native Americans, who had established a fairly congenial and symbiotic relationship with nature, the early settlers, accustomed to the conveniences of Europe, found it difficult to adjust to their new environment. Rather than adopt the ways of the “uncivilized” but highly adapted Indians, they attempted to transplant European styles of housing and agriculture to their new environment. Many suffered from cold, hunger, and other deprivations which often made their experience in the New World a sheer struggle for survival.

The wilderness was imagined less as a pristine refuge humans might live in “harmony” with than a hostile force to be subdued. The “pioneer spirit” is typically regarded as the quintessential expression of American freedom and individualism, but more negatively it also represents a tendency to regard nature as little more than a theater for human aggrandizement. The slaughter of the buffaloes has become an apt symbol of the pioneer tendency to destroy indiscriminately, to take whatever was immediately desired, and to leave the rest to waste. The logic is essentially the same in the modern attitude that nature exists solely to be exploited in the interest of advancing material comforts and human “progress,” with little regard for resource depletion or the disposal of waste.

In addition to the threats of starvation, wild animals, and potentially hostile natives, the wilderness was also feared because, without the restrictions of “civilized life,” it offered unlimited opportunities for moral depravity and bestial behavior. The settlers came to feel that it was their moral mission to tame and “civilize” the wild landscape and its inhabitants, bringing the “light” of civilization to the “darkness” of the wilderness. Contrary to the Romantic image of native Americans as “noble savages,” many settlers regarded them as subhumans who should either con-

vert to the white man's way of life or be slaughtered. Desire for land was also a factor in the settlers' hostility towards native Americans, of course. The doctrine of "manifest destiny" led Americans to believe that it was their birthright to occupy all the land from the Atlantic to the Pacific — a belief which brought them into conflict not only with the French and Spanish but also with the original inhabitants of the land. The genocide of native peoples and the environmental devastation which followed became a major point of controversy during the 500th anniversary "celebrations" of Columbus's discovery of America. While some Americans continued to look on Columbus as the fabled explorer who discovered the New World, others held him ultimately responsible for the destruction of both native American cultures and the original American wilderness.¹¹⁾

While the majority of Americans were caught up in the enterprise of clearing the wilderness to build a new civilization, other voices began to cry out for a new relationship between humanity and the wilderness. As Romanticism began to have an influence in America, a growing appreciation for nature found expression in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and the landscape paintings of Thomas Cole. The essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, believed that one could discover a divine presence in nature which (borrowing from Plotinus) he called "Oversoul." Emerson's emphasis on the essential unity between the individual soul and Oversoul earned him the title "Transcendentalist." In the essay, *Nature*, Emerson advocated retiring from both society and one's own chamber to stand in awed reverence before nature. Emerson was one of the first Americans to read deeply in Oriental thought, where he found a similar emphasis on the unity of self and cosmos. Nonetheless Emerson also championed the thoroughly American idea of self-reliance, by which he meant not an egoistic individualism based on self-centered interests, but the idea that to find one's true personal identity it is necessary to leave behind the corrupting influences of civilization, particularly its penchant for conformity.¹²⁾

The American Transcendentalist who most perfectly embodied Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance was Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau's best-known book, *Walden*, describes the three years he spent living in a

cabin he had built on the outskirts of Concord, Massachusetts near Walden Pond. Thoreau reflected that most people live lives of “quiet desperation,” concerned more with providing a comfortable life for themselves than with finding out what life is really all about. Thoreau wrote, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”¹³ For Thoreau nature and civilization are dichotomized. As with Emerson, whereas civilization demands conformity to certain social roles, nature is the temple in which individuals can discover their true selves. Thoreau thus provided an updated version of early Christian monasticism, which believed that the best way to know God is to know oneself and that the best way to know oneself is to retreat from the corruption of civilization to the purity of the wilderness.

Thoreau also believed that this direct contact with one’s inner conscience is the basis of moral action. In conflicts with “accepted social norms,” it is better to follow one’s own conscience. Thoreau’s imprisonment in 1846 for failing to pay his taxes to support the Mexican War dramatizes this principle. In his essay, “On Civil Disobedience,” Thoreau argues that if a government is unjust an individual has no obligation to follow its dictates. Government exists for the benefit of its citizens; citizens do not exist for the benefit of the government. Thoreau subscribed to the belief, found in both ancient Taoism and modern anarchism, that “That government is best which governs not all.”¹⁴ Thoreau’s concept of passive resistance later influenced both Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. in their struggles against state-sanctioned oppression.

The American preservationist, John Muir, was deeply influenced by the work of Wordsworth, Emerson, and Thoreau. After leaving university without a degree and working for a while at a carriage factory in Indiana, Muir set out in 1867 on a walk to the Gulf of Mexico, during which he began to develop a deeply religious appreciation of nature. Muir’s later travels took him to California and the Sierra Nevada. In his *Journals* Muir wrote, in language reminiscent of the Transcendentalists, that “everything

in it seems equally divine — one smooth, pure, wild glow of heaven's love."¹⁵) In the two words “equally divine” the later deep ecology perspectives of biocentric equality and intrinsic value are foreshadowed. Muir wrote voluminously and his writings helped familiarize readers with the splendor of the remaining American wilderness areas and the need to protect them.

Muir was part of the growing controversies over what should be done to preserve those wilderness areas. As early as 1832 the painter George Catlin had suggested that wild land be protected in government parks. In the same year the Arkansas Hot Springs became the first natural object to be designated a national reservation. Momentum for the creation of wilderness preserves grew rapidly during the second half of the nineteenth century — even as more and more wilderness was disappearing. In 1872 Yellowstone became America's first national park and in 1891 more than 13,000,000 acres of land were withdrawn from the public domain and declared national forest reserves. Muir himself was largely responsible for the establishment of the Yosemite National Park in 1890 (a trail in the park still bears his name). Two years later he helped found the Sierra Club for the purpose of protecting the park from any further development.

There were contradictory motives behind the establishment of wilderness areas and forest reserves, however. On the one side were *conservationists* who advocated the “wise use” or “planned development” of the nation's natural resources in the face of unchecked exploitation and rapid depletion. On the other side were *preservationists*, with Muir as their primary spokesperson, who felt that wilderness areas should be preserved for their own sake, apart from any utilitarian considerations. Official government policy tended to follow the arguments of conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot, however, who believed that scientific forestry practices and wise management could provide the nation with sustainable yields of forestry products. The Forestry Management Act of 1897 stated that the purpose of forest reserves is to “furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States.”¹⁶) Although he was willing to make some concessions to the conservationists, Muir ultimately

avored preserving wilderness areas for their own sake. Economic development eventually won out over environmental concern, however. Muir suffered another defeat in 1913 when the Sierra Club was unable to prevent a dam from being built in Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley to supply water and hydroelectric power to San Francisco. The argument again was that the needs of civilization took precedence over the preservation of wilderness.

While Muir had been less than completely successful in his efforts to preserve wilderness areas, his books were widely read and extremely influential. At the turn of the century public opinion began to see the value of preserving America's wilderness heritage, resulting in what Roderick Nash refers to as a "wilderness cult."¹⁷⁾ Theodore Roosevelt advocated vigorous "frontier virtues" as an antidote to the "flabbiness" of "overcivilization."¹⁸⁾ The Boy Scouts of America was established in 1910 to foster these virtues in youth. Novels such as Jack London's *Call of the Wild* and Edgar Rice Burrough's *Tarzan of the Apes* extolled the virtues of the primitive. Picture albums of wilderness scenes were extremely popular, as were vacations to wilderness resorts. The idea arose that wilderness areas should be preserved not only because they supplied forestry products, but also because of their scenic value — and the economic benefits of tourism to wilderness areas.

Aldo Leopold furthered the preservationists' argument that wilderness should be preserved not because of its value to humans — whether for forestry products, tourism, or beautiful scenery — but because of its intrinsic right to exist. Leopold joined the U.S. Forest Service in 1909 and is best known for his book, *A Sand County Almanac*. One of the book's essays, "Thinking Like a Mountain," describes Leopold's change of perspective. Earlier he had believed that forests should be managed by humans — that "bad" animals such as wolves should be exterminated so that "good" animals, such as deer, could flourish. But in holding this opinion he was not "thinking like a mountain" — from the point of view of nature — but rather according to purely human conceptions of "good" and "bad." One day in the wilderness he and some friends saw a pack of wolves

and began firing at them with their rifles. As one of the wolves died Leopold observed “. . . a fierce, green fire dying in her eyes.”¹⁹⁾ He realized that wolves are just as much part of the natural ecosystem as deers are since they naturally serve to keep the deer population in check.

Leopold was thus one of the first to embrace what would now be called a “biocentric” rather an “anthropocentric” perspective. His conclusion was informed by the growing science of ecology, which saw nature not in terms of isolated units (individual trees, flowers, animals, and the like), but in terms of organic systems composed of interdependent parts. In the same way that an engine cannot run if some of its parts are missing, so too healthy ecosystems cannot function if some of their organisms become extinct. In place of earlier ethical theories which concerned themselves with relationships between individuals or between individuals and society, Leopold advocated what he called the “land ethic.” In *A Sand County Almanac* Leopold wrote: “The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” and “[A] land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it.”²⁰⁾ This statement implies that the rights of humans should not take precedence over the rights of other life forms within the context of the total ecosystem. Nature does not exist merely for the benefit of humans, but has value in and of itself.

Leopold died in 1948 and *A Sand County Almanac* was not published until the following year. Leopold himself realized that his ideas were ahead of their time; indeed only recently have they come to be more fully appreciated. The dominant mood of the post-war decades was one of economic growth and material prosperity. Only gradually did the ecological devastation which this growth and prosperity were causing come to light. One of the first books to awaken Americans to the emerging environmental crisis was Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, which showed that the continued use of chemical insecticides in agriculture would eventually poison the entire food chain, from insects to birds to humans. Ecological awareness grew during the 1960s as other problems, such as air pollution

and the extinction of species, became prominent. In the face of growing public concern, the U.S. Congress passed legislation such as The Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and The Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Many environmentalists, while appreciating the change in perspective which such legal measures represented, nonetheless regarded them as piecemeal and reformist. The government's support of clean rivers, for example, was based more on the premise that they have value (economic and otherwise) for humans than on the fact that they are important to the ecosystem. Reformist legislation attempts to deal with specific problems as they arise but does nothing to challenge the dominant ideology that, within the values of our present capitalistic system, economic growth takes precedence over environmental preservation. The disillusionment with reformist efforts manifested itself in the emergence of environmentalism as a "counterculture" issue. The New Left, which had been fairly unified throughout the 1960s in its support for the civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War, began to fragment in the 1970s into groups concerned with distinct "single issues." The feminist, gay rights, and antinuclear movements all arose at roughly the same time as the environmental movement.

The American poet, Gary Snyder, emerged as a leading figure in the growing environmental movement. In the 1950s Snyder had been associated with the Beat Poets (a group which included Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg) and served as the model for the character Japhy Ryder in Jack Kerouac's novel, *The Dharma Bums*. Snyder's love of nature and his fascination with Japanese culture, particularly with Zen Buddhism, is already evident in that novel. Many Americans were becoming interested in Asian thought and attitudes towards nature at around the same time. There was an interest not only in Zen and Japanese art forms, such as *sumie* and haiku, but also in Chinese Taoist philosophy. Taoism's anarchistic idea of fleeing civilization to find oneself in nature undoubtedly reminded many Americans of Thoreau.

Snyder himself came to Japan in 1956 to study Buddhism, initially with Isshu Miura-roshi and later with Sessō Oda-roshi. He eventually returned

to the United States where his book, *Turtle Island*, won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1975. The book's title is taken from the native American name for the North American continent. Snyder's work manages to combine three central concerns: the literary, the religious, and the environmental. In his literary work Snyder is part of a long pastoral tradition in British and American poetry which includes the Romantics, the Transcendentalists, and more recent poets such as Robinson Jeffers and Wendell Berry. In the area of religion Snyder evokes Buddhism's respect for all life and its simplified, ecologically sensitive lifestyle. Environmentally, he emphasizes becoming familiar with one's "bioregion," (see "Bioregionalism" in the next section), having a sense of place, and involving oneself in a local community.²¹⁾

The conservation movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is sometimes referred to as the "first wave" of environmentalism in the United States. While there were a few dissenters such as Muir and Leopold, the dominant viewpoint was that nature should be protected because it offers economic and recreational benefits to humans. The "second wave" of environmentalism was ushered in with the publication of Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, and the dominant viewpoint was that nature should be protected because a damaged environment ultimately results in harm to humans. In both cases the arguments for protecting nature are *human*-centered, rather than *nature*-centered. The third wave of environmental thinking involves a complete change of consciousness — a "paradigm shift" away from the idea that nature exists primarily for the benefit of humans towards a more wholistic approach which sees humans as *part* of nature. Several recent ecological perspectives which reflect this shift in awareness will be examined next.²²⁾

Contemporary Schools of Ecological Thought

Deep Ecology. The phrase "deep ecology" was first coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and was made popular in the United States with the publication of the book *Deep Ecology* by Bill Devall and George Sessions. Essentially deep ecology critiques the reformist (i.e.,

“shallow”) tendencies of mainstream environmentalism by moving away from an “anthropocentric” to a “biocentric” perspective. The anthropocentric perspective, relying on utilitarian arguments, treats nature primarily as a resource to be managed and controlled by human beings for human benefit and comfort. A biocentric perspective, on the other hand, views nature as an end-it-itself, that is, as having intrinsic value on a par with the intrinsic value of human beings.

Deep ecology grounds itself on two ultimate norms: self-realization and biocentric equality. Self-realization involves the right of all beings to fulfill their inherent potential, a concept derived from humanistic psychology. The “self” which is realized should not, Devall and Sessions argue, be understood in its usual Western sense as “. . . an isolated ego striving primarily for hedonistic gratification or for a narrow sense of individual salvation in this life or the next” but rather as “organic wholeness.”²³⁾ The individual “self” is thus seen as part of universal “Self” — much the same as Plotinus described the Oversoul more in cosmic than in individual terms. Identification with nature cannot occur in egoistic isolation; rather, the self is inextricably related to larger social, ecological, even metaphysical contexts which transcend the individual.

Within the ecological “whole” itself, moreover, there is a fundamental equality. All that exists, exists on equal terms with everything else. The deep ecology principle of biocentric equality provides an ethical justification for treating everything that exists within nature with respect, while at the same time allowing for the fact that species exist in a symbiotic relationship with each other — it may be necessary for them to use each other as sources of food, for example. The act of killing plant and animal life can only be justified, however, to satisfy *vital needs* — quite in contrast with the vast amounts of environmental destruction being engaged in purely to provide for *human comfort*.

Deep ecology regards itself as part of a “minority tradition” opposed to what it calls the “dominant modern worldview.” The “minority tradition” is comprised of such diverse historical and cultural sources as perennial philosophy, native American and other “primitive” cultures, Romanticism

and American Transcendentalism, the pastoral literary tradition, scientific ecology, the “New Physics,” the Christianity of St. Francis and other medieval mystics, Eastern religious sources such as Taoism and Buddhism, Gandhi, the philosophies of Spinoza and Heidegger, the work of activists such as John Muir and David Brower, and ecofeminism.

Naess argues that deep ecology itself is not a monolithic ideology, but is rather based upon ultimate premises derived from various sources which, while differing among themselves, nonetheless result in similar conclusions of relevance to deep ecology.²⁴⁾ Despite the surface disparities between these various sources they all offer an alternative to traditional Enlightenment values. The “paradigm shift” of deep ecology thus emphasizes harmony with nature rather than dominance over nature; the intrinsic rather than the instrumental value of nature; a simplification of needs in keeping with the larger goal of self-realization rather than material / economic growth for a growing human population; the recognition that resources are limited rather than unlimited; an emphasis on appropriate technology rather than a blind faith in technological progress; making do with enough rather than consumerism; and decentralized bioregions rather than centralized national political units.²⁵⁾

The Australian philosopher Warwick Fox has recently sought to develop the deep ecology perspective in new directions. He suggests that the label “deep ecology” is problematic and should be replaced by “transpersonal ecology” (the term “transpersonal” being adopted from transpersonal psychology). Fox contends that the deep ecology principle of identification extends the boundaries of human ethical concern to include not only humans but the whole of nature. The problem then is not to develop a specific environmental ethic, i.e., a list of principles or ethical guidelines for how humans interact with the environment, but rather to cultivate an attitude which transcends human egoistic concerns and adopt a more wholistic concern for nature.²⁶⁾

Social Ecology. Social ecology can be seen not only as a self-contained philosophy in its own right, but also, in part, as a critique of and a response to deep ecology. In emphasizing biocentricism, deep ecology has been

accused of being misanthropic — more concerned about the fate of plants and animals than about the fate of human beings. Some of the more extreme statements of those identifying themselves as supporters of deep ecology have lent credence to this criticism. The population problem, in particular, led some deep ecologists to the Malthusian conclusion that famine, war, and diseases such as AIDS are desirable biological correctives to overpopulation — a stance that immediately drew criticism from social ecologists. In the ensuing debate many of the more extreme claims of misanthropes in the deep ecology camp were toned down or retracted.

This exchange, however, touched off a wider debate between deep and social ecology, and partially contributed to the establishment of the Left Green Network within the larger U.S. Green Movement. Social ecologists were critical of the deep ecology emphasis on changes in attitude or lifestyle, rather than on structural social change, as the best approach to solving ecological problems. Deep ecologists in turn were uncomfortable with the leftist rhetoric of social ecologists, fearing that social ecology was an attempt to infiltrate the ecology and Green movements with Marxist ideology and to shift discussion from ecological back to social concerns. Recently a rapprochement of sorts was reached between deep ecology and social ecology in a dialogue between *Earth First!* founder Dave Foreman and social ecologist Murray Bookchin which emphasized the common need for environmental preservation in the face of government and corporate irresponsibility.²⁷⁾

In retrospect much of the debate seems to have been based on the erroneous tendency (common in American politics however) to regard anyone who is not “pro-capitalist” as “Marxist” or “communist” — “reds in green cloaks,” as one article labeled not just the social ecologists, but the Greens as a whole.²⁸⁾ In fact, social ecologists are more squarely rooted in the anarchist libertarian tradition of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, which historically has been highly antagonistic to Marxism. While agreeing in part with Marx’s critique of capitalism, social ecologists differ entirely in both goals and methods, emphasizing nonauthoritarian political structures rather than a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” and decentralized

decision-making rather than central planning.

Murray Bookchin, social ecology's primary theoretician, identifies participation and differentiation as the key ethical precepts of social ecology.²⁹⁾ Cooperation, centered in small participatory communities, replaces the competition of large depersonalized societies as the fundamental ethical category. At the same time, differentiation leads to a state of stability, both ecologically and socially, since no one species, class, attitude, or whatever, dominates others. Both the alienation of humanity from nature and the alienation of the individual from society are primarily the result of changes in the total equilibrium — that is, the domination of one part over another part, which results in hierarchical rather than organic relationships.

Bookchin's critique of hierarchy and domination leads to the conclusion that ecological problems cannot be divorced from larger social and political problems. According to this analysis, while deep ecology seeks a wholistic perspective, it in fact perpetuates dualism by separating society from nature, thus remaining unaware of the link between social domination and the domination of nature. The domination of humans over nature cannot be eliminated unless the domination of humans over other humans is also eliminated. To give a concrete example, one cannot expect to solve the problem of the destruction of rain forests in Brazil without first addressing the impoverished social and economic conditions which drive the settler to the rainforest in the first place. It is inadequate, a social ecologist would say, to simply advise the Brazilian settler to "Revere nature!" Rather we must create an ecologically sustainable society which, unlike modern capitalist society, provides an adequate minimum standard of living for all people instead of hierarchically dividing people into rich and poor.

Bookchin's vision for a nondominating, nonhierarchical social order is encompassed in his idea of libertarian municipalism, which would restructure society on the basis of local communities rather than on the basis of nation-states (or a "global world order").³⁰⁾ Radical municipalism has been adopted into the principles of the Left Green Network, along with other principles of social ecology, such as ecological humanism and democratic decentralization. Decentralization is a theme found in other ecological per-

spectives as well, including bioregionalism, which envisions human societies constructed on the basis of ecologically defined areas, i.e. bioregions.

Ecofeminism. Ecofeminism attempts to see environmental problems primarily in terms of the historical relations which have existed between men and women. As with deep ecology, ecofeminism often expresses an interest in primitive societies. Some ecofeminists see ancient matriarchal societies as having been more “in tune with nature” and less environmentally destructive than later patriarchal societies. With the emergence of patriarchal societies — characterized by the domination of men over women — other forms of hierarchy and domination are seen as having emerged, including the domination of man over nature and man over man, through political and economic exploitation.

The solution to the environmental crisis is thus inextricably linked to the solution of the problems of hierarchy and male dominance. Some ecofeminists believe that women are inherently “closer to nature” and that the feminine values of nurturing should take precedence over the male values of domination in society.³¹⁾ Others go further, however, and see the reestablishment of matriarchal societies as a necessary corrective to centuries of male domination.³²⁾ Some ecofeminist critics, however, reject the notion that women are “closer to nature” and question whether matriarchal societies can solve the fundamental problems of hierarchy and domination. A matriarchal society in which women dominate men would be just as hierarchical as previous patriarchal societies. Moreover, even the attempt to achieve full equal opportunity for women does not address the fundamental class divisions of modern capitalistic society. While some women might gain access to traditional male domains of power, other women (and men) would continue to be disempowered. Some ecofeminists have thus argued that the problem is not only one of gender but also, perhaps more fundamentally, one of domination, which includes both the domination of men over women and the domination of humans over nature.³³⁾

Ecological Marxism. Even before communism’s current crisis, Marxism had been criticized by environmentalists as being no different from capi-

talism in its emphasis on, if not its success with, economic progress. The opening of Eastern Europe revealed that industrial development in socialist countries reeked as much havoc on the environment as the capitalistic system of the West, perhaps even more. Radical Marxist groups in the United States (such as the Socialist Labor Party) argue that the economic systems of the now-defunct “communist” regimes were in fact instances of “state capitalism” and that “real” socialism has never yet been tried. Environmental problems can only be solved if the economic exploitation which causes them is overcome.

While the countries which formerly constituted the Soviet bloc have begun to experiment with market economies, the traditional socialist view that production should be oriented towards genuine needs rather than towards profit is in fact very similar to the ecological stance. One promising line of argument being made by ecological Marxists is the extension of the traditional concept of exploitation to cover not only the exploitation of the working class, but also the exploitation of the environment. The increasing perception that environmental problems are class problems which affect the poor more than others, and that it is mostly the working class which is picking up the tab for environmental devastation — not the ones making the profits — also lends credence to the Marxist critique, although the majority of Americans, even in the post-Cold-War period, continue to be virulently “anti-communist.”³⁴⁾

Conservative Perspectives. Conservative perspectives on the environment are frequently criticized because they typically advocate piecemeal reform efforts that do little to address the underlying problems of environmental destruction. Many conservative positions seem to be little more than “greenwashing,” i.e., appearing to be concerned about the environment while continuing with business as usual. Politicians tout toothless “green laws” to make it appear they are doing something, while corporations indulge in “green advertising” which is geared more towards improving corporate images than towards actually improving the environment. A fully articulated conservative perspective which is actually *favorable* to the environment, and not just a cover for more economic growth or higher

corporate profits, has yet to make its appearance.

Nonetheless, there have been writers who have advocated a return to certain classical conservative positions. John McClaughry, for example, sees the potential for broadening the Green appeal, by exploring the “non-liberal” ideas contained in Burkean conservatism, Catholic social thought, libertarianism, and agrarianism. McClaughry sees affinities between some Green ideas and Jeffersonian democracy: the preservation of individual liberty in an age characterized by large public and private institutions; the restoration of small-scale human communities; a widespread distribution of private property ownership; the decentralization of economic and governmental power; individual and community self-help; environmental protection techniques (i.e., agrarian respect for the land); a sound money policy to prevent the accumulation of unearned wealth; and a nongovernmental “people-to-people” foreign policy.³⁵ While these ideas are indeed “conservative” in the classical sense, they are also “radical” in that they ultimately advocate the dismantling of global industrial capitalism as it is presently known in favor of a return to America’s agrarian past.

Social Anarchism. If McClaughry represents the right wing of libertarian thinking on ecological politics, social anarchism represent its left. Anarchism is a primary influence in social ecology and Bookchin himself can be regarded as an anarchist thinker as much as a social ecologist. While the Spanish Civil War perhaps marks the end of the classical period of anarchism, anarchism as a political philosophy has continued to develop, enjoying something of a renaissance since the 1960s. Kirkpatrick Sale, writing in *Social Anarchism* in 1985, saw the possibility for ecology and anarchism to “unite and inspire a single movement.”³⁶ As with Bookchin he was impressed by the fact that there is neither hierarchy nor domination in a stable ecosystem (i.e., government and authority are absent). Society should thus be organized as nature is, i.e., “naturally” without artificial and oppressive social structures.

The anarchist critique is relatively comprehensive because it sees the fundamental polarity as not being between males and females (as with feminists), or bourgeoisie and proletariat (as with Marxists), or humans

and nature (as with deep ecologists), or “us” and “them” (as with nationalists and separatists of various stripes), but rather between dominator and dominated. Anarchism avoids the reductionist, single-issue focus of feminism, Marxism, deep ecology, nationalism, separatism, and the like, and yet directly addresses the fundamental problem of domination which all of these movements were created to eliminate. Eliminate the basic polarity between dominator and dominated and all these other polarities will simultaneously be overcome.

Bioregionalism. Kirkpatrick Sale is also the author of the book *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision*.³⁷⁾ Bioregionalism is less a school of thought than an idea. The term, which was first coined by Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann in the 1970s, suggests that land should be divided into “bioregions” — areas having similar ecologies — rather than into arbitrary nation-states. Bioregionalism stresses the fact that distinct ecological communities encourage particular types of biological and human development; thus control should be local rather than through large impersonal political units. Bioregionalism is a remarkably elastic concept. Its emphasis on decentralization — and eschewal of highly centralized governments and transnational corporations — makes it popular with both deep and social ecologists, as well as with the cooperative movement and some conservatives.

NOTES

- 1) This article is a revised and expanded English version of the article “*Kankyo-tetsugaku-nyumon*” (“Introduction to Environmental Philosophy”) published in Japanese in *Chikyu to Kankyo Kyoiku (Earth and Environmental Education)*, volume 4, published by Tokai University Press, 1993. It also incorporates ideas from two previous articles published in this journal, “U.S. Environmental Politics and the Philosophy of Ecology” (June, 1991) and “Prospects for a Green Political Party in the United States” (November, 1991). Entirely new material has been added, however, and the present article updates these earlier efforts. My intention is to provide a succinct, yet comprehensive overview of current environmental thinking in the West for students, scholars, and other interested persons in Japan. Part I is presented here. Part II will be published separately.
- 2) “Shades of Green,” in *Utne Reader* (July/August, 1990), pp. 50–63.
- 3) For a general history see Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehis-*

- tory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). A comprehensive bibliography is Donald Davis, *Ecophilosophy: A Field Guide to the Literature* (San Pedro: R. & E. Miles, 1989).
- 4) See, for example, Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1974).
 - 5) See George Sessions, "Western Process Metaphysics (Heraclitus, Whitehead, and Spinoza)" in *Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985).
 - 6) See Richard Evanoff, "An Ecological Reading of Plotinus" in *Aoyama Kokusai Seikei Ronshu* (Tokyo: Aoyama Gakuin University, November, 1992).
 - 7) See James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
 - 8) See the brief discussion of creation spirituality in Part II.
 - 9) See Nicholas Arseniev, *Mysticism and the Eastern Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979).
 - 10) See Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), which greatly informs the present account.
 - 11) See Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy* (New York Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).
 - 12) See *The Portable Emerson*, ed. Carl Bode (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1981).
 - 13) Henry David Thoreau, *Walden in Walden and Other Writings*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 81.
 - 14) Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," *op. cit.*, p. 635.
 - 15) Quoted in Nash, p. 126. Nash also notes that Muir regarded leaves, rocks, and bodies of water as "sparks of the Divine Soul" (p. 125).
 - 16) Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 137.
 - 17) See *ibid.*, Chapter 9, pp. 141–160.
 - 18) Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 150.
 - 19) Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 130.
 - 20) *Ibid.*, p. 204.
 - 21) See especially Gary Snyder, "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution" in *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions, 1969), pp. 90–92 and "The Bioregional Ethic" in *The Real Work* (New York: New Directions, 1980), pp. 138–158.
 - 22) The section which follows includes revised and updated excerpts from my previous article, "U.S. Environmental Politics and the Philosophy of Ecology," *Aoyama Kokusai Seikei Ronshu* (Tokyo: Aoyama Gakuin University, 1991).
 - 23) Devall and Sessions, p. 67.
 - 24) See Arne Naess, "Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises" in *The Ecologist* (Vol. 18, Nos. 4/5, 1988).
 - 25) Devall and Sessions, p. 69.
 - 26) See Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1990).
 - 27) See *Defending the Earth: A Dialogue Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman*, ed. Steve Chase (Boston: South End Press, 1991).
 - 28) David Horowitz, "Environmentalists are simply Reds in Green cloaks" in *National Review* (March 19, 1990), reprinted in *Utne Reader* (July/August, 1990), p. 57.

- 29) Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1987), p. 25. Bookchin's fullest development of social ecology is contained in *The Ecology of Freedom* (Palo Alto, California: Cheshire Books, 1982).
- 30) See Bookchin, *The Limits of the City* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1986), pp. 164-184.
- 31) See Susan Griffin, *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).
- 32) See Sally Miller Gearhart, "The Future — If There Is One — Is Female," in *Reweaving the Web of Life*, ed. Pam McAllister (Philadelphia: New Society Books, 1982).
- 33) See L. Susan Brown, "Beyond Feminism: Anarchism and Human Freedom," in *Our Generation* (Vol. 21, No. 1) and Janet Biehl, *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1991).
- 34) The leading journal of ecological Marxist thought in the U.S. has been *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, P.O. Box 8567, Santa Cruz, California 95061, U.S.A.
- 35) See John McClaughry, "Some Tasks to Be Addressed by a Green Political Movement," and "The Institute for Liberty and Community." Both documents were written in 1984, and circulated by the The Greens / Green Party USA.
- 36) Kirkpatrick Sale, "Anarchy and Ecology — A Review Essay" in *Social Anarchism* (Vol. 5, No. 2, 1985), p. 14.
- 37) See Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1985).