in this sense deeply inconsistent in claiming adherence to them. This much I would concede to those who would dismiss the emancipatory credentials of the postmodernists. It is no part of my aim here to undermine the fundamental cause of ecological conservation, or to defend any 'postmodernist' posture which would have us focus only on the 'textuality' of 'nature' and its continually shifting signifier.

1

THE DISCOURSES OF NATURE

In its commonest and most fundamental sense, the term 'nature' refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity.[1] Thus 'nature' is opposed to culture, to history, to convention, to what is artificially worked or produced, in short, to everything which is defining of the order of humanity. I speak of this conception of nature as 'otherness' to humanity as fundamental because, although many would question whether we can in fact draw any such rigid divide, the conceptual distinction remains indispensable. Whether, for example, it is claimed that 'nature' and 'culture' are clearly differentiated realms or that no hard and fast delineation can be made between them, all such thinking is tacitly reliant on the humanity–nature antithesis itself and would have no purchase on our understanding without it. The implications of this are not always as fully appreciated as they might be either by those who would have us view 'nature' as a variable and relative construct of human discourse or by those who emphasize human communality with the 'rest of nature', and I shall have more to say on this in the following chapter. Suffice it to note here that an *a priori* discrimination between humanity and 'nature' is implicit in all discussions of the relations between the two, and thus far it is correct to insist that 'nature' is

the idea through which we conceptualize what is 'other' to ourselves.

But for the most part, when 'nature' is used of the non-human, it is in a rather more concrete sense to refer to that part of the environment which we have had no hand in creating. It is used empirically to mark off that part of the material world that is given prior to any human activity, from that which is humanly shaped or contrived. This is the sort of distinction which John Passmore makes central to his work on *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, where he writes he will be using the word 'nature'

> so as to include only that which, setting aside the supernatural, is human neither in itself nor in its origins. This is the sense in which neither Sir Christopher Wren nor St Paul's Cathedral forms part of 'nature' and it may be hard to decide whether an oddly shaped flint or a landscape where the trees are evenly spaced is or is not 'natural'.[2]

Passmore himself admits that this is to use the term in one of its narrower senses; yet it is also, I think, to use it in the sense which corresponds most closely to ordinary intuitions about its essential meaning. The idea of 'nature' as that which we are not, which we are external to, which ceases to be fully 'natural' once we have mixed our labour with it, or which we have destroyed by our interventions, also propels a great deal of thought and writing about 'getting back' to nature, or rescuing it from its human corruption. Ecological writing, for example, very frequently works implicitly with an idea of nature as a kind of pristine otherness to human culture, whose value is depreciated proportionately to its human admixture, and this is an idea promoted by Robert Goodin, in his attempt to supply a 'green theory of value'. What is crucial to a 'green theory of value', argues Goodin, is that it accords value to what is created by natural processes rather than by artificial human ones; and he employs the analogy

with fakes and forgeries in art to argue that replications of the environment by developers, even if absolutely exact, will never be the same, or have the same value, precisely because they will not be independent of human process:

> . . . a restored bit of nature is necessarily not as valuable as something similar that has been 'untouched by human hands'. Even if we simply stand back and 'let nature take its course' once again, and even if after several decades most of what we see is the handiwork of nature rather than of humanity, there will almost inevitably still be human residues in its final product. Even if we subsequently 'let nature take its course', *which* course it has taken will typically have been dictated by that human intervention in the causal history. To the extent that that is true, even things that are largely the product of natural regeneration are still to some (perhaps significant) degree the product of human handiwork. And they are, on the green theory of value, that much less valuable for being so.[3]

But persuasive as these approaches may seem, in some ways, there are a number of reasons to question their tendency to elide 'nature' defined as that 'which is human neither in itself nor its origins' with 'nature' defined as that part of the environment which is humanly unaffected. Much, after all, that is 'natural' in the first sense is also affected by us, including, one may argue, the building materials which have gone into the making of St Paul's Cathedral. On the other hand, if 'nature' is identified with that part of the environment that is humanly unaffected, then, as Passmore rightly notes, it is being defined in such a way as to leave us uncertain of its empirical application, at least in respect of the sort of examples he gives: the oddly shaped flint, the landscape where the trees are straight, and so on. The fact that we may not be able concretely to determine what is or is not 'natural' in this sense is no objection, of course,

to its conceptualization as that which is unaffected by human hand; but when we consider how much of our environment we most certainly know *not* to be 'natural' in this sense, and how much of the remainder we may be rather doubtful about, we may feel that the conceptual distinction, though logically clear enough, has lost touch with the more ordinary discriminations we make through the idea of 'nature' – as between the built and unbuilt environment, the 'natural' and the 'artificial' colouring, the 'Nature' park and the opera house, and so forth.

If we consider, that is, the force of Marx's remark that: 'the nature which preceded human history no longer exists anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral-islands of recent origin)';[4] and if we then consider the human 'contamination' to which these possible 'exceptions' have been subject since he wrote, then it is difficult not to feel that in thinking of 'nature' as that which is utterly unaffected by human dealings, we are thinking of a kind of being to which rather little on the planet in reality corresponds. Now this, it might be said, is precisely the force of so construing it, namely that it brings so clearly into view its actual disappearance; the extent, that is, to which humanity has destroyed, nay obliterated, 'nature' as a result of its occupation of the planet. This certainly seems to be the kind of prescriptive force that Goodin, and some of those associated with a 'deep ecology' approach, would wish to draw from it, insofar as they present human beings as always desecrating nature howsoever they intervene in it.[5]

But to press this kind of case is inevitably to pose some new conceptual problems. For it is to present humanity as in its very being opposed to nature, and as necessarily destroying, or distraining on its value, even in the most minimal pursuit of its most 'natural' needs. Since merely to walk in 'nature', to pluck the berry, to drink the mountain

stream, is, on this theory of value, necessarily to devalue it, the logical conclusion would seem to be that it would have been better by far had the species never existed. But, at this point, we might begin to wonder why the same argument could not apply to other living creatures, albeit they are said, unlike ourselves, to belong to nature, since they, too, make use of its resources, destroy each other, and in that sense corrupt its pristine paradise. In other words, we may ask what it is exactly that makes a human interaction with 'nature' intrinsically devaluing, where that of other species is deemed to be unproblematic – of the order of nature itself. If humanity is thought to be an intrusion upon this 'natural' order, then it is unclear why other creatures should not count as 'intrusions' also, and inanimate 'nature' hence as better off without them. We may begin to wonder what it is exactly that renders even the most primitive of human dwellings an 'artificial' excrescence, but allows the bee-hive or ant-heap to count as part of nature; or, conversely, whether the humanity–nature relationship is not here being conceived along lines that might logically require us to question the 'naturality' of species other than our own. Or to put the point in more political terms: we may suspect that this is an approach to the 'value' of nature that is too inclined to abstract from the impact on the environment of the different historical modes of 'human' interaction with it, and thus to mislocate the source of the problem – which arguably resides not in any inherently 'devaluing' aspect of human activity, but in the specific forms it has taken.

But rather than pursue these issues further here, let me return to the point I earlier raised concerning ordinary parlance about 'nature'. For there is no doubt that any definition of nature as that untouched by human hand is belied by some of the commonest uses of the term. In other words, if we count as 'nature' only that which

preceded human history, or is free from the impact of human occupancy of the planet, then it might seem as if we were committed to denying the validity of much of our everyday reference to 'nature'. To speak of the 'nature walk' or 'Nature Park'; of 'natural' as opposed to 'artificial' additives; of the 'natural' environment which we love and seek to preserve – all this, it might follow from this approach, is a muddle; and a muddle, it might be further argued, that we ought to seek to correct through an adjustment of language. But tempting as it might seem, in view of the conceptual imprecision of ordinary talk of 'nature', to want to police the term in this way, there are a number of reasons to resist the move. In the first place, talk of the countryside and its 'natural' flora and fauna may be loose, but it still makes discriminations that we would want to observe between different types of space and human uses of it. If ordinary discourse lacks rigour in referring to woodland or fields, the cattle grazing upon them, and so forth, as 'nature', it is still marking an important distinction between the urban and industrial environment. As we shall see in chapter 6, the criteria employed in such distinctions may be difficult to specify, but the distinctions are not of a kind that we can readily dispense with, or that a more stringent use of terminology can necessarily capture more adequately. Or to put the point in more Wittgensteinian terms, it may be a mistaken approach to the meaning of terms to attempt to specify *how* they should be employed as opposed to exploring the *way* in which they are actually used. The philosopher's task, suggested Wittgenstein, was not to prescribe the use of terms in the light of some supposedly 'strict' or essential meaning, but to observe their usage in 'ordinary' language itself; and it is certainly in that spirit that much of my pursuit here of the 'meaning' of nature will be conducted, even if that only serves to expose its theoretical laxity relative to any

particular definition we might insist it ought to have. Indeed, there is perhaps something inherently mistaken in the attempt to define what nature is, independently of how it is thought about, talked about and culturally represented. There can be no adequate attempt, that is, to explore 'what nature is' that is not centrally concerned with what it has been *said* to be, however much we might want to challenge that discourse in the light of our theoretical rulings.

Cosmological 'Nature'

These, then, are some of the reasons for questioning the adequacy of any attempt to conceptualize 'nature', even when we are thinking primarily only of the 'natural' environment, as that which is wholly extraneous to, and independent of, human process. Moreover, of course, we do not simply use the term 'nature' to refer to an 'external' spatial domain, from which we and our works are clearly delineated. We also use it in reference to that totality of being of which we in some sense conceive ourselves as forming a part. We have thought, that is, of humanity as being a component of nature even as we have conceptualized nature as absolute otherness to humanity. 'Nature' is in this sense both that which we are not *and* that which we are within.

When the order of 'Nature', for example, was conceived as a Great Chain of Being, as it was in the physico-theology which prevailed from the early Middle Ages through to the late eighteenth century,[6] humanity was thought of very definitely as occupying a place within it, and a rather middling one at that. Based on the Neoplatonist principles of plenitude (the impossibility of a vacuum or 'gap' in being), hierarchy and continuity, the Great Chain of Being perceived the universe as:

composed of an immense, or – by the strict if seldom rigorously applied logic of the principle of continuity – of an infinite, number of links ranging in hierarchical order from the meagerest kind of existents, which barely escape non-existence, through 'every possible' grade up to the *ens perfectissimum* – or, in a somewhat more orthodox version, to the highest possible kind of creature, between which and the Absolute Being the disparity was assumed to be infinite – every one of them differing from that immediately above and that immediately below it by the 'least possible' degree of difference.[7]

Or, as Pope expressed it in his *Essay on Man*:

> Vast Chain of being! which from God began,
> Natures aethereal, human, angel, man,
> Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,
> No glass can reach; – On superior pow'rs
> Were we to press, inferior might on ours;
> Or in the full creation leave a void,
> Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroy'd;
> From Nature's chain whatever link you strike,
> Tenth, or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.[8]

Pope in the eighteenth century is emphasizing the coherence of the 'natural' cosmos and chaos that would ensue from breaking its 'chain', where as the stress of Mediaeval thought was on the creative and generative power of God's love in divinely willing the fullest of universes.[9] But the essential idea that humanity is within this order of 'Nature', and indeed occupies a fairly modest rung in its hierarchy of being, remains common to both. Humanity is thought of as infinitely inferior to the deity, but also to all those aethereal spirits, angels, possibly more sublime mortals elsewhere in the universe, who people the myriad degrees of difference within the abyss which yawns between man and God. When 'Nature', then, is conceived in cosmological terms as the totality of being, humanity is

neither opposed to it nor viewed as separable from it. This is not to deny that there is much in the conception of the Chain that directly encouraged the idea of human lordship over the rest of animal (and vegetable) life. The teleological purposes it attributed to a deity, who had so designed all things and laws of nature as to place them at the service of his human servant, were frequently used to justify a dominion over all those creatures below us in the Chain, and an instrumental use of earthly resources. In the words of a key text of Scholastic philosophy: 'As man is made for the sake of God, namely, that he may serve him, so is the world made for the sake of man, that it may serve him',[10] and this was echoed in many other expressions of a similar complacency over the ensuing centuries. The increasingly ingenious and anthropocentric use of Christian doctrine by English preachers and commentators prior to the Reformation to support an instrumental use of nature has been charted by Keith Thomas, who concludes his survey by suggesting that 'a reader who came fresh to the moral and theological writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could be forgiven for inferring that their main purpose was to define the special status of man and to justify his rule over other creatures'.[11] In this sense, the idea of the Chain supported those currents of Enlightenment thought which emphasized our difference from, and right to exploit, 'nature', and operated as a kind of theological complement to their secular and temporalized teleology.

All the same, we should note that when conceived as a way of considering the question of 'Man's place in Nature', the cosmology of the Great Chain of Being can by no means be viewed as supplying a straightforwardly anthropocentric answer, and this is particularly true of the inflections it acquired in the age of Enlightenment itself. Descartes, Spinoza and Liebniz had all agreed to the principle that *non omnia hominum causa fieri* ['not everything is created for human ends'],[12] and Locke, Kant, Addison,

Bolingbroke, and many others, were to invoke the idea of the Chain as a reminder of the numerous creatures superior to man, and as a caution against arrogant assumptions of human dominance within 'Nature'. Addison wrote, for example, that the difference of species 'appears, in many instances, small, and would probably appear still less, if we had means of knowing their motives'. Thus, if under one aspect man is associated with the angels and archangels, under another he must 'say to Corruption, Thou art my Father, and to the worm, Thou art my sister'.[13] In similar vein, Bolingbroke argued that superior as man was, he was nonetheless:

> . . . connected by his nature, and therefore, by the design of the Author of all Nature, with the whole tribe of animals, and so closely with some of them, that the distance between his intellectual faculties and theirs, which constitutes as really, though not so sensibly as figure, the difference of species, appears, in many instances, small, and would probably appear still less, if we had the means of knowing their motives, as we have of observing their actions.[14]

We may say, then, that, although the Promethean assumptions of human separation from and superiority over 'Nature' do eventually triumph over the idea of our 'middling' rank within its overall cosmology, they were nonetheless continually countered by less confident assumptions, deriving from the Mediaeval theology, about humanity's place within this order. Worth noting, moreover, in this connection are the quite striking similarities between the contemporary ecological emphases on humanity's continuity with nature and place 'within' it, and those of the Great Chain of Being. Of course, there can be no direct analogue between a secular critique of instrumental rationality and of a 'technical fix' approach to nature, and a Neoplatonist theology

which grounds its demand for human humility in the distance which separates man from the lowliest of divine beings. Ecology, moreover, is generally opposed to the hierarchical ranking of species that is the organizing principle of the Great Chain. But if we extrapolate the cosmological principles from their theological trappings, and focus simply on the idea of plenitude, diversity and organic interconnection informing the idea of the Chain, then there would at least seem some parallel here with current arguments concerning the interdependency of the eco-system, the importance of maintaining bio-diversity, and the unpredictable consequences of any, however seemingly insignificant, subtraction from it. Moreover, there is no doubt that, in a general way, ecology would have us revise our attitudes to 'nature' and the place of humanity within it, along lines that would reintroduce some of the conception of the Chain; rather than view 'nature' as an external and inorganic context, we should regard the eco-system as a plurality of beings each possessed of its particular function and purpose in maintaining the whole.

Human 'Nature'

The limitations of thinking of 'nature' as that which is independent of us, and external to us, are also brought into view when we consider the way in which we use the term in reference to ourselves. For we, too, it is said, are possessed of a 'nature', and may behave in more or less 'natural' ways. Now, it might be argued, that all that we should read into this vocabulary is the idea that human beings possess properties which are of their 'essence', with no presumption being made about their 'naturality' in any other sense. In other words, in speaking of 'human nature' we are not necessarily implying that human beings par-

ticipate in the 'nature' we ascribe to animality or pointing to the continuity of their being with that of the 'natural' world. On the contrary, it might be said, we are precisely designating those features which are exclusive to them, and mark them off from 'nature' conceived on the model of 'animality'. Certainly, it is true that the idea of 'human nature' is very often used to emphasize our difference from 'natural' species, as when it is said, for example, that human beings are 'by nature' rational and moral beings in a way that no other species are, that it is against their 'nature' to behave 'like animals', or that in taking 'nature' as a model they are precisely reneging on what is true to their own.

It is in line with this view of 'human nature' that John Stuart Mill in his essay on 'Nature' denounces the immorality of following the course of nature and rejects any consecration of instinctual action. Since natural phenomena, he argues, are 'replete with everything which when committed by human beings is most worthy of abhorrence, any one who endeavoured in his actions to imitate the natural course of things would be universally seen and acknowledged to be the wickedest of men.'[15] Coming at the issue from a very different political perspective, Baudelaire employs a similar vocabulary in denouncing Romantic conceptions of 'nature' as a model of human beauty and goodness. 'Nature,' he writes, 'cannot but counsel that which is criminal . . . [In] all the actions and desires of the purely natural man, you will find nothing that is not ghastly.'[16] Yet there would be little point in moving these arguments were it thought that human beings are 'by nature' incapable of following the 'counsel' of nature, and their point, in fact, is not so much to assert the actual impossibility as to emphasize the immorality or cultural degeneracy of doing so. What is being disputed here is not so much the human possession of instinct or 'animal' desire, but the ethics of human conduct, and

specifically the extent to which 'nature' offers itself as an appropriate guide to this; in other words, whether it is conceived essentially as a source of virtue or of vice, and thus as a mode of being we should seek to emulate or disown. Clearly, as Mill himself in effect points out,[17] there is little point in recommending that human beings either follow or reject the model of 'nature' if nature is here being construed as a set of powers or properties that they have no choice but to comply with. Admonitions of this kind implicitly reject a deterministic conception of 'human nature' even as they advocate a certain view of its 'order' and propriety. To suggest, for example, that 'human nature' is betrayed by following the course of 'animal' nature is paradoxically to acknowledge that human beings are capable of defying their 'nature' in ways denied to other animals. It is to suggest, in effect, that 'human nature' is such as to be realized only in compliance with a certain order of 'conventions' of a kind that no other creature can be expected to recognize or would require its fellows to observe. As Empson wryly notes, the animal 'is at least unconventional in the sense that it it does not impose its conventions.'[18]

Yet there is no doubt, too, that the idea of a 'human nature' cannot be so readily divorced from the assumption of humanity's sameness with the animal world and rootedness within the order of nature. This is in part because the notion of our having a 'nature' carries with it something of that same necessity we attribute to animal and inorganic modes of being: to speak of 'human nature' is to imply that we are possessed of preordained features, and subject to their order of needs in the way that other creatures also are. These features may be supposed to be very different from those of animals, but in describing them as 'natural' to us we are imputing a similar determination and necessity to them.

But we should note, too, the way in which the idea has

been used to condemn the 'perversity' of human behaviour where it is thought to *diverge* from that of other animals – as in the case, most notably, of certain forms of sexual practice. The 'convention' through which homosexuality has been perennially condemned as a 'crime' against nature would have us conform to, rather than contravene, a supposed 'norm' of animal conduct; and a similar rationale is at work in the condemnations of much else that is thought 'perverse' in our own behaviour: here the point is to exclude those human modes of conduct that have been deemed (though often mistakenly in fact) *not to conform* to those of other animals.

But against all those cases in which the 'healthy' human norm is established by reference to the custom of nature, must, of course, be set all those numerous others in which we become creatures of 'nature' in failing to conform with the custom of humanity. The conception of what is proper to human nature is thus arrived at both in approval and in rejection of what is thought 'spontaneous' or 'instinctual', and it is this ambivalence of attitude that Edmund in *King Lear* turns powerfully to his own account in calling upon God to stand up for the bastards bred in the 'lusty stealth of Nature' rather than for the 'tribe of fops' who are got in the 'dull stale tired bed' of matrimony.[19] (Although we might note that what God is to stand up for are rights of inheritance to land which no 'lusty Nature' ever bestowed.)

The history of the ways in which the idea or model of nature has figured in human self-conceptions is extraordinarily complex, and there can be no question of offering more than the sketchiest account of its convolutions in this context.[20] But one of the main divisions which can be drawn is between those ethical, political and aesthetic arguments that are constructed upon a view of culture as offering an essential corrective to 'nature', or providing the milieu in which alone it acquires any definitively

human form, and those that view nature as releasing us from the repressions or deformations of culture and as itself a source of wisdom and moral guidance. The former regard human 'nature' as appropriately and fully reflected only in those achievements of 'civilization' that distance us from the sinfulness or naïvety or crudity of 'nature'; the latter would have us see the very process of authentic human fulfilment as jeopardized or distorted by the corrupting effects of cultural 'progress'. In the one conception, the emphasis falls on those human powers in which we transcend 'nature', and on the moral goodness which is realised only in our freedom from its order; in the other on the 'nature' within us that is the well-spring of human virtue and thus of social regeneration.

Broadly speaking, we can say that the one provides the animating idea of the high Enlightenment, the other of the Romantic reaction to its economic and social consequences. In releasing humanity from a Deist conception of the order of Nature as hierarchically fixed or Providentially designed to secure the 'best of all possible worlds', the Enlightenment sought to realize the inherent dignity of the individual as a self-motivating rational and moral being: the progressive development of art, science and culture is thus viewed as the vehicle for the realization of a 'human nature' previously held in thrall to superstitious fears of 'nature' and theological bigotry. In the Romantic reaction, which is profoundly influenced by Rousseau's summons to attend to conscience as the 'voice of nature' within us, the integrity of nature is counterposed to the utilitarianism and instrumental rationality through which the Enlightenment ideals were practically realized and theoretically legitimated: the point is not to return to a past primitivity, but to discover in 'nature', both inner and outer, the source of redemption from the alienation and depredations of industrialism and the 'cash nexus' deformation of human relations. In the aesthetic theory

of the Romantic movement the artistic or poetic imagination is charged with the task of expressing this latent and occluded force of nature as redemptive resource, and this idea remains central to the forms of expressivism into which it subsequently flows. In social theory, the Romantic critique receives its most powerful elaboration in the argument of the Frankfurt School critical theorists: 'instrumental rationality', in oppressing nature, cuts us off from it as a source, and thus betrays its original promise to release us from thraldom to a Deistic order by entrapping us in relations to nature that are deeply oppressive of ourselves as well.[21]

Let it be said immediately, however, that this is to offer only a very general framework of opposing viewpoints, both of which are subject to numerous mutations and inflections, and neither of which provide compartments into which we can readily slot the argument of particular writers. The argument of Descartes and Locke, for example, was crucial in laying the foundations of the Enlightenment idea of subjectivity, but remained committed to Deistic or Providential conceptions of the social whole. Kant is a major architect of the Enlightenment conception of the autonomous subject, but exerts a lasting influence on Romanticism in rejecting the utilitarian ethic and the 'civilization' that 'progresses' in accord with it; Marx combines a Promethean aspiration to transcend all natural limits on human self-realization with a quasi-Romantic critique of alienation; and there are many other examples one might give of such hybrid modes of thinking and lines of influence.

We must allow, too, that very divergent and often antithetical moral postures and political ideologies can be defended from either of these perspectives on the model offered by 'nature'. An Enlightenment conception of our 'nature' as 'improvable' has been of critical importance to the promotion of the ideals of equality, justice and freedom

which have come to ground the Western conception of progress. The (alas, continuing) horrors of the twentieth century have severely dinted the faith in the ameliorative powers of 'civilization', but in a sense this itself speaks to a presumption that our 'human nature' is such as to allow and require us to act in ways that transcend 'nature': to act in accordance with justice and to observe a system of rights. Moreover, the importance attached by a *tabula rasa* conception of nature to providing the appropriate cultural and physical milieu for human growth and self-realization has issued in some of the most progressive programmes of social reform.

On the other hand, it must be recognized that the emphasis on the role of culture in the formation or improvement of human nature can lend itself both to enlightened forms of educational and social policy and to the crudest forms of 'social engineering' and technocratism. The Enlightenment acclamation of human freedom and autonomy, moreover, carries within it a potentially repressive legacy of the modes of thought from which it breaks in the form of a continued elevation of mind over body, the rational over the affective. Though pitted against the more puritanical suppressions of bodily appetite and 'animal' instinct sustained in Christian dogma, the rationalist element of Enlightenment thinking may also be charged with fostering modes of 'corrective' education and regulation that have denied self-expression and served as the continued prop of class, race and gender divisions.

In view of this, it is not surprising that the Romantic conception of 'nature' as an essentially innocent and benevolent power has played such a key role in the discourses of sexual and social emancipation from the time of Blake and Shelley through to the 'flower power' politics of the sixties and much of the ecological argument of our own time. Liberating the 'nature' within or without us has been a constant theme of emancipatory discourse (and one

might argue, some reference to a 'repressed' nature is a condition of the coherence of any such talk). But we should not forget the irrationalities and repressions to which this 'nature libertarianism' can also lend itself. Romantic conceptions of 'nature' as wholesome salvation from cultural decadence and racial degeneration were crucial to the construction of Nazi ideology, and an aesthetic of 'nature' as source of purity and authentic self-identification has been a component of all forms of racism, tribalism and nationalism. Equally, of course, the appeal to the health, morality and immutability of what 'nature' proposes has been systematically used to condemn the 'deviants' and 'perverts' who fail to conform to the sexual or social norms of their culture.

Finally we might note the ways in which some of these inflections of the pro-nature ethic have prompted a series of counter-Romantic denunciations of the quest for humanist redemption through 'nature', ranging from T. E. Hulme's rejection of any Rousseauan confidence in human amelioration and preference for all that is 'life-alien', to Baudelaire's protestations against 'ensouled vegetables';[22] from Oscar Wilde's professions of hatred for nature, to Foucault's conventionalist leanings towards an erotic-aesthetic of 'cruelty' and 'dandyist' ethic of style.[23] In these voices we encounter some of the more 'violent' attacks on the 'violence' of 'nature' and a systematic refusal to endorse its truth, authenticity or regenerative powers. But we should note that they also give expression to a form of resistance common to all those who have challenged the appeal to 'nature' to legitimate and preserve a status quo, whether of class relations, patriarchy, sexual oppression or ethnic and racial discrimination. What is put in question through such challenges is precisely the extent to which what is claimed to be 'natural' is indeed a determination of 'nature', and hence a necessity to which we must accommodate, as opposed to a set of conventional

arrangements, which are in principle transformable. In the case of many of these expressions of dissent, however, it is not so much *any* invocation of nature that is rejected, but that construction of it which has pre-empted or distorted the potential forms in which it might be realized.

Within the general opposition to the naturalization of the social, therefore, we may distinguish between two rather differing types of claims: between those that reject the specific accounts that have been given of what is 'natural' in the name of the equal or more authentic 'naturality' of what they seek to institute; and those that insist on the non-natural, or normative, or culturally-constructed quality of all social arrangements, practices and institutions. Whereas the former position retains the idea of there being some sort of 'natural' order in human society, which if instituted will guarantee the well-being of its members and allow them to realise their essential 'nature' as persons, the latter emphasizes the discursive and revisable quality of what is claimed to be 'natural' to human beings and their societies at any point in history. For the latter position, then, 'nature' in human affairs is a concept through which social conventions and cultural norms are continuously legitimated and contested; it does not refer us to an essential or true mode of being from which we may think of ourselves as being culturally alienated at any point in time, or as having realized in some historical past, or as able potentially to realize in the future. The concept of 'nature' according to this 'culturalist' argument is certainly always employed *as if* it referred us to what is 'essential', 'true' or 'authentic' to us, but it is a usage that at the same time necessarily denies the historicity of what has been believed at any time to be the dictate of nature. Since 'progressive culture' has constantly re-thought the limits it has imposed on what is 'natural' or 'proper' to human beings and their society, the use of 'nature' as if it referred to an independent and permanent order

of reality embodies a kind of error, or failure to register the history of the legitimating function it has played in human culture. From this 'culturalist' perspective, then, 'nature' is a kind of self-denying concept through which what is culturally ordained is presented as pre-discursive external determination upon that culture. From a 'realist' perspective, by contrast, nature refers to limits imposed by the structure of the world and by human biology upon what it is possible for human beings to be and do, at least if they are to survive and flourish. It is an order of determinations that we infringe only at the cost of a certain 'loss' of self or 'alienation' from what is true to ourselves, and in this sense provides the essential gage by which we may judge the 'liberating' or 'repressive' quality of human institutions and cultural forms, including those through which we relate most directly to the environment and other creatures.

The essential difference or tension is, then, as suggested, between a generally 'nature-endorsing' and a generally 'nature-sceptical' response. For the former, which may take either conservative or progressive forms, 'nature' is appealed to in validation of that which we would either seek to preserve or seek to instigate in place of existing actuality; for the latter, which is usually advocated as progressive, but may be charged with conservatism in the free hand it gives to cultural determination, the appeal is always to be viewed as a dubious move designed to limit and circumscribe the possibilities of human culture.

Notes

1 In his essay on 'Nature' John Stuart Mill speaks of nature in this sense as 'what takes place without the voluntary and intentional agency of man'. See Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (Longman, London, 1874), pp. 3–65.
2 John Passmore, *Man's Reponsibility for Nature*, 2nd edn (Duckworth, London, 1980), p. 207.

3 Robert E. Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Polity Press, Oxford, 1992), p. 41; cf. pp. 30–40.
4 Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (Progess Publishers, Moscow, 1968), p. 59. (The observation is illuminatingly discussed by Neil Smith in *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1984), p. 54f. The idea of 'nature' as 'cultural construction' is more fully discussed in chapter 5.
5 Thus Goodin's general claim is that pristine nature is always to be preferred to that which has been tampered with, however congenial the effect. More specifically he argues that, if faced with the choice between a small-scale English village 'more in harmony with nature' and 'postmodern' Los Angeles, we must always opt for the former. All the same, 'grubbing out' nature to build even the most harmonious hamlet is a less acceptable option than leaving nature in its original state. See *Green Political Theory*, pp. 51–2.
6 The classic work on the subject is that of A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1964) where it is argued that it is only in the late eighteenth century that the idea attains its widest diffusion. See esp. p. 183.
7 Ibid., pp. 59–60.
8 Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle 1, 237–46 (Methuen, London, 1950), pp. 44–5.
9 Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, p. 67f.
10 *Libri Sententiarum*, II, 1, 8, cited in Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, pp. 186–7.
11 Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (Allen Lane, London, 1983), p. 25. In his preceding survey (pp. 17–24), Thomas cites, as instances of such anthropocentric ingenuity, the suggestion that horse-flies had been created 'that men should exercise their wits and industry to guard themselves against them'; that apes had been designed 'for man's mirth'; and the argument of the Elizabethan, George Owen, concerning the multiple purposes of the lobster: that it provided food to eat, exercise in cracking its legs and claws, and an object of contemplation in its wonderful suit of armour.
12 Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, p. 188f.
13 Ibid., p. 195.
14 Ibid., p. 196.
15 J. S. Mill, 'Nature' in *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 65.

16 Quoted in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989), p. 434.
17 J. S. Mill, *Nature*, pp. 13–19.
18 Willam Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966), p. 212.
19 Shakespeare, *King Lear*, I, ii. Cf. John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (Faber and Faber, London, 1949), esp. parts I, II.
20 One of the most illuminating and discriminating accounts of the role played by the idea of nature in shaping conceptions of human subjectivity is to be found in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, especially parts IV and V. My discussion here draws extensively on this work.
21 The seminal text here is Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso, London, 1979). For a full bibliography on the Frankfurt School, see David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980).
22 On both, see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 426–9, 434–42, 459–63.
23 For an illuminating tracing of these veins of Foucaultian resistance to 'nature', see James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (Harper Collins, London, 1993).

2

NATURE, HUMAN AND INHUMAN

Two closely connected distinctions have been central to Western thinking about nature: that between what is naturally given and what is contrived (the artificial) and that between what is dictated by nature and what is humanly instigated (the cultural or conventional). As R. G. Collingwood points out, in posing the question of the nature of nature the Ionian philosophers of the seventh and sixth centuries BC had already presupposed a difference between natural or 'self-occurring' things and the products of skill or artifice,[1] while by the fifth century a nature–culture demarcation is at least implicitly at work in the distinction between *nomos* (that which is a convention of culture, or socially derived norm or law) and *physis* (that which is naturally determined).

Both distinctions presume that there are certain ways in which humanity can – and indeed must – be counterposed to the rest of nature. The distinction between the natural and the artificial, for example, implies that there is a type of productive activity or creativity that is exclusive to human beings. Humanity, that is, has seen itself as differing from the rest of nature in virtue of the fact that it both reproduces and produces, or, if preferred, in virtue of the fact that it creates both natural and artificial 'products'. For while other living beings both produce in

Natural Environment, ed. Robin Attfield and Andrew Belsey (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994). See also their *Genetic Engineering: Catastrophe or Utopia?* (Wheatsheaf, London, 1988).

16 This is a point developed in criticism of Judith Butler's performance theory of gender by Sarah Chatwin (unpublished Ph.D. thesis 'Habeas Corpus: theories of embodiment in the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and contemporary feminism').

17 NASA is currently investing large sums in the research and development of a project to create the atmospheric conditions on Mars which might, in a matter of centuries, allow it to support life-forms of the kind found on earth. See report in *Geographical Magazine*, February 1993; *The Guardian*, 4 February 1993. For a discussion of the environmental ethics of the project, see Keekok Lee, 'Awe and Humility: Intrinsic Value in Nature. Beyond an Earthbound Environmental Ethic' in *Philosophy and the Natural Environment.*

18 For an example of this debate on the 'limits' of nature, see the exchange between Reiner Grundmann and Ted Benton in *New Left Review* (Benton, 'Marxism and Natural Limits', *New Left Review* 178 (November–December 1989); Grundmann's reply, *New Left Review* 187 (May–June 1991); Benton's reply to Grundmann, *New Left Review* 194 (July–August 1992).

5

NATURE AND 'NATURE'

In the previous chapter, I offered some illustration of the tension between the nature-conservationist ethic of ecology and the anti-naturalist impulse of culturalist theory; and I opened up some channels for rethinking this apparent conflict of perspectives. I here want to extend on my argument, by elaborating on the theoretical discriminations that I have suggested they both need to address more fully, though I shall be focusing here primarily on ecological discourse about nature.

Let me begin by expanding a little on the claims of anti-naturalist theory to ecological attention. As we have seen, the endorsement of nature as a site of truth and intrinsic value may easily proceed at the cost of proper recognition of the reactionary use to which these ideas have been put in the field of sexual politics. But since the forms of naturalization of the social that are criticized by feminist and gay theory have very standardly been used to legitimate other hierarchies and structures of oppression, notably those of class and racial difference, this point must be generalized into a caution against any too ready invocation of 'nature' as the victimized 'other' of human culture. Given how largely the appeal to the preservation of a 'natural' order of intrinsic worth has figured in the discourse of social conservatism, an uncritical ecological naturalism is always at risk of lending ideological support to those systems of domination that have played a major

role in generating ecological crisis. This may seem an obvious point to make. But ecological critics of the atomizing and destructive effects of instrumental rationality need to be careful in redeploying the organicist imagery that has been such a mainstay of right-wing rhetoric. Romantic and aestheticizing approaches to nature have as readily lent themselves to the expression of reactionary sentiment as sustained the radical critique of industrialism,[1] and this means that left wing ecologists, however understandably keen they may be to re-seize this tradition of romanticism for their own purposes, are dealing with a problematic legacy.

We have also to be wary of the ways in which romantic ideology may serve as the cover for the continued exploitation of nature. However accurate it may be to portray our engagement with nature as 'anthropocentric', 'arrogant' and 'instrumental', it is the work of a culture that has constantly professed its esteem for nature. The societies that have most abused nature have also perennially applauded its ways over those of 'artifice', have long valued its health and integrity over the decadence of human contrivance, and today employ pastoral imagery as the most successful of conventions to enhance the profits on everything from margarine to motor-cars.

At the same time, ecological politics needs to be ever alert to the multiple dimensions and repercussions of its own social impact. Today, we are building 'virtual reality' zoos to preserve wildlife from the miseries of captivity, and eschewing nature's fur and flesh in favour of synthetic fibres and factory-made proteins; Japanese businessmen are seeking relief from the pressures of catering to a booming leisure industry in 'refresh capsules' where they can revel in the sounds and scents of 'nature';[2] heritage and nature conservancy have become themselves big business; green products are the latest capitalist growth area; the interests of thousands of human offspring are daily discounted as we monitor the habitats of other animal species. Meanwhile public support for any radically corrective ecological programme remains vanishingly small. These developments speak to complex and contradictory attitudes to 'nature' and our place within it, and indicate that we may be contributing to its destruction and pollution in the very name of its preservation. In an overall way, they suggest that an eco-politics will prove that much more incisive the more prepared it is to question its own discourse on 'nature'.

It is, however, one thing to argue that eco-politics must attend to culturalist criticisms of naturalist rhetoric; it is another to suppose that everything has been said about nature once we have remarked on its 'textuality' and its continually shifting signifier. It is true that we can make no distinction between the 'reality' of nature and its cultural representation that is not itself conceptual, but this does not justify the conclusion that there is no ontological distinction between the ideas we have of nature and that which the ideas are about: that since nature is only signified in human discourse, inverted commas 'nature' *is* nature, and we should therefore remove the inverted commas.

In short, it is not language that has a hole in its ozone layer; and the 'real' thing continues to be polluted and degraded even as we refine our deconstructive insights at the level of the signifier. Hence the inclination to respond to the insistence on the 'textuality' of nature as Johnson did to Berkeleyan idealism, by claiming to refute it with a straightforward realist kick, by pointing to the latest oil spill or figures on species extinction and saying, 'there's nature fouled and destroyed by human industry, and I refute your anti-naturalism thus'. This is an understandable response to those who would have us focus only on the play of the 'sign' of nature. But the straightforward realist kick is not only insensitive to the ideological rep-

resentations of nature already discussed, but also fails to register the fact that an adequate response to anti-realism can only be conducted from a position which recognizes how difficult it is to refer to the landscape one is seeking to conserve simply as 'nature'. For if nature is conceptualized and valued, as it sometimes is in environmental philosophy, as that which is independent of human culture, then rather little of the environment corresponds to the concept: hardly anything we refer to as natural landscape *is* natural in this sense, and its supposed value might therefore be seen to be put in question. Even Cicero distinguished between an inherited non-human nature and a nature constructed through human activity, and concluded his survey of the forms taken by the latter by remarking that 'one may say that we seek with our human hands to create a second nature in the natural world.'[3] In our own time the human impact on the environment has been so extensive that there is an important sense in which it is correct to speak of 'nature' as itself a cultural product or construction.[4] Yet there is, of course, all the difference in the world between recognizing the truth of this and refusing to recognize the independent existence of the reality itself or the causal role played in its creation by processes that are not humanly created. It is one thing to recognize that much that is referred to as 'nature' takes the form it does only in virtue of human activity, another to suppose that this has no extra-discursive reality, or that there are no discriminations to be drawn between that which is and that which is not an effect of culture.

The distinctions in question are not, however, always clearly articulated within ecological argument, which is sometimes voiced in ways that obscure the difference between the 'nature' that is a product of human industry and historic in its formation, and the 'nature' that is theorized as prior to and independent of human activity. This tends to happen when green thinkers conceptualize

nature and its 'intrinsic' value, in terms of its independence, while at the same time referring to the rural landscape as an illustration of 'nature' in this sense. It is also evident in some of the arguments around the pros and cons of 'restoring' nature. For example, in defence of his claim that restored nature is always less than genuine nature and therefore depleted in value, Robert Goodin cites the objections that protesters made to the proposal to lease a National Trust property at Bradenham in Buckinghamshire for use as a NATO bunker. Since the bunker would have remained underground, the visual aspects of the site would have remained unchanged. Yet the protesters complained that their appreciation of the area would have been lessened by the knowledge that there was a bunker underneath it.[5] Now there were very good reasons to oppose the bunker, including this one, but Goodin's presentation of this particular objection in support of his value theory trades on the mistaken intimation that the site proposed for the bunker was pristine nature, when in fact, of course, it was a landscape already thoroughly worked over by human hand – and, indeed, if we are judging only by the number of human interventions that had gone into its creation, might have to count as more 'artificial' than some built environments. Goodin is here reliant on an 'ordinary' intuition that a piece of country estate counts as 'nature' in a way that, say, Los Angeles does not, even though in terms of his own theory of nature it is not at all obvious that it ought to be allowed to do so. It is not that Goodin is wrong to invoke his 'intuition', but rather that it is the kind of intuition that is very difficult to square with the fundamental intuition of his *theory* of nature – namely that this be conceptualized as that which is independent of human process. Something similar applies in John Passmore's case, too, since despite his professed restriction of the term 'nature' to that which is 'human neither in it itself nor in its origins',[6] much of his – very

illuminating – argument concerning the conservation and preservation of 'nature' is referring to an environment that only exists in the form it does as a consequence of human activity and to which in that sense it owes its 'origins'.

Indeed, it is not at all clear what it is that is being said to be independent of human activity in some of these arguments, or whether nature so conceived is something of which there can be said to be immediate experience. Wilderness, we might allow, does give us an *experience* of nature in this sense (though some have disputed whether there are any parts of the planet that are today entirely free of the impact of human industry). But clearly much of the experience of the countryside (especially in Western Europe) is of a humanly modified environment, and the 'nature' it instantiates that may be said to be independent of human activity would seem to refer us to *that which has been modified* and is therefore not the object of direct perception or evaluation. It would seem, that is, to refer to properties and processes that are indeed independent in the sense that they are not humanly created but only humanly managed, but that are certainly conceptually distinct from the surface forms of the environment to which they give rise as a consequence of that management. In fact a distinction of this kind seems equally applicable in the case of wilderness, which differs from the cultivated landscape not in virtue of the greater independence of the natural processes that have gone into its making, but in virtue of the fact that humanity had no hand in shaping their outcome. But if it is nature at this level – nature conceived as causal process – that the ecologists have in mind when they speak of the 'independence' of nature, then it is not clear that this is the kind of thing we can be said to 'destroy' or can be called upon to value and conserve. For nature in this sense is permanently at work in the world and an indispensable condition of every possible kind of human practice however destructive of the

environment; indeed, it is also at work within ourselves and thus cannot be viewed as exclusive to the non-human world, or identified with some separable realm of 'natural' entities that are thought of as valuable in virtue of their separation and independence of humanity.

Ecological Discourses of Nature

At any rate, it would seem important to recognize the multiple roles which 'nature' can be called upon to play in ecological discussion, and notably to distinguish between three very differing concepts it may be drawing upon. In line with the conceptual distinctions sketched in the previous chapter, I shall refer to these as the 'metaphysical', the 'realist' and the 'lay' (or 'surface') ideas of nature.

1 Employed as a metaphysical concept, which it mainly is in the argument of philosophy, 'nature' is the concept through which humanity thinks its difference and specificity. It is the concept of the non-human, even if, as we have seen, the absoluteness of the humanity–nature demarcation has been disputed, and our ideas about what falls to the side of 'nature' have been continuously revised in the light of changing perceptions of what counts as 'human'. But in a formal sense, the logic of 'nature' as that which is opposed to the 'human' or the 'cultural' is presupposed to any debates about the interpretations to be placed on the distinction and the content to be given to the ideas. One is invoking the metaphysical concept in the very posing of the question of humanity's relation to nature.
2 Employed as a realist concept, 'nature' refers to the structures, processes and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world, that provide the objects of study of the natural sciences, and

condition the possible forms of human intervention in biology or interaction with the environment. It is the nature to whose laws we are always subject, even as we harness them to human purposes, and whose processes we can neither escape nor destroy.

3 Employed as a 'lay' or 'surface' concept, as it is in much everyday, literary and theoretical discourse, 'nature' is used in reference to ordinarily observable features of the world: the 'natural' as opposed to the urban or industrial environment ('landscape', 'wilderness', 'countryside', 'rurality'), animals, domestic and wild, the physical body in space and raw materials. This is the nature of immediate experience and aesthetic appreciation; the nature we have destroyed and polluted and are asked to conserve and preserve.

I submit that when the Green Movement speaks of nature, it is most commonly in this third 'lay' or 'surface' sense: it is referring to nature as wildlife, raw materials, the non-urban environment, and thus to a 'nature' that has been affected in certain respects by human occupancy of the planet, and in some cases acquired its form only in virtue of human cultural activity. But when it appeals to humanity to preserve nature or make use of it in sustainable ways, it is also of course employing the idea in a metaphysical sense to designate an object in relation to a subject (humanity), with the presumption being that subject and object are clearly differentiable and logically distinct. At the same time, by drawing attention to human transformation (destruction, wastage, pollution, manipulation, instrumental use of) nature, it is, at least implicitly, invoking the realist idea of nature, and referring us to structures and processes that are common to all organic and inorganic entities, human beings included. Through the metaphysical concept, then, it refers to that realm of being that is differentiated from and opposed to the

being of humanity, through the realist concept to nature as causal process and through the lay concept to nature as a directly experienced set of phenomena. I shall not, however, attempt to expound these concepts any further in isolation from each other, since they are interlocking, and getting clear about the one will necessarily depend on establishing the meaning of the other.

In the first instance it is important to note the conceptual nature of the distinction between 'realist' and 'surface' nature, which is not intended to imply that these are separable dimensions, nor that the one is any more 'real' or more properly thought of as 'nature' than the other. The distinction rather (and I am here drawing on the work of Roy Bhaskar, and on Ted Benton's employment of Bhaskar's theory in developing his own ecological argument)[7] is between two aspects of a complex and ontologically stratified whole. The 'realist' concept is used in reference to those 'deep structures' of physicality and its causality whose processes are constantly at work in the world, the 'surface' concept in reference to the empirically observable 'nature' that is continually transformed as a consequence of the operation of these causal powers. The contrast here is between the nature that is presupposed as a permanent ground of all ecological activity and environmental change, and its historically changing surface effects, whether these be naturally precipitated (the earthquake or volcanic eruption) or humanly engineered (the ancient barrow or nuclear bunker). Nature is invoked in the realist sense not to discriminate between human and non-human being, but as the concept of that which is common to all animate and inanimate entities, and whose particular laws and processes are the precondition and constraint upon all technological activity, however ambitious (whether, for example, it be genetic engineering, the creation of new substances and energy sources, attempted manipulations of climatic conditions

or gargantuan schemes to readjust to the ecological effects of earlier manipulations).[8]

An observance of a distinction of this kind between 'deep' and 'surface' levels of nature is, as I have already suggested in the previous chapter, indispensable to the coherence of ecological argument. Without it, at any rate, it would seem difficult to make sense either of the notion of our 'instrumental' use of nature (which implies a nonchalant and myopic harnessing of its causal powers with a view solely to the advancement of human interests), or of the prescription to 'conserve' nature (which implies the need for us to change our forms of intervention in those causal powers). In short, it is only if we recognize a distinction of this kind that we can discriminate in the way required by green politics between what is and is not changed when human beings modify nature. As Ted Benton has put it:

> Factories, railways, telegraphic cables, hedgerows, fields and so on all bear the imprint of this restless human activity of shaping, moulding, rearranging things to suit our purposes. True, some of the changes wrought go deeper than this. Factories may be made of brick or stone, hedgerows of naturally-occurring species of tree and shrub, all of which have fairly obvious immediate or mediate sources in nature, given prior to and independently of human activity. However, there are also plastics, selectively bred or genetically engineered organisms, and so on. Humans create new kinds of substance and in doing so do not *merely* 'trigger' or 'regulate' causal mechanisms already present in nature. But my claim is that no matter how 'deep' we go into the structure of the materials and beings with which we work, it remains the case that the transformations both *presuppose* the causal constancy of structure and causal powers at a *deeper* structural level and are limited by the nature of that deeper-level structure.[9]

To accept this realist perspective, however, essential though it is to the coherence of ecological politics, is not in itself to take up a normative position towards nature (to specify what attitudes we should ideally adopt towards it or how best to conduct ourselves in our interactions with it). Nature in the realist sense is, as Benton himself suggests, essentially a theoretical-explanatory concept, which can tell us about the causes of problems in certain relations to nature and the conceptual coherence of envisioned alternatives, but does not tell us what is desirable in the way of comportment towards it.[10] It is true that nature in the realist sense sets certain limits on what we can do, or even try to do, and we must observe these on pain either of looking very foolish (as did Canute) or else perishing in the effort to transcend them. But since the elasticity of these limits is very much in dispute even among the ecologists themselves,[11] their existence does not guide in any but the broadest sense the policies we should adopt to the natural world. Indeed, since nature conceived as deep level structure has been a condition of all practices hitherto adopted, including those most condemned by green politics, we must conclude that none of the normative questions raised by the latter are to be settled *simply* by reference to the limits imposed by nature in the realist sense. In other words, there is a vast range of options open to human beings in this respect, all of them having divergent consequences on the planetary eco-system. Nature conceived as a complex of causal powers and structures clearly has its say in determining these consequences, and many of these, including some of the most calamitous from an ecological point of view, are unintended effects of the limits and conditions it imposes. We must observe these conditions if we wish to avoid such calamities and to preserve nature conceived as a set of resources and surface environment, but we shall not 'destroy' nature at this level if we fail to do so. Nature at this level is indifferent to our choices, will

persist in the midst of environmental destruction, and will outlast the death of all planetary life.

Nature, then, in this conception is not that which we are being asked to 'conserve' or towards which we have attitudes of the kind that enter into moral and aesthetic evaluations. Where ecology is associated with a set of political demands and requires us to preserve rather than destroy nature, or to rethink our attitudes towards it, it is drawing on the other conceptions to which I have drawn attention. The complexities of the 'lay' or 'surface' concept and some of their implications for the politics of environmentalism form the topic of the following chapter. For the remainder of this one, I propose to consider the implications for ecological politics of the answers given to the questions concerning the humanity–nature distinction that are raised through the 'metaphysical' concept.

Ecology and Metaphysics

I have consistently argued that there can be no ecological prescription that does not presuppose a demarcation between humanity and nature. Unless human beings are differentiated from other organic and inorganic forms of being, they can be made no more liable for the effects of their occupancy of the eco-system than can any other species, and it would make no more sense to call upon them to desist from 'destroying' nature than to call upon cats to stop killing birds. Since any eco-politics, however dismissive of the superiority of *homo sapiens* over other species, accords humanity responsibilities for nature, it presumes the possession by human beings of attributes that set them apart from all other forms of life.

We may reformulate this point in terms of the reliance of eco-politics (however tacitly) on a non-reductionist approach to human 'being': the species-specificity of

humanity must be conceptually distinguished and observed as a condition of imputing ecological accountability. But since our species-specific attributes may be regarded either as making us different in kind from the rest of nature or as marking only a difference of degree within an essential continuity of being, it is clear that anti-reductionism can be defended from either perspective. Specifically human needs, capacities and modes of living may be deemed such as to render implausible any attempt to explain them by analogy with those of other animals; or they may be thought explicable only by reference to what is commonly shared between human beings and other creatures. In short, an anti-reductionist approach to human 'being' can be professed from either an anti-naturalist or a naturalist perspective.

It is therefore not surprising that the key debate among those ecological theorists who have addressed these metaphysical issues concerns not anti-reductionism itself, but naturalism, and specifically the extent to which the latter is essential to the adoption of sound ecologial principles. Can one, as it were, be green without being anti-dualist? Now it may be said that the question is posed too baldly since so much depends on what is meant by being 'green' and what is meant by being 'dualist'. But if we treat it loosely as asking whether people can subscribe to ecological critiques of human abuse of nature while insisting upon our ontological difference, then it would seem that on the whole the argument of the ecological movement has been in the negative. Many green thinkers, that is, have tended to regard metaphysical naturalism as the obvious ally of their cause, and rejected dualism as inherently un-eco-friendly and even incompatible with support for their objectives. In other words, while the emphasis on our difference is thought to license an instrumental and destructive use of nature as mere means to human ends, the emphasis on our continuity and communality with

other species is presumed to encourage a more proper respect and preservative instinct for nature. The essential point at issue here has sometimes been expressed in terms of the conflict between ecology and 'humanism'. As Tim Hayward has put it:

> It is widely assumed by ecologistic writers, that humanism must be anti-ecological, or 'speciesist', due to an association of ideas which runs something like this: in starting from perceptions of the distinctiveness of human beings, humanists overemphasise their uniqueness vis-à-vis the rest of nature, and this leads them to see humans as apart from rather than a part of nature: a corollary of this is to view humans as ends in themselves, and the rest of nature as means only; this in turn serves as a legitimation for the Promethean project of 'mastering' nature.[12]

Hayward himself contests the assumption that 'humanist' and ecological agendas are in this sense opposed, while at the same time arguing against naturalist attempts to reconcile these: recognition of the ontological duality of human and animal being, he suggests, is not necessarily inimical to ecological objectives, and may be important to their promotion in ways that respect the quality and distinctiveness of human needs and capacities. It is from this perspective that he questions Ted Benton's defence of a 'non-reductive naturalism' as providing the more coherent basis from which to pursue an eco-socialist programme: a programme, that is, wherein social justice and the pursuit of human self-realization can be rendered consistent with natural limits on resource consumption and due regard for the needs of other creatures.[13] Hayward suggests, in fact, that Benton is seeking a synthesis of environmentalism's normative anti-humanism with a Marxism that is understood as a theoretical anti-humanism. But since Benton would want to defend his position as fully consistent

with a certain conception of 'humanism', this may be to invoke a prejudicial vocabulary. What is essentially at issue between them, one may argue, is the construction to be placed on 'humanism', and whether this does or does not preclude naturalist accounts of human formation and well-being.

Benton does not deny that there are 'self-realization' needs that appear peculiar to human beings as self-conscious and historical beings. But he associates dualism with a failure to respect the relative sophistication and complexity of the mental and social life of other species, and suggests that it often goes together with an imperializing disdain for animality and ecological co-existence. He would claim, in contrast, firstly, that there are many human needs which are, in fact, held in common with other animals, and that these can best be analysed by viewing them as specific modes of doing what other animals also do; and secondly, that those ('self-realization') needs that are wholly particular to human beings, and resistant to explanation in terms of a clearly perceptible cross-species need, are nonetheless illuminated by viewing them as derived from attributes or requirements common to both humans and non-humans. It is only a naturalistic approach of this type, he argues, that 'begins with the common predicament of natural beings and moves from that basis to render intelligible their specific differences in constitution, structure and mode of life', that can provide a satisfactory account of the *differentia specifica* whether of human beings or of any other living creature.[14] Thus, not only in respect of human activity relating to physical reproduction and gratification, but even in the case of 'spiritual' or 'cultural' pursuits, he suggests that the specification of the distinctively human 'proceeds not by identifying a further *sui generis* class of attributes or needs possessed only by humans, but, rather, by identifying the species-specific ways in which humans exhibit attributes

or meet needs which they share with other species'.[15] Cognitive, aesthetic and normative capacities and needs are thus to be viewed as 'in some sense consequential upon those needs which are common to natural beings, or upon the species-specific ways in which those common needs are met'.[16]

In the absence of any developed application of this naturalist programme (and Benton acknowledges it needs much further elaboration),[17] it is difficult to judge of the extent to which it can sustain its claim to be 'non-reductive' while remaining genuinely informative. My own sense is that Benton's argument may be reliant on an inherently problematic distinction between two types of human need or activity: those (relating to nutrition, reproduction etc.) whose specific modes are said to be explicable by reference to what other animals also do, and those ('spiritual' or 'cultural') needs which are said to be consequential upon those specific modes. At any rate, it seems to me to be highly questionable whether the specific modes in which human beings gratify physical needs can be understood without invoking precisely those 'spiritual' dispositions which are said to be 'in some sense' emergent or derivable from them. In other words, what distinguishes the specifically human mode of gratification of needs held in common with other creatures is the aesthetic and symbolic dimension itself, and one must question whether a non-reductive naturalism of the kind defended by Benton can fully respect this differentiation without falling into circularity.

A further – clearly related – problem is that Benton's claim that 'spiritual' capacities are to be viewed as 'in some sense' consequential upon other commonly shared 'animal' needs is altogether too evasive. For unless we are told more precisely in what sense this is, it is impossible to determine whether the position held is indeed non-reductive or not. As Hayward points out:

> If 'in some sense consequential' is to mean something more than the uncontroversial point that certain basic biological needs (e.g. eating) have to be satisfied before other (cultural) needs (e.g. composing symphonies) can be satisfied, or even arise, then it might be interpreted in one or other of the following ways. (a) The fulfilment of a 'higher' (or, as Benton calls it, 'supervenient') need is *eo ipso* the fulfilment of a 'more fundamental' need – e.g. a kind of sublimation: if so, then presumably the basic need could also be directly fulfilled without such a mediation; in which case, though, there would be nothing of the 'higher' need which really has the compelling quality of a 'need' at all. (b) If, on the other hand, it is consequent on the fulfilment of basic needs that higher needs arise, *as qualitatively new needs*, then it would not appear to be possible to explain the latter in terms of the former, since they would no longer be specific ways of meeting some more general need, but entirely irreducible, 'autonomous' needs.[18]

Since the first of these interpretations is reductionist, and the second dualist, neither, it seems, can be what Benton intends. Nor, it seems, can Benton mean that human needs can always be analysed as developed or elaborated forms of animal needs, or if he does, it is surely equally challengeable. In the first place, this carries the – highly contentious – implication that all human skills or powers are in some sense 'needed' or meeting needs. Benton himself explicitly rejects any crude biologism of the kind that might invite us to view, say, nuclear arsenals as the 'satisfiers' of an elaborated version of a porcupine's need for its quills, and he is surely right to do so. But anyone who is understandably resistant to that line of interpretation is surely opposed to it precisely because, by confusing properties that are biologically endowed and transmitted with culturally acquired capacities, it invites us to think of such capacities (e.g. to wage nuclear war) as

if they were essential attributes of human species existence. Perhaps, then, as Hayward suggests, what Benton has in mind is a view of distinctively human needs as emergent properties of needs shared with other animals: as 'complex needs which retain elements of more basic simple needs, but also incorporate a further "higher" element such that the whole need is something more than the sum of its parts – an emergent need which is neither reducible to the simple basic need nor autonomous of it'.[19] But as Hayward points out, this in effect confounds needs with 'emergent powers' or capacities, which is not at all what Benton wants, since his whole point is that human beings have developed many 'powers' to do things (such as build nuclear arsenals) that go against their needs.

The problem with the case put forward by Benton is that in its argument for *naturalism* it seeks to explain everything that human beings do as consequential upon needs held in common with other animals, and this invites us to view and accept as 'in some sense' natural all of humanity's various (and often extremely ecologically destructive) ways of doing things. But in order to preserve himself from *reductionism*, Benton must invoke, if only implicitly, a prior evaluation of human ways of doing things that distinguishes between their more or less 'naturally needed' quality – and the effect of this is to render those modes of doing things that are deemed not needed, or 'falsely' needed, unamenable to explanation in terms of his naturalist theory. I am thus substantially in agreement with Hayward's point that

> Benton expects more from a theory of needs than it will be able to yield, and is seeking to hold together an unsustainable set of claims: that the development of human species powers gives rise to new needs; that only some of those needs are 'real', and that a naturalistic account of how powers develop new needs will tell us which of these are *really* needs. The question this leaves us with is how any (normative) distinction between real and apparent needs can be generated from an account which would show that *all* new needs are produced by the development of species powers.[20]

Decisions about how we should comport ourselves, whether in our relations to each other or to nature, necessarily involve evaluation of the priority to be accorded to differing needs, capacities and forms in which human beings have pursued 'self-realization', and cannot be derived directly from some supposedly wholly objective knowledge we could in principle attain about the 'truth' of our needs. We may argue that there are some needs that ought to be universally met precisely because they are naturally dictated requirements of health and survival.[21] But we can do so only by appealing to the justice of equally providing for needs that are common to us all.

There is a further, more specifically ecological problem, so it seems to me, in the assumption that there is an objectively cognizable set of 'truly' human needs that we have in virtue of our common species-being, namely that it might invite us to suppose that these are necessarily compatible with what nature can furnish, and that we have only to get clear about the former (hence to dispense with 'false' needs) for ecological harmony to be restored. But this is surely to look at the problem from the wrong end on, and for a naturalistic philosopher might seem tantamount to arguing that the dinosaur became extinct through an excess of 'false' needs. Even if there were agreement on what is 'truly' needed, and a reorganization of production with a view to ensuring its universal satisfaction, there can be no guarantee of an indefinite fit between that which is established as collectively required as a condition of survival and flourishing and the provisioning of nature. It may well be the case that a certain level of material provisioning for everyone, both now and in the future,

is consistent with indefinite ecological sustainability.

But nature is not bound to deliver even on a norm of 'basic need' satisfaction, and how far it could, even in principle do so, depends on a number of relatively unpredictable variables (rates of human population growth, the technical potential for continuously enhancing the efficiency in the use of existing resources and energy forms, the rate and extent of pollution control and of new resources development, etc.).[22] Even less in the case of 'flourishing' can we proceed as if we could determine in some objective sense what provision, over and above basic need satisfaction, we would need in order to ensure it, or suppose that nature will automatically prove accommodating.

The point, surely, is that any ecological politics involves a choice of what – and whose – needs or preferences are going to be satisfied in the light of the available knowledge of ecological constraints. 'Flourishing' is what we ought to be re-thinking in the light of current and likely future resources; it is not an *a priori* given of human nature whose 'true' needs nature can be expected to fulfil. Meeting ecological constraints may require us, quite possibly, to sacrifice or severely restrict some sources of gratification and self-realization that it seems very difficult simply to dismiss as 'false' (very swift and flexible means of transport, for example). It will almost certainly require us to be imaginative and undogmatic in our attitudes to what we can enjoy: to open ourselves to the possibilities of an 'alternative hedonism' and to modes of living and self-fulfilment very different from those associated with our current assumptions about 'flourishing'. Openness of this kind, I suggest, is not necessarily encouraged by the adoption of a theoretical perspective that tends to discount the validity of subjective experience (and the important, if never exclusive, role it must be accorded in legitimating any 'politics of need') in favour of objective pronouncements on what is or is not a 'genuine' requirement of a

'flourishing' existence. Rather than adopt a position that implies that there can be a decisive authority on needs, we should recognize the extent to which human beings can be said to acquire 'new needs' in ceasing to experience old ones. Obviously, 'human nature' is not indefinitely malleable at this level, and we can certainly question the propriety of many forms of current consumption from the standpoint of their impact on the environment and the universal satisfaction of 'basic' needs. But to assume too much fixity in what we need as a condition of 'flourishing' would, in the end, be to undermine the demand that we should accommodate our consumption to the limits imposed by nature. At any rate, it would appear difficult on that basis to develop a compelling hedonist case for doing so.

Finally, let us note (though my argument here is in no sense directed against Benton's form of naturalism) that even if there are some who feel that they cannot be said to 'flourish' in a world where others are starving – that their 'flourishing' depends on everyone else having the means to do so – we can hardly claim a universal consent to this conception of 'flourishing'. In practice, as we know, the 'coat' of 'flourishing' can be cut in many differing ways, depending on who is in charge of the tailoring and what their priorities are. The fact that resources are limited no more determines who will be made to feel the pinch than the universality of the need for food ensures its satisfaction. The attempt to accommodate ecological crisis, in short, can be made in a variety of ways: capitalist, socialist, authoritarian, fascist, all of them in contestation over what it means for human beings to 'flourish' (which means also over the issue whether some, more than others, should be allowed to do so).

To denounce humanism as a form of speciesism that is automatically bad for the rest of nature is falsely to universalize a species that is profoundly divided against itself on

these kinds of issue. Many of its members are not at all convinced of the 'special' status of the others, and some of them will happily spend a good deal more respecting the needs of their polo pony in a week than an African peasant earns in a year. Of course, this latter point is itself 'speciesist' in the sense that it implies that the African peasant deserves as good or better than the polo pony. But this in itself only serves to highlight how central value issues of this kind are to ecological politics.

Humans and Animals

More generally – though my points here apply essentially only to the more reductive ('naked ape') forms of naturalism[23] – we may argue that attempts to account for human in terms of animal behaviour are vulnerable to the charge of being speculative and hence unverifiable. It is always open to one defending this position to speculate on the ways in which human 'needs' for poetry and pornography, casinos and Catholicism, archaeology and astronomy are 'built upon' or emergent out of more 'animal' types of need, but it is only if we are already disposed to overlook critical differences between symbolic and non-symbolic modes of being in the world that we shall be inclined to accept the account as uncontroversially informative; and even then, it can always be challenged by an alternative naturalist explanation of the putative line of connection between the human and the non-human. This is because what we map back onto 'nature' as prototypical of humanly elaborated needs or dispositions is necessarily to some degree a projection of our own self-understanding, and of the meanings attributed to our specific ways of doing things. There are ecologists, as we have seen, who are prone to accuse dualists of an anthropocentric arrogance in the emphasis they place on human

superiority. But there may also be something dubiously anthropocentric about their own readiness to assume that human needs, desires and capacities give us a direct access to knowledge of their 'analogues' in the worlds and life-styles of other species. It may be that we do not know as much about the meaning of animal modes of comportment as some naturalist accounts assume that we do. Perhaps the more Kantian approach, which argues that we cannot know what it would be for other creatures to consider themselves subjectively as ends, is less arrogantly humanist than is sometimes supposed, since it accepts, as Peter Strawson has put it, that for lack of the words to say what it is to be without them, 'we must in this matter be content with knowing ourselves.'[24]

In any case, it would seem important to distinguish between the 'arrogance' of a humanism that appeals to human difference in order to justify the maltreatment of animals and the 'humanist' defence of specifically human forms of self-fulfilment. It is one thing to 'boast' of our rights over animals, another to subscribe to the force of Hamlet's point, when he asks:

> What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
> Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unused.[25]

Admittedly, to our environmentally attuned ears, Hamlet's protestation may seem somewhat insensitive to the beast's ends, but its presumptions about the distinctive qualities of a human life are surely ones we want to respect – and can respect without in any sense endorsing the abuse of animals. There is a confusion, I think, in supposing that in any 'vaunting' of the human over the animal mode of

existence we are somehow doing an injustice to the latter or at risk of licensing indifference to animal suffering.

Moreover, we should be wary of the 'cruelty' that may be lurking in the 'kindness' of attempting to give voice to the 'subjective ends' of other animals. Projects such as that to extend the 'community of equals' to include the great apes[26] are certainly well-intentioned, but the bonds they seek to cement are arguably too little respectful of the quality of ape life and the ways in which it must be allowed to differ from our own. We should certainly protect apes from physical and mental cruelty as far as it is in our power, but whether the right way to go about it is to attempt to include them within a community in which they would necessarily seem to have to figure as a class of 'sub-humans' or 'second-class citizens' is altogether more dubious. Nor does it seem at all appropriate to claim in justification of such a project that rights should be granted to great apes on the same grounds we accord them to human imbeciles. We regard human beings who are too damaged to respect rights or to claim them for themselves as nonetheless possessing them in recognition of their potential to claim them had they met with less misfortune. To argue that fully flourishing animals, who in their normal state have no more capacity than the least self-realized human being to appreciate the meaning of a system of rights and obligations, should be accepted within the human moral community, is to overlook some fundamental and critical conceptual barriers; and, indeed, to ignore them at risk of abusing both members of our own species and failing to protect other species from misguided and potentially harmful forms of protection. For damaged human beings should no more be regarded as comparable to flourishing apes than should flourishing apes be exposed to the possible forms of maltreatment that might be invited by their legitimation as in some sense human 'equals'. To be sensitive in this area is precisely

not to seek to overcome these conceptual barriers or to undermine our intuitive respect for them, but rather to be as open as possible to the implications for non-human nature of the human forms of sensibility with which we are bound to approach it.

Of course, the Kantian line can be used to support assumptions about animal nature that are no less crass than those that the theorists of the 'naked ape' have offered about human nature. I would strongly dissent from any attempt to bend such arguments in support of an approach to other sentient creatures that denied their capacity for pleasure and pain. Nor am I implying that there is something inherently misconceived or presumptuous in the attempt to speak 'on behalf' of other animals. The point is not that we should dispense with human interpretations of their needs (an injunction that it would in any case be impossible to fulfil), and advocates of animal liberation are quite right to highlight the ways in which cruelty or indifference to the consequences of our actions towards other creatures is licensed by particular constructions of human 'needs' or 'identity'. The point is rather that in any understanding we bring to other animals we need to be aware of the limits of our understanding;[27] our very empathy with them requires us, as it were, to respect their difference from us and the ways this may constrain our capacity to 'communicate' on their behalf. To 'think' from their position is, as Derek Mahon suggests in his poem, *Man and Bird*,[28] to accept a certain inability to do so:

> All fly away at my approach
> As they have done time out of mind,
> And hide in the thicker leaves to watch
> The shadowy ingress of mankind.
>
> My whistle-talk fails to disarm
> Presuppositions of ill-will;

Although they rarely come to harm
The ancient fear is in them still.

Which irritates my *amour propre*
As an enlightened alien
And renders yet more wide the gap
From their world to the world of men.

So perhaps they have something after all –
Either we shoot them out of hand
Or parody them with a bird-call
Neither of us can understand.

Considerations of this kind do not imply that we should give up on all attempts to think across the 'gap' between the world of animals and the 'world of men'. To conceive of oneself as an 'enlightened alien' doomed to parodic whistling might precisely count as one such attempt. Nor do they imply that we should view our 'spiritual' needs or aesthetic, cognitive and moral capacities in wholly idealist terms as a supernatural endowment from the deity. To recognize what is exclusive to *homo sapiens* is not to reject evolutionary theory or to deny the particular determinations exercised by biology on what human beings can be or do. But it does mean recognizing that there are indeed features (language, reflexivity and evaluation, a vast excess of learnt over inherited skills, knowledge of mortality, an immense diversity of views within the species as to *how* best to do things) that pertain only to human cultures; and that reductive naturalist accounts will always be open to the objection that, by seeking to explain these by reference to other animals, they fail to engage with their species-specificity.

It also means recognizing that the human predicament is sufficiently different from that of any other living creature to make it implausible to suppose that metaphysical naturalism is the automatic ally of ecology, dualism (or 'humanism') its obvious enemy. For if human beings (or

significant numbers of them) do need to change their patterns of relating with the rest of nature, reminding them of what they share with other animals, who are incapable of any deliberated alteration of their ways, seems no more obviously persuasive than does the insistence on their difference. It is difficult to see why 'humanists' should necessarily be indifferent to the fate of non-human nature, or prove incapable of advancing its cause. Nor does there seem any reason to suppose that naturalism will guarantee good human relations or necessarily help to mitigate ecologically damaging forms of social exploitation.

The essential point here is that the relations between the adoption of a particular ontological outlook, and the attitudes one holds towards the conservation of nature, are much more tenuous than some ecologists seem to suppose; and no ecological set of prescriptions automatically follows from our putting the ontological knife in at one point rather than another. Indeed I would want to emphasize, in support of this point, that the forms of sensibility towards ourselves and other animals that I have here been advocating seem to me to be as readily endorsable from the 'non-reductive naturalist' position advanced by Benton as they do from the kind of 'dualism' defended by Hayward. Both the dualist and anti-dualist may be equally sensitive to the cruelties or malpractices that may be justified on the basis of their respective positions, or, in other words, may bring very similar intuitions or feelings to bear in their judgements about human relations to nature, despite their differences of ontological commitment. In a sense what this points to, in fact, is the limitations of presenting our feelings for nature as if they were solely determined by our theories of it, since our theories are in an important sense only as good as the sensibilities we bring to their interpretation and the constructions we place upon their implications for practice. We do not, as it were, first decide whether humans are or are not

quite distinct from animals and then adjust our feelings and practices accordingly. We develop or respond to the theories in the light of the feelings we feel (or fail to feel) towards nature, and thus far it may be said that specific ontological commitments do not govern, even though they can exercise a considerable influence, upon ecological responses.[29]

Moreover, whether we view our species-specific characteristics as rendering us distinct from the rest of nature, or as participant in its form of being, though in ways that also 'in some sense' divide us from it, we still have to decide what our view implies for the particular programmes we should adopt towards the natural realm (which means deciding what value we place on our own 'special' status in regard to it; to what extent nature should be preserved primarily for its 'intrinsic' qualities, to what extent it should be preserved because of our human dependencies and interests; to what extent our interests can be claimed to include an interest in the preservation of the 'intrinsic' worth of nature, and so forth).

The adoption of a naturalist metaphysics, I would argue, is no more obviously bound to generate progressive policies on these issues than is dualism bound to remain trapped within those forms of instrumental rationality that have made them so pressing. Since contrary political ideologies can be constructed upon both dualist and non-dualist positions, the commitment to either may be said to be less critical to the practices of the Green Movement than the evaluative interpretations that are brought to these differing perspectives on the nature–culture, nature–humanity, divides.

Notes

1 Cf. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (Hogarth, London, 1987), p. 229f; Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990), pp. 60–1. See also the essays collected in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920* (Croom Helm, Beckenham, 1987).

2 See Gavan McCormack, 'The Price of Affluence: the Political Economy of Japanese Leisure', *New Left Review* 188 (July–August, 1991), pp. 121–34 (the 'refresh capsules' and other hi-tech stress relief facilities are described on p. 123).

3 Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II, 151–2; see Neil Smith, *Uneven Development* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1984), pp. 45–6.

4 Notably in the work by Neil Smith cited above; in Ed Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (Verso, London, 1989); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1989); Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1984); cf. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, Oxford, 1991); Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1991).

5 Robert Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Polity, Oxford, 1992), p. 32.

6 John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, 2nd edn (Duckworth, London, 1980), p. 207.

7 Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Harvester Press, Hassocks, 1978); *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Harvester Press, Brighton, 1979); *Reclaiming Reality* (Verso, London, 1980); *Dialectic, The Pulse of Freedom* (Verso, London, 993); Andrew Collier offers a valuable introduction to Bhaskar's work in *Critical Realism: an Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (Verso, London, 1994). For Benton's ecological development of a 'realist' theory, see 'Marxism and Natural Limits', *New Left Review* 178 (November–December, 1989), pp. 51–86 (now reprinted in *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism*, ed. Peter Osborne (Verso, London, 1990), and 'Ecology, Socialism and the Mastery of Nature: a Reply to Reiner Grundmann', *New Left Review* 194 (July–August 1992), pp. 55–74. See also *Natural Relations* (Verso, London, 1993).

8 Ibid., p. 66f.

9 Ibid., p. 66.

10 Ibid., p. 58–9; cf. Benton's point that 'to recognize the "ecological facts of life", so to speak, is quite different from taking a certain view of how nature works as morally prescriptive.' (p. 69).

11 This is the important issue of dispute between Reiner Grundmann and Benton, the former (in his reply to Benton's 'Marxism and Natural Limits' in *New Left Review* 187 (May–June, 1991), pp. 103–20; and cf. his book on *Marxism and Ecology* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1991) emphasizing the almost indefinite technical possibilities for overcoming naturally imposed barriers on our powers to transform and 'master' nature, the latter insisting that the 'idea of a limitless mastery, the project of "controlling all natural and social processes" is literally unthinkable' ('Ecology, Socialism and the Mastery of Nature', p. 67).

12 Tim Hayward, 'Ecology and Human Emancipation', *Radical Philosophy* 62 (Autumn 1992), p. 12.

13 Hayward in particular takes issue with two articles by Benton: 'Humanism = Speciesism? Marx on Humans and Animals', *Radical Philosophy* 50 (Autumn 1988), pp. 4–18, in which Benton offers his view of naturalism as a corrective to the dualist tendencies of Marx's argument on nature in the 1844 Manuscripts; and 'On the Limits of Malleability', *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 4 (1990), pp. 68–71, in which Benton offers some criticisms of Richard Lichtman's account of human nature in an article in the same issue of *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. Cf. John O'Neill's discussion of how far Marx's approach to nature in his early work may be said to be 'eco-friendly' in 'Humanism and Nature', *Radical Philosophy* 66 (Spring 1994), pp. 21–9. O'Neill concludes that there are indeed central components of Marx's early thought that lend themselves to an 'anthropocentric humanism', and thus cannot be incorporated into defensible ecological political theory. But he also argues that the aspects of Marx's argument that most need to be rejected (notably his view of nature as 'man's inorganic body') are also those that have often been thought by greens to be closest in spirit to their own concerns.

14 Benton, 'Humanism = Speciesism ?', p. 13; cf. *Natural Relations*, pp. 54–7.

15 Ibid., p. 54.

16 Ibid., p. 56.

17 It is, he argues, no more than 'a very open-ended promissory note', see *Natural Relations*, p. 56.

18 Hayward, 'Ecology and Human Emancipation', p. 8.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 For a very forceful case in defence of this, see Len Doyal and Ian Gough, *A Theory of Human Need* (Macmillan, London, 1991).

22 These points are developed further in the last section of my review of Doyal and Gough, *A Theory of Human Need*, *New Left Review* 197 (January–February 1993), pp. 113–28; see also Doyal's response, *New Left Review* 200 (July–August 1993).

23 See, for example, the works cited in note 18, ch. 2.

24 Peter Strawson, *Bounds of Sense* (Methuen, London, 1966), p. 273; cf. Hayward, 'Ecology and Human Emancipation', p. 10.

25 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, IV. iv.

26 Cf. Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer (eds), *The Great Ape Project: Equality beyond humanity*, (Fourth Estate, June 1993), whose 'Declaration on the Great Apes' calls for 'the extension of the community of equals to include all great apes: human beings, chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans' and defines the 'community of equals' as 'the moral community within which we accept certain basic moral principles or rights as governing our relations with each other and enforceable by law'.

27 For Benton's discussion of the implications of this point, see *Natural Relations*, pp. 162–5, 212–15.

28 From *Four Walks in the Country Near Saint-Brieuc*, in Derek Mahon, *Selected Poems* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991), p. 16.

29 Cf. Michael Reid's emphasis on the primacy of empathetic feeling over discursive reasoning in determining our responses to the suffering of animals ('The Call of Nature', *Radical Philosophy* 64 (Summer 1993), pp. 13–18), though Reid, it seems to me, bends the stick too far in the other direction, and does not give due recognition to the important role that theory and discursive reasoning can play in changing the quality of our 'immediate' affective responses to the world.

22 No imputation of 'sneering' is here intended to Williams himself, who has done more than anyone to alert us to the 'dialectic' of environmentalism. See the penultimate section of this chapter.
23 Elmar Altvater, *The Future of the Market*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Verso, London, 1993), p. 187; cf. pp. 182–3. Altvater is here drawing on recent German research on human energy use.
24 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (Sage, London, 1990), p. 96; cf. Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (Methuen, London, 1987), p. 24.
25 Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*, p. 46.
26 Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, pp. 94–5.
27 Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*, pp. 53, 72. Cf. Wiener, *English Culture*, p. 50.
28 Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*, p. 53. Cf. Patrick Wright *On Living in an Old Country* (Verso, London, 1985), esp. ch. 2.
29 Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*, p. 59. Hewison argues, moreover, that the bargain is one which very often cedes the public very minimal access to the estates they are funding. But see also Urry's response to the criticism of Hewison and Wright of the National Trust, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 110f.
30 Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*, pp. 94–5, 98.
31 Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, pp. 110–12.
32 Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 289.
33 Wiener, *English Culture*, p. 61.
34 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 95–6.
35 Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 262.
36 As is evident from John Sheail's account of the struggles of local councils in his work on *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981). See esp. ch. 2, pp. 11–20 on the efforts of the Surrey council.
37 Altvater, *The Future of the Market*, pp. 193–8.
38 Clearly the *real* driving force of all of us! See Wiener, *English Culture*, p. 81.
39 Cf. Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (Verso, London, 1980), p. 81.
40 Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 184, pp. 36–7.
41 For further discussion of this ecocentric argument on the value of nature, see chapter 8.

7

LOVING NATURE

Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the facade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the facade of a palace double its size lent the heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting. Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but alas, if times be not fair! Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings oversadly tinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair.

Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule: human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle-gardens of South Europe are to him now; and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he hastens from the Alps to the sand-dunes of Scheveningen.[1]

Justly famed for its depiction of 'nature' Hardy's commentary on Egdon Heath is also interesting testimony to the difficulties of writing about the aesthetic experience of it. Raymond Williams, we may recall, would have us recognize both the permanence of the need for the countryside and the cultural relativity of its expression. Hardy, in this passage, illustrates how difficult the spirit of this compact may be to observe in the letter. For even as he is disposed to offer a general reflection on the emotional responses of 'our race', Hardy reveals many of the reasons why it may be illegitimate to do so. Pulled as his text is, in certain respects, towards a discourse of 'man' and 'nature', it is as constantly pulled out of that framework of thinking by its acknowledgement of the factors that disqualify so abstract an approach. No sooner has it offered some universalist observation about the 'men' who have 'oftener suffered from the mockery of a place' than these 'men' have yielded to the more particular community of those of a 'scarcer instinct', and 'instinct' itself even more rapidly to the idea of 'recently learnt emotion'.

The 'human souls' of the opening of the second paragraph have been transmuted to the 'more thinking among mankind' by its mid-point, who have then in turn relayed their aesthetic to the 'commonest tourist' by its end. The reference to an 'accepted' landscape as if it were indeed a general preference is in itself belied by the generality of the claim about the demise of orthodoxy: the attractions of the sublime are, we are given to believe, in some general sense replacing those of the pastoral. Nor is it a question here of simply recognizing that in some epochal way the fashion in 'nature' can change; even as Hardy pits the reign of some supposedly general aesthetic against another, as if it *were* the mood of the culture at large, the qualifications that disturb the universal humanism of the social reference invite us also to think about which part of 'our race' has dictated the vogue either in the

beauty called 'charming and fair', or in the more sombre attractions of the 'sublime'.

His equivocal discourse is an index of his sensitivity to that which must check the impulse to speak in any universal terms about human responses to nature. Even as Hardy is inclined to attribute some common aesthetic feeling to us all, he is alert to those factors that detract from confident pronouncements on its quality, and demand a more relativist appraisal. He thus registers a tension between the more universal and the more particular commentary that it is important to sustain in any exploration of humanity's 'love of nature'.

At one level, it is certainly unjustifiable to speak of what 'everyone' feels (or has felt) for nature, since we have the evidence here only of the sentiments recorded by a particular part of 'our race'. On the other hand, it may be equally presumptuous to suppose that the feelings which have been voiced are exclusive to that fraction of the human community that gave expression to them, or that the absence of a cultural record bespeaks an absence of sentiment. It may, in other words, be as complacent to assume that it is only the 'more thinking among mankind' who have felt the headiest inspiration in nature, or that their tastes have always cued those of the 'less thinking', as to overlook their hegemonic role in the creation of a supposedly 'common' aesthetic. In short, there could be as much elitism in refusing to credit any talk of 'human souls' in general as there is in ignoring the favoured position of those who do the talking. Yet we should clearly be cautious about accepting anyone's claim to knowledge in this area.

Though I shall here not be centrally concerned with the claims made within the Green Movement concerning human feelings for nature, I see the issues I shall be exploring as relevant to eco-politics on two main grounds. In the first place, those environmentalists whose primary

concern is with the preservation of the countryside and an existing order of rural space do presuppose a general aesthetic, as opposed to utilitarian, interest in the preservation of nature, and must appeal to this if they would have their political activities viewed as representing the collective concerns of the community. In other words, to the extent that environmentalists regard their campaigning as legitimated not by reference to minority tastes, but by reference to a collective appreciation of 'nature', they seek democratic credentials that require them to be as open as possible to the problems of speaking on behalf of a 'common aesthetic'. But, secondly, there are also a number of ecologists whose primary concern is not with preserving nature as a source of delight for human beings, but with saving it (particularly wilderness) from human intrusion, in other words, with conserving it as an 'intrinsic value'. Yet it is not uncommon to find those arguing this case doing so by way of appeal to the seemingly timeless and universal responses that nature elicits in 'humanity'. 'Visiting the Grand Canyon,' writes Holmes Rolston, 'we intrinsically value the rock strata with their color bands. Visiting Kentucky, we value Mammoth cave, with its stalactites;'[2] and he and others defending the 'intrinsic value' of nature frequently write as if there were a universal human capacity to 'love' nature, revere wilderness, simply to feel and respond to its absolute and independent worth. The appeal, it would seem, is very often to a common core of sensibility that we can and should collectively experience. Now maybe this is the case, and I do not want to suggest that there are no grounds for defending it, but here too it seems that the argument might be more persuasive were it to show itself more troubled by historical considerations, more ready to look at the role that specific cultural conditions have played in constructing tastes and feelings for nature, including the responses that are presented within the ecological

movement as those that 'humans' have or can be called upon to have.

Even, then, as environmental and ecological politics presumes common forms of appreciation of landscape or capacities to value nature, it should acknowledge how problematic it may be to imply that all human beings are as united in their aesthetic responses to nature as they are in their reliance upon it as a utility and means of satisfying material needs. At any rate, a reliance, which is obviously cross-cultural and universal in the one instance, is much less clearly so in the other. The specific 'satisfiers' of material needs (for food, shelter and the like) do indeed differ enormously across time and between (and within) given human societies, but natural resources are essential to every form of their provision. It is far more debatable whether there is any common structure of aesthetic need discernible within the variety of human affective responses to nature; or whether, if we insist that there is, we are not treating the aesthetic response itself as a merely elaborated form of the physical need, and thus mistaking its particular quality. Some, as we shall see, have offered an analysis of the attractions of nature in terms of human reliance on the means of survival supplied by the environment, but it is questionable whether this does full justice to a less instrumentally motivated, more specifically aesthetic, appreciation of it. The 'abnegation of the purpose of self-preservation,' argues Adorno, 'is just as crucial to the aesthetic perception of nature as it is to that of art. In this respect they hardly differ.'[3]

Indeed, it may be said that in treating aesthetic feeling as if it were comparable to a physical need or dependency, which persists even where it is not directly recognized or given expression,[4] we are in some sense failing to respect its status as an *experienced* response. To attribute a universal 'love' of nature, 'delight' in its beauty, 'awe' for its grandeur, and so forth, is precisely to attribute

to the human collectivity at large a set of subjectively acknowledged feelings, and the claim can appeal to nothing more objective for support than the consensus about the experience itself. As an empirical claim, in fact, any statement to the effect that all human beings have an appreciation or aesthetic 'need' for nature is as open to refutation through the failure of the experience in question as is the claim that everyone likes wine or cheese.

It may be objected that claims about human aesthetic feeling for nature are not intended to be construed in that way, but are rather to be viewed as judgements on its value or attractions that are made with a demand for universal assent. What is being articulated is not an empirical claim to the effect that everyone does in fact revere or love nature, but a Kantian 'pure' aesthetic judgement to the effect that nature is 'awesome' or 'beautiful' (where the implication is that everyone ought to find it so – and, since 'ought' implies 'can', is possessed of the sensibility allowing them in principle to do so).[5]

But it is doubtful, to say the least, whether a judgement of this kind could lay claim to being 'pure', and hence universal, since this would require the aesthetic experience in question to be conceptually unmediated, and it is not at all clear how 'nature' as such, as opposed to particular instances of it, could be the object of an unmediated phenomenological response. An experience of, say, a rose or a sunset as beautiful is, we might agree, simply an experience of delight in that particular thing, and hence the object of a pure aesthetic judgement. We feel, and pronounce, this sunset or rose to be beautiful, and the experience and judgement upon it, is, as Kant argues, to be differentiated from the experience and judgement that it is beautiful *qua* rose or sunset (where what is intended is that it is a beautiful instance *of* a rose or sunset, and the judgement is mediated through the concept of 'rose' or 'sunset' and hence not pure). In judging

'nature' to be beautiful, however, it would seem that we are necessarily judging it beautiful *qua* nature, and that the aesthetic experience in question is therefore dependant on possession of what is arguably a culture-bound concept of nature as a totality and form of 'otherness' (it is that, for example, which is *not* the product of art or culture and to be valued for that reason). We may allow that there is an aesthetic experience mediated through the concept of nature that is universal to Western culture, where nature has generally been appreciated *as nature* (because it is 'natural' rather than a work of human artifice). But how far this is universal to *humanity* would depend, it would seem, on the degree of universality attaching to such a conception of nature.

There is, moreover, a tendency for environmentalist discussions of 'human' feelings for nature to overlook their historicity and dependency on culturally specific systems of belief. Even those evaluations of nature that may reasonably be said to be common to a given epoch of Western culture have shifted quite dramatically with such changes of cognition. The transformations that have marked our attitudes to animals are clearly a case in point. To view animals as a separate creation, specifically provided by God for the purpose of meeting human needs, is to bring a moral and aesthetic sensibility to them that will differ in significant ways from that of a culture generally committed to the correctness of evolutionary theory and sceptical about the idea that it is the possession of a 'soul' that distinguishes humanity from other living creatures. To regard other animals as creatures kindred to ourselves is to invite a rather different appraisal of them than is invited by the Cartesian view of them as insensate 'machines'. The point here is not that we have 'obviously' over time, and through such shifts of thinking, become less cruel or hypocritical in our attitudes to non-human creatures, that we now 'love' them more than in earlier epochs, or have

a more profound understanding or aesthetic appreciation of them. None of these things is obviously true. Against the general abandonment of some practices (bear-baiting, cock-fighting, bird-stoning, horse-flogging) must be set the introduction of others (battery farming, vivisection, animal experimentation and use as human surrogates). Against the 'irrationality' of the canonization of a greyhound (France, thirteenth century); of rejecting a Bill in the House of Commons because of the flight of a jackdaw through the Chamber (England, 1604); of resistance to the idea of a Queen (as opposed to a King) bee (Aristotle to the mid-eighteenth century); of the claim that crows had been seen planting a grove of oaks to serve as future nesting (England, early eighteenth century),[6] must be set the more contemporary 'irrationalities' of the surrogate monkey-mother studies;[7] of animal beauty parlours; of Jurassic Park; of chicken-flavour injected chicken. Against the arrogant human speciesism of the theological cosmology must be set the racist and eugenical applications that have been made of evolutionary theory. Despite some rather muddled claims to the contrary, it is not clear that Western culture has become either more 'humane', or more intelligent, or more aesthetically sensitive towards other living creatures.

To make these points about the differing rationalities that have guided human feelings for animals is not to suppose that we do not also find good evidence of a trans-historical continuity in this. One is struck more by the similarities in the affections and interests informing the descriptions of animals in Homer and Joyce, Chaucer and Tolstoy, Buffon and Hardy than by the differences. The cat affrighted by the visitation of the Archangel Gabriel in Lotto's *Annunciation* is registered with the same empathy we have for the cat alarmed by the vacuum cleaner. There has been a remarkable stability in the animals that have been chosen as objects of human admiration or

revulsion. But if we can detect the signs of a common sentiment across epochs and cultures, we need also to recognize, and account for, considerable differences of temper and treatment We are not, it would seem, dealing simply here with the presence or absence of a simple affective response ('love' or 'respect'), but with the ways in which the patterning and distribution of that response is structured by different interpretations of the world. The feelings elicited by animals may indeed guide our ideas about the kind of creatures they are, and thus inform our theories about them – or prompt a distrust of the theories that are offered. (As Bolingbroke commented apropos Descartes' hypotheses about animals: 'The plain man would persist in thinking that there was a difference between the town bull and the parish clock').[8] But the feelings are themselves in turn shaped by the theories. We did not, in fact, learn whether animals were or were not machines by treating them as if they were, and to that extent it may be said that a primary affective response has determined our comportment towards them as objects of knowledge. But the knowledge we gain of them is also an influence on the feelings we subsequently experience for them.

The Sublime and the Beautiful

Similarly, in respect of the aesthetic of landscape, we may argue that there are separate, if interlocking, registers of feeling of which we need to take account. Western culture has so persistently expressed a tension between the environment in its more awesome and in its more charming aspects that it is difficult to resist the idea that this does indeed speak to some permanent structure of response rooted in universal features of human psychology. Yet at the same time, there is no doubt that this tension has

been differently experienced over time, and that changes of the kind that Hardy notes require us to recognize the historical mediations at work in their formation. From Homer to our own time, nature has been represented as both wild and pastoral, a site of exalting terror as well as of comforting serenity. To the 'sublime' of the Sirens, the Wandering Rocks, Scylla and Charybdis, and other terrors encountered by Odysseus, we have the 'beautiful' images of the well-tended flocks and cultivated lands that provide him hospitality on his travels, and to whose 'home' he eventually returns. Against the abysmal wastes of Dante's or Milton's hell is set the idyllic space of Paradise. Against the 'sublime' of Caliban in *The Tempest* or the 'heath' in *King Lear*, the charm of Ariel and the comforts of accommodated man. Yet this perennial abstract contrast, in which an antithetical topology is as often functioning as moral metaphor as describing any actual landscape and its respective attractions, must clearly be distinguished from that movement in thought, which from the mid-eighteenth century theorizes the response to the natural environment in terms of the 'beautiful' and the 'sublime', and cultivates the latter as a distinct aesthetic experience. It is one thing for nature as a chaotic or demonic instance of cosmic power to be opposed to nature as harmony and good order. It is another for chaos to be endowed with its own aesthetic appeal: the appeal of a certain limitlessness encountered in the landscape itself. The abyss, the whirlpool, the mountain range, the unbounded celestial space may have proved fearsome to earlier cultures, but it is only in the age of modernity that they begin to be celebrated as the source of a peculiar pleasure. Prior to the eighteenth century the 'sublime' is seldom used of landscape, but retains the sense given it by Longinus as a term of literary style or rhetoric, and it is only fully theorized as a nature aesthetic in the argument of Burke and Kant.[9] Even, then, as we recognize that this aesthetic development

is only possible in virtue of some more fundamental and trans-cultural properties of ourselves and nature, we also need to pay due heed to those factors responsible for the specific quality and influence of its manifestation as a cultural movement or fashion.

It is a limitation, one may argue, of naturalistic attempts to account for the pleasure we take in landscape in terms of biological need that they fail sufficiently to distinguish and observe these different registers. One of the more developed of these is that of Jay Appleton, who offers it in response to the lack he diagnoses of 'any universally accepted general theory by which landscape and emotions may be connected.' We do not have, he argues, 'the same understanding of those emotional reactions which arise from our experience of our inanimate environment as we have of grief, anger, joy, etc. resulting from our relations with other people.'[10] Drawing on Dewey's aesthetics and ethological studies, Appleton attempts to remedy this with a 'habitat' and 'prospect-refuge' theory, which explains the aesthetic appeal of different types of landscape in terms ultimately of our appreciation of their strategic role in human survival:

> Habitat theory postulates that aesthetic pleasure in landscape derives from the observer experiencing an environment favourable to the satisfaction of his biological needs. Prospect-refuge theory postulates that because the ability to see without being seen is an intermediate step in the satisfaction of many of those needs, the capacity of an environment to ensure the achievement of *this* becomes a more immediate source of aesthetic attraction.[11]

We respond to landscape (as also, it is claimed, to its representation in painting) intuitively on the basis of its ability to offer us both 'prospects' – commanding vantage points – and 'refuges' – places of concealment from which we may command the view without being viewable our-

selves. Open landscapes attract because they offer a clear vista, secluded areas (woods, caves, sombre or shadowed reaches, etc.), because of what they promise in the way of possible retreats and look-out posts. An instinctual, 'animal' structure of responses is thus said to underlie aesthetic experience even when the instincts themselves are no longer essential to survival. What we like and dislike about 'nature' is in the end an effect of our assessment of its potential as habitat.

But how far does this inform us about a distinctively aesthetic as opposed to more instrumental reaction to landscape? Anyone who goes in for 'wild' camping will appreciate the truth in the argument that 'habitats' (in this case, tent-sites) are selected with a view to their combined prospect-refuge potential, and are found variously attractive in the light of it. But the landscape we choose simply to gaze upon as an object of aesthetic pleasure is often very different from that we would choose to inhabit, and it is the abstraction from consideration of how it might serve any other needs that seems more relevant to the pleasure we take in it than any vestigial and unconscious role these needs might play in determining our admiration for it. In many cases, moreover, most noticeably in the frisson felt for the sublime, it is the defiance of rather than the obedience to, these considerations that appears to be of the essence of the aesthetic appeal.

There is, in any case, the more general problem that such an account cannot do justice either to the complexity and shifting character of what is found attractive in the *representation* of landscape, or to the impact of this cultural representation on the preferences experienced for *actual* landscape. If we explain, for example, the aesthetic appreciation of landscape art in terms of a prospect-refuge 'aesthetic' experience of actual landscape, we shall overlook the extent to which the representation of landscape has been a vehicle of political ideologies, and cannot be

adequately accounted for in abstraction from its social semiotics; but in the same process, we shall also overlook the extent to which the experience of actual landscape has been mediated historically by its artistic depiction. One relevant instance here would be the way in which a distinction between different types of landscape, and the taste in them, served in the 'civic humanist' aesthetic of the eighteenth century to map – and hence politically legitimate – a supposed difference between social strata. A distinction between the 'panoramic', ideal landscape and representations of occluded, enclosed landscapes without much depth of field, figured a difference between a refined capacity for thinking in general terms and a vulgar (and supposedly also female) incapacity to do so, with the taste in the former being associated with the powers of abstraction essential to the exercise of political authority.[12] In such a case, a habitat theory approach can offer no persuasive explanation of the advocacy of the 'prospect' over the 'refuge' landscape, and will remain blind to the political functions it is serving. Some of the issues raised here will be more fully explored at a later stage, but suffice it to note here that the relationship between the aesthetic experience of landscape and its cultural representation is not one-way but mutually determining; and that the political meanings embedded in the latter are both reflective of the actual inscription of social relations within the environment and refracted back into the aesthetic responses to it. Whatever insights are shed by 'habitat' theory on the fundamental motivations for discriminating between different types of landscape, it cannot accommodate the historical complexity of this dialectic.

Aesthetic theories that emerge in response to a particular fashion in nature may also be too little conscious of this historical complexity. Both Burke and Kant, for example, offer universalist explanations of the appreciation of the sublime in nature (Burke in terms of a common physi-

ology of sensations, Kant in terms of the properties and functions of the human mind);[13] but this focus on the enabling conditions in human nature necessarily abstracts from the political dimensions of the sublime aesthetic, and from the particular social conditions responsible for its emergence. Neither Kant nor Burke appreciates the extent to which the aesthetic of the sublime must be related to the revolutionizing ferments within human society at the time, or the ways in which it is functioning as a register of the social transformations of the period and the conflictual responses to them. Yet the celebration of the sublime in nature cannot be understood in isolation from the bourgeois challenge to the aristocratic order, and the latter's support for an Arcadian aesthetic; nor from the way in which the 'sublime' becomes a problematic and contested image of its political struggles, where it figures the individual striving, energy and self-mastery necessary to their success, but only at the cost of intimating the more dangerously 'sublime' potential of its emphasis on individual autonomy. Thus, it has been suggested that the sublime 'functions as an aesthetic means through which bourgeois thought established itself as the locus of individual effort and virtue in face of the charges of "luxury" brought against it by traditional writers'; but that this project is also subject to the political hijacking of the 'radical sublime' of the more subversive representations of the Revolution.[14] Moreover, even if we abstract from these political inflections and focus simply on this aesthetic as a landscape preference, we may argue that neither Kant nor Burke shows much awareness of the need to link the fascination with the sublime to scientific Enlightenment, the growth of industry and the increasing domestication of nature. Even less do they consider the extent to which their theorization of the aesthetic of the sublime may be reliant on attitudes to nature engendered by those developments.

Yet the interest in the sublime and the Romantic move-

ment into which it subsequently feeds, clearly do not come out of nowhere, but must be viewed as complex reactions to the Promethean achievements of the day in knowing and subduing a 'chaotic' nature. It is only, we may say, a culture that has commenced, in some sense, to experience its alienation from nature as the negative consequence of its industrial achievement that will be inclined to 'return' to the wilderness or to aestheticize its terrors as a form of foreboding against further encroachment on its territory. We may therefore argue in a general way that the cultivation of the sublime is the expression of anxiety, but also the aesthetic 'luxury', of a culture that has begun to experience its power over nature as a form of severance from it, while Romanticism only finds expression against the background of a certain mastery of its forces and a consequent concern for the alienation it entails. The romanticization of nature in its sublimer reaches is in this sense a manifestation of those same human powers over nature whose destructive effects it laments; or, as Neil Smith has rather bluntly put it, 'one does not pet a rattlesnake until it has been defanged.'[15] Where the nature at your doorstep is not a pastoral green, but rude, rugged and tempestuous, and you are still in the midst of the 'struggle against' its encroachment on *your* space, it is the aesthetic of the cultivated landscape that tends to prevail – as was the case in the North American preference well into the nineteenth century for a Concordian rather than a sublime aesthetic.[16] It is only, by contrast, where there is rather less wilderness left 'unfanged' that a landscape designer could promote the virtues of the 'sublime' garden replete with gibbets, crosses, poisonous weeds and 'scenes of terror' as did Sir William Chambers, the designer of Kew Gardens.[17]

The vogue for the sublime thus has its specific conditions of possibility that are overlooked by Burke and Kant even as they speak to these conditions in their own

analyses of it. For we may note here that they both offer accounts of it that relate the particularity of the experience to an element of human transcendence. In Burke's empirical account, the frisson of confronting nature in its most 'delightfully horrible' aspects depends very much on our capacity to observe it without quailing, in other words to place ourselves at the brink of danger while nonetheless preserving a certain distance from it. As he puts it:

> When danger or pain presses too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at a certain distance, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience.[18]

Such 'modifications' and the 'distancing' required to convert terror into a form of delight are clearly deemed exclusive to humanity. The experience of the sublime is not pure 'animal' fear, but subtly differentiated from it in virtue of our ability to feel secure in the midst of danger. Burke does not question the source of this capacity, but his whole account clearly presupposes that, unlike other animals, we are in a position to court, rather than simply to take flight from, the terrors of nature.

Kant, by contrast, is very explicit about the reliance of the aesthetic of the sublime on our transcendence over nature, but roots it, not in external mastery, but in the internal power of human reason. Nature, he tells us, is sublime 'in such of its phenomena as in their intuition convey the idea of infinity.'[19] But since this idea is conveyed in such a way that it recalls us to the impossibility of imagining this magnitude in nature (we cannot think what it would be to experience sensorily what we can conceptualize only mathematically), the aesthetic experience which it provokes turns on an appreciation of the sublimity of the mind rather than of nature itself:

> Where the size of a natural object is such that the imagination spends its whole faculty of comprehension upon it in vain, it must carry our concept of nature to a supersensible substrate (underlying both nature and our faculty of thought) which is great beyond every standard of sense. Thus, instead of the object, it is rather the cast of mind in appreciating it that we have to estimate as *sublime*.[20]

The sublime is thus an oxymoronic feeling combining displeasure in the inadequacy of our imagination to encompass the greatness of nature with pleasure at the evidence it provides of the excess of our powers of rational understanding over anything offered to sensory experience. The sublime is appalling because we cannot accommodate the immensity with which it confronts us, and wonderful because this failure itself indicates the superior power of human reason to anything encountered in the natural world.

> Bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piled up the vault of heaven, borne along with flashes and peals, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track, the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. But, provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; and we can readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature.[21]

In similar fashion, the infinite space of the heavens may (as Pascal claimed) affright us, but for Kant the fear itself invites us to consider the littleness or insignificance of

nature by comparison with an imagination that advances outwards in proportionately ever greater units as it encompasses the indefiniteness of the cosmos.[22] In the self-same moment, moreover, nature's immensity challenges us to forgo our own pettiness in favour of those highest principles over which it can exercise no 'rude dominion'. In inviting us to regard as nothing all those things over which it does hold this crude sway (wordly goods, health and life), it at the same time reveals to us all those transcendent qualities in ourselves that make it inappropriate to 'bow down before it'.[23] Nature, then, precisely in its most fearsome aspects, reveals our human dominion over it. As noumenal, rational and moral selves, we are not of this world; yet it is only in virtue of the aesthetic hold of the phenomenal world upon the imagination that we grasp this otherness in ourselves.

In Burke's theory, and even more explicitly in Kant's, then, the explanation of our awe of nature draws on the idea of an inherent human mastery or transcendence of it. Yet this very idea, we may argue, must be viewed as the cultural product of an age that, relative to earlier epochs, had de-deified nature and overcome a more directly 'animal' fear of its environment. Kant comes close to acknowledging this in his rejection of fear of nature as ignoble superstition, but he still fails to consider how far this freedom is the concrete social effect of Enlightenment as opposed to something achieved through an individual work of mastery upon the self.

One may also argue that the Kantian account of the sublime as that which reveals our human autonomy paved the way for the focus on art at the cost of nature in the aesthetic theory of the high bourgeois period. Though Kant himself remained committed to the eighteenth century view of the superiority of natural over artificial beauty, he was, suggests Adorno, one of the last philosophers to

retain suspicions of artefactuality and the 'fallibility of making'; and in the subsequent idealist aesthetics inspired by his emphasis on human freedom and dignity art comes to be valued precisely as the work of the autonomous individual:

> Natural beauty vanished from aesthetics thanks to the expanding supremacy of the concept of human freedom and dignity inaugurated by Kant but fully realised in Schiller and Hegel, who transplanted these ethical concepts into aesthetics, with the result that in art, like everywhere else, nothing deserved respect unless it owed its existence to the autonomous subject. (. . .) If one were to start appellate proceedings on behalf of natural beauty, the latter would be acquitted, whereas dignity would be convicted as the real culprit for its prideful elevation of the animal 'man' above the animal realm.[24]

In Hegel's aesthetic theory, for example, nature is regarded as deficient and 'prosaic' relative to art precisely in virtue of its immanence or lack of affirmative purpose: its failure to produce beauty for the sake of a beautiful appearance. But it is this very 'deficiency', its 'meaningful silence' or lack of conceptual definition which, so Adorno argues, is the essence of its beauty.[25] Moreover, there is a deep paradox in the attempt to sever art from nature, and to assert or realize its autonomy, since this represents a striving within art to attain the immanence and non-conceptual language of nature itself. Thus the more art distances itself from nature and the imitation of nature, the more it can be viewed as attempting to approximate to the spontaneous, self-generating and non-intentional aesthetic mode of being of nature itself.[26]

Yet there is also a paradox – though perhaps a necessary and irresoluble one – in Adorno's own position given that he suggests both that the essence of the beauty of nature is occluded or denied in the idealist aesthetics of

the bourgeois order, and that an appreciation of nature *as* beautiful comes only in the wake and as a consequence of its human mastery:

> . . . There is no room for natural beauty in periods when nature has an overpowering presence for man, as seems to be the case with peasant populations, which are known to be insensitive to the aesthetic qualities of natural scenery because to them nature is merely an immediate object to be acted upon. The allegedly ahistorical beauty of nature does have a historical core, and it is this core which both legitimates and detracts from natural beauty.[27]

The suggestion here would seem to be that insofar as nature is beautiful, or comes to be aesthetically valued, it is only in a culture whose dominion over nature is pre-emptive of a 'true' or 'proper' appreciation of that beauty. We might add that there is also an element of paradox in Adorno's confidence about the 'insensitivity' of peasant populations; for his own argument might appear to imply the difficulty of finally pronouncing on this. At any rate, it is surely important to consider whose 'word' we are going by in these matters, and whether it can be trusted.

Whose Tastes in Nature?

This brings us to a further set of questions raised by Kant's account and of relevance to any commentary on the aesthetic of nature. For to put it in Hardy's terms, had we not better recognize that when the philosopher or writer or critic is speaking of the tastes of 'human' souls, what they often implicitly have in mind as a standard for their discussion is the tastes of 'the more thinking part of mankind' or of the 'cultivated' soul? So that even where the aesthetic commentary is not explicitly elitist, as it is in all those cases where the 'unthinking men' are simply ruled

out as possible subjects of aesthetic experience at all, there is an uneasy hypothetical ascription at work in the text: we are talking here at best of what the collectivity of human souls would feel had they been given the leisure and education essential to a lofty and refined taste. Now, as far as Kant himself is concerned, it would be a little unfair to accuse him of any conscious elitism. His argument for the universality of human aesthetic responses to nature may be open to the objection – particularly in regard to his account of the sublime – that it is informed by culturally specific conditions of which it is unaware. And in a more fundamental sense, we may argue that it is compromised by a culture bound assumption of the concept of nature. But the intentions of his theory are certainly democratic, and this is particularly true of his treatment of every individual judgement of taste (eg. regarding what is beautiful or sublime in nature) as equal in normative force. Each judger in these matters is to be regarded, and to regard himself or herself, as exemplary of humanity at large. Moreover, Kant is ready to admit in the case of the appreciation for the sublime, that, although the foundations for this are laid in human nature, and we may expect of everyone the moral feeling requisite to the experience, nonetheless a measure of culture may be an essential precondition of this aesthetic response.[28] Even if it is marked by a certain 'privileging' of the preferences of the more thinking part of mankind, Kant's argument may be said to be more alert than many to the ways in which differences of culture or education determine aesthetic responses to nature.

Rather than pursue the issue further, therefore, in respect of Kant's philosophy, let us simply recognize here the need further to complicate any general discourse about the aesthetic of nature by allowing not only that tastes in nature are conditioned by the general ideas and fashions of their period, but also that the ideas and fashions are themselves

for the most part dictated by a privileged minority within the culture. In other words, when we speak of 'fashions' in nature, of shifts in taste in landscape design, of movements or moments in its pictorial or literary representation, we are almost always speaking of concepts and experiences whose influence within the culture is indissolubly linked to the socio-economic power of the trend-setters themselves. We need, in short, to insert a class dimension into any account of ourselves as nature lovers, since relations of class are not only inscribed physically within the landscape itself, but have also had major impact on the production and consumption of its cultural representation. For this reason, as it has been said, landscape is an ideological concept:

> It represents a way in which certain people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to external nature.[29]

The portrayal of landscape can therefore never be received as an index of majority feelings, nor even as evidence of how nature actually appeared to those who produced and consumed this art. Certainly, it speaks to us of the preferences of those in a position to be the arbiters of taste within their culture, but, since these tastes have been so coloured by considerations of social role and self-esteem, the depiction has often more to tell us about a desired environment than about the feelings evoked by the encounter with the reality itself. Or, at any rate, if it does tell us about the latter, it does so only in the form of allowing a sense of what needed to be occluded or obscured from its imaging. Cultural representations are in this sense 'realist' testimony to a certain fantasy or projection of nature, but not necessarily documents of the kind of

affection that the ecologists would recall us to. Just as a landscape painting is never simply painting the landscape, nor country writing ever simply description, so they can never be approached as reflecting a universal human feeling for nature or a common experience of it.

As John Barrell has shown in his study of the painting of Gainsborough, Morland and Constable, this element of ideological distortion affects the realism of even the more 'realist' renderings of landscape. In the work of these painters, as Barrell suggests, the indolent, bucolic shepherd, living in the responsive, servile nature of Pope's *Eclogues*, is exchanged for the working ploughmen of England in a representation that is both more plausible and more in tune with the prevailing concern and approval for human industry. In this sense, landscape painting from the mid-eighteenth century (reflecting the earlier shift to the Georgic mode in poetry) offers an altogether more actualized image of rural life. Yet, as Barrell convincingly argues, this more 'realist' portrayal remains marked by a profound tension. The real truth of rural existence is still too uncomfortable to be candidly displayed, and this results in a 'continual struggle at once to reveal more and more of the actuality of the life of the poor, and to find more effective ways of concealing that actuality.' The true harshness of rural existence – the reality of the 'dark side' of the landscape – could, as it were, be only half-imaged:

> As the figures become less and less the shepherds of French or Italian Pastoral, they become more and more ragged, but remain inexplicably cheerful. The effort is always to claim that the rural poor are as contented, the rural society as harmonious, as it is possible to claim them to be, in the face of the threatening awareness that all was not as well as it must have been in Arcadia. This jolly imagery of Merry England, which replaced the frankly

> artificial imagery of classical Pastoral, was in turn replaced when it had to be by an image of a cheerful, sober, domestic peasantry, more industrious than before; this gave way in turn to a picturesque image of the poor, whereby their raggedness became of aesthetic interest, and they become the objects of our pity; and when that image would serve no longer, it was in turn replaced by a romantic image of harmony with nature whereby the labourers were merged as far as possible with their surroundings too far away from us for the questions about how contented or how ragged they were to arise.[30]

Barrell admits that the development was not quite as neat and consecutive as this suggests, but the essential point is surely valid: even as the depiction of landscape gains in 'realism' by comparison with an earlier pastoral tradition, it perpetuates something of the same illusion, albeit by subtler means, regarding the essential order and harmony of man with nature. Or to put it more bluntly, the patrons and consumers of this art are still to be spared any too direct and unequivocal confrontation with the more painfully divisive dimensions of their social pre-eminence and its associated forms of control over 'nature'.

Democratizing the Nature Aesthetic

Much representation of landscape must for these reasons be viewed as a partial documentation of 'human' aesthetic responses to 'nature', and neither the more blatantly delusory neo-classical pastoral nor the more plausible imagings of landscape that supplant it can be read as evidence of the feelings of those whose relations to nature they depict. The playful shepherd, the picturesque peasant, the merry haymakers or the more obviously toiling, yet basically contented ploughmen: none of these penned or painted their own harmony with nature, or delight in its

charms; nor was it they who were destined to enjoy these representations of their responses to their environment.

Indeed, we can argue that there is a persistent tendency to *deny* any popular aesthetic of landscape in the presentation of the peasant or labourer as so closely in harmony with it that they become a party to it, and are thus – like the rest of nature – incapable of any evaluative relationship to it at all. The real feelings of the rural workers are refused or repressed through an idealization of their condition as one that is freed from alienation. Being so immanently part of their surroundings, they are spared the existential angst of cognitive separation from them, and in this guise, not infrequently, become the object of philosophic or poetic esteem and envy.

Heidegger's presentation of a mute and earthy peasantry, as embodying the 'pre-understanding' that is lost to technological wisdom, has proved inspirational as a rallying call to the establishment of 'authentic' relations with nature, but it functions only by denying to this 'peasantry' a Heideggerian consciousness of its own participation in Being. Wordsworth's celebration of rural wisdom may show more empathy for the actual travails of the 'peasant', yet in poems such as *Michael, Resolution and Independence, Old Man Travelling* or *Animal Tranquillity and Decay*, the argument turns on the contrast between the relative alienation of the poet-narrator and the more immanent 'being' of the workers.

The simple labourer in *Animal Tranquillity and Decay* is so unintrusive upon nature that birds of the hedge-row 'regard him not' and the young behold 'With envy, what the old man hardly feels'.[31] In *Resolution and Independence*, the silence or inarticulacy of the leech gatherer (whose voice 'was like a stream/ Scarce heard: nor word from word could I divide') is presented in idealized contrast to the voluble angst of the poet: 'I could have laughed myself to scorn to find/ In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.'[32]

Yet the fact remains, of course, that only the poet can tell us of his own comparative failure of gravity or philosophic insight.[33] However well-intentioned and sympathetic the writer or painter, there is an element of needed alienation, even a privileging of it, in the very attempt to give cultural expression to this form of intellectual self-deprecation. For this is essentially an ascription of feeling, knowledge or 'being' to those who are defined as incapable of giving voice to it themselves; or were they to prove capable of it, they would no longer be viewed as enjoying their envied harmony or closeness to their natural environment. (There is a curious contemporary ecological inversion of this tension, we might note, in Robert Goodin's objection that those who 'slavishly' adhere to green personal life-style recommendations 'will be living their lives so much in harmony with natural processes as to be wholly subsumed within them.'[34] Is this, we may wonder, because it is inappropriate for those who 'think' about nature to be 'subsumed' within it?)

Of course, there have been poets and painters who 'belonged' to the land, but their very exceptionality confirms the point. Had all country workers offered us poetry comparable to that of John Clare, we may be sure that poetry written about them would itself have been very different. As it is, 'their' closeness to nature can only be affirmed through 'our' distance; their philosophy only in 'our' philosophy; their truth only in the profundity of 'our' appreciation of it. (And this problem continues to afflict, of course, the 'intellectual' discourse which draws attention to it).[35]

The intellectual, then, who speaks to a 'peasant aesthetic' has obviously broken with a patrician humanism, and with any explicitly registered appeal to the 'man of culture' as the touchstone of good taste in nature. Yet the romanticization of rural immanence remains caught nonetheless in the paradox of its own implicit aesthetic transcendence. This

paradox, one may argue, continues to vex contemporary ecological pronouncements about the ways 'we' value nature (or fail to do so), about 'our' alienation from nature, and about the attitudes 'we'should adopt in order to heal the rift. For here, too, the temptation is to speak on behalf of all from a position of understanding and sensibility to nature that is itself, at least in part, the product of the theorist's specific positioning within society.

In this connection, we may note a further paradox of much writing on the environment: that of the feared democratization of the nature aesthetic. This is most frequently voiced in the form of an anxiety lest the 'solitary's' appreciation of nature prove in the end to be more of a common property than is compatible with its continued enjoyment.

This anxiety comes fully into play only at the point where urbanization undermines the basis for treating the rural worker as emblematic of a popular 'sense' of nature or communion with it. Clearly the steady removal of the mass of the people to the town as steadily removed the ground for any romanticization of their special affinity with rusticity, and there is a consequent shift of focus in the perception of their relations to nature. What begins to find expression is a fear lest these new found urbanites (and suburbanites) come to resort *en masse* to the forms of solace in nature that had hitherto been deemed appealing only to the more poetic soul or thinking man. Thus, in the frequently expressed regrets for the 'tourist' invasion of nature, we may discern a tacit recognition that the taste for even its more recondite attractions is not, after all, the exclusive preserve of the discriminating 'soul'. Wordsworth may here again serve as an illustration. For alongside his appreciation of the 'old man's' depth of understanding (and perhaps it is no accident that it tends to be a dying order that has most to teach the poet), he registers clear anxieties about the encroachment of 'artisans and labourers, and the

humbler classes' upon his cherished Lakes. Such persons, he recommends, should 'make little excursions with their wives and children among the neighbouring fields', rather than take the train to the Lakes themselves.[36]

From the point of view of our concern here with what can be claimed to be universal in the appeal of nature, what is interesting about these anxieties (and they are by no means exclusive to Wordsworth, but have been voiced continuously since his day) is the sense they betray that the nature so dear to the poetic spirit could also entrance the 'simple' or 'humble' masses.

Yet so far from being celebrated as a progress in human refinement, this provokes a certain alarm. There is, in this sense, a profound tension between the professed humanism of the discourse on 'our' love of nature, and the response to the evidence of its universal applicability. A cultivated taste that is generally recommended and applauded as the mark of the 'good' soul is regretted if it shows itself too actively among the masses at large. The aesthetic preference of the choicer spirit is fine, it would seem, when presented abstractly as a universal desideratum, but becomes a more problematic intrusion on the pleasures of the choicer spirit if concretized in actual popular desire. This tension needs to be appreciated wherever eco-politics draws on the support of the aesthetic of nature voiced by the 'more thinking part of mankind' in support of conservation. For the problem here, as Martin Ryle has noted, in challenging Jonathan Bate's presentation of Wordsworth as an uncomplicated ally of environmental politics, is that:

> Cultural appropriations of landscape can inflect, unhelpfully, the difficult quest for a democratic ecological language. Alongside the hope that the poet might speak to and for everyone, we find in Wordsworth an insistent valorization of a more educated and special sensibility. The poet is not just 'a man speaking to men', and such a formulation is not problematic only for the gender of its 'universal subject', for the same text (the 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads*) also says much about what makes the poet different. We can agree that poets are different, in their expressive talents, while sensing that a 'Nature' constructed as the guardian and touchstone of aesthetic distinction makes a problematic reference point for ecological and environmental politics.[37]

More generally, we may argue that environmentalism needs to be aware of the double-edged quality of an eco-lect that both invokes a universal human aesthetic need for nature, and appeals to that 'rarer' sensibility which would preserve it from the negative effects of its mass enjoyment. Such appeals, of course, do not necessarily take so explicit a form. They may merely be implicit in the objections that are made to the 'opening up' of nature to a tourist influx. They may also, even more tacitly, be at work in the tendency to suppose a contrast between the 'artificial' and 'constructed' quality of the popular taste in nature, and the more 'natural' and spontaneous responses of the 'genuine' nature lover. But as we have seen, even the more refined spirits have changed their taste in nature fairly regularly, and to that extent may be said to have been culturally 'constructed' in their desires. Has there ever been a community, we may reasonably ask, whose reactions to nature have simply been 'natural'?

This is not to deny the extent to which nature in our own times has been constructed, and indeed spoilt, through the accommodation to a mass interest in easy access to 'human' amenities. Beauty spots have, one might concede, been made both less beautiful and more attractive to many of their visitors because of the toilets, cafeterias, signed trails, eco-centres, museums and tourist shops with which they have been 'enhanced'. Above all, it is undeniable that the general preference for travelling through 'nature' by car, rather than going on foot (or by bike) has both profoundly altered the non-urban landscape and shaped

the appreciation of it. As Alexander Wilson has pointed out, the creation of 'scenic' routes is itself responsible for the promotion of a certain nature aesthetic – one that is essentially visual and has ruled out taste, touch and smell; for which landscape becomes an event in 'automotive space', and is comparable in its one-dimensionality to the view of it had in aerial photography. The designers of the great national parkways of North America have quite literally instructed their users in the 'beauties' of nature, he argues, by promoting some landscapes at the expense of others, by removing whatever bits of it were deemed unsightly, and by restricting all activities incompatible with the parkway aesthetic. The overriding strategy:

> is the production of nature itself. All of the road's design features organize our experience of nature. The result is that nature appears to produce itself with no apparent relation to the cultures that inhabit it or use it. Magnificent vistas now happily present themselves to us without the clutter of human work and settlement. The seasons begin to be synchronized with the tourist calendar: June is Rhododendron Time, autumn is Fall Foliage Time, winter is Wonderland.[38]

In this accommodation to a 'motorist's' aesthetic, and in many other instances, 'nature' has indisputably been tailored to modern needs, and a mass conception of its attractions shaped accordingly. It would be pointless to deny either these manipulations of nature in the process, or the offence they have caused to more minority tastes. My point here is only that the conundrum which this presents to the development of a democratic eco-politics must be fairly and squarely faced. An argument that appeals to the idea of a common structure of feeling and aesthetic dependency on nature cannot rationally employ a vocabulary that relies on a distinction between an 'inauthentic' (and destructive) 'popular' taste in nature

and the more 'genuine' feelings for nature of the 'choicer spirit'. Even less can it lend itself to a position which implies that a difference in taste can justify an unequal distribution of the benefits of nature.

The beauties of the landscape, and the forms of solace it affords, cannot, of course, be preserved except by restricting human access to them, and we must recognize the extent to which human destruction of the environment has made it absolutely scarce as a source of gratification. But it is important that the forms of abstemiousness in its enjoyment that this imposes are equally distributed. The fact that the attractions of nature are destroyed by the demand for them is no reason for implying that it is only some – whose tastes are not those of the vulgar tourist, but more properly appreciative of its charm – who should be allowed to enjoy them. If we would develop a more democratic ecological language, then it is important to avoid a discourse on the aesthetic of nature which suggests that it is always some 'less thinking' part of humanity that is responsible for its popularity. It is a displacement of the problem of the scarcity of nature to attribute the blame for the destruction of its charms to the 'mass' demand for them; and there can be no egalitarian solution to this problem which pretends that, in virtue of their superior aesthetic endowment, some have more rights to enjoyment than others.

On Behalf of a Shared Aesthetic: Some Concluding Qualifications

Much of the foregoing discussion has been intended to disturb a too complacently humanist approach to the aesthetic of nature, and to highlight those factors that render claims about 'humanity's responses extremely problematic. However, I would be sympathetic to anyone suggesting

that I may have bent the stick too far in the direction of a relativist account and not given due regard to the evidence or the arguments that might be adduced in defence of a more universalist position on the issue. In conclusion, then, let me simply note some of the factors that do need to be weighed in the balance here.

In the first place, though it may be presumptuous to speak of 'evidence' in any conclusive sense, it is indeed difficult not to feel that there has been a continuous and very extensively shared appreciation of natural phenomena – of flora and fauna, rivers and lakes, glades and forests, the sounds of bird-song, the colours and mutations of sea and sky, the heavens at night. Myth and epic poetry, religious imagery and the forms of public art all give us reason to suppose that nature, in at least certain of its aspects, has been a pervasive and perduring source of inspiration and delight, and that this speaks to some relatively direct and unmediated responses to the environment. Nor does it seem theoretically plausible to suppose otherwise. Cultural forces may mould preferences in landscape, and to some extent fashion even our tastes in roses or sunsets, but its mediations would not be possible were it not for the existence of certain phenomenological responses upon which they go to work and by which they are themselves informed and circumscribed. Moreover, the very extent to which art has been inspired by nature, and its standards, achievements and purposes considered in the light of the model provided by nature, is indicative of the importance of the latter as a primary or fundamental site of aesthetic judgement. Whether art is deemed inferior or superior to nature; whether it is applauded for imitating nature or for its abstraction from it; for its creative revelation of nature or autonomous transcendence of it: all such movements in art and shifts in the appraisal of its function in relation to nature speak to the significant role of the latter in providing the criteria of aesthetic judgement.

To this we might add that the very fact that tastes in landscape have changed is indicative of some underlying communality in human responses given the extent to which these changes – most notably the shift from the concordian to the sublime aesthetic – have come in reaction to the human encroachment upon nature and reflect a concern with what is lost to us in the very process of progressive dominion over it. That the new Vale of Tempe, as Hardy puts it, may be a gaunt waste in Thule; that it is now the parts which pre-industrial society reviled as 'nature's pudenda', that are now acclaimed as the most beautiful: this does not necessarily suggest, I think, that our affective responses to nature are at a profound level different from those of pre-industrial culture. What it suggests, rather, is the extent to which the history of the aesthetic of nature has to be thought in relation to the history of human domination: what we have come to prefer now is itself the effect of human transformations of the landscape and the particular forms of loss and destruction involved in these. But if that is the case, it also in a sense unites us across time with those in the past who, it may be said, did not esteem what we do now precisely because they had yet to experience its demise. What they valued less because of its abundance we now value more because of its progressive erosion. In this sense, one might claim that the very shifts of the aesthetic taste in nature speak to something more universal in the patterning of our responses to it.

Notes

1 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (Macmillan, London, 1965), pp. 12–13.

2 Holmes Rolston 111, 'Value in Nature and the Nature of Value' in *Philosophy and the Natural Environment*, ed. Robin Attfield and Andrew Belsey (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994). Cf. *Philosophy Gone Wild* (Prometheus Books, Buffalo, 1989).

3 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Routledge, Kegan Paul, London, 1984), p. 97.

4 I am not supposing here that this claim is entirely uncontroversial, or that the legitimacy of imputing unrecognized or 'objective' needs to persons is not very much at issue in the disputes between relativist and universalist theories of need and welfare. For a sense of these debates, see Len Doyal and Ian Gough, *A Theory of Human Need* (Macmillan, London, 1991), my comment on that work in *New Left Review* 197 (January–February 1993), pp. 113–28, and Doyal's response, *New Left Review* 200 (July–August 1993); Martha Nussbaum, 'Human Functioning and Social Justice: in Defence of Aristotelian Essentialism', *Political Theory* 20, 2 (May 1992); Glenn Drover and Patrick Kerans (eds), *New Approaches to Welfare Theory* (Edward Elgar, Aldershot and Vermont, 1993). My point here is only that these debates cannot have the same purchase in respect of aesthetic response, given its necessarily subjectively experienced character.

5 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. C. Meredith (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1952) Book I, esp. sects. 6–8, pp. 50–7. For an exposition and very illuminating discussion of the argument of *The Critique of Judgement*, see Jay Bernstein, *The Fate of Art* (Polity, Oxford, 1992); cf. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990), pp. 70–101.

6 All recorded in Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (Allen Lane, London, 1983), see pp. 106, 78, 62, 126.

7 Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions* (Routledge, London, 1989), pp. 226–40.

8 Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 35,

9 For a useful, brief discussion of the use of the 'sublime' as a rhetorical term, and of the development of its application to landscape in Burke and Kant's precursors (notably in the writing of John Dennis, Addison and John Baillie), see James Boulton's introduction to Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Routledge, Kegan Paul, London, 1958), pp. xliv–lxxii, and cf. the discussion of Kant, pp. cxxv–cxxvii. For an insightful account of Burke and Kant's argument and the literary sublime, see Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore and London, 1976).

10 Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (John Wiley, London, 1975), pp. 20–1.

11 Ibid., p. 73.

12 John Barrell, 'The Public Prospect and the Private View' in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993), pp. 81–102.

13 Though Kant, we might note, is critical of Burke's sensationalism for treating aesthetic judgements as if they were a matter of personal, subjective feeling, since this, he argues, offers no justification for their claim to universality, *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 130–3, sects 277–9.

14 See Tom Furniss, 'Bourgeois Revolutionary in a Radical Crisis', in Peter Osborne (ed.), *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism* (Verso, London, 1991), p. 33; cf. p. 39. Furniss here offers a very interesting exploration of the ideological impasse to which Burke's argument on the sublime is subject in consequence of this tension between its 'individualizing' and its 'democratizing' impulses.

15 Neil Smith, *Uneven Development* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990), p. 13.

16 The Hudson River School in the early nineteenth century draws heavily on sublime imagery, but remains a minority taste opposed to the dominant Concordian sympathies. See Appleton, *Experience of Landscape*, p. 40f; cf. Annette Kolodny's discussion of Philip Freneau's poem, 'American Village' where the praise is for the soil which 'Now reft of trees, admits the cheerful light', and for a landscape from which wild animals have been eradicated, *The Lay of the Land* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975), p. 34; Leo Marx's emphasis on the 'garden' image of the American pastoral ideal, *The Machine in the Garden* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1964), pp. 36–44, 75–88.

17 See James Boulton's accounts, in his edition of Burke's *Enquiry*, pp. ciii–civ, of Chambers' *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1722), and of Thomas Whateley's advocacy of 'sublimity' in his *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770).

18 Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 40.

19 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 103, sect. 255.

20 Ibid., p. 104, sect. 256.

21 Ibid., pp. 110–11, sect. 261; for some consideration of the possible implications of these Kantian arguments for our own times, see Arnold Berleant, 'The Aesthetics of Art and Nature' in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Kemal and Gaskell, pp. 228–43.

22 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 111, sect. 262.

23 Ibid., p. 105, sect. 257.
24 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 92.
25 Ibid., pp. 109–13.
26 Ibid., pp. 113–15.
27 Ibid., p. 96.
28 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 116, sect. 265.
29 D. E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Croom Helm, London, 1984), p. 15.
30 John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980), p. 16; cf. pp. 6–10.
31 Roger Sharrock (ed.), *Selected Poems of William Wordsworth* (Heinemann, London 1958), p. 42.
32 Ibid., p. 85.
33 As we have seen (chapters 3 and 4) these same tendencies are notable in the presentation of women as closer to nature.
34 Robert E. Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Polity, Oxford, 1992), pp. 81–2.
35 Cf. John Barrell's recognition of the recurring reflexivity of the intellectual critique of class bias in the representation of nature, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, p. 5.
36 Wordsworth, 'Letter on the projected Windermere railway' in *The Illustrated Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes*, ed. Peter Bicknell (Webbs Bower, Exeter, 1984), p. 191.
37 Martin Ryle, review of Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environment* (Routledge, London, 1991), in *Radical Philosophy* 62 (Autumn 1992), p. 42.
38 Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1992), p. 37, and passim, ch. 1.

8

ECOLOGY, NATURE AND RESPONSIBILITY

The discussions in this book have been shaped by two concerns: firstly, to acknowledge and give due weight to those arguments that invite us to be suspicious of the concept of 'nature' because of the numerous ideological roles it has been called upon to play; and secondly, to endorse the ecologists' concern for human destruction of nature and the validity of their claims regarding the calamitous consequences of failure to respect the limits and conditions it imposes. The aim has been to admit – and hold in productive tension – the wisdom both of those who insist on the 'culturality' or 'constructed' nature of 'nature', and of those who would insist on the independent existence and specific determinations of that which is referred to through the concept of 'nature'. For while it is true that much of what we refer to as 'natural' is a 'cultural construct' in the sense that it has acquired its form as a consequence of human activity, that activity does not 'construct' the powers and processes upon which it is dependent for its operation. And while it is also true that our discourses on nature are constitutive of a series of conceptions and representations through which our policies on the environment are necessarily mediated, it is not the discourse of 'global warming' or 'industrial pollution' that has created the conditions of which it speaks.

Few, perhaps, would wish in the end to dispute these points. But if I have dwelt in this book on the tension between 'nature' and nature, it is because of the ways in which the emphasis on inverted commas 'nature' tends to a denial of nature, and the ways in which the emphasis on nature tends to ignore the reasons for the inverted commas. As we have seen, there are many reasons to be sceptical of those discourses that see no reason for the inverted commas. Western philosophy, for example, has shown too little awareness of the extent to which its distinction between humanity and nature is reflecting an ethnocentric bias in favour of 'civilized' humanity; nor has it properly registered the historicity of its concepts of nature and naturality, which insofar as they have been thought in opposition to the human have themselves been revised in the light of changing perceptions of who belongs within that community and what constitutes the distinguishing attributes of human 'being'. Indisputably, too, the discourse of 'nature' has served mystifying and oppressive ends, whether in legitimating divisions of class, race and gender, in encouraging intolerance of sexual minorities, or in promoting fictitious conceptions of national and tribal identity that have been all too destructive in their actual effect.

Yet none of these points about the constructed nature of 'nature', its pseudo or ideological status, can be registered without at least implicitly invoking the extra-discursive reality of the nature that is distorted or misrepresented through these cultural appropriations of the term. Moreover, much of the critique of the violence that has been done through the concept of nature is directed at the policing functions it has performed in sustaining ecologically destructive social relations. The nature that the ecologists are concerned to conserve is also the nature that has been dominated and destroyed in the name of the 'naturality' of a certain order of human relations,

needs, rights of ownership and forms of exploitation. A postmodernist argument that fails to acknowledge these points cannot, I have argued, consistently present itself as a friend of the ecological cause. But this also means that adherents of that cause should avoid forms of political discourse that tend to conflate the reality of nature with its ideological representation. Such conflations, I have argued, occur whenever eco-politics valorizes a past 'harmony' with nature or rural order in ways that abstract from the divisive social relations responsible for the production of that 'order'; whenever it draws on the traditional genderization of the nature–culture opposition; and whenever, in inviting us to appreciate our kinship with other animal species, it overlooks those ways in which we profoundly differ from them, and are by comparison under-determined either by biology or by existing environmental conditions. It is an implication of this argument that green politics needs always to consider its prescriptions about nature in the light of its frequently professed commitments to feminism, anti-racism, respect for sexual minorities and the promotion of democracy and social justice. For many of the gains that have been made in advancing these emancipatory causes have come out of the refusal to accept that some set of behaviours is more in conformity to 'nature' than others, and they have in some case depended quite directly on our acquired powers to intervene in biology and divert the course it might otherwise have taken.

Plural Values

Relatedly, green politics needs to recognize that it is appealing not to a single, but to a plurality of values, the mutual compatibility of which is by no means obvious and certainly needs to be displayed rather than merely assumed.

We may briefly consider in this connection the relations among three of the more important types of argument that have been offered in support of ecological preservation and conservation and that have been continuously referred to in the course of this work. In the first place, there is the aesthetic argument, whose primary appeal is to the beauty of nature and to the pleasures and solace afforded by an unspoilt environment. According to this strand of environmentalist argument, nature should be preserved for much the same reasons we would want to preserve a work of art: because of the delight and inspiration it provides. Closely allied to this in some respects, though sharply distinguished from it in others, is the argument from the 'intrinsic worth' of nature. Nature should be preserved not as a means to any human end, whether aesthetic or utilitarian, but because it is inherently valuable *as* nature, and in itself, because, it has been said, its value cannot be regarded as 'reducible to its value to God or humanity'.[1] Those defending this position may differ in respect of the parts of nature that may be said to have value in themselves, whether, for example, value is inherent in both animate and inanimate nature, whether it extends to non-life supporting parts of the cosmos or is confined to planet earth; but there is essential agreement that nature has value independently of human purposes or perceptions, that this has to do with its autonomy of those purposes, and that this provides the compelling reason why human beings should revere it and as far as possible leave it be.[2] Thirdly, there is the argument from utility, which emphasizes the importance of nature as a means to the end of human survival and flourishing. We have a duty to conserve the resources of nature (in other words to make use of them in sustainable ways) because they are essential to all human life both now and in the indefinite future. Here the moral emphasis falls less on our responsibilities to other species or to nature in itself, and more on the duties we have

towards it in virtue of the obligations we have towards future human generations.

Green politics frequently appeals to all these reasons conjointly, though we may distinguish here between the more prominent role played by arguments from the aesthetic and intrinsic worth of nature in the case for *preservation* (for the maintenance of wilderness, wildlife and unspoilt countryside), and the more prominent role played by utilitarian argument in the case for *conservation* (for the maintenance of resources).[3] Arguments for the preservation of landscape, however, do also frequently appeal to more utilitarian considerations (when they draw attention to its importance in providing a 'scientific laboratory' for naturalist studies, to the use of the countryside as a means of recreation and retreat, to the potential pharmacological value of its flora, or to the role it plays in maintaining genetic diversity).[4] The main emphasis may be on the aesthetic attractions or independent value of nature, but a case made on these grounds is often supplemented by a more instrumental appeal to the practical use that is made of the non-urban environment, or to the potential dangers of disturbing eco-balance and distraining on bio-diversity through destruction of natural habitats. I myself have argued that policies aimed at preserving the beauties of nature may also help to promote its sustainable use as a resource, and vice-versa, and that what practically serves to enhance the aesthetic attractions of the environment may also advance the conservationist cause. But there can certainly be clashes of interests at this level. Energy conversion programmes, such as the use of wind-power, are not necessarily guaranteed to beautify the landscape, and may well involve the siting of machinery in some of nature's most rugged and unspoilt reaches.[5] To observe the 'hands off' approach to the environment recommended by some deep ecologists would inevitably be to restrict even the most eco-benign attempts to conserve resources by

means of technological interventions in nature. So while it would seem plausible to suppose that conservationary policies would on the whole advance rather than obstruct preservationist objectives, one can still recognize the possibilities for practical conflicts of interest, and the extent to which these reflect more fundamental, if less explicitly acknowledged, differences of moral outlook. The ecology movement, when viewed as a whole, draws its force from a range of arguments whose ethical underpinnings are really quite divergent and difficult to reconcile.

We might note here the normative tension between the appeal to the aesthetic attractions of nature and the appeal to its intrinsic worth. It may perhaps seem odd to some to speak of a tension here, given the regularity with which deep ecological claims about the independent value of nature refer us to its beauties and illustrate their argument by reference to aesthetically valued properties. Not only are many of the items revered by deep ecologists those *we* regard as beautiful (sunsets, waterfalls, mountains, rivers, lakes, trees etc.), but it is not uncommonly suggested that the value of some natural feature, such as a sun-set or volcano, resides precisely in its beauty.[6] Still, there is a significant difference between the position which insists that these things are admirable 'in themselves' and hence valuable regardless of their observer, and the aestheticist approach which sees the joys of nature as residing in their delight for us. The environmentalist who wants to preserve a beauty spot is precisely not suggesting that it be preserved whether or not it is aesthetically valued by human beings, but appealing to the pleasure and solace that it affords to them. Preservationists of this stamp may well argue that by preserving beauty spots we also advance the cause of other species and help in the maintenance of as rich and diverse an eco-system as possible; but the essential appeal of the argument is 'anthropocentric' in the sense that nature is being valued for the value it has for us. An argument

from the intrinsic worth of nature (including its supposed intrinsic beauty) is, strictly speaking, not of this order, since its logic would seem to require us to preserve the environment and its wildlife whatever value it happened to have for us (and even if, one may surmise, they struck us as ugly, monotonous and worthless). To be asked to preserve nature for its own sake is to be asked to maintain it regardless of what merit or interest it might have in our eyes, and whatever its ravages upon human health and well-being.

Or so it might seem. But it is here that we encounter tensions within the argument of deep ecology itself. For while, on the one hand, there is a tendency to dismiss as 'anthropocentric' any attempt to bring human values and interests to bear in judging the claims of nature to preservation, there is also a pervasive inclination to point to humanly admired qualities – its diversity, richness, autonomy and beauty, for example – as those that endow it with 'intrinsic' value. Yet why invoke the qualities of nature at all, let alone these positive ones, unless to invite appraisal of it on a scale of human values? If nature does genuinely have value independently of human estimation of it, then, strictly speaking, we cannot know what it is, nor, a fortiori, applaud or condemn it and should refrain from pronouncing on its qualities. Either, then, the argument to value nature 'for its own sake' is self-defeating since, in the absence of knowledge of those ways in which nature might be an end in itself, we have no conceptual means of obeying an injunction to respect it for those ends; or it is intended to register the fact that nature is (or should be) valued for other than instrumental purposes, and thus to draw attention to those properties in nature which, in the eyes of human beings, make it worth salvaging even if the salvage operation has to proceed at the cost of other projects they also value, and even (such is the perspective of an extreme eco-centrism) if it means sacrificing their

own species' well-being or survival. When construed in this latter sense, however, the ascription of 'intrinsic' value remains human-orientated both in the sense that the worth of nature is being judged and advocated by reference to human criteria of value (notably, the value placed on non-instrumental valuing), and in its assumption that human beings, unlike any other species in nature, could in principle subordinate their own interests to those of the 'rest of nature'. Indeed, it may be said that this latter assumption is incompatible with many of the claims that deep ecology is wont to make concerning human kinship with the 'rest of nature'. For we would not expect any other species to prioritize the needs of others over its own, and would regard it as profoundly unnatural were it to give evidence of doing so.

Of course, it may always be argued that human interests are themselves best served by enhancing the survival and flourishing of the rest of nature, and there are self-styled 'deep' ecologists who invite us to view the matter in this light. Thus, Arne Naess, who is usually credited with laying the foundations of a deep ecology perspective, defends his eco-centric and bio-centric argument by reference to a philosophy of human self-realization. Naess's 'ecosophy' (the term he has coined for a philosophical world-view inspired by the conditions of life in the eco-sphere)[7] justifies its call for the development of a 'deep identification of individuals with all life forms',[8] precisely in terms of its significance for the individual adopting such a perspective. But while it may well be true that an individual's life can only be enhanced by a deeper concern for other species and inorganic nature (and certainly true that the quality of all human species life both now and in the future can only be improved by rejecting a more consumerist interpretation of human interests), it is also clear that anyone arguing for preservation on this basis is operating within a value system that makes it extremely problematic

to defend the equal value and rights to survival of all life forms. Naess's human self-realization thesis, which pays special attention to the gains for our species of respecting the intrinsic value of nature, is, in other words, difficult to reconcile with his bio-centric egalitarianism. Anyone inviting us to view all life as having equal intrinsic value, or deeply to identify with the mosquito or the locust, the streptococcus or the AIDS virus, cannot consistently place more weight on human self-realization than on the gains that will accrue thereby to any other participant in the eco-system. Either some parts of nature are more valuable (rich, complex, sentient, beautiful . . .), and hence to be more energetically preserved, or they are not. But if they are not, then we should take the measure of the value system involved, and not present bio-centrism as if were plainly in the interests of the species being called upon to adopt its values. We cannot both emphasize the importance of human self-realization and adopt a position on the value of nature which would, for example, problematize the use of anti-biotics in the prevention of childhood illness.

None of these arguments are meant to deny the role that eco-centric and bio-centric philosophies may play in inviting us to re-think our attitudes to nature, and thus in becoming more sensitive to wasteful, cruel or irrational dimensions of our treatment of it. In checking nonchalance and causing a more embarrassed sense of our relations to nature, these eco- or bio-centric perspectives are a valuable adjunct of green politics. But they may be most valuable, paradoxically, precisely because of the reflections they provoke about the limitations of their logic. Through their very insistence on the 'intrinsic' value of nature, they invite us to think more seriously about how nature may be said to have value, and about the incoherence of attempting to speak for this except by reference to human utilitarian, moral or aesthetic interests and predispositions. By insisting on the equal value of all life forms, they recall us to the absurdity

of going to that extreme, to the actual dependency of life on the destruction of life, and thus to the compromised nature of all biotic relations to nature. The virtue of such moral recommendations, in other words, lies in the thought they provoke about the impossibility of following them to the letter, and about the immoralities into which we may be led by attempting to follow them in the spirit. They are useful not because we can observe them, but because they cause us to reflect on how we cannot, or why we do not want to. In this sense, they provide cautionary tales against the temptation to suppose that human relations to nature can be resolved from a position of moral absolutism.

For the most part, it should be said, those who insist on the 'intrinsic' value of nature do not go to the 'democratic' extreme of pressing the equal worth of all natural entities, but remain committed either explicitly or implicitly to the idea of a hierarchical ordering in nature. Those, for example, defending the cause of animal rights have challenged the Great Chain of Being conception of human superiority over other mortal creatures, and have entered into extensive debate about where exactly one draws the line between those non-humans who may be said to have rights (or, towards whom, at any rate, human beings have special duties), but there is a general consensus that we are here talking about rights or obligations that apply only to a restricted range of living beings – those who by virtue of their neuro-physiology are capable of a significant degree of sentience.[9] Such animals, whether or not we want to refer to them as 'higher' in virtue of their capacities for feeling (and hence to regard the epithets 'cruel' or 'insensitive' as appropriate descriptions of human maltreatment of them) are clearly being thought of as having claims to moral attention that are denied to less developed forms of life. Even, then, where arguments on the preservation of other species have been couched in terms strongly denunciatory of 'anthropocentric' attitudes to nature, they

have very frequently recognized, at least implicitly, that there are logical limits and practical difficulties in pressing to the extreme the case against human perspectives and self-privileging.

Obligations to the Future?

Nonetheless, we should still note the extensive difference of moral bias between all those arguments that stress the 'intrinsic' and non-instrumental value of nature, and call upon us to preserve it as an *end* in itself, and those that emphasize the value of nature as an essential *means* of the preservation and enhancement of human life, and thus the duty we have to conserve its resources for future generations. Neither theoretically nor practically are these two positions easy to reconcile, and we should not suppose that they are. Nor should we make the 'anthropocentric' mistake of simply assuming that the argument from 'utility' is more obviously coherent and morally compelling than the arguments from the intrinsic merit of nature.

Both its presuppositions – that human beings *do* have obligations towards future generations, and that it is the sense of these that provides the primary source of moral legitimation for the cause of ecological conservation – could well be disputed: the first on the grounds that there is something altogether too vague, and maybe incoherent, about imputing such an indefinite form of obligation; the second on the grounds that any such possible obligation is simply not sufficiently widely felt to merit the confidence placed by the Green Movement in this motivation to adopt policies of ecological sustainability. In other words, whatever the limitations of the arguments which appeal to the aesthetic or intrinsic value of nature, might not the argument from utility be said to be an equally vulnerable form of legitimation of the cause of nature conservation?

It is certainly deeply problematic, and not least because of the difficulties of imputing any general obligation to a human species, many of whose members have been deprived the access to those utilities they are supposedly obliged to bequeath to the future. But even if we abstract from this aspect of the problem for the moment, and accept the terms in which discussions of this issue are commonly pursued, namely, as a question about 'human' obligations to the future, there are still a number of objections to the idea of any such duty of which we need to take account. The most nonchalant, and I think more readily dismissible, are those that appeal to the idea of future human ingenuity and technical mastery: humanity has never set itself historical problems that it has not found the means to resolve; it matters little what 'we' do now, 'they' of the future will find means to surmount the ecological problems they inherit from the past, and may even discover ways of turning to their own advantage what we regard as deficiencies. But this 'Promethean' objection simply evades the moral issue, since the obligation is one that arises in virtue of the *present* knowledge we have, firstly about the predictable consequences of current levels of resource use and forms of pollution, and secondly of the likely limits of human powers, technical or otherwise, to contain or adapt to those consequences. One would not think very highly of an argument to the effect that we need not bother very much about infant malnutrition *now* because medical science over the next couple of decades or so is almost bound to find some means of correcting its negative effects on the adult individual; and we should not use similar forms of argument to justify ecological irresponsibility.

A second set of objections also proceeds from the premise of our 'ignorance' about future eventuation, but argues to the rather differing, and more convincing effect, that the inherent limitations in the knowledge that any given generation can be expected to have about the most

long term consequences of its environmental policies must also limit the obligations that it can be said to have towards those that will succeed it. As various commentators have pointed out, since we cannot predict all possible outcomes of our actions, and even those adopted for the best motives can have unintended adverse effects, the notion of human obligations to succeeding generations cannot be construed as extending into an unlimited future.[10] Just as the notion of a distinctively moral responsibility would begin to collapse were we to regard individuals as accountable for the entire concatenation of effects that might be causally traceable to any of their actions, so it does if attributions of a more collective or generational obligation are interpreted in those terms, as in effect they would have to be if viewed as indefinitely extending into the future.

But against this, it can also be said that the argument applies conversely, and on much the same grounds on which we do attribute individual responsibility for the more immediately foreseeable consequences of action, so it can be argued there is a more general and indefinitely relayed generational liability for the predictable consequences of the use, or misuse, of the environment and its resources. In this sense we might claim that the human species has a continuous intra-generational obligation to ensure ecological viability for those who are not yet born, although there will be definite limits on its liability at any point in time.

But it is at this point that the argument needs to address the implications of its universalist premises. For it would seem that the most compelling grounds for supposing that any given generation of occupants of the planet is ecologically answerable as a collective to all the members of the next lies in the assumption that these latter, too, in virtue of being humans possessed of certain needs for survival and self-fulfilment, have a right to avail themselves, as 'we' have done, of the natural resources essential to meeting those

needs. But unless the 'we' of this argument does have the universal applicability it claims, then the attribution of a general species accountability cannot be sustained. If there are some of 'us' who *been deprived* of the resources whose supposed availability grounds this obligation, then the argument for a collective species responsibility to the future ceases to have the validity that is claimed for it. For the 'human species' to be obliged to the future on these lines is for it also to be obliged to the present: to all those of its members who are currently denied the means of survival, let alone of the means of self-realization or 'flourishing' that it is assumed, on this argument, are included within the 'legacy' that each generation has a duty to bequeath. In short, there can be no justifiable grounds for arguing that there is a commonly shared 'species' responsibility to ensure ecological sustainability, which does not also at the present time provide grounds for insisting that this is a responsibility that has to fall essentially on those sectors of the global community that have hitherto been most selfishly irresponsible and profligate in their use of global resources. Thus we can argue that although there *is* an obligation to future generations that is grounded in what is common to us as human beings and in the knowledge we have of ecology, it is precisely because there is that there is also an obligation on the more affluent nations to promote the conditions in the present that might allow it to be more universally assumed and efficaciously pursued: which might actualize what for the time being must remain a merely regulative ideal of 'collective' species responsibility.

This, of course, has direct bearing on the question of the extent to which the argument from utility can draw on an acknowledged and morally compelling sense of obligation to conserve nature as a future resource. For one answer we might give is that the obligation to future generations will be the more universally and compellingly felt, the more justice comes to prevail in the distribution of global resources in the present. Which means, in effect, that it will depend on the extent to which those who have been most privileged in the access they have had to the earth's resources come to feel obligated to constrain their own consumption and to provide for those who have hitherto been seriously deprived.

Green Politics

These implications of the 'utility' argument have, it should be said, been widely acknowledged within the Green Movement. In pressing the claims of future generations, the Green parties have consistently emphasized their commitment to a more equitable distribution of global resources and the alleviation of poverty, and their manifestos and programmes systematically link the cause of nature conservation with the promotion of democracy, the emancipation of oppressed groups, and the adoption of more egalitarian economic strategies.[11]

In this sense, green politics, though tending to eschew the vocabulary of socialism and capitalism in favour of that of social justice and anti-industrialism, adopts an integrated and essentially left-wing perspective on the resolution of ecological crisis: a perspective wherein – to invoke the tension I sketched at the end of chapter 6 – the cause of the 'party of humanity' and that of the 'party of nature' are seen to be intimately connected: promoting global equality will reduce over-population, thus alleviating the stress on nature and allowing for the development of more conservatory practices towards the environment and non-human forms of life.

Yet it is one thing to argue for an integral perspective, another to accept, or be able to act upon, its implications in practice, and we would have to recognize that there

are very real difficulties in attempting to promote a green agenda of this kind within the existing economic context. We have already noted some of the ways in which heritage and rural preservation tends to confirm the ideologies of nature through which its exploitation has been legitimated and, in virtue of its insertion within the market economy, remains obedient to economic imperatives that serve neither social justice nor ecological good management. Other practical tensions relate to the socio-economic impact of successful acts of nature and wildlife conservation on the livelihood of human beings. One may certainly argue that there is no necessity for a conflict between nature and humanity at this level, and that conflicts arise only because of an economic system within which it is the imperatives of the accumulation of capital and maximization of profits that determine the allocation of human labour and the utilization of natural resources. An alternative economic system, in other words, could assert political control over production in ways that could in principle allow for a resolution of the competition between human and environmental interests. But there is no denying that within the existing economic order there must be a continuous contradiction between preserving nature and securing human employment, and that the one is very frequently achieved only at the cost to the other. It is, of course, precisely the argument of capitalism that human jobs will be placed on the line if we give too much priority to nature, and the workers who will have to pay the price if the costs of curbing pollution are set too high. It is an argument that can only be challenged by challenging the fundamental tenets of capitalist philosophy itself: that there can be no value placed on time and space that is not operational (and therefore reducible to monetary terms);[12] that human progress and well-being are to be judged by reference to rates of economic growth and GNP indices of living standards; that private consumer choice

takes precedence over the provision of public goods; and that there should always be strict correlation between work performed and rewards received. Such challenges to the alienation, commodity fetishism and work ethic of capitalist logic have of course been central themes of ecological critique. But so long as this logic does determine the course of social life, it will also ensure the truth of its own predictions, and thus protract a situation in which it is rather easier to be green and to triumph in the successful preservation of the environment, if it is not one's own employment that is put at risk in consequence.

Or perhaps it would be fairer to say that one of the effects of the inegalitarian structure of the market economy is that it distributes the conflicts of interest between humanity and nature very unfairly, and renders them a more acute experience for some than for others. Required by the state conservation laws to leave standing a certain ratio of trees to spotted owls, the lumberjacks in some parts of Oregon, where the spotted owl is doing particularly well, have now come to an end of their permitted logging activities, and are facing unemployment in consequence. Do they resent the spotted owl, or wish it unprotected? Not exactly, and some, it seems, have spent their enforced idleness in perfecting suitable hoots whereby to communicate with them. But there is a certain envy of the owl's prosperity and self-realization; or, as one of them has wrily commented, maybe it was now up to the lumberjacks to see whether they couldn't flourish on a diet of mice.[13]

Of course, against episodes of this kind must be set numerous others where the workers in question display no such ironic affection for the species whose protection may be endangering their own viability, and many have been markedly hostile to attempts to restrict whaling, seal-culling and similar enforcements. Those dependent on defence and nuclear contracts or employed in other dangerous and highly polluting industries have also shown

rather little sympathy for Greenpeace activities or the politics of the Green Movement. All the same, it would be a mistake for environmentalists to overlook the complexity of feeling that the ecological cause may engender in those whose means of life bring them most directly into conflict with it; and an even greater mistake to suppose that it is simply some failure of green sensibility on the part of the employees in these industries that accounts for their resistance to the ecological cause.

One implication of these tensions is that all of us who are critical of the destruction of nature may need to develop a stronger sense of our involvement in, and reliance upon, the industrial processes and means of communication whose effects we so deplore. Ecological writing offers many powerful descriptions of what it is like to be a *consumer* of pollution, a traveller through industrial wastelands, an observer of nature's spoilage, a victim of the poisons of its abuse; rather less attention gets drawn to the role played in the creation of these frightful scenarios by our most everyday needs (for electricity, house paint, medicine, glues, batteries, chemical cleaners, dyes, insecticides, etc.): for a whole range of commodities, that is, which we assume an easy access to and do not think twice about going to the nearest retailer to acquire. This is not to say that the contribution of consumer wants in precipitating ecological crisis is never targeted in this literature, and the role that individuals play at this level in its creation has come in for a good deal of criticism, notably in respect of the use of the private motor-car. But there is, all the same, a pervasive tendency to think in terms of a 'them' versus 'us', producers versus consumers, allocation of causes and consequences, which is not necessarily helpful in getting our moral bearings on the issue. To place all the blame on the indomitable forces of the modern industrial juggernaut, or to present its faceless agents and authorities as locked into a conspiracy to keep us from the truth of the toxins

it daily insinuates into our blood and breast-milk, air and water, is itself a piece of mystification: a reification of social relations that may indeed be hugely difficult to transform, but do not have the natural intransigence of the law of gravity. If we are all of us locked into systems of work, modes of consumption, and forms of transport which make our individual acts daily involuntary agents of pollution, waste and ozone deficiency, and if there are indeed innumerable agencies and bureaucratic authorities bent on denying us accurate information of the risks we run in satisfying our most natural functions, this is in part because so many continue to give their mandate to a mode of production geared first to the production of profit, and only very secondarily to making good its negative by-products for nature and human welfare.

This, to my mind, is a limitation of Ulrich Beck's influential and powerful indictment of the environmental consequences of modern society: that it is so predominantly addressed to the victimization of its collective client-consumers and so little to their differential and in some cases very collusive roles in maintaining the system of production that creates their plight. This universal vulnerability is associated by Beck with a shift from the 'classical' (and class) society of industrialism to that of the 'risk' society, a shift, he argues, that has been accompanied by significant changes in economic structures and political agencies. 'What corresponds,' he writes, 'to the political subject of class society – the proletariat – in risk society is only the *victimisation of all of us by more or less tangible, massive dangers.*'[14] But while Beck is right to point to the ways in which the 'risk' and dangers of modernity's manipulations of nature cannot be class confined or finally kept at bay through property and personal wealth, it would surely be a mistake to overlook the vast inequalities in their distribution, both globally and within the nation state; or the extent to which their production is the consequence of

a system that is still very much dependent on class and gender division and designed to sustain its inequalities of wealth, privilege and relative safety. The risk society may tend towards a consumer 'democratization' in the sense that it increasingly exposes everyone equally to its negative by-products; but one could hardly claim that its structures of *production* are tending towards any such 'democracy' of victimization. Hence when Beck assumes, as he tends to, that the resolution of the ecological problems of modernity will come through a 'collective' transcendence of its technocratic practice and its current modes of legitimation, he may be seriously underestimating the vested interests that the more privileged sectors of this 'collective' have in sustaining the existing relations of production and their divisive structure of wealth production.

Moreover, while it may be true, as Beck says, that the contemporary plea is 'I am afraid' where that of 'classical' industrial society was 'I am hungry',[15] this is in part, at least, because we expect so much more today than to 'live by bread alone', and because of the success of industrial society in meeting those expectancies. Victims we may be in many ways, and caught up unwillingly in the system that creates us such, but that system could not function without the cooperation and legitimation of certain desires, tolerances, and life priorities. Always to view the destruction of nature from the consumer end, as if it were a problem produced by others elsewhere beyond our powers of intervention, is, in a sense, to retain at the very heart of one's critique a misleading view of nature as an 'externality' rather than to see ourselves as permanently within its midst and determining of its context in all our acts of production and consumption. If we are serious about protecting nature (and hence ourselves from the risks incurred by its exploitation) we have also seriously to consider what we are willing to forego materially in order to achieve it. Or to put it more positively, we need

to re-think hedonism itself: to consider whether we might not derive more pleasure by restraining those forms of consumption that place most stress on nature and most endanger ourselves in the process. Our experience of life might, after all, be altogether more heady and exotic were it to be less narrowly fixated on the acquisition of resource-hungry, cumbersome, short-lived, junk-creating commodities.

Advocates of a less materially orientated consumption are often presented as puritan ascetics bent on inculcating a more 'spiritual' sense of needs and pleasures. Yet this is in some ways quite misleading. Modern consumption, it could be said, is too little interested in the goods of the flesh, too unconcerned with sensory experience, too obsessed with a whole range of products that screen out or keep us at a sanitary distance from a more sensuous and erotic gratification. Many of the goods deemed essential to a high standard of living are more anaesthetizing than they are indulgent of sensual experience, more ascetic than profligate in what they offer in the way of the pleasures of conviviality, neighbourliness and relaxation, freedom from noise, stench and ugliness. An eco-friendly consumption would not involve a reduction of living standards, but rather an altered conception of the standard itself; nor would it depend on some mass conversion to other-worldliness. It might require only that far more people become more exorbitant in their demand for such goods as to walk where they want to, when they want to; to loiter talking on street corners; to travel slowly; to have solitude, space to play and time to be idle – and were willing to pay the price in terms of a more modest and less privatized structure of material satisfactions.[16]

One is inclined to think, in fact, that the ecological cause can be best served by turning some of the sensibility we bring to the appreciation of the value of nature back upon ourselves. Mark Sagoff is quite right to argue that

cost-benefit analysis of environmental degradation fails to acknowledge, and cannot accommodate, the moral and aesthetic quality of the consumer concern for the preservation of nature and the risks run through pollution.[17] But if consumers are to be consistent on this issue, they ought also to consider the impact on the environment of the cost-benefit analysis that is so widely used in assessing the quality of their individual life-style and self-enhancement. The tendency for the value of nature to be represented only in monetary terms cannot in the end be entirely divorced from the tendency for individuals to assess the pleasures and potentials of their personal lives along similar lines.

I make these points not because I think they are the only ones that can be made about affluent consumption; nor because I think most Greens would disagree with them; but because of their bearing on the coherence of the 'utility' argument for nature conservation. For if this does entail, as it might appear to, some collective responsibility on the part of the more 'fearful' societies towards the more 'famished', then there are, to say the least, severe limits on the extent to which this obligation can be assumed within the existing order of capitalist relations; nor can one feel at all hopeful at the present time about the emergence of any extensive popular will to supersede those relations.

This has some bearing on the promotion of any eco socialist programme, since the prospects for its adoption in the West do, it would seem, look rather bleak if we are relying exclusively on some wholesale conversion to socialist morality. At any rate, one is not encouraged to think that the peoples of the affluent nations will readily forego their privileged modes of consumption in order to promote global equity now and to ensure the needs of future generations. This is not to deny the measure of support for these aims that does now exist – and the socialist case can, indeed, build on this through continuous exposure of the suffering and damage incurred by capitalist

accumulation. Against the inherent tendency of global capitalism to 'contain' and 'manage' ecological scarcities in ever more unjust ways, it can emphasize the potential of an alternative economic order to reconcile the cause of nature with that of social justice and greater human well-being. But I think it also has to be accepted that had a concern for parity been predominant, we would not be facing the forms of ecological collapse and social barbarism we now are. Worried though people may be about ecological attrition, and alarmed though many are about the ways in which the pursuit of First World affluence protracts and exacerbates deprivation elsewhere, it is abundantly clear that these anxieties in themselves have not proved sufficient to prompt any radical transformation of consumer habits. This means, I suggest, that the appeal to altruism has to be complemented by an appeal to self-interest, where what is stressed is not simply the misery and risk to be alleviated, but the pleasures to be realized by breaking with current market-defined and capitalist promoted conceptions of the good life. In other words, it is only if sufficient numbers come to experience the enticement of the gratifications promised by less materially fixated life-styles that they will seriously consider mandating policies to constrain very resource-hungry and exploitative modes of consumption. If there is to be any chance of reversing the profound, and in many ways justified, scepticism about the viability of an alternative to the market, it will require the socialist argument to be backed not only by some very convincing blue-printing of the institutions that could realize an 'authentic' and genuinely democratic socialist order, but also by an alternative hedonist vision: by very different conceptions of consumption and human welfare from those promoted under capitalism, pursued under 'actual existing socialism' or hitherto associated with orthodox socialist theory. If socialists are genuinely concerned with the universal satisfaction of basic needs now and in the

future, they must become advocates of an alternative utopia of wants.

Transforming Attitudes

But these points equally have bearing on the argument of those who would seek to promote the Green agenda simply by emphasizing the 'intrinsic' value of nature and insisting that it must be 'respected'. Robert Goodin's argument, for example, that Green politics is driven by a 'single moral vision' rooted in the primary, self-occurring value of nature, and that priority should always be given to the preservation of this value, seems absurdly voluntaristic in its supposition that 'people' could, or would ever wish, to cede such primacy to nature. Morover, given that Goodin's professed aim is to supply a theory of value for Green party politics, and that he is clearly committed to the democratic and humanly emancipatory aspects of the Green programme, his preparedness so to sever the question of agency from that of the protection of nature seems deeply problematic. There is, in fact, more of a tension between Goodin's Green theory of value and the interests expressed in justice, equality and human welfare in the Green party manifestos than Goodin himself seems prepared to acknowledge. When he claims that Green values should be given preference over a 'green theory of agency', and that it is therefore always more important that the right things be done to nature than that they be done in a particular way or through a particular agency;[18] or when, citing the Mediaeval English village in illustration, he tells us that 'living in harmony' with nature does not require egalitarian communities,[19] he is offering a moral foundation for Green politics that could in principle legitimate extremely reactionary policies on conservation. (We must, in any case, always ask what

exactly is meant by speaking of such communities as 'living in harmony' with nature when their individual members were so differentiated in their relations to it.)

Goodin is no doubt right that value and agency are divorced in the sense that ecological crisis might be accommodated in a variety of political modes. But it is precisely because a regard for the immediate interests of nature may be consistent with the least democratic political forms and the implementation of totalitarian methods of controlling human consumption and population that a Green politics that professes a concern for global equity and the emancipation of oppressed sectors of the human community must eschew a theory of value of a simplistic kind. It must surely also take issue with Goodin's suggestion that individuals could 'depart from a green personal lifestyle in almost any given respect' while still endorsing the Green theory of value and its public policies.[20] It may be true that we do not have to have 'silly beliefs about homoeopathic medicine or tree spirits,'[21] in order to be ecologically responsible, but we surely cannot consistently endorse Green policies on transport or resource conservation while retaining the 'greyest' or 'brownest' habits of consumption at the level of personal life-style.

There is, finally, a tension in offering a theory of value which places such weight on the preservation of nature as an *end* in itself to a Green party politics whose emphasis on the needs of future generations only makes sense if nature is viewed as a *means* to human preservation. At any rate, it is difficult both to argue for a theory of natural value, which implies that human beings distrain on the value of nature when they harness it to the satisfaction of their own interests, and to appeal to the obligations they have (and should feel) to ensure the indefinite continuity and flourishing of their species.

Goodin and other ecological writers, however, are quite right to imply that a transformation of our attitudes to

nature, including a re-thinking of the ways in which we have (or have not) valued it, can have an important role to play in transforming modes of production and consumption along lines that can help to ensure the provisioning for future generations. I support Goodin's sense, too, that the revaluation process does not require us to become deeply spiritual about nature, and is unlikely to be advanced by adopting mystical and divining attitudes towards it.

At any rate, one can certainly argue that the calls for a new 'religion' of nature are confused and quixotic if they are based on the assumption that by re-inspiring a certain 'awe' of nature we shall protect it against its further exploitation. The theological idea of nature as the purposeful gift of God did, perhaps, help to protect it by encouraging a certain fear of retribution for its abuse.[22] It is true, too, that animistic beliefs about nature have generally gone together with fears and taboos constraining human relations with it. But we must dispute the idea that these forms of reverence or superstition played any significant *causal* role in inhibiting its technical mastery.

Pre-industrial cultures were not spared the ravages of 'instrumental rationality' because of their religious feelings for nature; they experienced those feelings in the absence of the scientific understanding of its 'cosmic forces' and the technical means to harness its powers. It may indeed be more difficult to sustain a sense of obligation towards the preservation of nature (or to argue for that obligation), in the absence of any belief in its divine origins or spiritual purpose. But it is a mistake to suppose that by re-instilling some such structure of belief, even if that were possible, one would stay the hand of technology.

We cannot seek to protect nature by pretending to forms of belief that have been exploded by the march

of science and technology, however destructive that may have proved. Nor, one may argue, would it be desirable or appropriate to seek to rediscover in nature itself some quasi-divine authority compelling our obligations towards it. This is in part because of the implications of doing so for the conception of moral responsibility itself. The desanctification of nature has certainly gone together with, and in part encouraged, attitudes to its use that have had grave consequences from an ecological point of view; but the damage has proceeded correlatively with the development of modes of thinking that have conceived the morality of human actions to consist in their liberation from the coercion of fear and superstition.

It is this autonomous quality that arguably gives special value to those forms of obligation for the preservation of nature that we do happen to experience. The experience may, in a sense, come harder in a culture that has ceased to believe in a divinely ordained and supervised universe, but it is the more properly ethical for being motivated neither by irrational forms of superstition nor by any fear of divine retribution for the abuse of nature.

But there is also the further, and related, consideration that the holding of false beliefs about nature may be incompatible with the adoption of a properly moral regard for its preservation. As John O'Neill has put it:

> There is a necessary regulation between ethical concern for an object and true beliefs about it: proper concern for an object x presupposes the possession of a core set of true beliefs about x. This is not just because if one has false beliefs about x concerned actions for x are likely to be misplaced, true as this is. It is also that if one has systematically false beliefs about x, there is a sense in which x is not the object of one's concern

> at all. Hence the justifiable complaint lovers sometimes make on parting: 'You never really loved me; you loved someone else you mistook me for.' A similar complaint can be made of those in green movements who insist on an anti-scientific, mythologized and personalized picture of the natural world: the natural world simply isn't the object of their concern.[23]

Of course, there are relativists who will dispute this whole picture on the grounds that it speaks to the prejudices of scientific culture itself in supposing that any one account of nature can be said to be 'truer' than any other. But those who seriously espouse this form of relativism should also refrain themselves from any confident pronouncements about the damage inflicted by science or the risks incurred by the adoption of its methods. For to condemn the effects of conventional medicine, to target the poisons or pollutants of modern industry, or to offer any similar critique of the negative impact of the 'technical fix' approach to nature, is implicitly to accept as 'true' the accounts of the workings of biological and physical nature that are offered by science itself.

It is a profound error to suppose that, in defending a secular view of nature, one is in some sense committed to an uncritical acceptance of the 'authority' of science or bound to endorse the rationality of the modes in which scientific knowledge has been put to use. To defend such a view is, on the contrary, to seek to further the rational disenchantment with those forms of scientific wisdom and technological 'expertise' that have proved so catastrophic in their impact on the environment. To pit a religious or mystical conception of nature against these forms of technological abuse is less to undermine than to collude in the myth of the omnipotence of science: it is to perpetuate precisely the supposition that needs to be challenged – that because science and technology *can* achieve results that magical interactions with nature cannot, they are always

put to work to good effect. What is needed, in fact, is not more Green religion, but more Green science of the kind that the Green parties, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Vertic, and numerous other agencies one might name, are continuously throwing in the way of the smooth running of the military-industrial complex. Government and industry and all those bent on confirming us in our 'greyer' or 'browner' habits would far sooner that the Green Movement *did* confine itself to mysticism than come to them, as it fortunately so often does, armed with incontrovertible statistics and scientific evidence on the damage and risks of current policy on the environment.

In any case, it is not clear that by becoming more mystical or religious about nature one necessarily overcomes the damaging forms of separation or loss of concern that have been the consequence of a secular and instrumental rationality. What is really needed, one might argue, is not so much new forms of awe and reverence of nature, but rather to extend to it some of the more painful forms of concern we have for ourselves. The sense of rupture and distance that has been encouraged by secular rationality may be better overcome, not by worshipping this 'other' to humanity, but through a process of re-sensitization to our combined separation from it and dependence upon it. We need, in other words, to feel something of the anxiety and pain we experience in our relations with other human beings in virtue of the necessity of death, loss and separation. We are inevitably compromised in our dealings with nature in the sense that we cannot hope to live in the world without distraining on its resources, without bringing preferences to it that are shaped by our own concerns and conceptions of worth, and hence without establishing a certain structure of priorities in regard to its use. Nor can we even begin to reconsider the ways in which we have been too nonchalant and callous in our attitudes to other life forms, except in the light of a certain privileging

of our own sense of identity and value. All the same, we can certainly be more or less aware of the compromise, more or less pained by it, and more or less sensitive to the patterning of the bonds and separations that it imposes.

This, as I have argued throughout the book, precisely does not mean overlooking differences between ourselves and other creatures. It may on the contrary mean becoming more alert to what is problematic in the attempt to do so. To become more sensitive to nature may, in this sense, simply be to experience a little more regret than we have tended to in the past at the fact that the bonds cannot be indefinitely extended. We cannot be equally protective towards everything in nature; nor, one might argue, would it be any more appropriate to seek to be so than it is to attempt to protect one's child from every possible source of pain or damage. But our relations to the environment and its life forms could certainly benefit from something more of the angst experienced in the case of the child – whose exposure to risk we continue to feel very acutely in the very moment of appreciating the necessity for it. Rather than becoming more awe-struck by nature, we need perhaps to become more stricken by the ways in which our dependency upon its resources involves us irremediably in certain forms of detachment from it. To get 'closer' to nature is, in a sense, to experience more anxiety about all those ways in which we cannot finally identify with it nor it with us. But in that very process, of course, we would also be transforming our sense of human identity itself.

Notes

1 Cf. Robert Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Polity Press, Oxford, 1992), p. 8. The ecology movement today, suggests Goodin, is to be distinguished from that of the 1970s, in terms of the greater emphasis it places on the independent value of nature, by comparison with the earlier, more instrumental quality of the arguments for nature preservation and conservation.

2 Important treatments of the idea are to be found in Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986); Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1988); Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (The University of Georgia Press, London, 1991). See also the section on 'green philosophy' in *The Green Reader*, ed. Andrew Dobson (André Deutsche, London, 1994); A. Brennan, *Thinking about Nature* (Routledge, London, 1988); J. B. Callicott, *In Defence of the Land Ethic* (State University of New York Press, New York, 1989), part III; J. O'Neill, 'The Varieties of Intrinsic Value', *The Monist* 75 (1992); *Ecology, Policy and Politics* (Routledge, London, 1993), ch. 2.

3 Cf. John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, 2nd edn (Duckworth, London, 1980), p. 73. The quality of the distinction, and differential moral obligations to nature implied by it, are usefully illustrated in this work, esp. in chs 4 and 5.

4 Ibid., pp. 101–7.

5 Cf. *The Guardian*, pages on the environment, 5 November 1993. On the general question of the compatibility between the objectives of sustainability and the protection of the environment, see Bryan Norton, 'Sustainability, Human Welfare and Ecosystem Health', *Environmental Values* 1, 2 (1992), pp. 97–111.

6 See Robert Sylvan's discussion of 'deep' ecological conceptions of intrinsic value, *Radical Philosophy* 40 (Summer 1985), pp. 12, esp. pp. 8–9; Cf. Brennan, *Thinking About Nature*, chs 5–8.

7 Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989), p. 38; cf. pp. 34–67 passim.

8 Ibid., p. 85; cf. pp. 194–5 (where Naess makes clear a sympathy for Jainism).

9 The literature on animal rights is now vast. The more influential works include: Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (London, 1976); Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (London, 1988); Tom Regan and Peter Singer (eds), *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (Englewood Cliffs, 1976); Peter Singer (ed.), *In Defence of Animals* (Oxford, 1988); S. Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984); Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (The University of Georgia Press, Athens US, 1983); Keith Tester, *Animals and Society: the Humanity of Animal Rights* (London, 1991); M. P. T. Leahy, *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective* (London, 1991). For a superb discussion of the debates in this

field, and critique of liberal approaches, see Ted Benton, *Natural Relations* (Verso, London 1993); for an interesting appraisal of Benton's argument, see Bob Brecher, *Radical Philosophy* 67 (Summer 1994), pp. 43–5.

10 Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, pp. 75–87; J. B. Cameron, 'Do Future Generations Matter?' in *Ethics and Environmental Responsibility*, ed. Nigel Dower (Gower Publishing, Aldershot, 1989) pp. 57–78, esp. part II; B. Barry, 'Justice Between the Generations' in *Law, Morality and Society* ed. P. M. S. Hacker and J. Raz (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977), pp. 268–84 (though Cameron and Barry both contest Passmore's conclusion that the basis for our obligations to posterity resides in the love experienced for immediate descendants, and cannot be expected to extend beyond that foundation). Commentators, in fact, diverge considerably in the view they take of the implications of the point about limited knowledge for the degree and grounds of responsibility. See also the discussions of Gregory Kavka, 'The Futurity Problem' in *Obligations to Future Generations*, ed. R. I. Sikora and B. Barry (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1978), pp. 186–203; Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, pp. 88–114; R. and V. Routley, 'Nuclear Energy and Obligations to the Future' *Inquiry* 21 (1978), pp. 133–79; *Responsibilities to Future Generations*, ed. Ernest Partridge (Prometheus Books, New York, 1981).

11 Cf. The Manifesto of *Die Grünen* 1983 (which has been a model for other European Green parties). For further documentation and discussion of Green party policies, see Rudolf Bahro, *Building the Green Movement*, trans. Mary Tyler (Heretic Books, London, 1986); Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought* (Unwin Hyman, London, 1990); *Into the 21st Century: An Agenda for Political Realignment*, ed. Felix Dodds (Green Print, Basingstoke, 1988); European Greens 1989: *Common Statement of the European Greens for the 1989 Elections to the European Parliament* (European Greens, Brussels); Robert Goodin, *Green Political Theory*, chs 4, 5; Werner Hülsberg, *The German Greens* (Verso, London, 1988); André Gorz, *Ecology as Politics*, trans. P. Vigderman and J. Cloud (Pluto Press, London, 1987); Martin Ryle, *Ecology and Socialism* (Radius, London, 1988); Penny Kemp and Derek Wall, *A Green Manifesto for the 1990s* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1990); Jonathan Porritt, *Seeing Green* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1984); Jonathan Porritt and David Winner, *The Coming of the Greens* (Fontana, London, 1988); Charlene Spretnak and Fritjof Capra, *Green Politics: the Global Promise* (Hutchinson, London, 1984).

12 For an excellent recent critique of the short-comings of any attempt to value nature in monetary terms, see David Harvey, 'The Nature of the Environment: the Dialectics of Social and Environmental Change', *Socialist Register* (1993), part III; cf. Andrew Collier, 'Value, Rationality and the Environment', *Radical Philosophy* 66 (Spring 1994).

13 Report on *PM Programme*, Radio 4, 1992.

14 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (Sage, London, 1992), p. 45. It is impossible to do justice here to the richness of Beck's analysis of modernity, and my criticisms refer only to what I think is a problematic dimension of his account of the quality and political import of the public reaction to ecological dangers. For a much more adequate and considered analysis of Beck's overall argument, see Michael Rustin, *Radical Philosophy* 67 (Summer 1994), pp. 3–12.

15 Beck, *Risk Society*, see esp. part I.

16 The case for an 'alternative hedonism' is elaborated further in my *Troubled Pleasures* (Verso, London, 1990), pp. 23–86.

17 Mark Sagoff, *The Economy of the Earth* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988), esp. ch. 6.

18 Goodin, *Green Political Theory*, pp. 24–83.

19 Ibid., pp. 119–20.

20 Ibid., p. 82.

21 Ibid., p. 83.

22 The claim that religion has acted as a deterrent to ecologically damaging practices is, indeed, controversial, and we must note that there are very diverging opinions of the extent to which theological teaching (particularly that of the Judaeo-Christian tradition) constrains, rather than licenses, instrumental rationality. Some argue that Christian scripture has significantly encouraged the abuse of nature, others that it advocates a caring ethic of human stewardship towards it. But this dispute is itself very much about the interpretation to be placed on teachings (notably the Book of Genesis) that are not clear-cut in their message, and tends to be conducted in the light of the secular rationalizations to which theology can always be made to lend itself. But whatever the interpretation placed on scripture, it remains disputable how far beliefs in the divine creation and pre-ordained order of the universe can be said to have acted as a curb on the spread of Enlightenment forms of

confidence in human powers to interfere in its natural order and to disturb its social hierarchy. For discussion of the scriptural tradition, and some sense of the disputes it has generated, see: C. J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore, Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (University of California Press, Berkeley and London, 1967), pp. 150–68; John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, pp. 3–27; Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, pp. 20–50; cf. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (Wildwood House, London, 1982), pp. 29ff; Stephen Clark, *How to Think about the Earth* (Mowbray, London, 1993).

23 John O'Neill, 'Humanism and Nature', *Radical Philosophy* 66 (Spring 1994), p. 27.

INDEX