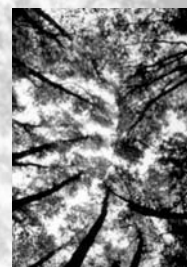


Green political thought

3



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Key issues

- ▶ Is there a distinct and coherent green ideology?
- ▶ What would a 'green' society look like?
- ▶ What are the distinguishing principles of green political theory?
- ▶ How have traditional political doctrines responded to the green challenge?
- ▶ Where does green politics lie on the left-right spectrum?

Is ecologism a distinct and coherent ideology? Do the two core ideas underpinning the ecological imperative – the need to reassess human–nature relations (discussed in Chapter 2) and the existence of ecological limits to growth – supplemented by a set of principles drawn from other doctrines, justify talking about ecologism as an ideology in its own right? If so, can it accommodate the broad range of competing perspectives and discourses within contemporary green political thought?

This chapter has two parts. The first part examines the central themes of ecologism. It starts by assessing the significance of the ‘limits to growth’ thesis as a green principle. As all ideologies need a vision of the ‘good society’ different from our own, the [next section](#) outlines the main features that characterise the dominant model of a green sustainable society. The following sections assess whether the driving idea behind green politics – the ecological imperative that we need to save the planet – requires

Decentralisation: The expansion of local autonomy through the transfer of powers and responsibilities away from a national political and administrative body.

that a green polity be built on the core political principles that characterise most versions of a green society, namely grassroots democracy, **decentralisation**, social justice and non-violence.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the way traditional political doctrines have responded to the environmental challenge. The concluding section draws these themes together by arguing that ecologism does represent a new and distinct ideological tradition that is broad enough to encompass several, often competing, green perspectives.

► The central ideas of ecologism

► *The limits to growth*

The publication of *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972) provoked a massive international debate about the existence of ecological limits to economic and population growth.¹ The authors used systems theory and computer modelling techniques (a new concept in the early 1970s) to analyse the complex interdependencies between five key variables: industrial output, resource depletion, pollution, food production and population growth. The computer simulations charted predicted outcomes up to 2100 if each variable continued growing at existing rates, and then for six permutations based on different assumptions about the growth of each variable. However, the interconnectedness of the variables meant that every attempt to address a single problem (e.g. resource depletion) simply pushed problems elsewhere (technical developments that double resource availability increase output, resulting in higher pollution). The authors concluded that if existing growth trends in each variable continued, ‘the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years’ (Meadows et al. 1972: 23).

3.1 Survivalism: leviathan or oblivion?

Many environmental theorists in the early 1970s had an overriding preoccupation with human survival. The leading environmental ‘doom-sayers’ were driven by a sense of urgency about the impending ecological crisis, which prompted them to recommend drastic – often authoritarian – solutions.

Garrett Hardin’s (1968) famous essay on the ‘Tragedy of the Commons’ (see Box 7.1) warned that, in a world of finite resources, freedom in the unregulated commons brings ruin to all. He proposed the illiberal solution of ‘mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon by the majority of people affected’. His ‘lifeboat ethic’ (Hardin 1977) callously recommended that ‘developed’ countries should abandon ‘less developed’ countries if their governments refused to control population growth and prevent ecological destruction. Thus rich countries in the North would be the ‘lifeboats’ loaded with survivors, cutting off aid to the poor nations of the South, who would ‘drown’ (even though the North consumes most resources and places most pressure on fragile ecosystems).

Robert Heilbroner (1974) and William Ophuls (1977) concluded reluctantly that the

management of the commons required a strong central authority to persuade self-interested people to change their ways. For Heilbroner, only a centrally planned, authoritarian state – ruled by a monastic government that combined religious orientation and military discipline – could force the required sacrifices and restructure the economy along ecologically sustainable lines. Ophuls envisaged a strong central authority dominated by ‘ecological mandarins’ who would govern by the application of ecological principles. If self-restraint was not forthcoming, then mildly coercive methods were needed in the short term to avoid resorting to more draconian methods in the longer term.

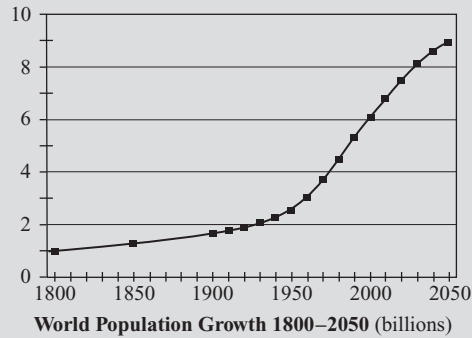
The illiberal recommendations of survivalism have been attacked from all sides: by capitalists and socialists, the Catholic church and ecofeminists. Despite the emphasis on practical solutions, the draconian prescriptions of survivalism seem impractical in a modern world dominated economically by global capitalism and politically by liberal democracy.

See Eckersley (1992) and Dryzek (2005: ch.2) for a wider discussion of survivalism.

The *Limits to Growth* report was enormously significant in the development of environmental thought.² The immediate impact of its apocalyptic message was to catapult environmental issues into the public eye and onto the political agenda. Its pessimism also resonated with the contemporary ‘**survivalist**’ concern (see Box 3.1) about population growth (see Box 3.2). In the longer term, ‘the belief that our *finite* Earth places limits on industrial growth’ has become a ‘foundation-stone of radical green politics’ (Dobson 2000: 62; emphasis added). Specifically, greens draw several lessons from the ‘limits to growth’ thesis (Martell 1994: 27–33; Dobson 2000: 63). First, the concept of finitude underpinning the ‘limits to growth’ thesis is unique to ecologism; it implies that any future sustainable world will be characterised by material scarcity rather than abundance. Secondly, by plotting the combined impact of the five variables, the report underlined the *interdependent*

Survivalism: Approaches characterised by an overriding preoccupation with human survival, a sense of urgency about an impending ecological crisis and drastic, often authoritarian, solutions.

3.2 Population growth



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

(Fourth principle of the deep ecology platform)

World population grew dramatically during the twentieth century, reaching 6 billion in October 1999. The rate of growth has, however, slowed and global population is expected to peak at 9 to 10 billion around 2060, with most growth in less developed countries.

Population control has been a key issue in environmental writing since the publication of

Paul Ehrlich's best-seller *The Population Bomb* in 1968 with its neo-Malthusian thesis that population growth was exponential. Many greens believe that only by reducing the world's population can global consumption be cut to sustainable levels. Population control is controversial because many suggested solutions are authoritarian and/or discriminate against poorer countries, as illustrated by Hardin's 'lifeboat ethic' (see Box 3.1), and by proposals to cut off food aid to poor countries unless their governments introduce compulsory sterilisation programmes or to impose stronger immigration controls to protect rich countries from refugees from the South. Some environmentalists are also enthusiastic about the Chinese 'one child per family' policy.

Green parties today, well aware of the sensitivities surrounding population issues, tend to downplay it and pointedly reject coercive methods. Indeed, most evidence suggests that economic and social development, by reducing poverty, providing for basic needs and improving female literacy and entry to the workforce, is the most effective means of slowing population growth (Harrison 1993; Sen 1994).

relationship between humans and nature, which teaches us that problems cannot be separated and treated in isolation (see Chapter 7). Thirdly, the current pace of economic growth is *exponential*, so that the gradual build-up of environmental problems may produce a sudden catastrophic outcome. This point is often illustrated by the following riddle. On what day will a pond be half covered with lilies, if the coverage doubles every day and will cover the entire pond on the thirtieth day? The answer is the twenty-ninth day (Brown 1978). The message is that policymakers need foresight to act early enough to prevent the catastrophic outcome predicted by *Limits to Growth*. Lastly, short-term technological fixes are insufficient because they do not address the underlying economic, social and political causes of the environmental crisis; they may delay destruction, but they will not prevent it. Overall, *Limits to Growth* suggests that ecological destruction is inextricably linked to prevailing economic, social and political systems. Greens have

concluded that only if these arrangements are radically transformed can environmental apocalypse be averted.

Subsequently, the 'limits to growth' thesis has been subjected to widespread criticism (Cole et al. 1973; Martell 1994; Beckerman 1995, *inter alia*). The easiest target has been its empirical claims, particularly about resource depletion, most of which have proven inaccurate because new reserves of oil, gas, coal and other minerals have been discovered (Beckerman 1995, 2002). In short, many indicators suggest that the state of the environment is healthier than predicted in *Limits to Growth*. It is now commonly agreed that the prediction of crisis by 2100 was overly pessimistic. The computer modelling used was very primitive, many of the assumptions were inaccurate and much of the data was flawed. Although updated versions of the *Limits to Growth* report try to meet some of these criticisms (Meadows et al. 1992, 2004), these are serious weaknesses. They show that the sense of urgency that *Limits to Growth* provoked, along with later publications in a similar survivalist vein such as the *Global 2000 Report to the President* published in 1980 and the annual Worldwatch Institute *State of the World* reports, may have been misplaced. These survivalist publications have also been fiercely attacked for underestimating the technological and political capacity of humans to adapt. This Promethean assault, once spearheaded by the economist Julian Simon (1981), has been reinvigorated since his death by Bjørn Lomborg (2001), a Danish statistician and political scientist (Dryzek 2005: 52–6) (see Box 3.3). Overall, their message is that broad trends show that economic growth ultimately improves environmental quality so we must do nothing that might hamper the operation of markets and free trade (see Chapter 10) and we can be confident that humans will find ways to solve any environmental problems that do emerge.

Nevertheless, the basic idea that there are ecological limits to growth remains potent, particularly with the emergence since the 1970s of a new range of global problems such as climate change and ozone depletion. Indeed, in 1995 a group of leading economists joined the fray by declaring that economic growth must sooner or later encounter limits imposed by the Earth's environmental carrying capacity (Arrow et al. 1995). If the great and the good of a discipline known more for its hostility to environmentalism are calling for institutional redesign to deal with pending ecological crisis, then there must be something in the idea (Dryzek 2005: 34). Perhaps greens need not be too defensive about drawing lessons from the 'limits to growth' thesis.

Finally, the 'limits to growth' debate also acted as a catalyst for an important debate in political philosophy about intergenerational justice, for it suggested that our actions now are likely to have a dramatic impact on the kind of world that we pass on to future generations of people not yet born. If so, do we have an obligation to future generations to protect the environment – to conserve resources, prevent pollution, avoid environmental degradation – so that the world they inherit is no worse (or even better) than

3.3 Bjørn Lomborg: *The Skeptical Environmentalist*

Lomborg, an ex-Greenpeace member, attacks environmentalists for constantly reciting the 'litany' of environmental fears about disappearing resources, overpopulation, biodiversity loss and pollution. He argues that this litany is inaccurate, and, fuelled by the need for environmental groups to raise funds and the media's search for 'bad news', it creates a climate of fear, which encourages bad policy decisions. In reality, he asserts that 'Mankind's lot has actually improved in terms of practically every measurable indicator' (2001: 4) and he marshals a huge array of statistics about key trends to show that natural resources, energy, food are actually becoming more abundant; people are eating more and living longer; species loss is exaggerated; forests are not disappearing; and pollution improves with economic growth. So, rather than introduce costly and ineffective policies to alleviate environmental problems that either do not exist or which we can do little to prevent, notably climate change, he recommends instead that efforts be concentrated on improving health and diets to alleviate poverty and save lives.

Lomborg has provoked huge criticism from the academic and environmentalist communities. He is criticised for creating a 'straw person', a survivalist environmental

litany that few people today really believe. He is widely condemned for 'bad science', including the selective use of evidence, the misinterpretation of key sources, a focus on quantity not quality (e.g. comparing old growth tropical rainforests with timber plantations) and a general insensitivity to the workings of complex ecosystems. A special issue of *Scientific American* (January 2002) had leading scientists lining up to attack him and Lomborg was even taken to the Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty, where he was found to have used dishonest methods, although this decision was overruled by the Ministry of Science in December 2003.

The publicity that Lomborg has attracted reflects the high stakes involved: environmentalists are sensitive to the 'cry wolf' charge that they are self-interestedly exaggerating the extent of the eco-crisis; anti-environmentalists (ranging from big business to the right-wing Danish and US governments) are keen to publicise any attempt to undermine the green case.

See Lomborg (2001), Jamison (2004), Dryzek (2005: ch. 3), Dryzek and Schlosberg (2005: chs. 5 & 6); the anti-Lomborg website: www.mylinkspage.com/lomborg.html; and his replies on www.Lomborg.com.

today? Future-generations arguments provide a powerful anthropocentric case for environmental protection that can supplement the ecocentric arguments discussed in Chapter 2 (see Box 3.4).³

Critical question 1

Must green politics be based on the idea of limits to growth?

► *A green programme for a sustainable society*

If ecologism is a distinct ideology, then it should be possible to identify a vision of the good society based on ecological principles that is fundamentally different from other ideologies. This section outlines the central

3.4 Obligations to future generations

The concept of intergenerational justice provides a powerful *anthropocentric* case for sustainability. Environmental protection is justified because our actions now will clearly have an effect on those still to be born; climate change, resource depletion, nuclear waste and biodiversity loss will all pose problems for future generations. However, there are problems inherent in the attempt to extend moral considerations to future generations.

1. The problem of *reciprocity*: why should we consider the interests of future people, who cannot offer us anything in return? This difficulty is acute for those who see justice as a matter of mutual advantage (e.g. Gauthier 1986), but such theories also have difficulty explaining obligations to existing people, notably the poor and needy. So, while theories of mutual advantage pose problems for future generations, they are also problematic in other, independent, ways.
2. The problem of *knowledge*: it may be objected that we cannot know what future generations will want or need (Golding 1972). However, against this, Barry (1991) argues that, whatever their wants, 'they are unlikely to include a desire for skin cancer,

soil erosion, or the inundation of all low-lying areas as a result of the melting of the ice-caps' (p. 248).

3. The problem of *scope*: it is sometimes argued that people who do not yet exist cannot have rights or interests. This consideration raises very complex issues about the possibility of benefiting or harming those who do not yet exist – and may never exist (see Parfitt 1984).

If we conclude that we do have obligations to future generations, many practical issues arise, including:

1. How strong is the obligation? Is it the same as that which is owed to people living now? Is it stronger for the immediate next generation than for later generations? Does the obligation diminish as it gets further away (in time) perhaps because we can share it with intervening generations? Does the satisfaction of future *needs* trump current *wants*?
2. What kind of obligation might we have towards future generations? Are we obliged to ensure they are no worse off than us or should we seek to improve their welfare?

In short, how much sacrifice is needed today?

characteristics of a green sustainable society. Of course, just as any definitive list of the core principles of socialism, liberalism or conservatism would be open to dispute, there is also considerable variation among the contrasting interpretations or discourses (Dryzek 2005) of ecologism. This account builds on the so-called 'four pillars', or core principles, of green politics identified by the German Greens in the 1980s – ecological responsibility, social justice, grassroots democracy and non-violence (see Box 3.5) – supplemented by the writings of green theorists, activists and academics.⁴

Ecological responsibility, or sustainability, is the primary aim of green politics and flows directly from the idea of limits to growth. A sustainable society has the capacity to last because the ecological carrying capacities of the planet are not exceeded. If the planet (and human society) is to survive, then development – economic, social, political – must be self-sufficient

3.5 The 'four pillars' of green politics

The 1983 political programme of Die Grünen, the German green party, set out four core political principles which have subsequently been adopted by most green parties elsewhere:

1. ecological responsibility
2. grassroots democracy
3. social justice
4. non-violence

The concept of ecological responsibility, or sustainability, is informed by the two core ideas of ecologism: (1) the need to recast human–nature relations; (2) the limits to growth. However, it is less clear how the *practical* political commitments to grassroots democracy, social justice and non-violence reflect these two ideas. If the primary aim of ecologism is to achieve a sustainable society, does it really matter how we get there and what the green polity looks like?

and geared towards the satisfaction of basic needs. Development must be guided by the principle of futurity so that the impact of economic activities on natural resources today does not prevent future generations of humans from meeting their needs and will allow non-human nature to flourish; thus futurity mixes the anthropocentric aim of protecting future generations of humans with the ecocentric aim of preserving the well-being of non-human nature.

The sustainable economy will require a fundamental transformation in attitudes to economic growth, consumption, production and work.⁵ The relentless pursuit of economic growth that characterises the existing capitalist economic system creates a range of environmental problems, notably resource depletion, destructive production and pollution. In contrast, greens advocate 'an economic system oriented to the necessities of human life today and for future generations, to the preservation of nature and a careful management of natural resources' (Die Grünen 1983: sect. 1, p. 7). If we aim to satisfy 'needs not wants', the pressure for continual economic growth would be removed. Many greens advocate a steady-state economy in which the levels of population and wealth are kept constant (Daly 1992), or dramatically scaled back (Georgescu-Roegen 1971).

Greens identify consumption, in particular 'unnecessary' consumption, as a major problem. They argue that the rate of economic growth is maintained by the creation of artificial wants, through advertising, fashion and peer pressure, that generate the unnecessary and wasteful levels of economic activity characteristic of the consumer society. The 'needs not wants' principle poses an explicit challenge to the supremacy of the profit motive. Greens believe that the pursuit of profit stimulates activities that create unnecessary consumer wants and encourages wasteful production strategies such as built-in obsolescence. Instead, a green economy would be based on production primarily for use rather than profit, and would thereby rule out such frivolous consumption. In this *conserver* society, people would be educated to consume less, thereby reducing production, protecting resources

3.6 Greens and technology

Greens believe that the *control of technology* is a prerequisite for effective environmental protection. A suspicion of 'high' technology has been a constant theme of modern environmentalism, from Rachel Carson's (1962) warnings about poisonous synthetic chemicals and pesticides, through fears about nuclear power, to contemporary concern about genetically modified organisms. Greens question the widespread assumption that technological solutions will always be found to environmental problems and that the benefits of technology always outweigh its costs.

Greens are not simply Luddite opponents of all forms of technological progress. They recognise that some technologies, such as medical advances, have dramatically improved the quality of life. Some greens see modern information technology playing a key role in a

green society characterised by small, high-tech cottage industries, although others point out that the production and use of these technologies massively deplete resources and generate pollution.

What all greens seek is greater democratic control over the development and use of technology. So, consistent with their commitment to economic and political decentralisation, greens would remove the control of technology from central government and big corporations and place it in the hands of the community. Following the ideas of Gandhi and Schumacher, they advocate wider use of intermediate and appropriate technologies, such as wind power and other forms of renewable energy, which are congruent with the needs, skills, culture and environment of local communities.

and cutting pollution. Environmental damage from production can be minimised by using renewable resources, reusing goods, recycling materials and adopting cleaner technologies.

Greens also believe that the rejection of the consumer society will improve the quality of life because a society based on material acquisition is, at best, undesirable, at worst, ethically wrong. As Trainer (1985) puts it: 'Our main problem is that most people hold the disastrously mistaken belief that affluence and growth are possible – and worse still that they are important. Our chief task is to spread the understanding that being able to buy and use up more and more expensive things is hollow and senseless' (p. 249). Furthermore, in a society dominated by the pursuit of economic growth and consumption, there is little time for active citizen participation in the democratic activities of the polity (Barry 1999a: 175). Thus consumerism restricts the opportunity for liberty and self-determination. On either count, greens believe that any quantitative reduction in the overall material standard of life in the sustainable economy will be more than compensated for by the resulting benefits, both material, such as improved craftsmanship, healthier food and safer communities, and 'spiritual' in terms of personal happiness, individual fulfilment and a more co-operative society.

Greens are firmly committed to the 'small is beautiful' philosophy of Fritz Schumacher (1975). The sheer size and complexity of large-scale production and modern technologies damage the environment in many ways (see Box 3.6). For example, pollution is concentrated in one area so that 'hotspots'

stretch the carrying capacity of the local ecosystem to the limit. The spatial separation of workplace and home increases traffic volume because employees travel long distances to work and the finished product is then transported nationally or internationally to consumers. Thus the price of economic efficiency arising from economies of scale is massive resource consumption and traffic pollution. Instead, the green economy would be characterised by decentralised, small-scale production within a self-sufficient local community. Production would be for local needs rather than for commercial trade further afield. Agricultural production would use less intensive, organic farming methods and serve the local community. Consequently, traffic volume would fall, as fewer journeys would be made and people would travel shorter distances to work, by foot, bicycle or public transport. Overall, resource consumption would drop dramatically.

The green economy would not dispense with money, but it would be a non-capitalist market economy with less trading activity. It might look like the local exchange trading systems (LETS) that have gained some popularity in recent years. In LETS, goods, skills and services are exchanged or bartered within a closed local network of individuals. No money changes hands. The aim is exchange and trade, not accumulation (see Barry 1999a: ch. 6). There would be less emphasis on paid work in the formal economy. Greater value and social recognition would be attributed to the wide range of tasks that currently do not normally count as paid labour, such as parenting, housework and community voluntary work. Greens support basic income schemes in which everyone would receive a non-means-tested income to ensure economic security for all and to allow people to adopt a more fulfilling lifestyle less dependent on the whims of the market-place (Robertson 1985).

What kind of political institutions would be needed to support the sustainable society? The clarion call of the greens – ‘Think global, act local’ – underpins the principle of political *decentralisation*. Political power would be located at the lowest ‘appropriate’ level to encourage what Kirkpatrick Sale (1980) has called ‘politics on a human scale’. In its most radical deep ecology and ecoanarchist forms, the green polity would consist of small self-governing communities. Sale proposes that the basic unit of the sustainable society should be the ‘bioregion’: an area of land defined by the natural, biological and geological features that give an area its identity, such as watersheds or mountain ranges, rather than the human political boundaries represented by towns, states or countries (Sale 1980, 1991; Tokar 1992). Social and economic life within that community should be self-sufficient, requiring no more than the resources available within that bioregion.

Green politics is not, however, confined to the concept of sustainability. As we have seen, greens identify moral as well as environmental reasons for cutting back on consumption and changing our lifestyles. The fact that we over-consume and degrade the environment is not just bad for the environment, but also evidence that we are ‘bad people’. Green politics has a view

on how a ‘good person’ should behave in the ‘good (green) society’, as illustrated by the centrality of the three remaining pillars to green politics. First, green party organisations are typically modelled on participatory democracy. The green state would be a *grassroots democracy*; indeed, participatory democracy would extend beyond political institutions into the economic arena, where the basic form of collective work organisation would be the worker co-operative or commune. Secondly, green politics emphasises *social justice*. A principle of intragenerational equity regards distributional equity, particularly between the rich North and the poor South but also within each country, as a prerequisite of sustainability. A principle of intergenerational justice requires justice towards unborn future generations (see Box 3.4). The need to protect biodiversity leads greens to favour diversity in human relations, specifically opposing all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation or age. Thirdly, greens espouse *non-violence*, opposing international violence (war, armies, nuclear weapons), and are committed to non-violent civil protest.

Thus greens have a broad and radical vision of what a sustainable society might look like. Inevitably, this programme has attracted extensive criticism. Few people would deny that the economic and social prescriptions outlined here would help reduce environmental destruction, but many sympathisers question whether such wholesale reform of economic activity and individual lifestyles is really necessary or desirable, let alone feasible. Unease about the radical prescriptions proposed by many greens has contributed to the popularity of *sustainable development* (see Chapter 8), which outlines an alternative policy paradigm based on the reform of the existing capitalist system, rather than the more fundamental transformation of society outlined above.

However, this chapter is concerned with the content and coherence of ecologism as a radical and distinct green ideology. This section has shown that, although sustainability is the central imperative of ecologism, greens have yoked it to a more general understanding of what a good society and a good person will be like. This begs a fundamental question: does a commitment to sustainability *necessarily* imply a commitment to the principles of participatory democracy, social justice, non-violence and decentralisation – or is the relationship merely contingent?

Critical question 2

Is the radical green vision of the sustainable society an unattainable utopia?

► *Does sustainability require specific political arrangements?*

The primacy of the ecological imperative is the driving feature of green ideology. If the objective is to save the planet, does it matter how we do it? Suppose the ‘survivalist’ prescription of an authoritarian, centralised and inequitable society were the most effective means of achieving sustainability.

Put differently, how can greens be certain that the principles of democracy, decentralisation, social justice and non-violence are the best means of reaching the sustainable society?

Goodin (1992) provides the best formulation of this problem with his distinction between the green *theory of value* and the green *theory of agency*. He argues eloquently that the significance greens attribute to the theory of agency – the means of getting there – is wrongheaded. Instead, the green theory of value, which underpins the case for sustainability, should take priority (Goodin's own theory of value is outlined in Chapter 2). This ecological imperative provides the unified moral vision that binds the green agenda together; without it the green message lacks legitimacy, coherence and direction. Goodin's vision is consequentialist: 'it is more important that the right things be done than that they be done in any particular way or through any particular agency' (ibid.: 120). In any irreconcilable conflict between the two, the theory of agency will always be subordinate to the green theory of value. It may be desirable that Good actions coincide with Right actions – that democratic, non-violent methods achieve the sustainable society – but it is not essential. Put simply (and simplistically), green ends justify the means.⁶

Most radical greens recoil at the consequentialist implications of Goodin's thesis because it might justify using authoritarian or coercive measures to reach a sustainable society. So, are there good grounds for rejecting Goodin's claim that ecological outcomes trump procedures? It is not enough for greens, rooted as many activists are in the emancipatory new social movements and New Left of the 1960s and 1970s (see Chapter 4), simply to express a preference for participatory democracy, non-violence and egalitarianism. They also need to show that without them an ecologically sustainable society is unattainable. If they cannot do so, then perhaps greens must either drop their radical political and moral agenda, or concede that environmental outcomes are less important to them than doing things the 'right' way.

The force of Goodin's argument stems from distinguishing between the theories of value and agency. Eckersley (1996) argues that this sharp delimitation is flawed, and that greens are right to say that the means are as important as the ends. She criticises Goodin's own theory of value for being too narrowly based on the non-human world, and therefore providing an insufficient grounding for a green political theory. Instead, the green theory of value should be expanded to incorporate the value of autonomy and self-determination: 'the freedom of human and non human beings to unfold in their own ways and live according to their "species life"' (Eckersley 1996: 223). If moral priority is attributed to autonomy, then it is essential to establish political arrangements that will allow human (and non-human) autonomy to flourish, such as social justice, non-violence and grassroots democracy. This emancipatory interpretation of green politics suggests a blurring of the Right and the Good so that the way something is done is part of what makes it the *right* thing to do – a clear rejection of Goodin's consequentialist

position. In short, a green theory of agency can be grounded in a green theory of value.

Whether this interpretation enriches ecologism is open to debate. Eckersley's argument, despite the reference to enhancing the autonomy of 'non-humans', seems self-consciously anthropocentric. It is also explicitly individualistic, since autonomy is precisely the value made paramount in liberal individualism. Giving moral priority to individual autonomy seems odd in an environmental theory. But it may be that encouraging individual human autonomy is the best *means* to the sustainable society because it can contribute to changing the way people behave (although it is through exercising our autonomy as consumers that we have caused many of the ecological problems we face today).

Alternatively, greens might argue that change should be justified to further the wider *social* good, rather than to allow *individual* autonomy to flourish. Thus another 'green' riposte to Goodin might hold that ecologism is not only about sustainability, but also about creating the good society in which, for example, self-interested materialism is rejected as morally unacceptable. We return to these two arguments below in examining whether participatory democracy, decentralisation and social justice and, briefly, non-violence (see Box 3.7) are the political arrangements most suitable to bring about sustainability.

Critical question 3

Do green 'ends' justify the 'means'?

► *Must green politics be democratic?*

The uneasy relationship between ecological concerns and democracy is a central issue in green political theory, and a good example of the means/ends debate. Most greens declare that democracy, specifically participatory democracy, is a core principle of ecologism. However, if Goodin is correct, the primacy of the ecological imperative might justify sacrificing democratic principles to protect the planet. This kind of consequentialist thinking underpins the eco-authoritarian argument of the survivalists that ecological imperatives such as population growth and resource depletion demand swift, decisive and drastic government action (see Box 3.1). A strong authoritarian government, unhampered by the need to win elections or protect liberal rights, might coerce self-interested individuals into acting in the collective interest by, say, producing fewer children and living more frugal lifestyles.

Most contemporary greens find these authoritarian solutions repugnant and want to rule them out of court for contravening the ecological principle of democracy. Yet on what grounds is democracy a core green principle? After all, it is obvious that democratic procedures may not always generate environmentally beneficial outcomes. For example, most experts agree that

3.7 Is non-violence a green principle?

Green politics is informed by a concern not to harm the natural environment, yet there is no entirely satisfactory distinctive *green* justification for non-violence.

Modern warfare is clearly bad for the environment for it wreaks devastation upon it. Yet war is an extreme case. Within civil society, it is important to distinguish between violence against people and violence against property. Almost all greens reject the former, but many would regard the latter as legitimate and there are certainly numerous examples of environmental activism directed against property, whether it is spiking bulldozers, pulling up GM crops or smashing up McDonald's outlets (see Chapter 6). Thus it is important to be clear about what is meant by 'violence'.

The green commitment to non-violent protest in civil society has a practical explanation arising from the close links between the green movement and the peace, anti-nuclear and

women's movements, which all rejected the use of violence against people. The use of well-rehearsed, *anthropocentric* arguments against non-violence that originated in other political struggles – anti-militarism, fear of nuclear accidents, the links with male violence – explains why non-violence has not figured prominently in debates within green political theory.

At the level of green *principle*, where there is a trade-off between non-violence and other green ends, such as achieving a sustainable society, greens need to show that non-violence is a prerequisite for achieving that end. Otherwise it will be trumped by the ecological imperative. However, at the level of *strategy*, a principle of non-violence places the onus on opponents to show why coercive or violent methods might be superior.

See Doherty (1996) for a wider discussion of non-violence and green politics.

climate change prevention requires tough restrictions in car use and high petrol taxes. Yet governments are reluctant to implement such unpopular policies because an angry electorate might vote them out of office. As Goodin (1992) puts it: 'To advocate democracy is to advocate procedures, to advocate environmentalism is to advocate substantive outcomes: what guarantee can we have that the former procedures will yield the latter sort of outcomes?' (p. 168). He is not suggesting that democratic procedures are illegitimate or undesirable; it is just that when it comes to choosing between procedures, the ecological imperative should always trump democracy.

However, Goodin simply asserts that the theory of value takes priority without properly discussing how policies will be derived from it (Hayward 1995). One practical argument for democracy is that infallible green policies will not simply drop like apples from a theory of value, so the means of reaching decisions do matter. Those arguments that defend the use of non-democratic methods often contain an implicit technocratic assumption that a governing elite of politicians, scientists and professionals knows best; Ophuls (1977) even talks of a 'priesthood of technologists' (p. 159). The implication is that certain ecological decisions should be made by those people possessing this 'superior knowledge' (Saward 1996: 80) and not left to the whims of democratic procedures. This argument effectively privileges

science over other forms of knowledge and understanding of ecological issues, and gives power to an elite minority. Whilst technical knowledge is, of course, critical in many ecological decisions, it provides only part of the picture. A wide range of alternative perspectives and considerations – non-technical, local, ethical, social, political – should also be included in the decision-making process to ensure a more informed decision that can attract widespread support (Barry 1999a: 199–201). Greens argue that participatory democracy offers the best means of including these factors in the decision process.

The case for participatory democracy starts from a critique of liberal democracy. Greens argue that liberal democracy is unable to produce the best decisions because it is characterised by hierarchy, bureaucracy, individualism and material inequalities. It offers limited opportunities to participate in the public sphere. For example, Porritt (1984) complains that ‘The representative element of the system has insidiously undermined the element of participation, in that turning out to vote now and then seems to have become the be-all and end-all of our democracy’ (p. 166). Consequently, liberal democracy nurtures an atomised individualistic focus on the private sphere, which makes it a poor breeding ground for the ecological consciousness and responsible citizenship needed to bring about a sustainable society. Greens want to replace representative democracy with participatory democratic procedures based on a discursive or deliberative model (see Dryzek 1990; Smith 2003). These radical forms of democracy presume active citizen participation in governance in institutions such as political parties, local government, neighbourhood assemblies, voluntary associations and the workplace. The green case thus plugs into a much broader tradition of radical democratic theorising in seeking a society where widespread participatory democracy means citizens are fully, freely and actively involved in the decisions that shape their lives (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984). Greens frequently invoke the ancient Greek city state, or more contemporary examples such as the New England town meeting (Tokar 1992: 104), to argue that face-to-face democracy would produce communities that are more in tune with, and therefore considerate towards, their natural environment.

Greens employ two related arguments to support the claim that participatory democracy will result in beneficial environmental outcomes. First, participatory democracy should produce more responsive government. Institutions would be more responsive and accountable because power would be shifted away from the hands of the few: from central government to local communities, from managers to workers, from the central party bureaucracy to the local branch (Goodin 1992: 127–8). Environmental protection would be improved if more people had a say because the decision-making process would draw on a wider range of interests (i.e. beyond the political, business and professional elites who currently dominate). The greater diffusion of information necessary for participatory democracy to operate will provide more ammunition for local communities to protect their environment and,

conversely, may enhance the speed with which evidence of environmental damage is communicated to decision-makers. By forcing the institutions of civil society to respond to popular demands, participatory democracy is more likely to produce, if not morally perfect outcomes, then at least morally better ones (ibid.: 128). Of course, a participatory democratic decision may still give greater priority to material well-being than to environmental protection, perhaps by allowing a factory to release high levels of pollutants in order to protect jobs in the local community. Nevertheless, by virtue of the improved responsiveness gained from drawing on a wider circle of interests, knowledge and skills, there is, on balance, a strong, if not overwhelming, instrumental case for saying that participatory democracy makes ecological outcomes more likely.

A second green argument for participatory democracy is that it will create the conditions for the development of greater individual autonomy. In liberal democracy, material inequalities, bureaucratic hierarchies and divisions of labour in work and home deny the majority of citizens the opportunity to shape their own lives; they are unable to become self-determining agents. If democratic structures and opportunities to participate were prevalent in all walks of life – at work, at school, in neighbourhood assemblies – then people should learn to participate simply by participating (Pateman 1970: 42–3). This involvement should nurture a ‘democratic personality’, which shows greater respect for, and more responsibility towards, fellow citizens (Gould 1988). Discursive democracy, by encouraging citizen involvement and deliberation, enables preferences to be altered and encourages behaviour that conforms to publicly agreed norms. Replacing the self-contained individual of liberal democracy whose identity is only occasionally expressed in the public sphere (notably by voting), the individual in a participatory democracy is more likely to be a public-spirited citizen keen to promote collective activities and community identity. At this point, greens give the arguments for participatory democracy an ecological twist by suggesting that this radical conception of democratic citizenship can also nurture ‘an ecological citizenship capable of developing and giving expression to collective ecological concerns’ (Plumwood 1996: 158). At the very least, active citizen participation will educate individuals about environmental issues because they will have access to more information and the opportunity to exchange knowledge and views with fellow citizens. Further, once the shift from ‘self-regarding’ individual to ‘other-regarding’ citizen has been made, it is a much smaller step to extend that public concern to foreigners, future generations and non-human nature (Eckersley 1996; Barry 1999a). In short, participatory democracy can help nurture an ecological consciousness.

If so, this second argument substantially strengthens the first claim that participatory democracy improves institutional responsiveness: whereas better responsiveness is concerned with the *aggregation* of preferences, greater autonomy should also produce a *transformation* of preferences (Elster, quoted in Barry 1999a: 226). Indeed, it is the aggregation of preferences that (in

part) has contributed to ecological problems, such as mass consumerism or public resistance to measures aimed at reducing car use. If participatory democracy takes preferences as given and simply provides a more effective way of aggregating them, then governments may be *less* likely to introduce progressive environmental policies. Instead, greens want to alter human preferences because the radical transformation to a sustainable society will be easier to achieve if people can be persuaded by the force of argument that it is right for them to change their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, rather than being told to do so (Barry 1999a: 228).

To return to the discussion at the end of the [previous section](#): Eckersley argues that ecological ends justify democratic means because moral priority should be given to nurturing the autonomy of members of the human and non-human community. Participatory democracy is one of the conditions necessary to construct a society in which the conditions for human autonomy prevail. Thus the connection between ecology and democracy is no longer merely contingent. Moreover, authoritarianism is ‘ruled out at the level of green principle’ because it ‘fundamentally infringes the rights of humans to choose their own destiny’ (Eckersley 1996: 223).

However, an alternative green riposte to Eckersley might justify participatory democracy on the different grounds that its communicative and deliberative procedures provide the best *means* of changing individual preferences and facilitating the ecological citizenship necessary for the good society. Hence participatory democracy is a core green principle because it contributes to the *common good*, not because moral priority should reside with individual autonomy.

Whichever justification is accepted, how practical is this vision of a participatory democratic polity? It is significant that green theorists and activists have become increasingly reconciled to the continued existence of the (albeit reformed) representative institutions of liberal democracy (see Doherty and deGeus 1996). Even where a powerful case is made for a distinctive ‘ecological democracy’, it is presented as a model of a ‘post-liberal democracy, not an anti-liberal democracy’, which would retain many elements of the liberal democratic state (Eckersley 2004a: 138). But many greens now see deliberative democratic procedures as *supplementing*, rather than replacing, reformed liberal democratic institutions. Thus the provision of more opportunities for greater citizen participation could operate alongside attempts to encourage greater ‘institutionalised self-criticism’ and ‘reflexiveness’ in existing institutions by making them more open, transparent and accountable (Paehlke 1989; Beck 1992; Barry 1999a). The ascendancy of the sustainable development paradigm has been the catalyst for widespread democratic institutional innovation along these lines during the last decade, including roundtables, citizen juries and extended referenda (see Chapter 11). It is a moot point whether this ‘downgrading’ of participatory democracy undermines the case for democracy as a core green principle. However, the arguments made here could be used to reformulate a green principle of democracy,

which would require an extensive *democratisation* of existing institutions and procedures – even if this falls short of pure participatory democracy.

Critical question 4

Can a liberal democracy be ecologically sustainable?

► *Must a green polity be decentralised?*

Goodin (1992) observes that ‘If there is anything truly distinctive about green politics, most commentators would concur, it must surely be its emphasis on decentralisation’ (p. 147). Decentralisation is a constant, oft-repeated theme in party programmes and theoretical tracts. The green case for political decentralisation, as with participatory democracy, draws on a range of intellectual traditions, most notably anarchism, but greens again add a distinctive ecological slant.⁷ They follow the anarchist tradition in favouring decentralisation because it creates ‘human-scale’ political institutions. The underlying assumption is that only in a small community can individuals

Bioregionalism: An approach that believes that the ‘natural’ world (specifically, the local bioregion) should determine the political, economic and social life of communities.

regain the sense of identity lost in the atomised, consumerist society. This idea informs, for example, the ‘small is beautiful’ philosophy of Schumacher (1975), the ‘**bioregionalism**’ of Sale (1980, 1991) and the ‘libertarian municipalism’ of Bookchin (1989: 179–85). As Goldsmith et al. (1972) put it: ‘it is probable that only in the small community can a man or woman be an individual. In today’s large agglomerations he is merely an isolate’ (p. 51). Sale (1991: 64) anticipates that the population of a bioregion will not exceed 10,000 people – small enough for individuals to feel sufficiently attached to their community to participate meaningfully. Citizens need to be able to meet to discuss issues openly, suitably informed about the issues affecting their community, able to understand the implications of their decisions and knowing that their participation may have some influence (Goodin 1992: 149). Thus a decentralised community is a precondition for a flourishing participatory democracy. Greens hope that the combination of decentralisation and participatory democracy will produce fulfilled, other-regarding autonomous citizens prepared to accept the material sacrifices required of a low-consumption sustainable society.

Greens make a further distinctive ecological argument for political decentralisation, which holds that policy decisions made by the local community should be more sensitive to the environment. Sale (1980) takes this line furthest by arguing that we should learn from nature by basing the decentralised community on the natural boundaries of the bioregion such as mountain ranges and watersheds. In the bioregion, human communities will become ‘dwellers in the land’: closer to nature and more respectful of it, more knowledgeable about the capacities and limits of the immediate

physical surroundings and, therefore, able to cohabit more harmoniously with natural landscapes.⁸

Decentralisation may be a necessary condition for participatory democracy, but there is no guarantee that a decentralised society will be democratic. Sale (1980) concedes that a society based on a natural bioregion may not always be characterised by democratic or liberal values because another 'natural' principle, diversity, implies that bioregional societies should boast a wide range of political systems, some of which, presumably, might be authoritarian. Even if the political system is democratic, there may be drawbacks about life in a small community. Social control mechanisms may prove oppressive if, as Goldsmith et al. (1972) suggest, offenders are brought to heel by the weight of public opinion. Discrimination against minorities or non-conformist opinion may be rife. Small parochial societies may also be intellectually and culturally impoverished, perhaps reducing innovation in clean technologies (Frankel 1987). So, ironically, the homogeneous decentralised society may lack the diversity that ecologists value.

Another difficulty with decentralisation is that many environmental problems are best dealt with at the national or international level. Global commons problems do not respect the political boundaries between existing nation states, let alone small bioregions. Problems such as climate change and ozone depletion require co-ordinated action across communities and nations, which implies international co-operation between centralised nation states (see Chapter 9). The green slogan 'Think global, act local' may therefore provide an inadequate strategy for dealing with problems of the global commons. Relying on local communities alone to protect the environment assumes that the local community has full knowledge about the causes, impact and solutions to a particular problem; even then, it 'makes sense only when the locals possess an appropriate social and ecological consciousness' (Eckersley 1992: 173).

Greens counter this criticism by stressing that they advocate decentralisation to the lowest 'appropriate' level of government (Schumacher 1975; Porritt 1984). If local communities need to co-ordinate action to deal with transboundary problems, greens insist they must do so 'as independent agents negotiating arrangements that are mutually agreeable to all concerned' (Goodin 1992: 152). Underpinning most 'ecoanarchist' accounts is a deep distrust of the state (Bookchin 1989; see also Barry 1999a: ch. 4), which leads them to reject a central co-ordinating agency that could encroach on the sovereignty of the autonomous decentralised community. Thus Bookchin (1989) talks of a 'humanly scaled, self-governing municipality freely and confederally associated with other humanly scaled, self-governing municipalities' (p. 182).

There are many reasons why this response is flawed. What if the communities are unwilling to act? Co-operation *within* a community may not result in a benevolent attitude towards the outside world. Small parochial communities often define themselves by reference to those outside, so they

may be quite averse to considering wider questions, such as the possibility of environmental damage elsewhere. They may even try to free-ride on other communities by producing pollution that damages those living downstream or downwind. Hostility or indifference between communities may be accentuated by the existence of economic inequalities between them; perhaps a poor community might feel less co-operative towards a richer neighbour. It is not difficult to imagine a community being highly sensitive towards its own local environment but unconcerned by damage further afield. It may, therefore, require a central agency (the state?) to persuade localities to change their behaviour. Even if all communities were willing to act collectively to protect the environment, there would still be a role for a central agency to co-ordinate their actions. Yet, resolute in its rejection of such a central agency, the green anarchist model gives no adequate explanation of how the necessary co-ordination might take place (Goodin 1992; Martell 1994).

On balance, the problem lies not with decentralisation *per se*, but with the way the dominant ecoanarchist model, characterised by its distrust of the state, narrowly defines it. Decentralisation does not mean that there should be no central state, let alone no state at all, yet that is what many greens seem to want. Indeed, where international co-ordination is required, green distrust of the state sometimes overrides the ecological imperative. This ecoanarchist model of decentralisation has come under strong attack from writers sympathetic to green politics (Eckersley 1992; Goodin 1992; Martell 1994; Barry 1999a, *inter alia*). Indeed, the emergence of a debate about the nature of the 'green state' has been one of the most significant contemporary developments in green political theory (Eckersley 2004a; Barry and Eckersley 2005; Paterson et al. 2006). Most contributors to this debate are working towards a green theory of the state; in short, they want to transform the state rather than abolish it.

Eckersley (2004a) offers the most developed model of a green state. She identifies three major challenges to the transition to a green world: the anarchic system of sovereign nation states (see Chapter 9), the promotion of capital accumulation and the 'democratic deficit' of liberal democratic state capitalism. She also highlights three countervailing positive trends – environmental multilateralism (see Chapter 9), ecological modernisation (see Chapter 8) and deliberative/discursive democratic practices (see Chapter 11). Together, these trends underline the continuing significance of the nation state. Rather than accept the popular view that globalisation has rendered the sovereign state largely impotent, she argues that the state is still the most important political institution in the struggle against global environmental destruction; it is one of the few institutions with the capacity and legitimacy to implement the radical changes that greens demand (p. 7). It is therefore essential that this powerful state be sympathetic to green objectives; moreover, if it is to fulfil the role of 'public ecological trustee' (p. 12), then it should also be a 'good' state. Sovereignty and democracy are key elements

in Eckersley's model. A green state will recognise its responsibilities to those who live beyond its border, because environmental problems do not respect traditional territorial boundaries of the sovereign nation state. Her theory of 'ecological democracy', based on principles of deliberative democracy, holds that 'all those potentially affected by ecological risks ought to have some meaningful opportunity to participate, or be represented, in the determination of policies or decisions that may generate risks' (p. 243). Thus Eckersley recasts the state in a new role, as an ecological steward and facilitator of transboundary democracy, rather than a selfish actor jealously protecting its own territory.

The starting point for Eckersley, in contrast with the ecoanarchist model, is the nation state. Not all these revisionist green theorists embrace the nation state as readily as does Eckersley. Most want to see some degree of decentralisation to 'appropriate' levels, with the onus resting more on the proponent of centralisation to argue that specific powers or responsibilities should reside at a higher level. This kind of reinterpretation would leave decentralisation as a core principle of ecologism, but the kind of state it would produce would look very different from the ecoanarchist model.

To summarise, sustainability may not always be best achieved by political decentralisation. However, greens need not abandon decentralisation, because ecologism is not simply concerned with achieving the right (short-term) outcomes. The case for decentralisation can also be based on its contribution to achieving a good society; although centralisation might sometimes produce better outcomes, if the long-term aim is to create people with the dispositions most likely to be conducive to sustainability, then decentralisation should make this more likely. As with democratisation, decentralisation is not just about getting the right outcomes now; it is also concerned with nurturing a good society inhabited by ecologically concerned citizens.

► *Must a green society be egalitarian?*

Green theorists generally attribute great importance to 'social justice', but their treatment of the complex relationship between social justice and environmental issues has, until recently, been rather undeveloped (see Box 3.8). Social justice is a highly contested concept. The definition used by greens locates them firmly within the camp of those who link justice with equality. Greens seek a sustainable society characterised by social and economic equality, but why should this be good for the environment? Is there a causal relationship between social justice and sustainability so that, for example, the alleviation of poverty will benefit the environment? Or will inequitable policies sometimes be compatible with sustainability? Is equality a necessary condition for effective participatory democracy and political decentralisation? This section identifies three arguments supporting the claims of social justice to be a core green principle.

3.8 Defining social justice

Social justice is concerned with the principles that should govern the basic structure of a society, including the regulation of the legal system, the economy and welfare policy. Theories of social justice generally deal with the distribution of rights, opportunities and resources among human beings.

There are many competing accounts of justice with distribution based variously on principles such as needs, desert, entitlement, utility and equality. A broad division can be identified in modern theories of justice between those which link justice to some notion of equality and those which link it to entitlements, or rights. By defining social justice in terms of social and economic equality, greens adopt a socialist or welfare-state liberal conception of justice. By contrast, Nozick (1974) argues that justice requires that we get the things that we are entitled to – because we have, say, a right to property. If that means some people get more than others, then so be it, because Nozick does not think that inequalities are *in themselves* unjust. However, not all who define

justice by reference to rights are anti-egalitarian (e.g. Benton 1993).

Theories of social justice have, until recently, been largely silent about environmental issues. This is partly explicable by reference to the individualism inherent in liberal theories of justice. The problem here is that environmental goods – the reduction of acid rain or preservation of an endangered species – are not normally distributed to individuals. Yet most policies intended to protect the environment will have distributional implications, perhaps because they will require public expenditure or involve restrictions on the behaviour of individuals (car drivers or hunters), and they will certainly affect some people more than others (Miller 1999).

However, even when modern theories of justice are not individualistic, they are nevertheless anthropocentric in that they explicate value as value for and to human beings (whether individually or collectively). They therefore have difficulty in explaining the intuition that nature might have either inherent or intrinsic value.

First, some greens base their commitment to equality on a lesson from nature (Dobson 2000: 22). The holistic message is that nature consists of a mass of interdependent entities with each part having some value to other parts. Therefore no part is independent of, or superior to, any other part; hence the principle of equality (Dobson 2000: 24). Aside from the weaknesses in the holistic case discussed in Chapter 2, it is hard to see why interdependence necessarily implies equality. After all, there are many interdependent human relationships (employer/employee, landlord/tenant, teacher/pupil) where equality would not normally exist. In short, the argument from nature is fundamentally flawed.

Secondly, social injustice contributes to environmental degradation. There is little doubt, for example, that poverty in less developed nations, by encouraging over-intensive farming and the cultivation of marginal land, results in environmental problems such as desertification and deforestation. Economic inequality between North and South is underpinned by an international trading system that encourages less developed countries to produce cash crops for Northern consumption (rather than developing a self-sufficient economy), primarily to pay off debts to those same countries and their

financial institutions. Countless social conflicts over 'pollution burdens', environmental entitlements and access to natural resources represent and contribute to a growing 'environmentalism of the poor' in less developed countries that is underpinned by the widespread perception of ecological injustice (Martinez-Alier 2003). It is clear that in many respects the alleviation of poverty will contribute to sustainability. For example, 'development' seems to be the most effective solution to overpopulation. Greater social and economic equality for women, improved female education and literacy, universal access to family planning programmes and the provision of maternal and child health care of good quality are the best means of controlling population growth (see Box 3.2).

Poor and minority communities in affluent nations also bear the brunt of environmental harms because they tend to live near to and work in the most polluting industrial facilities and they are exposed to the highest levels of pollutants. Moreover, they lack the financial resources to afford less environmentally damaging goods or to invest in energy conservation. In the USA in particular, a powerful sense of injustice arising out of these inequities, and fuelled by a plethora of social conflicts over polluting factories, the siting of toxic waste facilities and road construction has contributed to the emergence of the environmental justice movement (Bullard 2000; Roberts and Toffolon-Weiss 2001; Visiglio and Whitelaw 2003). (See Chapter 6.)

Yet the relationship between social justice and sustainability is more complex than is suggested by the simple conclusion that poverty is bad for the environment. In particular, many environmental problems are the result of affluence. Major global problems – climate change, ozone depletion, acid rain – have been caused primarily by development in the advanced industrialised nations of the North. Conspicuous consumption, high levels of car ownership and the extensive use of air conditioning, for example, are key characteristics of rich nations and all massively damaging to the environment. Of course, the redistribution of wealth from the affluent North to the less developed South, and from rich to poor within individual nations, might have an overall positive impact on the environment, simply by cutting out the extremes of wealth and poverty. It is not axiomatic, however, that greater economic equality will reduce damage to the environment; it might just lead to different types of degradation, or a sharing out of the responsibility for causing it as poorer nations are able to increase consumption. Moreover, a key issue in North–South environmental diplomacy is that of 'catch-up': poorer Southern countries want the material benefits of development – refrigerators, washing machines, cars – that the affluent North has experienced. Why should they be denied these opportunities by accepting a steady-state economy? Yet catch-up for the South is certain to have some negative consequences for sustainability because it will inevitably result in higher levels of consumption.

It is also important to consider the impact of sustainability on social justice. Every policy aimed at resolving an environmental problem will have a

distributional impact. The closure of a heavily polluting factory will have a negative distributional impact on the employees who will lose their jobs. A policy to reduce petrol consumption through fuel taxes or restrictions on car use will discriminate more heavily against someone who is dependent on a car, because they need it for work or they live in a remote rural area, than someone who has no car or who can easily switch to public transport. In short, there will be many occasions when a choice has to be made between social justice and sustainability.

A third argument suggests that social justice may have a close functional relationship with other components of the green programme, notably the steady-state economy, participatory democracy and decentralisation. A more egalitarian society may be an essential condition of the transition to a steady-state economy. Currently, the gross economic and social inequalities that are integral to capitalist accumulation and wealth creation are legitimated politically by a trickle-down effect that raises the absolute standard of living of low-income groups (even though relative poverty increases) and by a costly welfare state that provides a safety net for the very poorest members of society. This situation is made possible by continued economic growth and an ever-expanding economic pie, but would these inequalities still be acceptable if the economy were static? People may accept inequality when their own material lot is improving, but they are likely to resent it deeply if they are getting poorer in absolute terms. Moreover, the greater transparency of a democratic, decentralised sustainable society would make the persistence of inequality more obvious. Any shift to more frugal consumption patterns and simpler lifestyles is likely to prove more acceptable where everyone is seen to be making similar sacrifices; if not, inequality is likely to be a potential source of social conflict. If this argument holds true at the level of an individual country, it is even more valid on the international stage. Without a major reduction in intragenerational inequality between North and South, by means of debt relief, aid, technology transfer and reform of international trading agreements, there is likely to be only limited progress towards resolving global environmental problems (see Chapters 9 and 10).

The radical forms of participatory democracy and decentralisation desired by greens may also be unworkable without something approximating to equality of wealth and income. It is hard to envisage participatory democracy functioning effectively if the face-to-face interactions that it requires bring individuals of vastly different wealth (and hence power?) together on a regular basis. Indeed, the extension of participatory democracy across society, especially in the workplace, where it should result in narrower income differentials, will in itself contribute to greater equality, partly by making the many sources and forms of inequality more transparent to ordinary people and fuelling demands for their removal (Carter 1996). Similarly, it is more likely that decentralised communities would co-ordinate environmental policies and accept reductions in consumption if the standard of living in

each was reasonably similar. The existence of significant disparities in material wealth might encourage poorer communities to seek economic parity with their neighbours.

Overall, there are good reasons for regarding social justice as a core green principle. Admittedly, the relationship between social justice and sustainability is complex and uncertain. Many environmental measures will have a negative impact on social justice; it is therefore incumbent on governments to ensure that disadvantaged groups are compensated in other ways. Nevertheless, on balance, greater equality should benefit sustainability both by alleviating poverty and by facilitating democratisation and decentralisation. Underpinning both arguments is the powerful pragmatic political imperative: ‘no justice, no cooperation; no cooperation, no solution’ (Connelly and Smith 2003: 31). This mantra of poor Southern nations has catapulted equity issues to the forefront of international environmental diplomacy (see Chapter 9). Similarly, equity considerations are critical in persuading individual citizens to support sustainable policies and become ecological citizens. In short, the pursuit of social justice is a core green principle because it should ease the transition to a sustainable society.

It has been argued in the preceding sections that participatory democracy, decentralisation and social justice (or reformed versions of these concepts) can be regarded as essential components of a sustainable society (and of the means of getting there), although the case for non-violence seems less persuasive. The discussion has also brought out the importance of *ecological citizenship* as a critical ingredient of a green theory of agency. This concept of ecological (or green or environmental) citizenship has attracted growing interest amongst green theorists (Barry 1996, 1999a; Christoff 1996a; Dobson 2003; Dobson and Sáiz 2005; Dobson and Bell 2006). Whichever theoretical approach is adopted (see Box 3.9), there is consensus over the need for active ecological citizenship because of the recognition that the transition to a sustainable society requires more than institutional restructuring; it also needs a transformation in the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of individuals. Greens recognise that the radical changes necessary for sustainability are only possible if undertaken willingly by individual citizens. As Barry puts it, ‘Citizenship . . . emphasizes the duty of citizens to take responsibility for their actions and choices – the obligation to “do one’s bit” in the collective enterprise of achieving sustainability’ (1999a: 231). Ecological citizenship needs to be nurtured at the level of the (reformed) state, through the deliberative processes engendered by democratisation, decentralisation and egalitarianism, but its effect would spill over from the political sphere into the realms of economic and social activity. This belief that human nature can be changed and preferences transformed – making people less individualistic and materialistic – is an important defining characteristic of ecologism, which, as the following section shows, shapes its relationship with other ideologies. Indeed, the above discussion shows how ecologism has

3.9 Ecological citizenship

Andrew Dobson (2003) argues that ecological citizenship is a particular form of post-cosmopolitan, non-territorial citizenship, which stresses responsibilities rather than rights, and regards those responsibilities as non-reciprocal rather than contractual, thereby contrasting with traditional liberal and civic republican notions of citizenship obligations. For him, ecological citizenship has four defining characteristics:

1. It is non-territorial. Conventional notions of citizenship are located within the nation state, but because many environmental problems are international and do not respect national boundaries, ecological citizens have to operate both within and beyond the state.
2. It takes place in both the public and the private realms. Citizenship is traditionally concerned with the way individuals behave in the public sphere, but the private acts associated with day-to-day lifestyles have public implications (by contributing to environmental degradation), so ecological

citizenship must encompass the private realm.

3. It is associated with virtues that enable citizens to meet their obligations; in particular, the social justice needed to ensure a just distribution of ecological space, whilst care (and compassion) is required for the effective exercise of justice.
4. It involves a range of non-contractual responsibilities – notably an obligation to ensure that our ecological footprints are sustainable – that are owed to strangers near and far (including future generations), but without any expectation that they will be reciprocated.

Dobson's model of ecological citizenship has attracted a number of criticisms, such as for using the nebulous notion of 'post-cosmopolitan' citizenship and over who is eligible to be an ecological citizen. For greater detail, see the exchange between Dobson (2006) and Hayward (2006a, b) in *Environmental Politics*, vol. 15, no. 3.

been informed by contributions from different ideological traditions. This infusion of ideas raises questions about the distinctiveness of ecologism and its relationship with other political traditions.

► Traditional political ideologies and the green challenge

Ecologism is an ideology built on two main ideas: a reconceptualisation of the human–nature relationship away from strong anthropocentrism and an acceptance of the idea of limits to growth. It draws its subsidiary principles, such as participatory democracy, decentralisation and social justice, from other political traditions, but the relationship is not all one way. Ideas developed by ecologism have begun to influence established political ideologies. So, whereas the first part of this chapter showed how ecologism has given a green slant to concepts borrowed from other traditions, this second part shows how those other traditions have responded to the challenge posed by ecologism. The discussion starts with those political traditions based on individualism and a belief in social order – conservatism, liberalism,

authoritarianism – and continues with those traditions that seek human emancipation through political, economic and social change – socialism, feminism, anarchism. It is argued that this second group of ideologies is closest to ecologism.

► *Conservatism and neo-liberalism*

There seems little in common between ecologism and the neo-liberal and conservative New Right with its enthusiasm for the market and the defence of the individual. Indeed, the New Right has been particularly hostile towards environmentalism (e.g. Ridley 1995; see also Paehlke 1989: ch. 8; Rowell 1996). Environmentalists are dismissed as ‘doomsayers’ and environmental regulations attacked for constraining free trade. The emergence of ‘free market environmentalism’ (Anderson and Leal 1991; Moran et al. 1991) reflected less a concern for the environment *per se* than an extension of a set of economic canons – the hegemony of the market and the sanctity of property rights – to incorporate a new problem. Environmental problems are blamed on the ‘Tragedy of the Commons’, which, it is argued, arises from the absence of clear, enforceable and tradeable property rights; put differently, the market solution is to privatise public goods, such as endangered species. The libertarian notion of justice based on entitlements contrasts sharply with the green conception of justice based on equity (see Box 3.8). In short, there is nothing that cannot be solved by the market; if there is an environmental problem, then trust the market to sort it out.⁹

Traditional conservative writing, although less overtly hostile, has also been critical of environmentalism: quick to condemn greens as dangerous radicals or socialists in disguise. Typically, green parties are compared to a water melon: ‘green on the outside; red on the inside’. Yet there are many similarities between traditional conservatism and green principles (Pilbeam 2003; Scruton 2006). Both share a deep suspicion of Enlightenment ideas of progress and rationality, whilst drawing comfort from Romantic and nostalgic visions of a pre-industrial past. The principle of conservation – common to both doctrines – represents a desire to protect our historical inheritance and maintain the existing order for ourselves and for our descendants. As Scruton (2006) observes, ‘Conservatism and conservation are in fact two aspects of a single long term policy, which is that of husbanding resources’ (p. 8), by which he means social, material and economic capital. The conservative philosopher Edmund Burke stressed the importance of partnership between past, present and future generations. This idea informs the conservative notion of ‘stewardship’ – holding land in trust for the next generation and for the wider nation – which has something in common with future-generation arguments. Both doctrines display respect for stability and tradition. Change, where necessary, should involve organic, gradual adaptation, not revolution. The green ‘precautionary principle’ resonates with the conservative scepticism about radical technical or social experimentation.

Both doctrines reject liberal individualism, believing that individuals flourish best when embedded within strong, supportive communities. Overall, Gray (1993) observes that ‘Concern for the integrity of the common environment, human as well as ecological, is most in harmony with the outlook of traditional conservatism’ (p. 124).

Despite these affinities between conservatism and ecologism, the attempt by Gray (1993) to appropriate environmentalism for conservatism represents a rare exercise in linking the two doctrines.¹⁰ This omission reflects a fundamental difference between the two traditions that Gray, in his attempt to ‘rescue’ environmentalism from its radicalism, rather misrepresents. Put simply, conservatism tends to see human nature as fixed and immutable whilst ecologism, as the discussion above showed, believes it is both possible and desirable to transform people. More broadly, whereas conservatism seeks to protect the status quo, ecologism seeks the radical transformation of the economic, political and social system. Core green principles, such as participatory democracy, egalitarianism and non-violence, contrast sharply with the conservative preference for authority, hierarchy and (where necessary) coercion. Conservatism has little to say about limits to growth and dismisses any attempt to extend value beyond humans. Not surprisingly, despite certain common ideas, ecologism and conservatism have drawn few explicit lessons from each other.

► *Classical liberalism*

The discussion of environmental ethics in the [previous chapter](#) showed how many green theorists have employed a liberal rights discourse or, following Bentham, mobilised utilitarian ideas to justify extending obligations to non-humans. It was John Stuart Mill, in his *Principles of Political Economy*, who first developed the idea of the steady-state economy, whilst several key liberal ideas such as toleration, deliberation and the civic society have informed ecologism.

Yet there is much in liberalism that seems incompatible with ecologism. Like conservatism, liberalism is ‘*incurably anthropocentric*: unable to appreciate nature as anything but resources’ (Wissenburg 2006: 23). The centrality of the individual in liberal thought contrasts sharply with holistic arguments about interdependence. Whereas ecologism implies state intervention in pursuit of the common good, the liberal state is neutral, favouring no specific theory of the good and making no judgements about the ethical worth of different lifestyles (de-Shalit 2000: 92; Wissenburg 2006). Liberalism insists on the importance of individual property rights, with the implication that people should be allowed to pursue materialistic lifestyles and be free to use property as they choose. Liberal ideas such as representative government, market freedom and the pursuit of individual private gain sit uneasily alongside the green acceptance of collective solutions to environmental problems, intervention and the need for constraints on individual lifestyles (Martell 1994: 141).

Several political theorists have tried to ‘rescue’ liberalism for the environment, arguing that many of the apparent differences can be resolved (Wissenburg 1998, 2006; de-Shalit 2000: ch. 3; Stephens 2001; Bell 2002; Hailwood 2004). Typically, however, they still concede that fundamental differences remain. Wissenburg (2006), for example, argues that classical liberalism can be modified to accept limits to its neutrality and to rid itself of its neutral bias by, for example, conceding some institutional representation to non-human interests. Indeed, he claims that the question now is not ‘whether, but ... to what degree can liberalism be green?’ (p. 31), although he recognises that only some liberal thinkers have made significant moves in this direction. Moreover, he also acknowledges remaining differences, with liberalism committed to the importance of individual private property and unwilling to recommend any specific good life, specifically the frugal lifestyle of the sustainable society.

■ Authoritarianism

The legacy of survivalism suggests that ecologism has more in common with authoritarian thinking, although this is a linkage that is distressing to most greens and seized upon by opponents to berate environmentalism.

It is important, first, to dismiss any suggestion that green politics can be linked to fascism, despite the best efforts of Anna Bramwell, one of whose polemics is entitled *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler’s ‘Green Party’*. The Nazi enthusiasm for biological metaphors and spiritualism was reflected in their view of man as at one with nature, which is embodied in the idea of ‘blood and soil’, i.e. human attachment to land and place. The Nazis also set up nature reserves and experimented in deciduous reforestation, organic farming and alternative forms of energy. However, the vast bulk of Nazi ideas, principles and policies directly conflict with those of ecologism. The existence of a few ‘ecological ideologues’ does no more than show that National Socialism was open to ecological ideas; indeed, ‘the ecologists were eventually seen as hostile to Germany’s national interests’ (Bramwell 1989: 205). The few similarities should not be over-exaggerated. As Vincent (1993) observes, just because the Nazis employed ‘socialist methods or favoured ancient German traditions does not mean that either socialism or conservatism are eternally besmirched’ (p. 266).

There is a stronger case for identifying an authoritarian wing within ecologism dating from the survivalist writings in the 1970s (see Box 3.1). Driven by their overriding preoccupation with human survival and strong sense of urgency, the survivalists were prepared to recommend strict government controls on individuals and organisations, even if it meant suppressing liberal values. Nevertheless, it has been argued above that the centrality of green principles of democracy and social justice effectively places these authoritarian perspectives outside the ambit of ecologism. Ironically, the main impact of survivalism was to provoke a reaction against this authoritarian strand of thinking, which gave green politics its powerful emancipatory

character. Contemporary green theorists now go out of their way to distinguish themselves from the authoritarian tradition.

■ *Socialism and Marxism*

Ecologism has an ambivalent relationship with socialism. Many greens emphasise the sharp differences between the two doctrines, in particular the socialist commitment to unconstrained economic growth, and they point to the poor environmental record of countries in the former Soviet bloc as evidence that socialist central planning is no better for the environment than capitalism. Indeed, Porritt (1984) regards both capitalism and socialism as forms of the ‘super-ideology’ of *industrialism*. Conversely, socialists condemn environmentalists for failing to recognise capitalism as the source of environmental ills and for seeking to protect middle-class privileges such as access to the countryside, whilst ignoring basic social issues such as poverty (Enzensberger 1974). However, several theorists have sought to build links between the opposing camps – often for reasons of practical politics – and the manifestation of this convergence is a body of writing known as *ecosocialism* (Gorz 1980; Frankel 1987; Ryle 1988; Benton 1993; Pepper 1993; Hayward 1995; Sarkar 1999).

There are, of course, several distinct traditions of socialism, which can be broadly divided into revolutionary doctrines, such as Marxism, and reformist approaches, such as social democracy. Most versions are characterised by two related features that seem to set socialism apart from ecologism: its anthropocentrism and its commitment to economic expansion. First, socialism, like capitalism, sits firmly in the Enlightenment tradition in striving for human mastery over nature and assuming that greater freedom will be achieved through material accumulation. Thus Marx believed that alienated humans could attain freedom by mastering, transforming and manipulating nature, none of which was tempered by any great concern for the non-human world. Contemporary Marxists have condemned green ideas such as the steady-state economy as regressive and anti-working class. Yet some socialists point out that mastery does not have to result in environmental destruction; it might imply a more ecologically benevolent notion of stewardship (Pepper 1993: 221). Others have tried to ‘rescue’ Marxism for ecology by, for example, reinterpreting his early writings on the dialectical theory of human–nature relations (Dickens 1992; Benton 1993).¹¹ Nevertheless, the socialist tradition, including ecosocialism, bases its concern for the environment firmly on human-centred motives, which suggests that there is little scope for reconciling the contrasting views of human–nature relations.

Secondly, socialism is committed to the pursuit of economic growth. Marxism anticipates human emancipation occurring in a communist utopia characterised by material *abundance* where the economic pie is sufficiently large to satisfy everyone’s needs. By contrast, the utopian green sustainable society

would experience some degree of material *scarcity*. Whereas socialists have little problem with economic growth and wealth creation *per se*, greens believe that in a finite planet unconstrained economic growth is simply unsustainable. Socialists argue that environmental ills should be blamed specifically on capitalism, not industrialism (and they dismiss the record of the former state socialist countries as irrelevant because they were never truly socialist). It is capitalism, characterised by the dominance of the competitive and dynamic market, the need to accumulate capital, the unbridled pursuit of profit, the use of destructive technologies and the hegemony of economic interests, which has created the contemporary ecological crisis. By creating new goods and wants, capitalism nurtures the consumerist ethos, whilst contributing to wider and deeper poverty, which socialists see as the underlying cause of environmental problems: 'It is the accumulation of wealth and its concentration into fewer and fewer hands which creates the levels of poverty that shape the lives of so many people on our planet, thus making it a major determinant of the environment which people experience' (Weston 1986: 5). Socialists despair that greens, with their 'naive' analysis of society, miss the real target, namely the capitalist system, its institutions and power relations.

It is on this second point that ecosocialism has started to build a bridge between socialism and ecologism. In particular, some writers in the ecosocialist tradition concede that there may be ecological limits to growth, and that unrestrained economic expansion is unsustainable (Ryle 1988; Benton 1993; Hayward 1995). If the central socialist goal of changing the ownership and control of the means of production is insufficient to prevent environmental degradation, then the assumption that material accumulation is the surest path to human emancipation is also brought into doubt. Ecosocialists argue that economic growth must take account of ecological limits and they challenge the 'productivity' ethos of industrial society (Ryle 1988). At a strategic level, the 'industrialism or capitalism' debate has little immediate significance because the global hegemony of capitalism, reinforced by the collapse of the Soviet bloc, clearly makes it the main adversary for both greens and socialists. Thus ecosocialism encourages greens to focus their attention on capitalism as the root cause of ecological problems.

The emergence of ecosocialism has encouraged a process of mutual learning on other issues too. Socialism presses greens to consider how change might be achieved when confronted by the institutions and power relations associated with global capitalism, such as multinational corporations, international financial markets and trade liberalisation. Ecologism is rather hazy about how the change to a sustainable society is to occur, and who will take the lead in bringing it about. Socialists question whether the green emphasis on changing individual values, lifestyles and consumption patterns, combined with a focus on micro-level community politics, is sufficient to overcome the might of global capital. Conversely, socialism has endured many setbacks since the 1980s, which combined with the decline of the industrial

proletariat (the key agent for socialist change), have forced socialists to cast around for new allies. Not surprisingly, there seems to be considerable common ground with the ecological movement, as illustrated by the red-green coalitions that have emerged in several countries (see Chapter 5). The consensus between ecologism and socialism across a range of common core principles, notably social justice, equality and democratisation, has led theorists from both camps to explore the potential of new social movements and rainbow coalitions of issue movements – socialists, greens, feminists, anti-racists, gay rights – as agents for change (see Part II). Most socialists might agree with Gorz (1980) that ‘the ecological movement is not an end in itself, but a stage in a larger struggle. It can throw up obstacles to capitalist development and force a number of changes’ (p. 3). However, for now, socialists and greens share a common foe: capitalism.

Ecosocialists have also contributed to the reassessment of the role of the state within green political theory (Hayward 1995). Whilst greens traditionally distrust the state, socialists see it as playing a central role in bringing about social change. Socialist solutions to environmental problems mirror the approach to other problems: a reformist socialist strategy uses a central interventionist state to regulate the market to protect the environment whilst pursuing a social programme based on a redistribution of wealth, equality and collective ownership. As the earlier discussion of decentralisation and the state revealed, many greens now attribute a key role to the state in delivering environmental protection policies.

Finally, it would be wrong to over-emphasise the significance of ecosocialism within the socialist tradition. Ecosocialism tends to draw on a very narrow body of socialist ideas, namely, the ‘decentralist, non-bureaucratic, non-productivist socialism’ (Dobson 2000: 187) of utopian socialists such as William Morris, G. D. H. Cole and Robert Owen. Their vision of a decentralised, self-sufficient community has much in common with ecologism, but it is not the dominant position within socialism, where the centralist, labourist heritage represents a sharp cultural barrier between the two movements.

The dialogue between these two ideologies has been particularly lively. Ecologism has certainly been sharpened by the socialist critique of capitalism. Socialism has also taken on board some of the lessons of ecologism; indeed, many socialists would agree that ‘A socialism for the 21st century must put at its heart the ecological challenge and escape from the limits of productivist thinking’ (Mellor 2006: 36). Yet critical differences remain on key issues, such as attitudes to human–nature relations, and in the institutional and cultural manifestations of each movement.

► *Feminism*

Ecofeminists are keen to correct the tendency for green politics to ignore feminist issues.¹² The deep ecology movement, and especially the US group

Earth First!, is often criticised for 'misogynistic proclivities' and for being 'saturated with male bravado and macho posturing' (Seager 1993: 226–7). Yet many women are active within the green movement and opinion polls frequently show that women are more concerned about environmental issues than are men. Just as there is no doubting the important contribution made by women to green politics, neither can the vibrancy of the burgeoning ecofeminist discourse be contested, with at least four broad approaches to ecofeminism identifiable: liberal, cultural, social and socialist (Merchant 2005). Yet the lack of agreement about the central message of ecofeminism may have diluted its impact on ecologism. The main source of conflict has been the dominance within ecofeminism of the 'difference' approach, which has been widely attacked within mainstream feminism.

'Difference' feminism, rather than seeking equality within the existing patriarchal society, emphasises the virtues of attributes such as nurture, kindness and care that are specifically feminine in that they are generally possessed by women (King 1983; Collard 1988). 'Difference' ecofeminists claim that these feminine values and forms of behaviour are precisely what will be needed in a green society, as opposed to the individualistic, instrumental rationality of patriarchal society, which, ecofeminists argue, is primarily responsible for the current abuse of nature. In short, ecofeminists identify a set of female traits, value them positively, and argue that the environment would be better protected if everyone (men and women) developed these traits. Ecofeminists also draw parallels between the domination of nature and the domination of women. They claim that, as women are closer to nature, they can better empathise with and understand its problems 'because we recognise the many faces of oppression' (Collard 1988: 97). Combining these arguments, ecofeminists claim that to solve ecological problems we must first remove patriarchy.

The 'difference' approach has been attacked on a number of fronts. Many feminists shudder at the way ecofeminists celebrate precisely the kind of stereotypical female traits that most feminists blame for the subjugation of women in contemporary society. Feminists might sympathise with the sentiment that the traditional undervaluing of female characteristics such as motherhood needs to be rectified, and that men should be encouraged to develop female traits – 'feminising' men. Nevertheless, there is a danger that this may turn out to be a reactionary path which exposes women to strong social pressures to conform to those subservient female forms of behaviour that patriarchal society allocates to them. Moreover, the task of trying to identify gender-specific traits may be fruitless. After all, men often display so-called feminine traits and women exhibit 'masculine' traits. Even if we could identify male and female traits, not all female traits (submissiveness?) may be desirable, and not all male traits (courage?) undesirable (Dobson 2000: 191–2). Moreover, if feminine traits immutably belong to women because of their biological make-up, how can men be expected to develop them?

Underlying these criticisms is the fundamental objection that this entire exercise smacks of ‘essentialism’: that female traits are biologically derived and, therefore, the female character does not vary across time, culture, race or class (Sargisson 2001). Evans objects that this essentialist celebration of the natural – the idea that women’s biology is their destiny – ‘could entrench more or less every aspect of the female condition many of us have fought to renounce. Having fought to emerge from nature, we must not go back’ (Evans 1993: 187). Alert to the dangers of essentialism, several ecofeminists have qualified the nature–female link by arguing that gender roles are socially rather than biologically produced (King 1989; Plumwood 1993; Seager 1993). If femininity is a social construction, then it follows that men could learn female traits. Plumwood (1993) argues that we need a model of a ‘degendered’ human consisting of traits that are independently chosen rather than based on either male or female characteristics.

Alternatively, several ecofeminists, like ecosocialists, argue that female oppression and environmental degradation are both inextricably tied up with the power structures of capitalist society (Biehl 1991; Mellor 1992, 1997; Salleh 1997). These writers argue that it is women’s gender – the nature of women’s work and their roles in society – rather than their biology that brings women closer to nature. Both women and nature are materially exploited, by patriarchy and by capitalist institutions and mechanisms. It is through their social location that women frequently bear the brunt of ecological devastation, particularly in less developed nations where women’s issues and poverty go hand in hand. Indeed, women have initiated many collective grassroots struggles to defend their environment, as illustrated by the protests of the Chipko women in India who famously used the non-violent strategy of ‘tree-hugging’ to protect their forests from multinational timber companies (Shiva 1989). Wider solutions to these problems would require the transformation of capitalist society, but ecofeminism, with its predominantly philosophical orientation, has only slowly engaged with these issues.

Ecofeminism highlights the need to incorporate feminist concerns into green theory and, ‘by tapping into women’s rage and despair at the destruction of our planet’ (Seager 1993: 252), it may provide a catalyst for environmental activism. However, ecofeminism has made only a limited contribution to ecologism because it offers no coherent vision of a green society and no clear strategy for feminist environmental action.

► *Anarchism*

The profound influence of anarchism on the development of ecologism has already been established.¹³ Anarchist writers such as Bahro (1986), Bookchin and Sale have made a major contribution to the ecological critique of contemporary society, the model of a sustainable society and green theories of agency. Anarchism is, in many respects, the political tradition apparently closest to an ecological perspective and, conversely, contemporary anarchism

is itself shaped by ecological concerns (Eckersley 1992: 145). Core green principles such as decentralisation, participatory democracy and social justice are central features of the anarchist tradition, and many greens have inherited the anarchist distrust of the state. Anarchists have also helped shape the praxis of green politics by advocating grassroots democracy, extra-parliamentary activities and direct action.

Two main schools of ecoanarchism can be distinguished (Eckersley 1992; Pepper 1993): 'social ecology', which is primarily the product of Murray Bookchin's (1980, 1982, 1989) extensive writings, and ecocommunalism, which is a general category incorporating a range of more ecocentric positions, including the bioregionalism of Sale (1980, 1991). Ecocommunalism focuses on the relationship between society and nature and, in recommending greater integration of human communities with their immediate natural environment (for example, living within the carrying capacity of their bioregion), is closely linked with deep ecology and the ecocentric ideas discussed in Chapter 2. By contrast, social ecology attributes ecological degradation primarily to social causes. The discussion below focuses on Bookchin's explicit linkage of social hierarchy and environmental problems because it has made a notable theoretical contribution to the emancipatory message of ecologism.

The core message of social ecology is that the human domination of nature stems from 'the very real domination of human by human' (Bookchin 1989: 44). Echoing the thinking of the nineteenth-century anarchist Peter Kropotkin, Bookchin has a benign view of nature based on the belief that it is interdependent and egalitarian – 'ecology recognises no hierarchy on the level of the ecosystem. There are no "kings of beasts" and no "lowly ants"' (Bookchin 1980: 59). Bookchin argues that humans are naturally co-operative and will flourish best in a decentralised, non-hierarchical anarchic society, such as early pre-literate societies, which, he claims, were organic and at one with nature, seeking neither to dominate nor be dominated by it. Subsequently, as social hierarchies developed based on age, gender, religion, class and race, so humans acquired the apparatus and aptitude for domination of other humans and, by extension, non-human nature. Today, domination and hierarchy characterise society and shape a range of related dualisms: intellectual over physical work, work over pleasure and mental control over the sensuous body. Social ecology seeks the replacement of domination and hierarchy with equality and freedom. In short, if social hierarchy can be removed, then environmental degradation will also disappear.

Bookchin's thesis is vulnerable to the empirical criticism that there have been many societies characterised by social hierarchy, which have also lived in harmony with nature, such as feudalism. Conversely, a non-hierarchical egalitarian society, such as Marx's post-capitalist utopia, might still exploit nature (Eckersley 1992: 151). Nevertheless, Bookchin contributes an important social element to ecocentric thinking, which is intended to rectify the mystical flavour of deep ecology. Indeed, Bookchin has engaged in a series of

vicious attacks on deep ecology, which he describes disparagingly as ‘mystical eco-la-la’, for its insensitivity to social issues. He has little patience with the deep green belief that change will come about simply through a transformation of individual world-views stimulated by better spiritual connections with nature. He also despises the misanthropic flavour of some deep green writing, detecting support for coercive forms of population control, immigration and aid policy, and he has engaged in vitriolic debate with the former leading Earth First! activist Dave Foreman (Bookchin and Foreman 1991). Notwithstanding their mutual hostility, social ecology and ecocommunalism share important principles, notably their belief that the state is intrinsically inimical to green ecological and social values (Barry 1999a: 98). Despite the growing acceptance of liberal democratic institutions amongst greens, the anarchist critique of the bureaucratic, centralised state and commitment to local political action continue to wield a strong influence over green theory and practice.

Critical question 5

Can green ideas be satisfactorily accommodated within established political ideologies?

► Neither left nor right but in front?

Greens like to describe themselves as ‘neither left nor right but in front’ because they want to affirm their difference from other ideologies. What do they mean by this claim and is it accurate? Is ecologism a distinct ideology? If so, can it accommodate the many different green discourses discussed above, and where is ecologism located on the classic left–right ideological spectrum? Or is it necessary to use different criteria to categorise it?

Ecologism is characterised by two core ideas: the need to reconceptualise the human–nature relationship and the acceptance of the idea of limits to growth. At this point, consensus breaks down. Some writers hold that ecological imperatives require no specific political structures (Enzensberger 1974; Ryle 1988; Goodin 1992). Ryle, for example, believes that ‘widely varying forms’ of sustainable society are possible, including ‘authoritarian capitalist’ and ‘barrack socialism’, which would both be a far cry from the green model outlined above (Ryle 1988: 7). Others believe that ecological imperatives do imply certain political forms and exclude others. Martell (1994: 160), for example, argues that intervention and central co-ordination are needed, thus ruling out markets, capitalism and decentralisation. By contrast, Dobson believes that ‘there is something about ecologism . . . that pushes it irrevocably towards the left of the political spectrum’ (Dobson 2000: 73) – a position that acknowledges the powerful influence of the emancipatory ideologies (Eckersley 1992).

3.10 The technocentric–ecocentric dimension

Technocentric orientation

- an adherence to cornucopian assumptions that there are no limits to growth
- an unrestrained commitment to economic growth
- scientific and technological optimism that human ingenuity will find an answer to every ecological problem
- a strong emphasis on material values and resistance to widening public participation in decision-making
- an anthropocentric world-view

Ecocentric orientation

- a belief that there are both ecological and social limits to growth
- a development philosophy that seeks to minimise resource use and operate

within the carrying capacity of ecosystems

- an appreciation of the complexities of ecosystems and the limits to human understanding and elitist expertise; i.e. we cannot solve every problem and we must adopt a cautious approach to the use of technology
- the belief that materialism for its own sake is wrong and an emphasis on non-material values such as education, fellowship, civic responsibility, democratic participation and community
- an ecocentric respect for nature and a belief that all lifeforms should be given the opportunity to pursue their own destinies

Modelled on O’Riordan (1981).

It is helpful to illustrate the relationship between ecologism and other ideologies diagrammatically. Conventional political discourse is dominated by distributive issues: who gets what, when and how? Thus ideologies are typically categorised along the familiar left–right dimension according to the position they take on key political dualisms such as ‘state v. market’ or ‘equality v. hierarchy’. In contrast, ecologism, whilst not denying the importance of distributional issues, is driven by an ecological imperative, which is not picked up by the left–right dimension. By adapting O’Riordan’s classic **technocentric**–ecocentric dimension (Box 3.10), it is possible to categorise different ideologies according to their perspective on environmental issues (see Figure 3.2).

Technocentric: A mode of thought which optimistically believes that society can solve all environmental problems, using technology and science, and achieve unlimited material growth.

The technocentric–ecocentric dimension cuts across the left–right dimension, thus giving some force to the green claim to represent a fundamentally different approach to politics. This sharp distinction holds good as long as we focus on those two ideas of non-anthropocentrism and limits to growth. However, as soon as the broader set of green principles is introduced into the equation, the distinction becomes more blurred. In Figure 3.4 the relationship between ecologism and other ideologies is illustrated by superimposing the technocentric–ecocentric dimension onto the conventional left–right dimension (based on attitudes to state intervention in the market).¹⁴ If ecologism consists of the core ecological imperative supplemented by green principles of democratisation, decentralisation and social justice, then the

Figure 3.3 The technocentric–ecocentric continuum

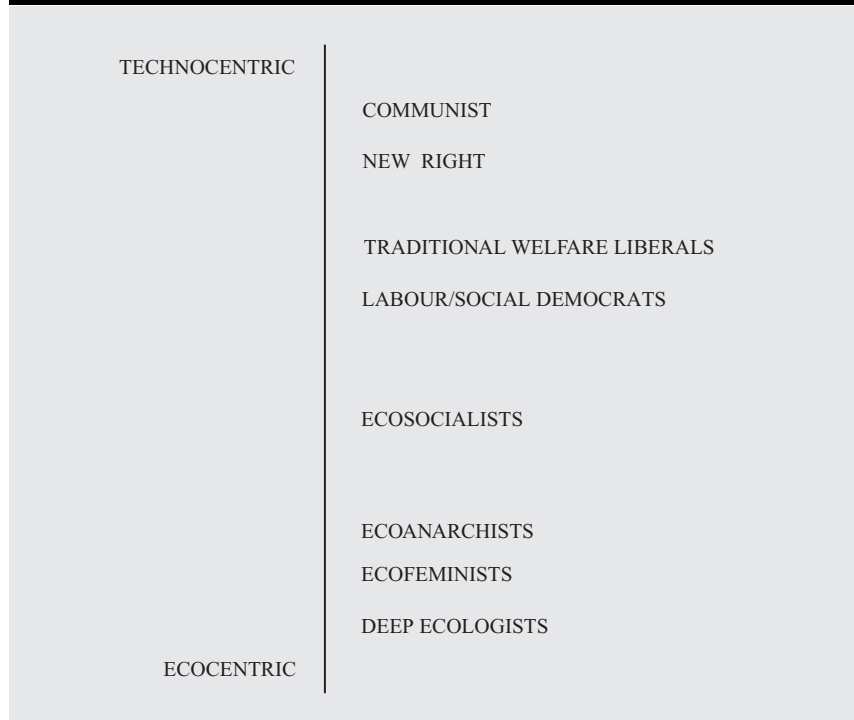
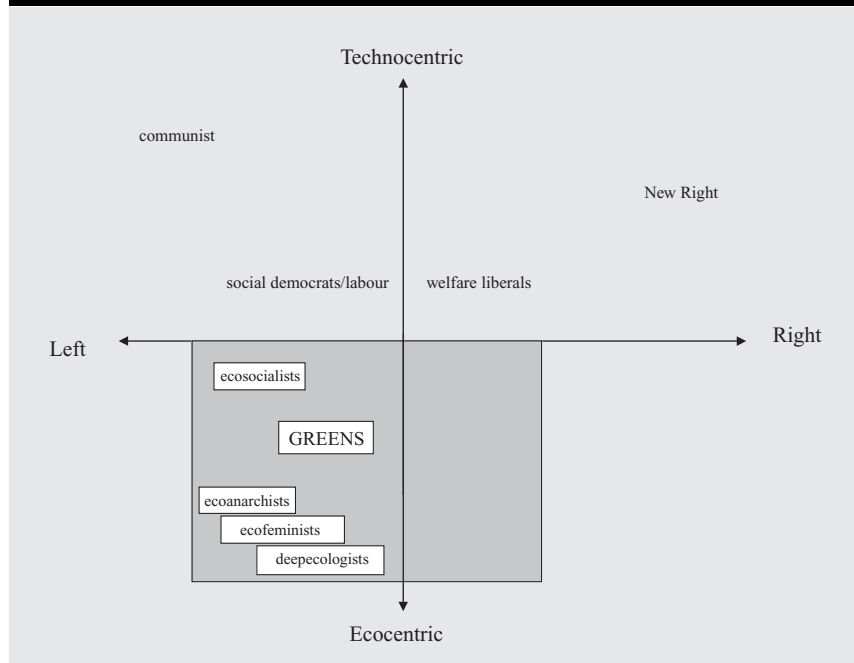


Figure 3.4 Mapping ecologism



shaded area in Figure 3.4 represents the broad area covered by ecologism. On this reading, ecologism clearly has most in common with those doctrines (socialism, anarchism, feminism) that (1) are critical of capitalism and have sought to transform it and (2) believe that human nature can and should be changed to make us less individualistic and less materialistic, although it has also drawn on reformist doctrines that seek to dilute the worst aspects of the market, such as welfare liberalism and social democracy. Thus ecologism stretches leftwards from just right of centre, but it does not reach the far left because greens want to control the market rather than remove it and their suspicion of the state means they reject any form of command economy. Ecologism goes no further to the right because sustainability is incompatible with an unfettered market economy. Moreover, greater participatory democracy and decentralisation would be impossible in either a command economy, by definition, or in a free market, where they would be curtailed by economic inequality and the capitalist dynamics of accumulation, competition and concentration. This approach leads to a conclusion that is slightly broader than that of Dobson: yes, ecologism does occupy broadly left-of-centre territory, but it draws in a wider range of perspectives than his anarchist-emancipatory framework. Although the model of a sustainable society outlined at the start of the chapter closely mirrored the ecoanarchist blueprint, the discussion of core green principles and the influence of other ideologies has highlighted weaknesses in this model and indicated the existence of several alternative perspectives *within* the green political arena. Indeed, it seems reasonable to expect that, just as there are many varieties of socialism, feminism and conservatism, the territory staked out by ecologism will have space for a range of green alternatives, including both the radical ecoanarchist and the 'pro-state' ecosocialist models.

This relatively relaxed approach to fixing the boundaries of ecologism is sensitive to the view that attempts to pin down a definitive 'correct' version of ecologism not only close down discussion (and put off potential adherents) but also understate the impact of green political theory on other political traditions. In this respect, there is much to commend Barry's (1999a) attempt to distinguish green political theory from the ideology of ecologism to enable a richer debate unencumbered by the need to adhere to a 'party line'.

Nevertheless, the central argument of this chapter is that the two core themes that underpin the ecological imperative (a reassessment of human-nature relations and the finitude of the Earth's resources), supplemented by a coherent set of principles drawn from other doctrines, is sufficient for us to talk legitimately about ecologism as an ideology in its own right. However, an important underlying theme is that many green theorists and activists have increasingly come to accept that liberal democracy is here to stay, so ecologism needs strategies for reforming it (Wissenburg 1998). It is this question that underpins the remainder of this book.

► Further reading

Dobson (2000) is the best introduction to ecologism, and is complemented by Barry (1999a), which includes good coverage of issues such as the green state, ecological citizenship and green political economy. Hay (2002) provides an exhaustive coverage of the many streams of thought influencing green political thought. Goodin (1992) is a clever and provocative book that demands attention. Dobson and Eckersley (2006) provides an excellent introduction both to the relationship between ecologism and other ideologies, and the way traditional political concepts have responded to the ecological challenge. For more detailed examination of the relationship between green theory and other ideologies, see Eckersley (1992), Pepper (1993), Hayward (1995) and de-Shalit (2000). Amongst the burgeoning literature relating green theory to traditional political concepts, see Smith (2003) on democracy, Eckersley (2004a) on the state and Dobson (1998, 1999) on justice. See the journals *Environmental Politics* and, for debates about the links between ecology and Marxism, socialism, anarchism and feminism, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. Milbrath (1989) presents a fascinating vision of a sustainable society. Ernest Callenbach's novel *Ecotopia* offers one vision of a green 'utopia'.

NOTES

- 1 The *Limits to Growth* report was sponsored by the Club of Rome, a group of affluent industrialists, academics and civil servants.
- 2 The *Limits to Growth* report was so successful that it drew attention away from other important contemporary contributions, notably Georgescu-Roegen's (1971) work on the second law of thermodynamics. See Barry (1994).
- 3 Detailed discussions of future-generations arguments include Golding (1972), Barry (1991), Laslett and Fishkin (1992), de-Shalit (1995) and Dobson (1998, 1999).
- 4 Fuller discussions of the sustainable society can be found in Die Grünen (1983), Porritt (1984), Ekins (1986), Milbrath (1989), Goodin (1992), Tokar (1992), Pepper (1996), Barry (1999a) and Dobson (2000).
- 5 For a more detailed discussion of the green, or steady-state, economy, see Ekins (1986), Daly and Cobb (1990) and Barry (1999a).
- 6 Goodin's own theory of agency differs significantly from radical green perspectives in that he regards the liberal democratic central state as the best means of achieving green ends and he rejects (rather disparagingly) the green predilection for living simple individual lifestyles as misconceived and likely to detract from reaching green outcomes (Goodin 1992: 78–83, 120–3).
- 7 The discussion here focuses on political decentralisation rather than on the potential ecological benefits of a decentralised economy arising from small-scale production, appropriate technologies and reduced trade and travel.
- 8 McGinnis (1998) provides an introduction to bioregional writings.
- 9 For a critique of free-market environmentalism, see Eckersley (1993) and Barry (1999a: 150–5).
- 10 See also Wells (1978) and Scruton (2006).

- 11 For the relationship between Marxism and ecology, see also Grundmann (1991), Benton (1996), Barry (1998), Foster (2000) and Hughes (2000).
- 12 Good collections of ecofeminist writings include Caldecott and Leland (1983), Collard (1988), Plant (1989) and Warren (1994).
- 13 See Eckersley (1992), Pepper (1993) and Barry (1999a) for a wider discussion of ecoanarchism.
- 14 The contemporary blurring of left and right on their attitudes to the market undoubtedly reduces the usefulness of the state–market dimension, but it remains the dominant way of categorising ideologies. See also Paehlke (1989: 190) and Eckersley (1990).