

Future Primitive: The Politics of Militant Ecology

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July 2016

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Front Matter

Abstract

This study examines the philosophical and political principles informing radical environmental activism in the United States. The major groups that comprise this movement - Earth First!, the Earth and Animal Liberation Fronts, and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society - are united by a particularly militant breed of ecocentrism: a commitment to defend the integrity of wild nature by any means necessary, including illegal and potentially violent tactics. This study is the first to depict militant ecology as an intellectual as well as political movement, one with its own theorists and philosophical antecedents, which expresses a coherent and compelling alternative to the philosophical and political outlook of modernity.

The first part focuses on the scientific, metaphysical, religious, and anthropological principles informing militant ecology activism. Comparisons with other schools of contemporary green political thought show that, despite its unsystematic nature, militant ecology offers the most consistent articulation of an ecocentric political theory. However, the movement is not monolithic in its interpretation of these principles. For some activists, ecocentrism entails a commitment to uphold the natural order and defend wilderness against human greed and hubris, while others understand it as a call to end oppression and fight for justice for all life on Earth - humans included. For the purposes of this study, these two camps are described, respectively, as *ecowarriors* and *total liberationists*.

The second half examines the “future primitive” political program of militant ecology. In the end, it is apparent that despite many valid critiques of the contemporary political system, certain aspects of the militant ecology program are incompatible with the movement’s commitment to effective action in defense of wild nature. Particular attention is devoted to the differences among total liberationists and ecowarriors and determining which camp is more consistent in its commitment to the principles of militant ecocentrism. Though ecowarriors have been most frequently criticized for their indifference to social justice, this study concludes that it is in fact the total liberationist wing, with its more anthropocentric focus and higher likelihood of co-optation by the political left, that poses a greater threat to the radical core of militant ecology.

For my wife and daughter

1. Militant Ecology in the 21st Century

For most Americans, the mention of radical environmentalism, eco-terrorism, or militant ecology brings a particular set of images to mind. Bands of camouflaged saboteurs prowling through forests by night, pouring sand into gas tanks and driving spikes into trees. Lean and long-haired protestors joining arms to block roads into contested logging areas. Mink and fox released from fur farms, dogs and rabbits freed from research laboratories, the faces of their liberators concealed behind black balaclavas. A lone activist perched in the mist atop a centuries-old California Redwood. A Japanese or Icelandic whaling vessel rammed head-on in the Arctic Ocean. Vegans, hunters, ecofeminists and American Indians joining together to protest the corporate development of public lands in the West. An army of black-clad anarchists smashing storefronts and clashing with police in the streets of Seattle. Ski resorts, automobile dealerships, and condominiums burnt to the ground, smoke and ash rising into the sky.

Despite their disparate actors and methods, all of these scenes have a few elements in common. In addition to a passionate commitment to defend the welfare and integrity of wild nature, ranging from individual animals to entire ecosystems, these scenarios all evince a willingness to employ extreme *tactics*, working outside the bounds of traditional legal or political channels in order to achieve ecological goals.

Beyond this tactical extremism, is it possible to speak of a distinct outlook or set of principles that differentiates militant ecology groups from more moderate environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club or Wilderness Society? While a handful of observers and activists have claimed otherwise,¹ the majority of activists, as well as their critics, acknowledge that the socio-political goals of militant ecology differ significantly from those of the mainstream environmental movement. However, most activists are reluctant to spend much time theorizing on the subject, arguing that the

¹ Steve Vanderheiden argues that it is their more extreme tactics, rather than a set of more radical goals, that distinguishes militant ecologists from mainstream organizations (“Radical Environmentalism in an Age of Antiterrorism,” in *Environmentalism in the United States: Changing Conceptions of Activism*, ed. Elizabeth Bomberg and David Schlosberg (New York: Routledge, 2009), 116); while John Wade, an activist who served three years in federal prison for actions against suburban sprawl, similarly asserts that the main difference between the Earth Liberation Front and the Sierra Club is “not so much the *ends* but the *means*” (“Radical Environmentalism: Is there Any Other Kind?,” in *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth*, ed. Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella, II (Oakland CA: AK Press, 2006), 281).

core of militant ecology lies not in a particular ideology but rather a willingness to *act*. Dave Foreman, one of the founders of Earth First!, regularly criticized the tendency of political movements to become “mere debating societies,” insisting that direct action was more important than the philosophical hairsplitting for which radicals are notorious; for this reason he often enjoined his comrades to “let our actions set the finer points of our philosophy.”² Echoing this sentiment, Earth First! activist and theorist Christopher Manes claimed that “biocentrism” - the life-affirming outlook of radical environmental activism - “exists insofar as it *acts*, not in the achievement of philosophic stability.”³ Indeed, a preference for effective action over ideological purity and precision is a common feature among militant ecologists of all persuasions. Based on his extensive interaction with activists from Earth First! and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, journalist Rik Scarce concluded that they were all, almost without exception, spurred to action by an intuitive perception of the natural world rather than intellectual persuasion.⁴

Does this mean that militant ecology is merely another special interest group with no broader social vision - or worse, an outlet for adolescents to engage in acts of nihilistic rebellion? Despite its decades-long and highly visible presence on the American political scene, few attempts have been made to attain a comprehensive understanding of the militant ecology outlook, especially as it has developed into the twenty-first century. Certainly, there have been many valuable works by historians, journalists, and social movement scholars on the subject. However, such studies are often focused on the history, membership, and strategy of individual groups such as Earth First! rather than offering a comparative perspective across the movement at large, and do not fully explore the broader philosophical principles and socio-political goals that undergird radical environmental activism.⁵ In addition, the majority of these studies focus on the development of radical environmentalism in the eighties and nineties, making an update necessary in order to reflect the changing demographics, strategies, and priorities of the movement up to the present.⁶ Studies that actually discuss more recent

² Dave Foreman, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1991), 20.

³ Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1990, 17, 21; Christopher Manes, “Philosophy and the Environmental Task,” *Environmental Ethics* 10 (1988), 82.

⁴ Rik Scarce, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement, Updated Edition* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2006), 31.

⁵ See, for instance, Martha F. Lee, *Earth First! Environmental Apocalypse* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995); Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*; Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer, *Environmental Activism: A Reference Handbook* (Denver: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2003); Derek Wall, *Earth First! And the AntiRoads Movement: Radical Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1999); and Susan Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs: Earth First! and the Environmental Movement* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1993).

⁶ Valuable exceptions include Giorel Curran, *21st Century Dissent: Anarchism, Anti-Globalization and Environmentalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), and Panagioti Tsolkas, “No System but the Ecosystem: Earth First! and Anarchism,” *Institute for Anarchist Studies* (1 April, 2015), <http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2015/04/01/no-system-but-the-ecosystem-earth-first-and-anarchism/>.

developments, by contrast, have an unfortunate tendency to treat militant ecology as more ideologically monolithic than it really is, ignoring the diversity of views within the movement as a whole.⁷ In addition, the so-called “eco-terrorist” tactics of these groups have probably received more scholarly attention than their ideology or membership; but while these studies provide valuable insight into the efficacy and development of such tactics, they only superficially examine the underlying political vision of these groups - if they do so at all.⁸ As Paul Joosse notes, these studies rarely delve into deeper motivations due to the pervasive attitude among analysts and the media that militant activists are either “terrorists” for whom no motive can be morally exculpatory, or merely “misguided kids” incapable of mature political thought.⁹ Finally, though the writings and interviews of the activists themselves provide the best insight into the ideological motivations behind their activism, these tend to focus on the needs of the present or on specific aspects of their beliefs rather than on the movement’s broader socio-political outlook, philosophical foundations, and development over time.¹⁰

The *Earth First! Journal* also serves as an invaluable forum for reflection on the development of militant ecology, from the perspective of the activists themselves.

⁷ See David N. Pellow, *Total Liberation: The Power and Promise of Animal Rights and the Radical Earth Movement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Richard J. Ellis, *The Dark Side of the Left: Illiberal Egalitarianism in America* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

⁸ For a few of the most prominent, see Ron Arnold, *Ecoterror: The Violent Agenda to Save Nature: The World of the Unabomber* (Bellevue, WA: Free Enterprise Press, 1997); Don Liddick, *EcoTerrorism: Radical Environmental and Animal Liberation Movements* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006); Sue-Ming Yang, Yi-Yuan Su, and Jennifer Varriale Carson, “Eco-Terrorism and the Corresponding Legislative Efforts to Intervene and Prevent Future Attacks,” *Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society (TSAS)*, no. 14-04 (May 2014); Gary Ackerman, “Beyond Arson? A Threat Assessment of the Earth Liberation Front,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2003), 143-170; Paul Joosse, “Leaderless Resistance and Ideological Inclusion: The Case of the Earth Liberation Front,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 3 (2007), 351-68; and Paul Joosse, “Elves, Environmentalism, and ‘Eco-Terror’: Leaderless Resistance and Media Coverage of the Earth Liberation Front,” *Crime Media Culture* 8, no. 1 (2012), 75-93. An exception is Bron Taylor, “Religion, Violence and Radical Environmentalism: From Earth First! to the Unabomber to the Earth Liberation Front,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 1-42, which takes greater account of the complexities of the movement’s ideology.

⁹ Joosse, “Elves, Environmentalism, and ‘Eco-Terror,’” 83.

¹⁰ Though many examples can be cited in the pages of the *Earth First! Journal*, *Green Anarchy*, *Resistance*, *Bite Back*, and other influential movement ‘zines, a few of the more significant book-length entries include Foreman, *Confessions*; Manes, *Green Rage*; Paul Watson, with Warren Rogers, *Sea Shepherd: My Fight for Whales and Seals*, ed. Joseph Newman (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982); Leslie James Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front 1997 - 2002* (Portland OR: Arissa Media Group, 2007); Craig Rosebraugh, *Burning Rage of a Dying Planet: Speaking for the Earth Liberation Front* (New York: Lantern Books, 2004); Julia Butterfly Hill, *The Legacy of Luna: The Story of a Tree, a Woman, and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2000); Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella, *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? Reflections on the Liberation of Animals* (New York: Lantern Books, 2004); Howie Wolke. “Earth First! A Founder’s Story.” *Lowbagger.org: Environmental News, Opinion, and Art* (April 6, 2006), <http://lowbagger.org/foundersstory.html>; and

In sum, it has been a common practice among scholars, critics, and activists alike to treat the militant ecology movement as either a motley assortment of psychologically defective vandals, misguided teenagers, and anarchistic ruffians, or a cluster of loosely related organizations preoccupied with direct action and indifferent to the philosophical foundations of their views. It should therefore come as no surprise that the militant ecology movement is perceived by the public at large as an unruly mob made up of “fascists and Marxists, terrorists and mystics, people with axes to grind and hucksters in pursuit of wine, women, and song, destroyers of local economies, purveyors of distrust, obscurantists, atheists, misogynists and misanthropes.”¹¹ Though these epithets may have some element of truth, they fail to convey what is most distinctive - and indeed, what is truly radical - in the militant ecology outlook.

Given the urgency of the problems that militant ecologists confront, their preference for effective action over philosophical hair-splitting is understandable. However, in light of the changing priorities and tactics of radical environmental activism - underscored by the marked decline in major acts of sabotage and arson since the early years of the new century - now is an opportune time to more fully assess the social and political outlook underlying the militant ecology movement in America and to consider what shape it is likely to take in the future, as well as its broader significance in the development of American environmental politics.

1.1 The Importance of Militant Ecology

It might be objected that these militant ecology groups represent a hopelessly small fringe within the American political spectrum, and that the ideas and tactics they espouse are so far outside the mainstream as to stand little chance of achieving any success. However, while their outlook is indeed unique within the contemporary U.S. political arena, the principles of militant ecology are not as wholly foreign to American culture as its critics or supporters might suppose. One object of this study, then, is to show that many of the philosophical and political ideas underlying militant ecology - metaphysical holism, nature mysticism, natural law, and civil resistance - actually have deep roots in Western and North American culture, though they may be so submerged beneath the ideological superstructure of late modernity as to seem positively alien to it. In addition, though it is difficult to say how far the ideals of militant ecology have filtered into the political mainstream, it is clear that elements of its philosophy and tactics have helped shape the values of contemporary green politics.¹² As Earth First! co-founder Dave Foreman claimed, with some justification,

Mike Roselle, with Josh Mahan, *Tree Spiker: From Earth First! to Lowbagging: My Struggles in Radical Environmental Action* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009).

¹¹ Manes, *Green Rage*, 151.

¹² Curran, *21st Century Dissent*, 126.

We have brought the discussion of biocentric philosophy - Deep Ecology - out of dusty academic journals. We have effectively introduced nonviolent civil disobedience into the repertoire of wildland preservation activism. We have also helped to jolt the conservation movement out of its middle-age lethargy and reinspire it with passion, joy, and humor.¹³

Another response is that, whatever their fringe status, certain elements within these groups have nevertheless achieved sufficient notoriety to be deemed the “the no. 1 priority in the Domestic Terrorism Program,” according to FBI Domestic Terrorism Section Chief James Jarboe.¹⁴ This status is reflected in the increasing use of the “terrorist” designation and stronger penalties for ecological sabotage after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Various federal acts have directly targeted ecological sabotage, including the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which made tree-spiking a felony; the 1992 Animal Enterprise Protection Act and its successor, the 2006 Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, which included not only vandalism but also acts of “intimidation” among the offenses punishable by law; and, of course, the 2001 PATRIOT Act, which counts the destruction of inanimate objects as terrorist activity.¹⁵

In addition to the federal government, several states have also passed laws to increase penalties for purported acts of eco-terrorism. The past decade has seen a marked increase in state “Ag Gag” laws to prohibit animal activists from clandestinely filming acts of abuse in animal facilities.¹⁶ Radical environmental organizations have also been subject to several undercover operations, the most prominent being “Operation THERMCON” - which targeted Earth First! and led to the arrest of co-founder Dave Foreman and the “Arizona Five” in 1987 - as well as “Operation Backfire,” which concluded in the indictments of eighteen alleged ELF and ALF activists in 2006.¹⁷ Though many activists and scholars protest that designating acts of sabotage and vandalism as “terrorism” detracts from the term’s significance, it nevertheless points to the political importance of accurately understanding the philosophical and political outlook of militant ecology. A recurring question among scholars and policymakers is whether these groups would be ever be willing to use lethal force against individuals in order

¹³ Foreman, *Confessions*, 215.

¹⁴ *Oversight Hearing on: Eco-Terrorism and Lawlessness on the National Forests: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health, U.S. House of Representatives*, 107th Cong. (2002) (statement of James F. Jarboe, Domestic Terrorism Section Chief, FBI Counterterrorism Division) <http://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/the-threat-of-eco-terrorism/>. This was downgraded in 2008 to “one of the most serious terrorism threats in the U.S. today.” See “Putting Intel to Work Against ELF and ALF Terrorists,” *Federal Bureau of Investigation* (June 30, 2008) http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/june/ecoterror_063008.

¹⁵ For a discussion of these legislative efforts, see Yang, Su, and Carson, “Eco-Terrorism.”

¹⁶ Vanderheiden, “Radical Environmentalism in an Age of Antiterrorism,” in *Environmentalism*, 120.

¹⁷ Judi Bari, “Earth First! Exposes FBI Conspiracy,” *The Slingshot* (April 1997); “Eco-Terror Indictments: ‘Operation Backfire’ Nets 11,” *Federal Bureau of Investigation* (January 20, 2006) <http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2006/january/elf012006>.

to achieve their aims. Is their widely agreed-upon refusal to purposefully harm any living being central to their philosophy, or is it simply a *tactic* to be cast aside when more pressing concerns arise? A more in-depth examination of their philosophical and ethical principles - as well as divergent opinions within the movement - can provide insight into these questions.

Despite the significance of these concerns, it may nevertheless be true that the government's portrayal of these groups as the primary domestic terror threat was always overblown; and that even if it might have been true in early years of the twenty-first century, such charges appear positively ridiculous in light of the events of the last decade. Indeed, the precipitous drop in incidents of ecological sabotage, the heavy governmental repression of activists, and the decline in membership of groups like Earth First! all seem to indicate that, as a political force, militant ecology is on its last legs.¹⁸

A central contention of this study is that while the "golden age" of militant ecology may have passed, while many of its more extreme tactics seem to have been abandoned, and while several of its most dedicated activists have been imprisoned or moved into other arenas, militant ecology is not dead. That is because the core of militant ecology is not simply a tactic. It is not reducible to a certain group. It is not even an ideology or a philosophy, in the sense of being a systematic body of thought tied to a particular theorist or intellectual movement. It is, rather, an *ethos*, a foundational worldview with many potential practical expressions. The current repression of and decline in radical activism (a fate suffered by countless radical organizations in recent decades, particularly those of the left¹⁹) therefore does not herald the death of militant activism in defense of the natural world; it has merely altered its form. This is perhaps the most important reason for studying militant ecology today - it represents a unique force on the American political scene, whose fundamental principles will remain relevant as long as human society exists at odds with the integrity of the natural world. A deeper appreciation for its socio-political outlook and how it has evolved over the last four decades is therefore of importance to scholars who want to understand the evolution of radical politics in the United States, political leaders who wish to be responsive to such developments, and activists who want to learn from the history of their movement in order to develop their ideas and strategy in the future. Most importantly for this study, the outlook of militant ecology also offers a compelling, coherent, and realistic perspective on contemporary environmental issues, one that supplements (and in many cases improves upon) those provided by the prevailing schools of environmental and political thought.

¹⁸ Lauren Kirchner, "Whatever Happened to 'Eco-Terrorism'?" *Pacific Standard* (January 26, 2015)<http://www.psmag.com/nature-and-technology/whatever-happened-to-eco-terrorism>.

¹⁹ For a discussion of this trend, see Stanley Aronowitz, *The Death and Rebirth of American Radicalism* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

1.2 Militant Ecology and the Politics of Counter-Modernism

A major reason for militant ecology's enduring interest therefore concerns the distinctiveness of its philosophical principles. Though the more specific characteristics of the militant ecological ethos will be discussed throughout this study, it can be reduced to two broad principles: philosophically, a reverence for the totality and integrity of wild nature, extending from individual organisms to ecosystems to the very natural processes that give them being (an outlook known as *ecocentrism*); and strategically, a willingness to employ the most effective means necessary in order to defend ecological integrity. Thus, following Giorel Curran, this outlook might be referred to as *militant ecocentrism*.²⁰

Some scholars have denied the uniqueness of militant ecology by assimilating it to one end or another of the mainstream political spectrum. Among scholars who locate militant ecology on the political left, Roderick Nash has argued that it represents one more step in the evolution of natural rights liberalism, which has expanded from embracing all of humanity to embracing nonhuman animals and the natural world as a whole.²¹ Michael E. Zimmerman traces the roots of militant ecology to the counter-culture and insists that, despite their criticisms of the Enlightenment and modernity, most activists are social progressives; Robyn Eckersley has similarly identified militant ecology as an extension of traditional leftist concerns with freedom and equality to the natural world, a kind of "emancipation writ large."²² Less sympathetic critics have also depicted militant ecology as an appendage of the extreme left, portraying its activists as "watermelons" - green on the outside, red on the inside - who in their opposition to industrialism, free-market capitalism, the military and property rights have acted as a socialist fifth column within American society.²³ In short, many scholars, activists, and critics regard militant ecology as a wing of the progressive left, an extension of tradi-

²⁰ This designation differs from Curran, in that he speaks of a militant *biocentrism*, which for the purposes of this study is replaced with *ecocentrism*. However, Curran is correct to point out that it is this particularly aggressive quality that differentiates militant ecology groups from many otherwise ecocentric philosophical currents, such as deep ecology (Curran, *21st Century Dissent*, 203).

²¹ Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

²² Michael E. Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 4; Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 56, 22, 30.

²³ For example, see James Delingpole, *Watermelons: How Environmentalists are Killing the Planet, Destroying the Economy and Stealing Your Children's Future* (London: Biteback, 2012). One of the first to make this connection was Ron Arnold, prominent critic of environmental policy and founder of the "Wise Use" movement, who argued in 1984 that "environmentalism is an already existing vehicle by which the Soviet Union can encourage the Free World to voluntarily cripple its own economy" (David Helvarg, *The War Against the Greens: The 'Wise-Use' Movement, the New Right, and Anti-Environmental Violence* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994), 139).

tional leftist concerns with universal liberty and equality that encompasses nonhuman animals and ecosystems in its quest for an egalitarian society.

Against those who locate militant ecology on the left, several scholars have pointed out parallels between the militant ecological social vision and certain currents on the ideological right, though these have been largely critical. Ecofeminist Val Plumwood claims that, due to its “big-tent” approach and failure to supply a rigorous critique of capitalism and hierarchy, certain strains of militant ecology might lend themselves to cooptation by conservative advocates for capitalism, private property, and small government.²⁴ Pointing even further to the right of the traditional American spectrum, some observers have criticized the totalitarian or “ecofascist” potential of certain strains of militant ecology which prioritize the good of the ecosystem over that of individual humans. Various positions attributed to certain activists, such as support for population control and immigration restrictions, apparent indifference to social justice, preference for pre-modern social orders, nature mysticism, distaste for cities, and critical attitudes toward the Enlightenment, have only added fuel to the fire for leftist critics.²⁵

Militant ecologists themselves, however, often claim to have transcended the traditional left-right spectrum altogether, echoing the well-known slogan of the German Greens: “Neither left nor right, but in front.” Earth First! co-founder Foreman was particularly adamant on this point, insisting that the “tired, worn-out dogmas of left, right and middle of the road” were nothing more than “internecine squabbles between different factions of humanism.” Earth First!, by contrast, is “not left or right; we are not even in front... We’re in a wholly different game.”²⁶ Sea Shepherd founder Paul Watson likewise claimed that “we do not have a right-wing or a left-wing political agenda. We are not part of any specific political trend and we may be politically incorrect, but we try to be ecologically correct.”²⁷ The claim to transcend traditional left-right politics has been criticized by various critics, particularly on the left.²⁸ However, it is certainly true in one sense: militant ecology does operate outside the concerns of

²⁴ Val Plumwood, “Deep Ecology, Deep Pockets, and Deep Problems: A Feminist Ecosocialist Analysis,” in *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*, ed. Eric Katz, Andrew Light, and David Rothenberg (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 71.

²⁵ Michael E. Zimmerman, “Rethinking the Heidegger-Deep Ecology Relationship,” *Environmental Ethics* 15 (Fall 1993), 205.

²⁶ Foreman, *Confessions*, 30.

²⁷ Lamya Essemlali with Paul Watson, *Interview with a Pirate: Captain Paul Watson* (Buffalo, NY: Firefly Books Ltd., 2013), 70.

²⁸ Michael E. Zimmerman, for instance, fears that militant ecology’s claim to be neither left or right, as well as its condemnations of modernity, are “uncomfortably reminiscent” of National Socialism (Zimmerman, “The Threat of Ecofascism,” *Social Theory and Practice* 21, no. 2 (1995), 207-238). For similar reasons, Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier also worry that such a slogan ignores how ecological concerns have been “co-opted” by the extreme right and is therefore “historically naive and politically fatal” (Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1995)).

the mainstream American politics, with their basically anthropocentric, instrumental, and thoroughly *modern* perception of nature. As one writer for *Resistance* notes, “It is not whether you are ‘left’ or ‘right;’ it is how far you are from the center. Clearly, organizations like the Earth Liberation Front embrace ideologies where liberation and conservation work hand in hand.”²⁹ Even the United States Green Party, which is quite radical in its environmental commitments compared to the dominant Democratic and Republican Parties, must nevertheless be deemed unacceptably anthropocentric by the standards of militant ecology on account of its more moderate positions on population, immigration, and nonviolence.³⁰

Militant ecology can also be distinguished from other schools of green political and ethical thought by its particularly aggressive approach to the defense of wild nature. For this reason, despite being strongly influenced by broader currents of radical environmental philosophy, the militant ecology movement has come under fire at various points from deep ecologists such as Michael Zimmerman, social ecologists such as Murray Bookchin and Janet Biehl, and ecofeminists such as patrice jones and Marti Kheel, all of whom condemn its violent propensities and misanthropic tenor.³¹ These characteristics carry it even further afield from most alternative approaches to environmental politics such as liberal environmentalism, environmental justice, ecosocialism, eco-anarchism, free market environmentalism, the “new conservation” movement, and sustainable development. While these philosophies will be discussed throughout this study, suffice it to say that they all differ from militant ecology in their basic acceptance - sometimes explicit, sometimes implied - of the primacy of human welfare. Thus, despite attempts by some critics and scholars to graft militant ecology onto the traditional left-right spectrum or place it within the current of radical or mainstream environmental philosophy, it is clear that its underlying ethos does not fit neatly into the American political or intellectual scene. Indeed, what may be most noteworthy about the philosophy and politics of militant ecology is its resolute opposition to most of the defining features of not just American society but of the modern world itself.

The question of what precisely constitutes “modernity” is a contentious one. However, despite its imprecision, the concept remains useful as a description of a broad constellation of overlapping ideas and institutions that have come to define contemporary life in the developed world. Peter Berger defines the core of modernity as “the transformation of the world brought about by the technological innovations of the last few centuries, first in Europe and then with increasing rapidity all over the world,” an innovation made possible by the rising capitalist market economy, the bureaucratic nation-state, the heterogeneous metropolis, and the complex ideological configurations

²⁹ Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, 118.

³⁰ See “Platform,” *Green Party US* (July 2014) <http://www.gp.org/platform>.

³¹ See Zimmerman, “Ecofascism;” Biehl, “Ecofascism;” patrice jones, “Mothers with Monkey-wrenches: Feminist Imperatives and the ALF,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters*; and Marti Kheel, “Direct Action and the Heroic Ideal: An Ecofeminist Critique,” in *Igniting a Revolution*.

produced by the Renaissance and Reformation.³² Though scholars quibble over the specifics of these principles, modernity can be broadly understood as a constellation of related but not synonymous (indeed, at times even contradictory) concepts and institutions: the humanism of the Renaissance and the rationalism of the Enlightenment, which undermined traditional political authority and gave birth to liberalism, socialism, nationalism, and their many variants; and the rise of mechanistic science during the Scientific Revolution, which in turn led to the Industrial Revolution and humanity's technological domination of the biosphere.

Opposition to modernity can therefore take a variety of forms, depending upon which of these defining elements of the modern world are singled out as being particularly pernicious and what alternatives are proposed. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, counter-revolutionary thinkers such as Joseph de Maistre, Edmund Burke, Augustin Barruel, and Juan Donoso Cortes attacked the social and political consequences of Enlightenment rationalism and liberalism, which in their view had undermined the foundations of traditional political authority and opened up the floodgates of anarchy and rebellion.³³ Romantic artists and thinkers ranging from Rousseau to Nietzsche, on the other hand, decried the effects of dry scientific rationalism and bourgeois capitalism on the human spirit, stifling organic traditional cultures, the higher sentiments, as well as the creative Dionysian instincts, hearkening back to the Middle Ages or ancient Greece in their quest for a more authentic existence.³⁴ In the twentieth century, the theorists of the Weimar "Conservative Revolution" such as Ernst Junger, Carl Schmitt, Werner Sombart, Oswald Spengler, and (to varying degrees) Martin Heidegger, as well as thinkers associated with Fascism and National Socialism, rejected the decadence and materialism of modern culture while embracing

³² Peter L. Berger, *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 70; Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979), 5.

³³ The most relevant primary sources include Joseph de Maistre, *Considerations on France*, trans. Richard Lebrun (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Edmund Burke, *Revolutionary Writings: Reflections on the Revolution in France and the First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Augustin Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1799); and Juan Donoso Cortes, *Selected Works of Juan Donoso Cortes*, trans. Jeffrey P. Johnson (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000). Some of the most influential secondary sources on this counter-revolutionary tendency and its relation to the counter-Enlightenment include Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Graeme Garrard, *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2006), Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Owen Bradley, *A Modern Maistre: The Social and Political Thought of Joseph de Maistre* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

³⁴ In addition to Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," and Garrard, *Counter-Enlightenments*, another useful study of the counter-modern tradition in Romantic art, particularly with respect to technology, is Nicols Fox, *Against the Machine: The Hidden Luddite Tradition in Literature, Art, and Individual Lives* (Washington DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 2002).

certain developments in modern technology. Jeffrey Herf has described this outlook as “reactionary modernism.”³⁵ And in the later years of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first, there has been a resurgence of religious fundamentalism, particularly in the Muslim world, which has attacked the secularism and moral degeneracy of modernity and fought to restore a purer age of religious orthodoxy.³⁶

However, the political right does not have a monopoly on counter-modern attitudes. While critics on the right attack modernity for its subversion of authority, religion, authenticity, and vitality, those on the left critique its failure to live up to its own emancipatory and progressive ideals. Though Marxism itself fully embraced the modern spirit in its underlying humanism, progressivism, and enthusiasm for applied science and technology, other forms of utopian socialism and communitarianism have displayed what Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy refer to as “Romantic anti-capitalism,” grounding their opposition to capitalist modernity upon their nostalgia for pre-capitalist institutions such as the medieval guild system.³⁷ The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, while adopting a Marxian social analysis, nevertheless questioned the progressive view of history and argued that the scientific and rationalist outlook of the Enlightenment - despite its ostensibly emancipatory aims - had ironically given rise to the totalitarianism and technocracy of the contemporary world.³⁸ Finally, thinkers associated with the nebulous schools of postmodernism, deconstructionism, and post-structuralism have also rejected the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of modern thought, emphasizing instead the interplay of power perspectives and complex cultural identities, as well as the role played by “metanarratives” and worldviews in jus-

³⁵ The seminal study of this tendency is Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Michael E. Zimmerman applies it to Heidegger in *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990). Anna Bramwell is a useful resource for the antimodern, proto-ecological dimension of National Socialist and Fascist thought, particularly her *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

³⁶ Ali Mirsepassi points out the direct linkage between political Islam and counter-modern European thought, arguing that Muslim intellectuals “have come to know the West, modernity, and democracy largely through the radical counter-Enlightenment ideas of German philosophy, as well as of certain French intellectuals, in a genealogy that goes back to the counter-Enlightenment movement: from its various twists and turns through such early ideologues as Joseph de Maistre - who defended the French *ancien regime* - to such latter-day and more boldly aggressive defenders of the aristocratic ‘order of rank’ as Friedrich Nietzsche, and finally Martin Heidegger, on the eve of fascist total war against the values of the Enlightenment in World War II” (Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6).

³⁷ Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy, “Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism,” *New German Critique* 32 (Spring-Summer 1984), 46.

³⁸ “The Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant” (Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 1). This tendency is also noticeable in the works of Herbert Marcuse, namely *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

tifying the power of the dominant elite.³⁹ Foucault, in particular, went to great lengths to demonstrate how the entire structure of modern life is in fact a veiled mechanism of social control. It is therefore clear that opposition to the enlightened, technological modern world has, in Graeme Garrard's words, "returned in the twentieth century with a vengeance," surfacing in a variety of national contexts and from all points of the ideological compass, "from conservative Catholics and German Romantics to liberals, neo-Marxists, feminists, environmentalists and postmodernists."⁴⁰

Despite its location within this broadly antimodern nexus, however, militant ecology is distinct from other forms of revolt against the modern world. Unlike many currents on the right, its rejection of modernity does not stem principally from the modern subversion of hierarchical authority, weakening of traditional religion, or tendency towards decadence and egalitarian leveling, but rather the destructive effects of modern anthropocentrism and technology on the Earth and nonhuman life. Conversely, unlike leftist critics of modernity, militant ecologists do not generally see the solution to the current predicament as a more equitable distribution of resources or more egalitarian and rational applications of technology, but question the necessity of industrial technology and many forms of resource exploitation altogether. And, while largely agreeing with the postmodern critique of humanism, progress, instrumental rationality, cultural homogeneity, and technology, militant ecologists reject postmodernism's perception of nature as a "social construct," its suspicion of "metanarratives" and truth claims, and its underlying ethos of nihilism and resignation.⁴¹ Militant ecology therefore represents a distinctive variant of counter-modern thought, in that its objection to modernity is not exclusively of a political, cultural, ethnic, or traditionally religious nature, but rooted rather in a devotion to the health and integrity of wild nature. The chief objection to modernity is not found so much in its impact on human society or even the human spirit, but rather upon the Earth itself.

It is therefore appropriate, following Freya Mathews, to refer to the foundational socio-political outlook of militant ecology as *counter-modern*, since its revolt against modernity is not premised upon a nihilistic deconstruction of modern principles (as in deconstructive postmodernism) nor a nostalgic yearning for the past (as in various forms of reactionary antimodernism), but rather entails a positive doctrine stressing

³⁹ Jurgen Habermas has criticized these post-structuralist thinkers for their denial of the emancipatory dimensions of modernity, as well as their affinities with counter-Enlightenment theorists, in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987). Richard Wolin also purports to reveal the parallels between critics of the Enlightenment such as de Maistre, Nietzsche, and Heidegger and post-structuralist/postmodernist thinkers such as Gadamer, Bataille, Blanchot, and Derrida in *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance With Fascism, From Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰ Garrard, *Counter-Enlightenments*, 3, 10.

⁴¹ Michael E. Zimmerman, "On Reconciling Progressivism and Environmentalism," in *Explorations in Environmental Political Theory*, ed. Joel J. Kassiola (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2003), 149-177; Arthur Verslius, "Antimodernism," *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary*, 137 (2006), 96-130.

the sacredness of the Earth, the need for ecologically-sound political and economic principles, and a more authentic vision of human dwelling in the world. As EF! cofounder Foreman once proclaimed, “We do not engage in radical action because we are primarily motivated by opposition to authority, because we are antinomians, but because we are *for* something - the beauty, wisdom, and abundance of this living planet.”⁴² According to Mathews, the ecocentric aspiration to protect the natural world from undue human disturbance and live in harmony with nature “implies an ethos that is far more encompassing than that of the traditional environmental movement... as encompassing in fact as the ethos of modernity that it seeks to reverse.”⁴³ Indeed, with the possible exception of certain strains of Christian traditionalism and fundamentalism - and there is very little overlap between the two in terms of membership - militant ecology may very well be the only truly counter-modern discourse currently discernable on the political stage of the United States, the modern nation *par excellence*.

Thus it is appropriate, for the purposes of this study, to prefer the expansive term “militant ecology” rather than the more familiar “radical environmentalism.” While the designation of *radical* does properly refer to those who endeavor to remake the world “from the roots,” at the present it primarily suggests either a merely tactical extremism or an ideological commitment to the far left, neither of which adequately capture the essence of the militant ecology movement. *Militancy*, with its martial connotations and suggestion of effective action in pursuit of a cause, is more apt. Likewise, while *environmentalism* has historically concerned itself with by-products of the industrial state and the more efficient use of resources, militant *ecology* implies a much broader reconsideration of the interactions of humans and the natural world, entailing a far more comprehensive need for social, political, and cultural reform.

Among militant ecologists this socio-political ideal is often described as the *future primitive*.⁴⁴ Coined by the bioregionalists Jeremiah Gorsline and Freeman House, and elaborated by thinkers such as Raymond Dasmann, John Zerzan, and Dolores LaChapelle, the future primitive ideal entails a recovery of certain aspects of traditional wisdom concerning an authentic human relationship to the Earth, as well as its judicious application to the present day. As Dasmann describes it, future primitive “does not mean the rejection of the best of modern technology, but it does mean the avoidance of the worst... The future belongs to those who can regain, at a higher level,

⁴² Foreman, *Confessions*, 214.

⁴³ Freya Mathews, “Letting the World Grow Old: An Ethos of Countermodernity,” in *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 275, 277.

⁴⁴ This term originated with Freeman House and Jeremiah Gorsline, “Future Primitive,” *North Pacific Rim Alive, Bundle Number 3* (San Francisco: Planet Drum Foundation, 1974). See also Raymond Dasmann, “National Parks, Nature Conservation and ‘Future Primitive,’” *Ecologist* 6, no. 5 (June 1976); Dolores LaChapelle, *D.H. Lawrence: Future Primitive* (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1996); and John Zerzan, *Future Primitive: And Other Essays* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1994).

the old sense of balance and belonging between man and nature.”⁴⁵ Believing such a society to be the only hope for authentic human existence on Earth, and perhaps the only alternative to ecological catastrophe, militant ecologists have been the most forceful proponents of the future primitive ideal on the American political scene. As Dave Foreman described it, the deep ecological vision of Earth First! “seeks to develop a new paradigm, questions the essence of human civilization, fundamentally condemns human overpopulation and industrialism, is *anti-modern* and *future primitive*, bioregional, reinhabitory, and resacralizational.”⁴⁶ And as one green anarchist writes: “We strive for a ‘futureprimitive’ reality, one which all of our ancestors once knew, and one we may come to know: a pre/post-technological, pre/post-industrial, pre/post-colonial, pre/post-capitalist, pre/post-agricultural, and even pre/post cultural reality - when we were once, and may again be, WILD!”⁴⁷ Despite its seemingly utopian aspects, the future primitive outlook does not unconditionally valorize primitive societies, nor does it demand an immediate and complete return to hunter-gatherer tribalism. As another green anarchist writes, “Most primitivists understand that an acknowledgment of what has been successful in the past does not unconditionally determine what will work in the future. The term ‘future primitive’ hints at a synthesis of primitive techniques and ideas that can be joined with contemporary anarchist concepts and motivations..”⁴⁸ Though which aspects of the past and present are rejected and which affirmed differs among activists, this future primitive ideal may well be regarded the guiding myth of the militant ecology movement.

Thus, militant ecology differs from many other forms of counter-modern thought in its explicitly activist and political tenor. Arthur Versluis correctly classifies militant ecology among the forms of “hard antimodernism,” eschewing mere critique or reformism in favor of uncompromising opposition to the modern industrial-technological system, by violent means if necessary. Indeed, among the various forms of countermodern radicalism, he asserts that ecological antimodernism is “without doubt the most sweeping in its indictment of modernity.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, though its aims are idealistic and radical, the counter-modern outlook of militant ecology is resolutely opposed to fruitless nostalgia as well as impractical utopianism. However radical its vision, the extreme threats posed to wilderness and the nonhuman world by humankind demand a lucid assessment of the contemporary situation and immediate, effective action on behalf of wild nature. Unlike some other currents of counter-modernity, militant ecol-

⁴⁵ Dasmann, “National Parks,” 167.

⁴⁶ Dave Foreman/Chim Blea, “Cat Tracks: Individualism and Ecology,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 6 (June 1986), 21.

⁴⁷ Green Anarchy Collective, “Why Civilization?” *Back to Basics 1: The Origins of Civilization* (2004) <http://greenanarchy.anarchyplanet.org/2013/09/05/back-to-basics/>

⁴⁸ Green Anarchy Collective, “What is Green Anarchy? An Introduction to Anti-Civilization Anarchist Thought and Practice,” *Back to the Basics 4: What is Rewilding?* (2004), 2. <http://greenanarchy.anarchyplanet.org/2013/09/05/back-to-basics/>.

⁴⁹ Versluis, “Antimodernism,” 107.

ogy cannot content itself with nihilism, nostalgia, or retreat to Lukacs' "Grand Hotel Abyss," but must work effectively to achieve its political aims. This unlikely combination of idealism and strategic pragmatism can be attributed to the fact that the highest good for the militant ecologist - the preservation of a spontaneous, wild natural world free from human domination - demands immediate and effective political action. Militant ecology is therefore defined by a dilemma: its adherents categorically reject almost every feature of the modern world, but the nature of their commitments forces them to engage in it. They are mystics who must speak the language of science and economics; primitivists and Luddites who must utilize modern technology; anarchists, libertarians, and tribalists who must rely upon a bureaucratic nation-state to protect what wilderness remains in the United States.

In addition to its highly visible tactics, then, militant ecology is deserving of study because it is a unique political movement with a nuanced philosophical outlook, one whose importance is only likely to increase as the ecological effects of fossil fuel depletion, overconsumption, and population growth continue to worsen. One must therefore conclude with Versluis that ecological counter-modernism "is not going to disappear. It cannot, because... it is bound up intimately, indissolubly, with modernity itself."⁵⁰

1.3 Purpose and Outline

This study analyzes the philosophical and political principles underlying the militant ecology movement in the United States. While a 2014 report identified over seventy groups that have engaged in extreme acts for environmental aims worldwide, this study will focus primarily on the most historically and strategically significant: Earth First!, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, the Earth Liberation Front, and the Animal Liberation Front.⁵¹ Though these groups do not necessarily have a monopoly on the militant ecology ethos, they have nevertheless constituted its most visible expression in the latter half of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first. It may be objected from the outset that, given the differing concerns, tactics, and operational arenas of these groups, as well as the significant disagreements that have rent them over the years, it would be a mistake to seek out a common outlook that unites them. Indeed, it may be a mistake to group them together into a single "militant ecology movement" at all; as Christopher Manes has argued, a shared willingness to employ extreme tactics does not necessarily indicate that these groups "share a common ideology or even a common goal."⁵² However, despite the different priorities among these groups, there are good reasons for regarding them as part of a single broader movement, or as successive generations of the same militant ecocentric tendency. Though their focuses are different, these groups are better viewed as parts of an interconnected web, with

⁵⁰ Versluis, "Antimodernism," 116, 122.

⁵¹ Yang, Su, Carson, "Eco-Terrorism."

⁵² Manes, *Green Rage*, 17.

overlapping aims and membership.⁵³ In short, despite the many differences regarding strategic priorities and tactics, it is difficult to disagree with Bron Taylor's assessment that "there are significant agreements too, which make it possible to speak about radical environmentalism in the singular tense, as *a* movement with *a* worldview - despite its diverse factions, power struggles, and contested issues."⁵⁴

The first part of this study (chapters two through seven) focuses on the general principles of the militant ecology movement, examining activists' views on science, metaphysics, religion, ethics, and human nature, and comparing these to other prominent schools of environmental political thought. These comparisons will show that, despite its unsystematic nature, militant ecology not only has a distinctive counter-modern outlook of its own that places it outside the contemporary American political spectrum; it also offers the only consistent articulation of an ecocentric political philosophy. However, while these general ecocentric principles can be more or less attributed to all militant ecologists, the movement is not monolithic in its interpretation of them. For some activists, ecocentrism entails a commitment to uphold the natural order against human greed and hubris, while others understand it as a call to end oppression for all life on Earth - humans included. For the purposes of this study, these two camps are described, respectively, as *ecowarriors* and *total liberationists*.

Part two (chapters eight through thirteen) examines the future primitive political program of militant ecology, particularly its rejection of the nation-state in favor of anarchic and decentralized "bioregionalist" communities; its aversion to heavy technology, industrialism, and growth-oriented economic systems (especially capitalism); the relationship between its commitment to wilderness preservation and social justice; and the most common tactics and strategies for political change. In the end, it will become apparent that despite many valid critiques of the contemporary political system, certain

⁵³ To mention a few examples: Earth First! has historically worked closely with the Sea Shepherds, with both Dave Foreman and Paul Watson regarding EF! as the Earth's "army" and the SSCS as its "navy" (Steven Best, "Watson, Paul (1950-) and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (New York: Continuum, 2005), 1720). Also, in the most well-known account, the ELF emerged as a splinter cell from a British EF! group, modeling itself after the Animal Liberation Front and embracing more radical tactics in defense of the Earth (Liddick, *EcoTerrorism*, 64). Likewise, in addition to their similar organizational structure, several actions in the U.S. have been carried out under the banner of both ELF and ALF - for example, actions to protect old growth forests or liberate native species from enclosures (Noel Molland, "A Spark That Ignited a Flame: The Evolution of the Earth Liberation Front," in *Igniting a Revolution*, 56.) ALF and ELF are considered by many activists to be the underground wing of the militant ecology movement. Finally, there is overlapping membership. To take one example, high-profile activist Rod Coronado has at various point in his life acted under the auspices of EF!, the SSCS, the ALF and the ELF, pointing to the permeable barriers and shared concerns among these groups (Dean Kuipers, *Operation Bite Back: Rod Coronado's War to Save American Wilderness* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009)).

⁵⁴ Bron Taylor, "Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes: Global Bricolage and the Question of Violence within the Subcultures of Radical Environmentalism," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Jeffrey Kaplan and Helene Loow (AltaMira Press: Walnut Creek, 2002), 37.

aspects of the militant ecology program are incompatible with the movement's own stated commitment to *effective* action in defense of wild nature. Particular attention is devoted to the differences among total liberationists and ecowarriors and determining which political program is more consistent in its commitment to the principles of militant ecology. Though ecowarriors have been most commonly criticized by scholars and internal critics for their supposed indifference to social justice and propensity for "ecofascism" - indeed, many recent scholars have treated them as a kind of reactionary aberration within the inherently progressive militant ecology milieu⁵⁵ - this study concludes that it is in fact the total liberationist wing, with its more anthropocentric focus and higher likelihood of co-optation by the political left, that proves the greater threat to the radical core of militant ecology. The ecowarrior camp, by contrast, offers the most logically consistent expression of the militant ecology outlook and serves as the source of the movement's most original ideas. Indeed, it may be the only thing that has prevented the movement's complete absorption into the radical left.

While most historical and sociological studies of radical environmentalism treat its philosophical outlook as little more than politicized version of deep ecology, this is the first work to depict militant ecology as a unique intellectual as well as political movement - one with its own theorists and philosophical antecedents, and with a great deal of insight into contemporary environmental politics.⁵⁶ This political outlook, as expressed by major leaders such as Dave Foreman, Christopher Manes, Paul Watson, Mike Roselle, Judi Bari, Julia "Butterfly" Hill, Craig Rosebraugh, Leslie James Pickering, David Barbarash, Rod Coronodo, and others, may not be as systematic as more academic approaches to environmental political theory; but it does express a coherent, compelling, and practical alternative to the philosophical and political principles of modernity.

Given the more comprehensive and theoretical nature of this study compared to previous ethnographic, sociological, and historical studies, it has been necessary to rely primarily upon written accounts rather than field work. Though the latter provides invaluable insights into the tactics and motivations of particular activists and groups, it has rarely taken the broader philosophical foundations of the movement as a whole into consideration. It is, of course, a challenge to adequately convey the philosophical and political outlook of a movement as broad and anarchic as militant ecology, one lacking a clear hierarchy or even, in the case of underground groups such as the ELF and ALF, a well-defined membership. Like many other grassroots social movements, militant

⁵⁵ See Pellow, *Total Liberation*; Dowie, *Losing Ground*; and Ellis, *Illiberal Egalitarianism*.

⁵⁶ Precedents to this study might be found in the work of Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley. Both scholars thoroughly described and critiqued the philosophical and political principles of "ecologism" and radical environmentalism, respectively. However, while providing valuable insight into these more radical environmental philosophies, they did not delve deeply into the specific ideology animating militant ecology groups. See Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*; and Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought: Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

ecology might be more accurately described as a “*milieu*” than a formal organization.⁵⁷ Since the most nuanced and theoretically rigorous expressions of the militant ecology ethos are often found in the writings and statements of movement spokespersons and leaders, it has been necessary to rely on these to some extent. In order to balance this possible editorial slant, this study will attempt to capture the widest array of views available, referring to a range of sources including the published works of prominent activists and spokespersons; interviews with leaders and grassroots activists conducted by social scientists such as Bron Taylor, Don Liddick, and David Naguib Pellow; and, to provide greater insight into the debates and variety of views among grassroots members, the articles and letters published in movement journals, ‘zines, and web pages such as the *Earth First! Journal*, *Resistance*, *Underground*, *Memories of Freedom*, *Bite Back*, *Green Anarchy*, and *Live Wild or Die*, as well as the communiques released by underground groups.

In the end, a thorough study reveals that despite clear influences from other social movements and academic philosophies, the outlook underlying the militant ecology movement is truly unique on the American political scene, transcending both the traditional left-right spectrum as well as the academic articulations of radical environmental philosophy. Due to their combination of extremism and pragmatism, and their distinctive ideological orientation, the writings of the more theoretically astute militant ecologists prove of particular interest for the insight they can provide into contemporary ecological politics. While one might be forgiven for doubting the real-world impact of environmental political theory, environmental ethics, and indeed contemporary political theory as a whole, the writings of these militant ecological activists have one distinct advantage over more academic exercises in environmental thought. Activists themselves are not working within the scholastic paradigms of academic political theory and environmental philosophy, and can therefore offer an original perspective that is firmly grounded upon an awareness of natural and political realities. Their writings therefore serve to both popularize certain environmental theories - bringing them “out of dusty academic journals” - and develop them further, applying their philosophical understanding of ecocentrism to the real-world problems of political activism.

⁵⁷ Simson L. Garfinkel, “Leaderless Resistance Today,” *First Monday* (March 2003) <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1040/961>

2. Ecocentrism in Theory and Practice

The first part of this study (chapters two through seven) concentrates on the scientific, metaphysical, religious, and ethical principles underlying the militant ecology movement in the United States. In addition to detailing its major philosophical influences and antecedents, the following chapters also compare the movement's outlook to other prominent schools of environmental and political theory. Ultimately, it will become clear that the ethos of militant ecology is not only more intellectually coherent than is typically believed; it also offers a compelling lens through which to understand and combat the modern ecological crisis.

Philosophically, the core of militant ecology is *ecocentrism*. According to Robyn Eckersley, the ecocentric outlook differs from the dominant paradigm of modernity in its rejection of *anthropocentrism*, which ascribes value and meaning to humanity alone and views the natural world in primarily instrumental terms.¹ Sometimes used interchangeably with *biocentrism* or *deep ecology* (though the three terms are actually distinct, as the following argument makes clear), this basic attitude of ecocentrism is shared by militant ecological activists of all varieties. One of the founding principles of Earth First! was "an enthusiastic embracing of the philosophy of Deep Ecology or biocentrism... Natural things live for their own sake, which is another way of saying they have value."² Controversially, for the founders of EF! this ecocentric outlook entailed "a placing of the Earth first in all decisions, even ahead of human welfare if necessary."

John Johnson provides a succinct summary of this outlook from a more recent EF! perspective:

Humans are not the end all, be all of evolution, but merely a strand in the web of life, with no inherent right to wreck everything and spoil the grand evolutionary pageant for everyone else. Deep ecology says that all living beings and life-giving systems are equal and have an intrinsic value, beyond what value humans may ascribe. In other words, all life and life-giving systems have inherent worth and a right to exist for their own sake...³

¹ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 28.

² Foreman, *Confessions*, 27, 26.

³ John Johnson, "Do We Know Where Our Deep Ecology Is?", *EF! Journal* 26, no. 1 (March/April 2006), 43.

Despite the shifting priorities within EF! over the years, from wilderness and wildlife preservation to social justice and revolutionary political change, journalist Rik Scarce could still declare in 2006 that “ecocentrism is what this movement is about, not narrow human concerns.”⁴

Earth First! activists are not alone in expressing these attitudes. The first communiqué released by the Earth Liberation Front reveals that the activists involved “embrace social and deep-ecology as a practical resistance movement,” justifying their extreme acts in defense of the natural world.⁵ Ecocentrism or biocentrism is also an important dimension of green anarchism, a primitivist critique of civilization that has been highly influential among earth and animal liberationists. As the Green Anarchy Collective explains, ecocentrism “centers and connects us to the earth and the complex web of life... Green anarchy strives to move beyond human-centered ideas and decisions into a humble respect for all life and the dynamics of the ecosystems that sustain us.”⁶ An ecocentric ethos also serves as the foundation for the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Founder Paul Watson, describing his encounter with a dying whale in 1975, claimed that the experience “changed my life and made me an eco-centric person. In other words, I think that other species are not inferior to humans. On that day, I pledged allegiance to the victims of humanity and I stopped serving the egotistical aspirations of our species.”⁷ Finally, despite the potential philosophical conflicts between ecocentrism and animal liberation theories, which will be discussed at length in chapter four, an *Earth First! Journal* article in support of the Animal Liberation Front claims that the two outlooks actually converge on several points: both emphasize the intrinsic worth of the natural world; both seek to protect healthy, undisturbed ecosystems for wild animals; and like ecocentrism “animal liberation ultimately strives to return all animals to an existence where they can pursue individual prosperity as well as the maintenance of ecological integrity as community members in the circle of life.”⁸

While activists often describe their views as *biocentric* rather than *ecocentric*, or treat the terms as synonymous, the latter term will be used throughout this study. Biocentrism, which is literally “life-centered,” prioritizes the welfare of all *living* organisms, while from an ecocentric perspective value is ascribed not only to living organisms but also to inanimate or abstract entities such as rivers, mountains, forests, ecosystems, and species. As EF! theorist Christopher Manes points out, radical activists place

⁴ Rik Scarce, “A Quarter Century of Deviance,” *EF! Journal* 26, no.1 (March/April 2006), 50; Gerrard Winstanley, “Evolving Earth First!,” *EF! Journal* 26, no. 6 (September/October 2006), 34-5.

⁵ Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front 1997-2002*, 10.

⁶ Green Anarchy Collective, “What is Green Anarchy? An Introduction to Anti-Civilization Anarchist Thought and Practice,” *Back to Basics 4: What is Rewilding?* (2004), 2.

<http://greenanarchy.anarchyplanet.org/2013/09/05/back-to-basics/>

⁷ Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 28.

⁸ “Ecology of Animal Liberation,” *EF! Journal* 18, no.3 (March 31, 1998), 18.

“not life, *bios*, at the center of this new ethic, but the entire community of living and non-living entities that make up an ecosystem.. .”⁹

These broad principles of philosophical ecocentrism are not necessarily confined to militant ecology activists. They can also be discerned among other schools of environmental thought such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, and certain religious variants of environmentalism. What most distinguishes militant ecology from these other branches of environmental philosophy and activism is its political commitment to changing human society and its particularly *militant* brand of ecocentrism, its commitment to effective direct action that goes so far as to embrace illegal and possibly violent tactics in pursuit of ecological aims. This union of philosophical ecocentrism and militancy is succinctly captured by the well-known Earth First! slogan, “No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth.” Rather than an expression of ideological and strategic rigidity, this slogan should be understood to mean that while ecocentric *principles* are non-negotiable, their specific political and strategic implementation should ultimately depend on their effectiveness.¹⁰ As Earth First! leader Judi Bari remarked, “If we are serious about putting the Earth first, we need to choose tactics because they work, not because they are macho or romantic. That’s what no compromise really means.”¹¹

In keeping with this pragmatism, militant ecology is most often characterized by its willingness to employ extreme tactics which operate outside of normal political or legal channels in the furtherance of ecological goals. However, the definition of an extreme tactic itself is also a matter of contention. Is “extreme” synonymous with “illegal,” or should its meaning be extended to cover actions that are legal but unorthodox (such as some forms of “guerrilla theater” and civil disobedience)? Or should its meaning be limited to actions that are not simply illegal but also *violent*, such as property destruction, intimidation, and assault? Though there is considerable disagreement among activists on this point, it is most accurate to say, with Steve Vanderheiden, that it is partly this willingness to perform acts of “ecotage” that separates militant ecological groups “from mainstream ones like the Sierra Club that eschew extralegal tactics entirely as well as groups like Greenpeace that engage in nonviolent direct action and political theater but reject causing property damage.”¹² Ecotage is therefore a class of radical tactics that includes both illegal and potentially violent acts undertaken in order to achieve ecological aims. Groups and activists who endorse ecotage are therefore the true advocates of a *militant* ecology, willing to do whatever is necessary in defense of the Earth.

⁹ Manes, *Green Rage*, 144.

¹⁰ An interpretation suggested by Bill Devall, *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City, Peregrine Smith Books 1988), 30.

¹¹ Judi Bari, “Spiking: It Just Doesn’t Work,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 3 (February 2, 1995), 8.

¹² Vanderheiden, “Radical Environmentalism in an Age of Antiterrorism,” in *Environmentalism*, 116.

This strategy of eco-defense by any means necessary was embraced early on by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which has been tracking down and disabling illegal whaling vessels since 1977. Though focused on the direct confrontation of illegal marine activities, founder Paul Watson insists that all forms of resistance have their place, and that “strategies based on litigation, legislation, education, covert action and civil disobedience are all complementary.”¹³ Earth First!, whose founders were strongly influenced by the band of anarchistic eco-saboteurs in Edward Abbey’s *The Monkeywrench Gang*, has also been a longtime advocate of an “all of the above” approach to ecological resistance. Shortly after its founding, Dave Foreman insisted that all EF! activists should “share a general worldview, a general strategy, a passionate love for the wild, and a burning commitment to defend the wild... [and] to resist the insane juggernaut of technological, Cartesian ‘civilization’ to reduce a diverse, precious, and living world to a dusty heap of ‘resources’.”¹⁴ Contending that pacifistic utopianism is a fantasy, Foreman claims that “we who are antibodies should merely resist the ravages of the disease using whatever tools and tactics that are effective in saving natural diversity. In this sense, *the end does justify the means* so long as the means are consistent with the end which is natural diversity and a world cured of the humanpox.”¹⁵ Though some of its goals may have changed, with the focus of the organization shifting from wilderness defense to the promotion of “total liberation” for all of life on Earth, EF! still abides by a pragmatic, “every tool in the toolbox” approach to ecological resistance. As Mike Jakubal wrote in the *Earth First! Journal* in 2008, “The main factor influencing whether we use a particular method of action or continue to use it in the future is that action’s ‘effectiveness.’ In other words, will that action in fact lead to the desired change in behavior?”¹⁶

This commitment to direct action achieves its most radical and notorious expression among underground earth and animal liberationists, who eschew legality and conventional morality and adopt tactics ranging from vandalism to arson. Underground activist Rod Coronado, lamenting the growing reformist and media-centered tendencies in aboveground environmental groups, asks, “When did we begin to determine tactics based on their ability to obtain media coverage? When did we begin to distance ourselves from illegal direct action?... An effective strategy requires the acceptance of

¹³ Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 107.

¹⁴ Foreman, *Confessions*, 214; Dave Foreman, “Around the Campfire,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 2 (December 21, 1986), 2.

¹⁵ He continues: “But in a strategic sense, it means that it is not so important to make a moral statement, to convince the general public with our courageous and ethical stance, as it is to just stop the goddamned destruction. Stop the road. Stop the clearcut. Get the cows out. Save the grizzly. Save the one redwood. Stop toxic waste dumping in that one stream. *Resist*. Resistance restrained only by what is strategically and tactically most effective in the short term... This view naturally leans far more towards monkeywrenching in the dark than to noble Gandhian direct action or political lobbying” (Dave Foreman/“Chim Blea,” “Cat Tracks: What are we Fighting For?” *EF! Journal* 4, no. 2 (December 22, 1983), 17).

¹⁶ Mike Jakubal, “Strategy and Tactics,” *EF! Journal* 28, no. 6 (September/October 2008), 21.

individual underground action as part of the path to victory.”¹⁷ ALF spokesman David Barbarash likewise enjoins activists,

We need to be smart about how we move forward, and not discard any tactics. We shouldn’t overlook the legal avenues to change, nor should we dismiss illegal means just because our society, at this moment in its history, has deemed these actions illegal... I believe the most successful way forward to animal liberation is a multi-pronged attack on all fronts by different people: while one group is lobbying government representatives for changes to legislation, another group is protesting and blockading the labs, and at another time the ALF will enter those labs to rescue the animals and destroy the implements of torture.¹⁸

Lest this paint too grim a picture, it is important to note that most radical activists deny that such tactics must be violent, arguing for both moral and pragmatic reasons that ecotage should be confined to property destruction that does not endanger any life, human or otherwise. However, their critics are not convinced by such protestations, and have frequently branded such tactics as “eco-terrorism.” This term, coined by “Wise Use” activist Ron Arnold in 1983, was later adopted by U.S. Representative Frank Riggs (RCA) for his 1998 Congressional hearing on “Acts of Ecoterrorism Committed by Radical Environmental Organizations.”¹⁹ One definition of eco-terrorism, from FBI Domestic Terrorism Section Chief James F. Jarboe, defines it as “the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally- oriented sub-national group for environmental-political reasons.”²⁰ Following this definition, a 2014 study has identified over seventy such “eco-terrorist” groups worldwide, responsible for nearly one thousand incidents from 1970-2012.²¹ Though the government’s use of the “terrorist” label has been roundly criticized, it nevertheless points to a few of the most significant and influential militant ecology groups on the American stage, those which have historically embraced extreme tactics - ecotage - in furtherance of their goals. The principal groups include Earth First!, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, the Earth Liberation Front, and the Animal Liberation Front. Not surprisingly, these are also the groups that have received the most scholarly attention, and will therefore form the core of this study.²² What follows is a brief description of these organizations.

¹⁷ Rod Coronado, “Every Tool in the Box: Learning to Live Like the Coyote Nation,” *EF! Journal* 18, no. 2 (January 31, 1998), 3.

¹⁸ Quoted in Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella II, “Behind the Mask: Uncovering the Animal Liberation Front,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters*, 45.

¹⁹ Vanderheiden, “Radical Environmentalism in an Age of Antiterrorism,” in *Environmentalism*, 117.

²⁰ Yang, Su, and Carson, “Eco-Terrorism,” 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² These are not the only militant ecology groups of significance, and others will be discussed in the following pages which have also been extreme in their commitment to defending wild nature - such

2.1 Earth First! (EF!)

Though not the first to form, Earth First! nevertheless holds a special place among American militant ecology groups. According to most versions of its founding story, which has acquired a mythological status among activists, Earth First! was first conceived in April 1980 when Dave Foreman, Ron Kezar, Bart Koehler, Howie Wolke, and Mike Roselle went hiking in Mexico's Pinacate Desert.²³ Most of those present were disaffected foot soldiers from mainstream conservation organizations such as the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club, and Friends of the Earth. While commiserating over copious amounts of beer around the campfire and reflecting upon the freewheeling ecosaboteur protagonists of Edward Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang*, they decided that it was time to introduce "a new joker in the deck: a militant, uncompromising group unafraid to say what needed to be said or to back it up with stronger actions than the established organizations were willing to take."²⁴

Philosophically, Earth First! was radical in its embrace of "a new worldview, a bio-centric paradigm, an Earth philosophy" that drew heavily upon the philosophy of deep ecology as well as Aldo Leopold's land ethic in insisting that "all human decisions should consider Earth first, humankind second."²⁵ It also returned to the early conservation movement's concern with undisturbed wilderness; Foreman would describe the organization as "a fundamentalist revival within the wilderness/wildlife preservation movement," a return to the principles of Leopold, Bob Marshall, John Muir, and Henry David Thoreau.²⁶ However, EF! sought to preserve the wilderness not solely for recreational, aesthetic, or spiritual reasons but as an arena of natural evolution and continued speciation. As Wolke explained, "We've recognized that wilderness preservation is the most urgent necessity on Earth. Once wilderness is gone, in most places geologic time will be needed for nature to restore it."²⁷ In contrast to most other "new social movements," Earth First! received little impetus from the traditional or New Left in its early days. It grew out of the conservation movement, deeply rooted in the wilderness of the Western states, and embraced a philosophy that prioritized not human welfare or socio-economic equality but the preservation of wild nature.

In addition to its unique and radical philosophical perspective, Earth First! was also among the first ecological groups to embrace a radical strategy and methods. In contrast to the moderation, compromise, and orthodox tactics of mainstream environmen-

as Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, the Animal Rights Militia, the Earth Liberation Army, and the Justice Department.

²³ Various renditions of this story, some of which include a Mexican brothel, are found in Lee, *Earth First!*; Foreman, *Confessions*; Manes, *Green Rage*; Wolke, "Earth First!," Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs*; and Roselle, *Tree-Spiker*.

²⁴ Foreman, *Confessions*, 17-19.

²⁵ Lee, *Earth First!*, 39.

²⁶ Foreman, *Confessions*, 18; Foreman, "Deep Ecology Vision Passion Courage," *EF! Journal* 7, no. 4 (March 20, 1987), 20).

²⁷ Howie Wolke, "Grizzly Den: Earth First!'s Proper Role," *EF! Journal* 2, no. 4 (March 1982).

tal groups - lobbying, lawsuits, press releases, and so forth - Earth First! was designed to “set forth the pure, hard-line, radical position of those who believe in the Earth first” and utilize both traditional methods as well as “demonstrations, confrontations, and more creative tactics and rhetoric.”²⁸ Earth First! was to provide a radical flank, asking the seemingly impossible - “calling for the creation of vast wilderness preserves, pioneering a revolution in our housekeeping habits on the planet, questioning the very tenets of Western Civilization, and engaging in non-violent direct action to stop the industrial beast whenever necessary”²⁹ - in order to make mainstream groups appear more reasonable in their demands. Though this strategic goal has been downplayed since the 1980s, Earth First! is still committed to performing acts of “aboveground illegalism” in order to directly confront lawmakers and extractive industries, while also reporting sympathetically on underground acts of sabotage by the ELF and ALF.³⁰ Earth First! has therefore adopted an “every tool in the toolkit” approach to its overriding radical goal, the defense of the Earth from the harmful activities of humankind, the restoration of vast tracts of wilderness and reintroduction of threatened species.

Earth First! met with considerable early success, gaining national prominence with a series of bold actions - particularly the unfurling of a huge banner giving the impression of a rupture in the hated Glenn Canyon Dam - and gaining a wide following that included “street poets and cowboy bar bouncers, agnostics and pagans, vegetarians and raw-steak eaters, pacifists and those who think that turning the other cheek is a good way to get a sore face.”³¹ In bringing ecocentric deep ecology into the political arena, introducing nonviolent civil disobedience and ecological sabotage (known as “monkeywrenching” among activists) into the repertoire of conservationist activism, and helping to “jolt the conservation movement out of its middle-age lethargy and reinspire it with passion, joy, and humor,” the early EF! had a lasting effect on the environmental movement in the United States.

However, this inclusive and non-hierarchical organizational strategy would lead to a variety of conflicts within the movement, culminating in an acrimonious schism in the late 1980s. On one side were arrayed several of the founders and early members who were strongly influenced by the historical conservation movement, more “macho” in outlook and behavior (dubbed the “rednecks for wilderness” due to their southwestern roots and inordinate fondness for beer, hunting, and chicken fried steak), more libertarian in the classic American tradition of Jefferson and Thoreau, more tolerant of clandestine activities such as monkeywrenching, more concerned with preserving wilderness and biodiversity, and generally less interested in issues of social justice. They were, as a consequence, denounced as misanthropic, racist, and elitist by some

²⁸ *EF! Journal* 1, no. 1 (November 1, 1980).

²⁹ Dave Foreman, “An Environmental Strategy for the 80s,” *EF! Journal* 2, no. 8 (September 1982), 7.

³⁰ Dreamer and Magpie, “Aboveground Illegalism,” *EF! Journal* 29, no. 6 (September/October 2009), 2.

³¹ Foreman, *Confessions*, 20.

of the younger activists, who were mobilized by former union organizer Judi Bari as well as founding member Mike Roselle (the only co-founder whose previous activism work was in leftist organizing rather than conservation). This new generation was more influenced by the leftist tradition of civil disobedience, more concerned with social justice and avowedly critical of the United States and capitalism, more urban in focus, and more interested in building a mass movement by incorporating disadvantaged populations.³² This split has been portrayed as a conflict between “biocentrism” and “social justice,” between the right and the left, between the Western cowboy culture of the founders and the “Californicated hippie utopianism” of Judi Bari and her socialist followers, as well as a conflict regarding strategy and tactics.³³ Whatever the case, the resulting schism led to the departure of many of the old guard and the transformation of Earth First! into a more explicitly left-leaning organization, though still retaining its ecocentric focus.³⁴ In addition to philosophical differences, certain legal issues and heavy government surveillance - culminating in the arrest of Dave Foreman in 1990 - also contributed to the movement’s evolution away from its roots, while the departure of the early founders, the death of Ed Abbey, and the car bombing and later death of Judi Bari left the movement bereft of visible leadership.

Following its early “rednecks for wilderness” phase and its second “green socialism” wave, in the mid-to-late 1990s a third wave began, marked by the influx of green anarchists into the movement.³⁵ Unlike the more socialist-influenced anarchists of the Bari era, these green anarchists were typically insurrectionary primitivists, eschewing any efforts at publicly organized civil disobedience, confining their tactics to acts of sabotage and vandalism and rejecting all compromises with the established order as irredeemably “leftist.”³⁶ This war on civilization declared by some of its most vocal

³² For discussions of “the schism,” see Foreman, *Confessions*, 217; Lee, *Earth First!*, 97; Roselle, *Tree Spiker*, 143; Bron Taylor, “Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front,” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (New York: Continuum, 2005), 518-524; Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs*, 411; Dave Foreman and Nancy Morton, “Good Luck, Darlin’, It’s Been Great,” in *The Earth First! Reader: Ten Years of Radical Environmentalism*, ed. John Davis (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1991); and Panagioti Tsolkas, “No System but the Ecosystem: Earth First! and Anarchism,” Institute for Anarchist Studies (April 1, 2015), <http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2015/04/01/no-system-but-the-ecosystem-earth-first-and-anarchism/>.

³³ Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs*, 359; Bron Taylor, “Earth First!’s Religious Radicalism,” in *Ecological Prospects: Scientific, Religious, and Aesthetic Perspectives*, Christopher Key Chapple, ed., SUNY Press: Albany (1994), 199.

³⁴ Not everyone would agree: Foreman, reflecting on the development of Earth First in 2012, writes that “the new Earth First! of the 1990s as since should be thought of as a wholly new outfit instead of a going-on from the earliest Earth First! of the 1980s. Eighties Earth First! was a conservation group with many ‘rednecks for wilderness,’ who were hunters and fishers. Since the early 1990s, EF!, although it sometimes works on wilderness and wildlife, seems to be made up mostly of urban anarchists, animalrights radicals, class-struggle Marxists, and politically-correct leftists” (Dave Foreman, *Take Back Conservation* (Durango CO: Raven’s Eye Press, 2012), 182).

³⁵ Donny, “Thoughts on a Changing Earth First!,” *EF! Journal* 27, no. 4 (May/June 2007), 2.

³⁶ Tsolkas, “No System but the Ecosystem.”

members has led to a shift away from wilderness defense to a more anti-infrastructure strategy, as well as an increase in anti-capitalist and anti-civilization thought.³⁷

In the last decade or so there has been greater focus on the dynamics within the group itself and a sometimes controversial fixation on instances of sexism, racism, transphobia, and other varieties of internal “oppression.”³⁸ While this greater attention to human issues is obviously viewed as a positive development by many within the movement, several activists have derided it as a distraction from their fundamental commitment to ecodefense. Regardless, Earth First! remains the premier aboveground militant ecology organization in the United States, and its organ, *The Earth First! Journal*, is still the most important venue for debate and strategizing in the larger movement.

2.2 Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS)

Though Earth First! has changed significantly since its founding, alienating some of its original members in the process, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society began and for many years remained the vehicle of one man: Captain Paul Watson.³⁹ Born in Toronto, Watson was one of the founders of Greenpeace in 1972, but soon became disillusioned by its unwillingness to engage in any form of direct action beyond non-violent civil disobedience. The matter came to a head in 1977, when he was voted off the Greenpeace Board of Directors for his aggressive style and willingness to engage in property destruction. Denouncing the organization he helped found as the “Avon ladies of the environmental movement,” and claiming that it had been “misappropriated by lawyers, financiers, fund raisers and bureaucrats,”⁴⁰ Watson set out to found an organization committed to the direct defense of threatened marine life. The result was the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which was founded by Watson, Starlet Lum, Ron Precious, and Al Johnson as the “Earthforce Environmental Society” in 1977 and formally incorporated in the United States in 1981.⁴¹

While the scope, tactics, and priorities of Earth First! have changed considerably since its founding, the SSCS has remained committed to one overriding and focused

³⁷ “Identity Crisis?” *EF! Journal* 28, no. 5 (July/August 2008), 6.

³⁸ Donny, “Thoughts,” 2.

³⁹ The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society might be considered an outlier among other groups, since due to its very mission - interfering with illegal fishing - it is international in scope. It has been included in this study because it is a significant and prominent militant ecology organization with substantial links to the United States. It is included in most surveys of American radical environmental activism, and its founder Paul Watson was strongly influenced by the philosophy and tactics of Earth First!. Though most of these groups are international in character, the principal focus of this study is on how they took root and/or developed in the United States.

⁴⁰ Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 71, 84.

⁴¹ “The History of Sea Shepherd,” *SeaShepherd.Org* (accessed May 11, 2016), <http://www.seashepherd.org/who-we-are/our-history.html>

goal: “To end the destruction of habitat and slaughter of wildlife in the world’s oceans in order to conserve and protect ecosystems and species.”⁴² This is done primarily through investigation of and direct action against illegal activities: “Sea Shepherd opposes anyone who violates the laws of marine conservation... We target those who commit crimes on the high seas and we act in accordance with the United Nations World Charter for Nature, which authorizes NGOs and individuals to implement international conservation laws.”⁴³ Thus, while the extreme tactics endorsed by many in EF! - and the even more extreme and potentially violent tactics practiced by those in the Earth and Animal Liberation underground, discussed below - are self-evidently illegal, the acts of the SSCS are ostensibly within the bounds of international law. It was pragmatism that prompted the organization to focus on unlawful operations rather than other, legal marine activities that were more ecologically damaging: as Watson explains, “We are interested in concrete results. Destructive but legal fishing must be fought on legal grounds. At sea, we fight the poachers because they are the only ones that we are in a position to stop.”⁴⁴ Far from an ideological commitment to legality or pacifism (which Watson has repeatedly rejected),⁴⁵ this brand of strategic property destruction - coupled with a refusal to physically harm any living being - is embraced because it is a viable strategy that is most likely to obtain results.

Nevertheless, this veneer of legality has not prevented several national governments and organizations - including Watson’s old friends in Greenpeace - from denouncing the Sea Shepherds as vigilantes and eco-terrorists. It has been classified a terrorist organization in Japan and placed on the Interpol “Blue Notice” list for its hardline tactics against illegal fishing vessels. Though it currently holds a tax exempt status in the United States, where it is headquartered in Seattle, State Department messages published in 2011 by WikiLeaks revealed that the Japanese government has long been pressuring the United States to revoke its charitable status. The organization’s multiple audits by the IRS in recent years, it is widely believed, were undertaken with such an end in view,⁴⁶ and in 2012 the U.S. Court of Appeals issued an injunction banning

⁴² “Who We Are,” *SeaShepherd.Org* (accessed May 11, 2016), <http://www.seashepherd.org/who-we-are/>.

⁴³ Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 82, 108.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁵ “Few changes on this planet have taken place solely because of nonviolent action. To remain nonviolent totally is to allow the perpetration of violence against people, animals, and the environment” (Paul Watson and Warren Rogers, *Sea Shepherd, My Fight for Whales and Seals* (New York: WW Norton, 1982), 167).

⁴⁶ Seann Lenihann, “U.S. Whaling negotiator hinted to Japan that IRS might pull Sea Shepherd Conservation Society nonprofit status,” *Animal People* (January/February 2011), <http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/anp/2011/10/01/u-s-whaling-negotiator-hinted-to-japan-that-irs-might-pull-sea-shepherd-conservation-society-nonprofit-status/>.

Watson and any other American members from harassing or approaching Japanese whaling vessels.⁴⁷

Watson was strongly influenced by Marshall McLuhan's theories of electronic media, and SSCS tactics attempt to use such means in order draw national attention to the illegal fishing practices of countries such as Iceland and Japan. While ostensibly adhering to the terms of the International Whaling Commission's 1982 moratorium on commercial whaling, these nations have continued the practice under a loophole that permits killing whales for scientific purposes. The well-known Animal Planet weekly series *Whale Wars* has brought considerable publicity to the group as well as the cause of marine conservation. However, the chief goal of the organization is not awareness-raising but taking direct, effective steps to stop illegal hunts while they are happening. They remain committed to nonviolence insofar as they refuse to harm any living being and use weapons or explosives; nevertheless, they are willing to destroy property, believing that "respect for life takes precedence over respect for property which is used to take life."⁴⁸

The SSCS is thus linked with EF! by a shared ecocentric orientation and willingness to use any effective means necessary to preserve the integrity of wild nature - in this case, that of marine ecosystems. Paul Watson once referred to the SSCS as "the navy of Mother Earth" and "the flagship of Gaia's whale navy," while Earth First! was the army.⁴⁹ Following Watson's resignation as head of the SSCS in 2013 and the decline in international whaling (due in part to the efforts of the Sea Shepherds) the organization has shifted its focus to other illegal fishing campaigns, particularly off the coast of West Africa.⁵⁰

2.3 Earth and Animal Liberation Fronts (ELF and ALF)

The previous two organizations operate primarily aboveground and confine their illegal acts to small-scale incidents of civil disobedience or sabotage. By contrast, the next two groups under consideration are most notorious for the highly destructive and secret nature of their activities. Though the ELF and ALF formed separately and differ in their respective focus on ecological and animal issues, in the United States they have been allied since the 1990s and are often classified together for their commitment to underground direct action, with tactics ranging from sabotage to arson.

⁴⁷ "Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Hands Down Ruling in Favor of Whale Poachers," *SeaShepherd.org* (February 27, 2013), <http://www.seashepherd.org/news-and-media/2013/02/27/ninth-circuit-court-of-appeals-hands-down-ruling-in-favor-of-japanese-whale-poachers-1491>

⁴⁸ Quoted in Manes, *Green Rage*, 109.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁰ Caty Enders, "Can Sea Shepherd Survive its Own Success?" *The Guardian* (June 5, 2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/05/sea-shepherd-whale-wars-animal-planet>

The first appearance of the ELF in North America was in 1996 or 1997, though some trace its origins back to the “Environmental Life Force,” a short-lived radical environmentalist group active in California the 1970s. However, this organization disbanded in 1978 and its founder, John Hanna, has strongly criticized the extreme tactics of the contemporary ELF.⁵¹ The more commonly-accepted story traces its origins to a 1992 British Earth First! gathering in Brighton, where a split occurred between activists who wanted to denounce ecotage and those who believed that such illegal tactics were still necessary.⁵² According to most sources, it was ultimately decided that EF! would confine itself to aboveground activities such as civil disobedience and demonstrations, while activists wishing to employ more extreme tactics would carry them out under the banner of the Earth Liberation Front.⁵³ As Judi Bari commented approvingly from across the Atlantic, “Despite the romantic notions of some over-imaginative Ed Abbey fans, Earth First! is in reality an above ground group... Civil disobedience and sabotage are both powerful tactics in our movement. For the survival of both, it’s time to leave the night work to the elves in the woods.”⁵⁴

However, the reasons behind this split went deeper than a mere division of labor. Not only did the ELF reject the exclusive commitment to aboveground acts of civil disobedience that was gaining traction in the nineties-era EF!, they also distanced themselves from the “macho male-oriented ‘eco-warrior image’ and the ‘reactionary, apolitical rantings about population controls and immigration’ espoused by some early EF! members.”⁵⁵ In fact, the expectation that the ELF would serve as an underground wing for Earth First! was frustrated by an enormous divergence in outlook between the two groups. As one activist explains, the ELF saw themselves as much more homogeneous than EF! and had originated through a struggle for earth/animal liberation, rather than as a bunch of red-necks... the ELF philosophy was also totally different, in that it immediately formed a link with animal liberation, something that took EF! ten years to do. the ELF saw a holistic link between earth, animal, and human liberation, and focused on issues such as anti-fascism. and eco-feminism.⁵⁶

These divergences reflect the different philosophical influences upon these groups. Earth First! and the Sea Shepherds were, in their early years, more influenced by the ecocentric critique of anthropocentrism and modernity advanced by deep ecology, while the later generation of EF! activists tended to embrace the left-wing social ecology of Murray Bookchin. The Earth Liberation Front, by contrast, was more avowedly influenced by green anarchism, a school of thought dedicated to bringing about the collapse of modern civilization. As an early ELF communique reads, “ELF works to

⁵¹ Curran, *21st Century Dissent*, 219.

⁵² Long, *Ecoterrorism*, 45; Liddick, *Eco-Terrorism*, 64.

⁵³ Noel Molland, “A Spark that Ignited a Flame: The Evolution of the Earth Liberation Front,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 49.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Joose, “Leaderless Resistance and Ideological Inclusion,” 355.

⁵⁵ Tara, “The History of the Earth Liberation Front,” *EF! Journal* 21, no. 1 (November 1, 2000), 4.

⁵⁶ “From Partisans to Fire Elves,” *Underground* 9 (Winter 1997), 5.

speed up the collapse of industry, to scare the rich, and to undermine the foundations of the state. We embrace social and deep-ecology as a practical resistance movement. We have to show the enemy that we are serious about defending what is sacred.”⁵⁷

These differences in focus also entailed a change in targets. Unlike their predecessors in Earth First! and the SSCS, who focused on protecting remote wilderness areas, ELF activists have often sought to cause damage to high-profile targets in more populated locales - ski resorts, genetic research labs, cities afflicted by urban sprawl, and automobile dealerships.⁵⁸ Its more avowedly revolutionary orientation also demanded a different type of tactics and organization. As articulated by Craig Rosebraugh and Leslie James Pickering, who acted as spokesmen for the group from 1997 until the early 2000s, the ELF Guidelines include a commitment 1) to cause as much economic damage as possible to businesses that profit off the destruction of the natural environment; 2) to educate the public; and 3) to “take all necessary precautions against harming life.”⁵⁹ Acceptable tactics for this group therefore extend beyond the civil disobedience and low- key monkeywrenching of the EF! and SSCS, including arson, vandalism, and other forms of property destruction among its repertoire. In order to avoid infiltration and government repression, the ELF also operates with fewer organizational constraints; its activists employ a cell structure which “can consist of just a few people who have the ability to cause extreme amounts of economic damage with just one action.”⁶⁰

These extreme tactics and practice of leaderless resistance were inspired, in large part, by the Animal Liberation Front. Though not always classified as a radical environmental organization due to its historical focus on individual animal liberation over more general ecological issues, the important links between earth and animal liberation in the United States make it an integral component of this movement. Indeed, as later chapters will establish, a concern with animal life - particularly wildlife - is inseparable from a thoroughgoing ecocentric outlook.

Tracing its origins back to the nineteenth-century Bands of Mercy in Britain, as well as the Hunt Saboteurs Association established in 1963, the Animal Liberation Front was founded in England by Ronnie Lee in 1972 and spread to the United States sometime between 1977 and 1982.⁶¹ While EF!, the SSCS, and the ELF are principally guided by deep ecology, social ecology, or green anarchism, much of animal liberation ideology is traceable to the theories of Peter Singer and Tom Regan, rejecting an incremental approach to animal welfare and insisting on the abolition of animal research and exploitation. Like other groups in the militant ecology movement, the ALF cou-

⁵⁷ Pickering, *Earth Liberation Front*, 10.

⁵⁸ Joosse, “Elves, Environmentalism, and ‘Eco-Terror,’” 81.

⁵⁹ Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, ix.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶¹ Steven Best and Anthony Nocella, “Behind the Mask,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?* 18-21; Ingrid Newkirk, *Free the Animals! The Untold Story of the U.S. Animal Liberation Front and its Founder, “Valerie”* (Chicago: The Noble Press, Inc., 1992).

ples its rejection of anthropocentrism with a belief in the sacredness of all life, leading them to eschew violence against human beings. The property and instruments used for animal exploitation, however, are fair game. Common ALF tactics include releasing research animals from laboratories and fur farms, vandalizing slaughterhouses, smashing furriers' storefront windows, and sabotaging hunting equipment.⁶² Inspired by the Irish Republican Army, the ALF consists principally of decentralized, autonomous cells engaged in guerrilla warfare and united by a shared ideology, a strategy of "leaderless resistance" which was later adopted by the ELF. And like the ELF, underground animal liberation activists take credit for their actions through the release of anonymous communiques, which are then publicized by aboveground activists in the North American Animal Liberation Press Office (and previously by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals).⁶³

Shortly after the arrival of the ELF to the United States, a series of actions began to be carried out under the banner of both the ELF and ALF, by groups adopting titles such as the "Animal Liberation Front Eco-Animal Defense Unit" and the "Bay Area Cell of the Earth and Animal Liberation Front."⁶⁴ In 1998, ELF and ALF claimed joint responsibility for the destruction of two USDA Animal Damage Control Buildings in Olympia, Washington, and joint operations have continued ever since.⁶⁵ While the ALF contributed its more extreme tactics and leaderless resistance strategy, the ELF seems to have brought a more holistic ecological and social orientation to these operations, moving beyond individual animal liberations and towards the defense of the Earth as a whole. As Bron Taylor notes, collaboration between animal liberationists and radical environmentalists has tended to result in the former becoming "radically ecologized," turning their attention more towards endangered wild species and the defense of whole ecosystems.⁶⁶ Many activists, at any rate, see the two movements as inseparable. According to Mike Jaynes, writing in the *Earth First! Journal*, the earth and animal liberation movements are "so closely related that they are, in essence, the same movement... Disdaining labels of all kinds, I think the one they all boil down to, the all encompassing one I would most proudly wear, is that of 'biocentric.'"⁶⁷ An anonymous writer in the *Journal* also argued against the "media-generated stereotype of the ALF as a purely 'animal rights' organization," claiming that "the ALF is an autonomous volunteer insurgency that is as opposed to environmental destruction as it is to animal abuse... The struggles of the ALF and Earth First! are too similar for us to remain divided."⁶⁸ For many, the ALF is considered the "animal liberation arm"

⁶² Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 119-122.

⁶³ Liddick, *Eco-Terrorism*, 40.

⁶⁴ Molland, "Spark that Ignited a Flame," in *Igniting a Revolution*, 56.

⁶⁵ "A History of the E.L.F.," *Resistance: A Journal of Grassroots Direct Action* 3 (2000), 5.

⁶⁶ Bron Taylor, "Religion, Violence and Radical Environmentalism," 20.

⁶⁷ Mike Jaynes, "Animal Defense and Earth Defense," *EF! Journal* 29, no. 3 (March/April 2009), 20-1.

⁶⁸ "Animal Liberation Front: Past and Present," *EF! Journal* 18, no. 4 (March 31, 1998), 17.

and the ELF the “environmental arm” of the underground militant ecology movement, indicating the shared vision that unites them.

Unlike EF! and the SSCS, these anonymous underground groups lack any kind of membership rolls, leadership, or clear means of determining and enforcing basic organizational principles. Indeed, given the lack of a clearly-defined membership or command structure, it is problematic to identify them as “organizations” at all: the authors of the *Animal Liberation Primer* claim that “we are not members of the ALF; in fact the ALF has not one single member. We are ALF activists by virtue of the fact that we carry out actions, whether on occasional or frequent basis.”⁶⁹ Simson L. Garfinkel likewise suggests that the ELF should be more accurately described as a “*movement* or a *milieu*” rather than a formal organization, given its strategy of leaderless resistance and lack of internal communications or strategic collaboration.⁷⁰ For the purposes of this study, ALF/ELF will mostly be used as a catch-all term for the underground army of the militant ecology movement, which - despite a considerable decline in the incidents of ecological sabotage and the heavy governmental repression of so-called “eco-terrorist” acts since the early 2000s - remains an active presence on the U.S. scene.⁷¹

Despite varying degrees of extremism, then, it is clear that the ecocentrism of militant ecology is no armchair philosophy. As Paul Joosse rightly notes, militant ecologists gauge their success not in terms of membership numbers or government access, but “by the number of ‘direct actions’ [they] can mobilize, and the efficacy of these actions in putting a halt to the ongoing degradation of the wilderness.”⁷² Though what this entails differs significantly among individuals and groups, all activists share this commitment to achieve their aims by whatever means necessary. As Gerrard Winstanley wrote in the *Earth First! Journal* in 2006, “Throughout the history of the EF! movement, our three unifying principles have been clear and simple: A biocentric worldview (that means humans ain’t at the top of the ladder); a no-compromise stance against ecological destruction... and a confrontational, creative direct-action approach to defending the wild.”⁷³

It will become clear in the following chapters that the warrior ethos of militant ecology is a direct outgrowth of its philosophical outlook. While most activists probably do not have these arcane metaphysical concerns in mind when they are removing survey stakes from old-growth forests or liberating mink from fur farms, their underlying philosophical orientation is inextricably linked to their political program as well as

⁶⁹ Curran, *21st Century Dissent*, 202; *An Animal Liberation Primer: Third Edition*, ed. by @nu (2002), 13, <http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/ALFPrime.htm>

⁷⁰ Garfinkel, “Leaderless Resistance Today.”

⁷¹ Lauren Kirchner, “Whatever Happened to ‘Eco-Terrorism’?” *Pacific Standard* (January 26, 2015) <http://www.psmag.com/nature-and-technology/whatever-happened-to-eco-terrorism>.

⁷² Joosse, “Leaderless Resistance and Ideological Inclusion,” 356.

⁷³ Gerrard Winstanley, “Evolving Earth First!,” *EF! Journal* 26, no. 6 (September/October 2006), 34-5.

their uncompromising tactical approach. However, it is necessary to reiterate that the radicalism of militant ecology does not lie merely in its willingness to condone extralegal tactics. Nor does it lie in its generally anarchic and anti-capitalist political program, as some scholars and activists have claimed.⁷⁴ Its true radicalism, its true revolt against modernity, is its insistence that the integrity of the ecological whole takes precedence over the needs of the human species, and its willingness to do whatever is necessary in order to defend wild nature. It is this particularly militant breed of ecocentrism, rather than any specific set of tactics or political prescriptions, that represents the greatest contribution of militant ecology to contemporary environmental politics.

Despite some differences of emphasis, commitment to this militant ecocentrism generally entails the acceptance of certain fundamental principles, including 1) scientifically, an acknowledgement that human activity is currently threatening the integrity of the biological community and the survival of life on Earth; 2) metaphysically, a holistic understanding of reality as an interconnected, interdependent web; 3) a religious conception of life, the Earth, and/or natural processes as sacred or deserving of respect; and 4) a recognition that humankind - or at least some portion of it - has outgrown its niche and arrogated itself to the role of lord and master over the biosphere. These principles form the subject of chapters three through six. Chapter seven outlines the chief differences between the two camps of the militant ecology movement - ecowarriors and total liberationists - in their interpretation of these principles and, indeed, the meaning of ecocentrism itself. Altogether, these four philosophical principles lead up to the chief political premise of militant ecology, whose implications are detailed in chapters eight through thirteen: a commitment to overcome the ecologically destructive modern world and bring human society back into accord with nature, by any means necessary.

⁷⁴ Pellow, *Total Liberation*.

3. The New Science

Though militant ecology did not emerge as a political movement until the 1970s, its roots lie much deeper. Rather than a wholly new creed, ecocentrism can be understood as a synthesis of certain contemporary scientific currents with a far more longstanding tradition of metaphysical holism. Given that it is the central role of science that makes ecocentrism a distinctively modern school of thought - despite its counter-modern orientation - this feature bears examination at the outset.

Militant ecology draws upon several contemporary scientific currents, particularly evolutionary biology, ecology, conservation biology, and the Gaia hypothesis. In addition to their practical utility in wilderness and wildlife conservation, it is their *holistic* analytical approach which, for many militant ecologists, sets these contemporary trends apart from the dominant mechanistic and reductive paradigm of modern science. The central claim of holistic science is that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Therefore, as Dobson explains, from a holistic perspective “the best knowledge is held to be acquired not by the isolated examination of the parts of a system but by examining the way in which the parts interact.”¹ In the radical environmentalist account, this holistic tradition of thought, though prevalent in the pre-modern world, was submerged for centuries in the West beneath the dominant paradigms of philosophical dualism and scientific reductionism. It was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that scientific holism experienced a resurgence in the guise of evolutionary theory, the “new physics,” systems thinking, chaos theory, the Gaia hypothesis, and - most importantly for environmentalists - scientific ecology. These contemporary holistic currents in science have provided environmental activists with an objective and socially-accepted vantage point from which to critique the mechanistic and reductive tendencies of modern science and social theory. In its place, they stress an appreciation for nature and human society as an interrelated whole.

Among these various “new sciences,” evolutionary biology offers particularly strong support to the ecocentric outlook, with its implicit depiction of the interconnectedness of all life and the primacy of natural processes.² Evolutionary biology is therefore one means of approaching the central intuition of militant ecology: since all life on Earth (indeed, everything in the known universe) is ultimately related, there is no basis for the anthropocentric dualism that has previously justified humanity’s feckless destruction of the natural world. In the realm of physics, relativity and quantum

¹ Val Dusek, *The Holistic Inspirations of Physics: The Underground History of Electromagnetic Theory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 16; Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 39.

² Bron Taylor, “Earth First!’s Religious Radicalism,” in *Ecological Prospects*, 187.

theory promote a holistic interpretation of the universe as a series of integrated and interrelated energy events, while chaos theory stresses the spontaneous order that can arise out of seemingly random occurrences, portraying the workings of the natural world as far more complex and sensitive to interference than earlier reductionist theories allowed.³ In the field of geoscience, James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis envisions the Earth as a planet-wide regulatory system in which the evolution of species and their biological, physical, and chemical environments are inextricably related. Though possibly contrary to Lovelock's intention, many militant ecologists have taken up the Gaia hypothesis in order to promote a holistic understanding of the Earth as a living organism rather than the lifeless rock presented by mainstream science.⁴ And the science of ecology, most obviously, has provided the primary scientific foundation for environmental activism, envisioning the landscape "as a unified system of integrally related parts" rather than a mere assemblage of exploitable resources.⁵

3.1 Anti-Science?

While most of the aforementioned "new sciences" are broadly accepted within the scientific community, many of them - and, more importantly, the mystical interpretation sometimes attributed to them by non-scientists - are held in suspicion among the more "tough-minded" researchers of biology and physics. Some may point to these departures from the reigning paradigm to argue that militant ecology is either pseudo-scientific or, indeed, positively *anti*-science. However, while militant ecologists do voice a suspicion of applied science and technology due to their complicity in ecological degradation and negative effects on human life (a suspicion shared by other counter-modern thinkers such as Heidegger, Jacques Ellul, and Lewis Mumford), they are not inherently anti-scientific. Science and certain forms of technology, in fact, have an important role to play in radical environmental ideology. While the core of militant ecology is a *spiritual* conviction of the "interrelatedness and sacrality of all life," as Bron Taylor points out, its second pillar is a *scientific* understanding that the Earth is in the midst of an unprecedented anthropogenic extinction crisis. It is this scientific understanding, derived from findings in ecology and conservation biology, that provides the rationale for their militancy: "Without this claim there is no basis for urgency, no reason for people with deep moral sentiments to risk their freedom or disrupt their lives.. ."137 Science, then, is one important part of understanding the world and humanity's place in it, and need not conflict with the deeper intuitions of militant ecocentrism.

³ James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987 (2008)).

⁴ James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of our Living Earth* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 60.

⁵ J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," in *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 23.

Ironically, although science might seem to represent the modern achievement *par excellence*, many in the militant ecology movement have been well-disposed to it, particularly ecology and conservation biology. The scientific dimension of militant⁶ ecology was particularly conspicuous in the early days of Earth First!. In addition to their extreme tactics in defense of old-growth forests, one of the most radical features of the early EF! platform was its wilderness proposal for the United States, unprecedented in its scale and deeply informed by ecology and conservation biology. Responding to the widespread conviction among radical environmentalists that the scientific endeavor has resulted in more harm than good, conservation biologist and EF! activist Reed Noss claimed that ecology and evolutionary biology were an exception to this rule. In addition to being “infused with concepts of interdependence, interrelationship, and co-adaptation,” these sciences were explicitly non-anthropocentric in orientation, demonstrating “unequivocally that humans are just one ephemeral component of an interrelated and interdependent biota... firmly within nature, not on top of it.”⁷ The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society has been concerned with protecting marine ecosystems since its inception, with Paul Watson asserting that “defending ecosystems is more important than anything else. If the oceans die, we will all die.”⁸ Despite its decline in importance in recent decades, appeals to the environmental sciences for legitimacy remains common. Among underground activists, the communiques of the Earth Liberation Front often condemn the social *and* ecological effects of deforestation, urban sprawl, and genetically modified organisms, while animal liberationists appeal to evolutionary biology to emphasize human kinship with other organisms and the importance of preserving intact ecosystems and animal habitats.⁹

In addition to the support it provides to the metaphysical intuitions of ecocentrism, applied science and technology also play a significant role in combatting environmental degradation. Though claiming that science emphasizes “only one facet of the real world - which is certainly mystical and poetic at its core,” EF! activist R.F. Mueller concedes that “given the inevitability of its presence in our lives, our efforts must be directed toward elevating science to a new analytical level...”¹⁰ In addition, Acha Demiks defends the practical utility of science in a 2007 issue of the *Earth First! Journal*, declaring that to take down the powers that are destroying this planet, we need science; to be successful after the fall of industrial society, we need science. We need to know about the science of ecology to be able to fight the global banking system. We need to

⁶ Bron Taylor, “Earth First! And Global Narratives of Popular Ecological Resistance,” in *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism*, ed. Bron Raymond Taylor (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 16.

⁷ Reed Noss/Diamondback, “Scientific Ecology?” *EF! Journal* 10, no. 1 (21 Nov 1989).

⁸ Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview with a Pirate*, 43.

⁹ A VHMNT Supporter, “The Most Neglected Animal Rights Issue,” *No Compromise* 4 (October 1996), 12.

¹⁰ R.F. Mueller, “Of Pipedreams, Science and the Wilderness,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 3 (February 2, 1987), 27.

know about physics to monkeywrench. We need to know about biology and ecology to preserve what little we still have.¹¹

In short, while justifiably suspicious of many aspects of the scientific enterprise and its historical applications, many ecowarriors count the more holistic currents in ecology and conservation biology among the “benign” sciences that can help lead humanity towards a more harmonious existence with the natural world.

Though this pro-science outlook among militant ecologists might seem to contradict their counter-modern orientation, it is important to remember that the branches of science that have most influenced environmental politics actually emerged in *opposition* to the prevailing mechanistic reductionism of modern scientific thought.¹² Indeed, the nineteenth-century German biologist who coined the term *Ökologie*, Ernst Haeckel, was influenced by philosophical pantheists such as Lucretius, Giordano Bruno, Spinoza, and Goethe, adopting a vitalist outlook that envisioned the universe as one unified and balanced organism.¹³ In addition, early proponents of arcadian ecology and natural theology such as Gilbert White, William Cowper, and John Ray were staunch critics of modernity who questioned the mechanistic materialism of mainstream science.¹⁴ Theodore Roszak describes the intellectual and temperamental differences between holistic thinkers and the practitioners of mainstream science: “Holistic thinkers, always deeply imbued with an artistic appreciation for the subtle, the mysterious, the incommensurable, were stubbornly hostile toward the mathematical model and analytical habits that had for so long dominated the scientific mainstream.”¹⁵ In other words, ecology is called “the subversive science” for a reason: its findings question not only the practices of contemporary society, but also the worldview on which the modern world and its most vaunted achievements - empirical science and technology - were built. Therefore, there is no essential contradiction between a counter-modern outlook and

¹¹ Acha Demiks, “Dear Shit Fer Brains,” *EF! Journal* 27, no. 2 (January/February 2007), 4-5.

¹² Eugene C. Hargrove, *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1996), 40.

¹³ Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 43, 55. See also Daniel Gasman: “Haeckelian Monism, which revitalized for the modern world the mystical Monism of the pre-Socratics, the hermeticism of Bruno, the pantheism of Spinoza, the romanticism of Goethe, and the idealism of the German *Naturphilosophen*, was a movement that was ultimately identifiable, not so much with the traditions of conventional positivism, materialism, and rationalism that were reflected in the popular, albeit superficial images of Haeckelian Monism, but rather, and more importantly, in the astonishing popular recrudescence of age-old hermeticism as a viable intellectual tradition at precisely the same time.” Haeckel’s Monistic followers harbored “a conception of science that seemed to be subversive of science, and that at unexpectedly revealing moments appeared to hark back to the intellectual assumptions of ancient and medieval pre-scientific and mystical attitudes and traditions” (Daniel Gasman, *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology* (New York: Peter Land, 1998), 60, 27).

¹⁴ Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 98-100.

¹⁵ Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 166.

a pragmatic appeal to ecology and conservation biology, since despite their inevitable complicity in it, these sciences nevertheless function as *critiques* of the modern world.

Though their degree of scientific literacy varies, what these theories have to offer many militant ecologists is a holistic vision of an interconnected, interdependent cosmos, one in which an imperceptible order lurks beneath the apparent chaos of the natural world, in which animals are more than machines, ecosystems and landscapes more than scattered accumulations of exploitable resources, the Earth more than a lifeless rock drifting through a meaningless universe, and humans more than the resource managers or overlords envisioned by the dominant scientific paradigm. Thus, while some academic observers might criticize radical activists for their appeals to allegedly pseudo-scientific thinkers such as Fritjof Capra, David Bohm, and Rupert Sheldrake, their activism is nevertheless informed by an accurate - if sometimes unsophisticated - understanding of ecology and conservation biology.

3.2 Nature Knows Best?

This scientific veneer has not convinced their critics, however. One common critique of militant ecology - indeed, of environmental and animal rights activism in general - is that it is based upon romantic, antiquated, or plainly false views of nature. Several critics claim that militant ecologists promote a “fuzzy wuzzy” understanding of the natural world (to use Richard Conniff’s phrase), emphasizing a harmonious and benign conception of “Mother Earth” that ignores harsh natural realities of disease and predation: Luc Ferry opines that “deep ecologists blithely disregard all that is hateful in nature... [and] retain only the harmony, the beauty and the peace,” concluding that “the sacralization of nature is *intrinsically* untenable.”¹⁶ Likewise, critics of animal liberation often claim, with Lorenzo Lutherer and Margaret Simon, that “many people in the animal rights movement seem to view humanity as the only predator, denying or choosing not to believe that there is a predator chain in nature.”¹⁷

While these accusations of pseudo-scientific sentimentalism might seem to lend credence to the stereotype of “tree-hugging,” drug-addled naivete promoted by the mainstream media, they misrepresent the views of most militant ecologists. This critique rests upon the anthropocentric assumption that nature is only worthy of reverence when it is directly beneficial to humankind, a belief which is roundly rejected by eco-centric thinkers. Indeed, as Eckersley writes, “Ecocentric theorists simply do not need to depict nature as having a kindly human face or to show that nature is essentially benevolent or benign in order that humans respect it and regard it as worthy.”¹⁸ While

¹⁶ Richard Conniff, “Fuzzy-Wuzzy Thinking About Animal Rights,” *Audobon* (November 1990); Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, trans. Carol Volk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 133.

¹⁷ Lorenzo Otto Lutherer and Margaret Sheffield Simon, *Targeted: The Anatomy of an Animal Rights Attack* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 5.

¹⁸ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 59.

proponents do often emphasize the nurturing, life-giving aspects of the Earth, this is complemented by a more tragic view of nature in which humans themselves are only a part (and not a particularly important one) of the greater whole.¹⁹ Thus, while the workings of the natural world might seem positively hostile to its various individual organisms, militant ecologists emphasize how these harsh realities - predation, disease, even the occasional asteroid - conduce to the beauty and health of the whole. Nature's apparent "cruelty" is merely a product of humanistic morality, one that is rejected by a thoroughgoing ecocentrism.²⁰ One reason for this reverence towards the natural order is, as Reed Noss explains, that nature "has developed in all its beauty through organic evolution and is a vast web of interactions more complex than humans can ever fully comprehend."²¹

Such attitudes cannot be easily dismissed as romantic nonsense. With Eugene Hargrove, one might claim that nature knows best "in part because whatever it does through creative indifference is beautiful but also, more importantly, because the end result is a creative output that is far too complex for humans to reproduce, to go beyond, or even to fully participate in; as such, it is unique and irreplaceable."²² The idea that nature knows best simply counsels humility in the face of the natural order, respect for the ways in which physical, ecological, and evolutionary processes - even those requiring death and suffering - have conduced to the beauty of the whole. It is true that some within the movement may be guilty of overemphasizing the beneficence of the natural world and ignoring the realities of struggle and violence. However, radical activism is not usually based upon a naive belief in natural harmony, but on the belief that the ecological whole is inherently valuable and that humanity has radically overstepped its bounds in attempting to dominate it.

3.3 The Viability of Preservation

A more serious criticism of militant ecology is that, with its historical emphasis on preserving wilderness areas and preventing species extinction, it is reliant upon an outmoded understanding of ecological science. While early ecologists such as Frederic Clements, Paul Sears, and Eugene Odum subscribed to models of ecological succession and ecosystemic equilibrium that emphasized natural order and harmony, later ecologists have stressed the role of disturbance, disharmony, and chaos, viewing ecosystems

¹⁹ Daniel Deudney, "In Search of Gaian Politics: Earth Religion's Challenge to Modern Western Civilization," in *Ecological Resistance Movements*, 298.

²⁰ As Naess puts it, "Nature is not brutal, but from a human point of view (and that's my point of view), we do see brutality. As we see yellow in the sun. As we see these fantastically blue mountains outside this window." ("Everything Really Important is Dangerous: A Discussion with Arne Naess," in *Wisdom in the Open Air: The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology*, ed. Peter Reed and David Rothenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 106).

²¹ Noss, "Scientific Ecology," 21.

²² Hargrove, *Foundations*, 195.

as temporary agglomerations of individual organisms rather than ordered wholes.²³ Such a shift has had predictable consequences for environmental preservation, with “New Conservationists” such as Steward Brand, Björn Lomborg, Peter Kareiva, Ted Nordhaus, and Michael Shellenberger eagerly donning the scientific mantle to declare that there is no such thing as “pristine” nature, that the natural world is resilient to human interference, and that traditional preservationist goals should therefore be abandoned.²⁴ “Science tells us,” Nordhaus and Shellenberger report, that almost all places are in continual states of flux and evolution, and environmentalists are therefore “asserting an unscientific way of seeing places - one that assumes stasis across time.”²⁵ In light of these shifts in scientific opinion (or at least a vocal portion of it), Jozef Keulartz denounces militant ecologists, with their sad devotion to pristine wilderness and ecological humility, as pseudo-scientists whose refusal to “cast even the briefest glimpse at evolutionary ecology seems to be inspired by unadulterated fear.”²⁶ Based upon this more sophisticated understanding of ecology, he calls for a “more flexible” nature policy that, one assumes, would give scientific sanction to greater human modifications of the biosphere.

However, it is not clear that these theoretical developments really undermine the militant ecological stance in any way. Indeed, as Curt Meine notes, the idea that “nature changes” is hardly new (Heraclitus was a well-known early proponent). Early naturalists such as Humboldt, Darwin, Marsh, and Leopold obviously understood this basic concept, and it was never before regarded as an impediment to action on behalf of natural conservation.²⁷ Whatever the case, as Callicott points out, the deconstructionist perception of nature as dynamic, chaotic, and unpredictable does not undermine the holistic land ethic, since it was never intended to uphold some kind of mystical ecological status quo in the first place. Ecosystemic disturbances are *obviously* natural, random, and unpredictable, but anthropogenic disturbances differ from these in being more frequent, widespread, and regularly occurring. Extinction, too, is obviously natural, but under normal circumstances speciation outpaces it; “What is wrong with anthropogenic species extirpation and extinction is the rate at which it is occurring and the result: biological impoverishment instead of enrichment.”²⁸ In addition, while contemporary “disturbance boosters” like to point to the resilience of the natural world to human modification, this is neither absolute nor does it give humanity a blank check for environmental exploitation: “The human population has often bounced back after

²³ Donald Worster, “The Ecology of Order and Chaos,” in *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁴ Paul Kingsnorth, “Rise of the Neo-Greens,” in *Keeping the Wild: Against the Domestication of Earth*, ed. George Wuerthner, Eileen Crist, and Tom Butler (Washington: Island Press, 2014), 5.

²⁵ Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, *Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 103.

²⁶ Jozef Keulartz, *Struggle for Nature: A Critique of Radical Ecology*, trans. Rob Kuitenbrouwer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 143, 155.

²⁷ Curt Meine, “What’s So New about the ‘New Conservation,’” in *Keeping the Wild*, 48.

²⁸ Callicott, “The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic,” in *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, 91.

epidemics, genocide, and wars,” write Claudio Campagna and Daniel Guevara, “but we do not take epidemics, genocide, and wars in stride because humanity has proven resilient to their onslaughts.”²⁹

Ecologists, both scientific and political, have always recognized the inevitability of natural change. What they object to is the biologically-impoverishing *rate* and *extent* of contemporary anthropogenic change. Even the heavy emphasis on wilderness preservation in the early Earth First! was not based on purely spiritual or recreational concerns, but rather grew out of a recognition that it is only in large, interconnected wilderness areas, relatively free from human disturbance, that natural speciation can continue. The battle for wilderness was conceived of as “a battle for life itself, for the continued flow of evolution.”³⁰ The Sea Shepherd’s resistance to whaling and overfishing, as well as the joint ELF-ALF efforts against habitat destruction and urban sprawl, also evince a desire to protect the arena of natural evolution against the most destructive forces of anthropogenic change. Despite Murray Bookchin’s grumbling that “nature in deep ecology and David Foreman’s interpretation of it becomes a kind of scenic view, a spectacle to be admired around the campfire (perhaps with some Budweiser beer to keep the boys happy or a Marlboro cigarette to keep them manly),” the true motivation of militant ecology is not merely to set aside a few static, arcadian, postcard-worthy playgrounds for college students and rich birdwatchers. The aim is nothing less than to preserve the very arena in which natural evolution can continue, by minimizing the technological domination of the Earth by humanity.³¹

3.4 Beyond Science

Contrary to the claims of critics, then, militant ecology is not generally hostile to the knowledge that science can provide, though it is equally clear that science alone does not provide the foundation for a militant ecological worldview. To counter charges of pseudo-scientific sentimentalism and New Age mysticism frequently levied by its critics, some supporters have sought to portray radical environmentalism as a science-based movement whose principles are derived from ecology and conservation biology.³² Several militant ecologists have nevertheless pointed to the dangers in relying on a purely scientific understanding of the world. For one, as Christopher Manes pointed out, how-

²⁹ Claudio Campagna and Daniel Guevara, “Conservation in No-Man’s-Land,” in *Keeping the Wild*, 58.

³⁰ Foreman, *Confessions*, 2.

³¹ Murray Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement,” *Green Perspectives: Newsletter of the Green Program Project*, nos. 4-5 (summer 1987).

³² See Anthony G. Payne: “Contrary to what the Rush Limbaughs of the world proclaim, deep ecology is not founded on a ‘hug a tree’ theology or the like. If the dittoheads would take the trouble to carefully study the movement’s literature they’d discover that the foundations of deep ecology rest on a great deal of conservation science, ecology, field biology, evolutionary biology and the like” (“An EF!er and a Devout Christian,” *EF! Journal* 16, no.4 (February 2, 1996), 25.

ever holistic they may be when compared to the old Newtonian models, even “new sciences” such as quantum physics still “*function* as an extension of the technological power behind the environmental crisis” and therefore form an unlikely basis for resistance, though they may have some practical applications in the struggle.³³ In other words, despite its utility, much of contemporary scientific research, and particularly its technological applications, are still mostly premised upon a mechanistic and anthropocentric understanding of reality. Animal liberationists are even more critical of applied science, since its supposed imperatives have been used to justify animal experimentation. The green anarchist philosophy that has inspired several more recent activists in EF! and the underground is even more suspicious of science: “Science is not neutral. It is loaded with motives and assumptions that come out of, and reinforce, the catastrophe of dissociation, disempowerment, and consuming deadness that we call ‘civilization.’”³⁴ Another concern with a purely scientific approach to ecological politics is that science alone gives humans little reason to value an ultimately transitory earthly life, making it all too easy to give into despair and adopt an outlook of nihilism.³⁵

An exclusive reliance on scientific arguments would also render the principles of militant ecology open to constant critique in the face of an ever-shifting scientific opinion. While a strong scientific foundation is obviously desirable, the highly contentious and politicized nature of many recent environmental science debates - particularly concerning global warming, rates of species extinction, and the Earth’s carrying capacity - would seem to make science alone a poor foundation for activism. Writing in the *Earth First! Journal*, one activist bemoans the fact that “the wilderness movement has now lost much of its spiritual underpinnings and relies heavily on the data and blessings of certain branches of the scientific community,” which has transformed the debate into a contest between conservation scientists and industry scientists.³⁶ Militant ecologists therefore insist, with some justification, on a more solid basis than current scientific opinion for their activism. This basis is a moral and, for many, ultimately religious

³³ Christopher Manes, “Philosophy and the Environmental Task,” *Environmental Ethics* 10 (1988), 80.

³⁴ Green Anarchy Collective, “What is Green Anarchy?,” 4.

³⁵ A particularly bleak illustration of this nihilism is provided by Dorion Sagan and Lynn Margulis: “We cannot stop evolution. We can, and probably should, try to stop certain global human activities among which may be counted overuse of plastics, rain forest destruction, and soil erosion. But to think that by doing so or not we are either going to kill off life on earth or save it is a form of unscientific self-aggrandizement... Conservation on an evolving planet is ultimately a lost cause. Truly considered, this is a very difficult, even a dangerous, thought - indeed, most would rather not think it, as it seems to admit of no solution save a fruitless resignation to the endless murderous quality of life in an energetic universe.” Here is an acknowledgement on the part of a renowned biologist of the immense harm that human activities can do to the biosphere and other species - indeed, an admission that they should “probably” stop a few of them - coupled with a hardheaded scientific pronouncement that all such efforts are doomed to failure. One can only imagine the ads: “Nine out of ten biologists agree, conservation is pointless!” (Dorion Sagan and Lynn Margulis, “God, Gaia, and Biophilia,” in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, ed. in Stephen R. Kellert and Edward O. Wilson (Washington DC: Island Press, 1993), 350, 361).

³⁶ Gene Therapy, “In Defense of Eco-Spirituality,” *EF! Journal* 16, no. 3 (2 February 1996), 25.

faith that the Earth and its wildlife possess an inherent value of their own, regardless of concerns about human welfare.

3.5 Conclusion

Despite its importance in shaping the ecocentric outlook and its practical significance for ecological restoration and resistance, the foundation of militant ecology cannot be sought in value-free science alone. The falsifiable hypotheses demanded by the scientific method can provide no stable grounding to whatever social or moral outlook might happen to accidentally agree with them. These modern sciences of quantum physics, evolutionary biology, and ecology serve as one means of approaching ecocentrism, symbols of its higher truth and metaphors for understanding the unity of the cosmos, as well as useful tools in combatting environmental degradation and transitioning to a more ecologically benign society. In addition, by demonstrating the damage that humanity is continually inflicting upon the biosphere, science provides an important impetus to the movement's militant activism. Ultimately, though, the philosophical and metaphysical underpinnings of ecocentrism go deeper than any kind of empirical science possibly can. In the words of Alan Drengson, "Science alone cannot solve our problems, for commitment to saving the Earth and respect for Nature are not scientific; they are moral and religious. Furthermore, they require holistic understanding, and there is no science for the creation of holistic vision; this is more art than science."³⁷ Therefore, while employing contemporary scientific models and certain forms of technology to aid their cause, the true foundation of militant ecology must be sought elsewhere. Ecology may be the master science, but it remains a product of the modern world, materialistic and value-free. It must be conjoined to a more overarching transcendent principle, a reverence for the wholeness, integrity, beauty, and continual unfolding of life on Earth, in order to be complete; otherwise it remains merely a shadow flickering on the wall of a cave. This holistic metaphysical outlook forms the object of the next chapter.

³⁷ Alan R. Drengson, "Paganism, Nature, and Deep Ecology," *EF! Journal* 8, no. 5 (1 May 1988), 20.

4. Holistic Metaphysics

While the foregoing chapter might suggest that militant ecology is shaped primarily by contemporary scientific trends, this in fact constitutes only one dimension of its outlook - and not even the most important one. Ecology, the “new physics,” and the Gaia hypothesis all provide a way of viewing the physical world that emphasizes wholeness and interdependence against the mechanistic reductionism of the modern scientific paradigm, and it is through science that militant ecologists have come to understand the full extent of contemporary ecological problems. However, the holistic perspective that underlies militant ecocentrism is in fact far older than the science of ecology itself.

The principal aim of this chapter is to illuminate the metaphysical outlook of militant ecological activism. Among critics who bother to analyze it in any depth, this is sometimes understood to be a vague and confused “New Age” nature mysticism, or at most a politicized version of deep ecology.¹ However, this characterization is not wholly adequate. While militant ecology does receive much of its inspiration from twentieth-century eco-philosophies such as deep ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism, a major contention of this study is that the ecocentrism espoused by activists is in fact a contemporary iteration of a much older holistic outlook, viewing the cosmos as an interconnected whole whose integrity takes precedence over narrow human concerns. It is therefore neither a wholly modern “New Age” outlook nor a wholly scientific one, but rather a philosophical ethos with significant parallels to several currents in premodern and counter-modern thought. A brief overview of this tradition will help to situate ecocentrism in its philosophical context, and perhaps (though this may be overly optimistic) absolve militant ecology of the charges of “kookiness” or “pseudointellectualism” that have been leveled against it. As Paul Shepard asserts, while the science of ecology is itself quite young, what it really signifies is “a scope or a way

¹ Murray Bookchin, with characteristic bombast, managed to touch on all three themes in one essay. He condemns the “barely disguised racists, survivalists, macho Daniel Boones, and outright social reactionaries” of Earth First! while at the same time ridiculing deep ecology (springing from “the Sunbelt’s bizarre mix of Hollywood and Disneyland, spiced with homilies from Taoism, Buddhism, spiritualism, reborn Christianity, and in some cases eco-fascism”); in the end, he dismisses the whole movement as “a black hole of ill-digested, ill-formed, and half-baked ideas...” (Murray Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology”).

of seeing” that “is very old and has been part of philosophy and art for thousands of years.”²

This chapter commences with a brief overview of the tradition of holistic metaphysical thought that forms the philosophical foundation of militant ecology. This is followed by a discussion of the most recent formulations of this outlook, the land ethic of Aldo Leopold and the deep ecology school founded by Arne Naess, evaluating the extent to which these eco-philosophies have contributed to the ethos of militant ecology. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of two major challenges to these holistic metaphysics: the postmodern understanding of nature as a “social construct,” which denies the existence of any objective metaphysical reality whatsoever; and the objections of liberal political theorists, who fear that a holistic outlook will translate into totalitarianism and indifference to individual rights - both human and nonhuman.

4.1 Philosophical Antecedents

An accurate understanding of the metaphysical orientation of militant ecology demands a brief consideration of its philosophical antecedents. While a comprehensive account is beyond the scope of this chapter, the subject has been extensively discussed by many scholars researching the roots of contemporary environmental thought.³ Despite their wide disparity in space, time, and milieu, these philosophical influences on contemporary environmentalism share, implicitly or explicitly, the basic features of the ecocentric outlook: a holistic perception of the cosmos as a united whole that transcends its purely individual and material constituents, and a rejection of narrow anthropocentrism in the service of an order that transcends human interests alone.

Many radical environmental thinkers regard their holistic perception of a living cosmos infused with meaning as simply the most recent iteration of a primordial tradition, dating back to the beginnings of human existence.⁴ Survivals of this “Paleolithic mind” (to use Max Oelschlaeger’s term) can be discerned among indigenous traditions the world over, from the paganism of pre-Christian Europe to traditional Native Amer-

² Paul Shepard, “Introduction: Ecology and Man - A Viewpoint,” in *The Subversive Science: Essays Toward an Ecology of Man*, ed. Paul Shepard and Daniel McKinley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 1-2.

³ Though there are too many to mention, the following discussion is heavily indebted to Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Fourth Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*; John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers, From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2006); Laura Westra and Timothy M. Robinson, eds., *The Greeks and the Environment* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1997); David Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb, eds., *Deep Ecology and World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Grounds* (Albany: State University of New York, 2001); J. Baird Callicott, *Earth’s Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1994); and Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Books, 1985).

⁴ Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, 12.

ican spiritual practices. Or, as an article in the *Earth First! Journal* puts it, “Deep ecology, with its holistic perception of nature and animals, is not a new idea,” but an ancient one long predating modern civilization.⁵ Though this outlook cannot be decisively attributed to all pre-modern and indigenous cultures, militant ecological thinkers nevertheless hope that the metaphysical principles underpinning these societies might form the foundation for a future primitive culture more attuned to natural realities. As Christopher Manes writes of European paganism, the rituals and rites of the ancient northern religions “helped our ancestors *dwell* on earth, something we have almost completely forgotten to do in a technological society...”⁶ Militant ecologists and environmental thinkers also frequently point to the nondualistic metaphysical doctrines of Eastern Asia, particularly Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as another survival of this primordial tradition.⁷

Militant ecologists tend to be highly critical of Western civilization, corrupted (they claim) by a dualistic, anthropocentric religion and a domineering attitude towards the natural world intensified by the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution. However, the East does not have a monopoly on metaphysical holism. Environmental scholars point to the existence of “a more or less continuous minority tradition” in the West that has upheld similar principles - though, given its opposition to the mechanistic-reductionist-atomist paradigm that reigns in the modern West, this strain has been largely submerged since the Renaissance.⁸

According to some scholars, certain aspects of this holistic outlook can be discerned at the very beginnings of Western thought, among Greek philosophers such as Anaxago-

⁵ “Ecology of Animal Liberation,” *EF! Journal* 18, no. 3 (March 31, 1998), 18.

⁶ Christopher Manes, “The Cult of the Tree-Cutters,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 7 (August 1, 1986), 22; Manes, “A Ritual to Sol,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 8 (September 1987), 32; Manes, “Paganism as Resistance,” *EF! Journal* 8, no. 5 (May 1988), 22.

⁷ In the *Earth First! Journal*, Chris Kortright writes that “after studying many religions, I have concluded that Taoism is the most biocentric” in its efforts to decenter the human being from the center of creation (Chris Kortright, “The Tao and Biocentric Anarchism,” *EF! Journal* 17, no. 3 (March 31, 1997), 9). The Taoism of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu may provide the clearest spiritual expression of the anarchistic ecocentrism shared by many militant ecologists. Proponents of this view are sometimes accused of lumping these diverse traditions together into some kind of “Eastern” spiritual stew. However, there is some validity in regarding Lao Tzu’s teachings on the Way of nature, Hinduism’s monistic understanding of a self-manifesting Brahman, and early Buddhism’s doctrine of interrelation and ascetic self-overcoming as significant antecedents to the ecocentric worldview. For more, see Callicott, *Earth’s Insights*; and Barnhill and Gottlieb, *Deep Ecology and World Religions*.

⁸ George Sessions, “Spinoza and Jeffers on Man in Nature,” *Inquiry* 20 (January 1977), 481.

ras, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato,⁹ and Plotinus,¹⁰ who despite their differences promoted a vision of the cosmos as an ordered whole bound together by higher laws.¹¹ The triumph of a dualistic, monotheistic religion is believed by many radical environmental thinkers to have sounded the death-knell for nature religion in the West. However, the syncretic nature of medieval Christianity permitted the continuing influence of the animist principles that characterized pagan folk religions, as well as the holistic metaphysics of ancient Greek thought.¹² Saint Francis, with his celebration of the brotherhood of all creation, is often thought to have brought these proto-ecological understandings into a more orthodox Catholic framework.¹³ According to Alan Drengson, these elements of the primordial tradition served as loci of resistance within the increasingly legalistic religious orthodoxy, survivals of the ancient ethos of holism against the otherworldly dualism that came to define orthodox Christianity.¹⁴

In the radical environmentalist account, the advent of the modern era in the West is marked by the emergence of Renaissance humanism, Enlightenment rationalism, liberal social atomism, and the reductive scientific method, whose combined effect was to limit knowledge to the purely empirical and analytical study of the material world. Important underground currents of holistic and pantheistic thought persisted, however. Ancient Greek holism and pantheism saw a resurgence during the Renaissance and

⁹ Though Plato is often counted among the progenitors of Western anthropocentrism for his mind-body dualism, scholars have discerned several elements of his thought that lend themselves to an ecocentric interpretation: his holistic conception of the world as a single living organism in which the good of all beings is connected; his theory of immutable Forms, which accord a dignity and value to things apart from human opinion or utility; and his association of human happiness with the health of the whole community (Cooper, *Panentheism*, 30-2; Timothy A. Mahoney, "Platonic Ecology, Deep Ecology," in Westra and Robinson, *The Greeks and the Environment*).

¹⁰ According to Plotinus and Neoplatonism, all entities in the cosmos are emanations of a perfect transcendent principle, the One, and possess beauty and dignity on account of the role they play in the orderly unfolding of the divine. Though Plotinus conceived of the material world as an imperfect emanation of a transcendent principle, and has therefore been accused of world-denying asceticism, his criticism of Gnosticism makes it clear that he did not regard the material world as *evil* in the usual sense of the term. It lacks the perfection of the One, certainly, but nevertheless possesses dignity and goodness to the degree that it reflects the divine (Laura Westra, "Plotinian Roots of Ecology: Post-Normal Science and Environmental Ethics," in *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought: Part Two*, ed. R. Baine Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press), 2002; Cooper, *Panentheism*, 39, 43).

¹¹ Dusek, *Holistic Inspirations*, 4.

¹² It is possible to detect a survival of holistic Neoplatonic themes in the theology of PseudoDionysius, John Scotus Eriugena, Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, and Jakob Bohme, who understood the world itself to be an emanation of the divine. All of creation is therefore holy, from the absolutely transcendent Godhead to its unfolding in the natural world.

¹³ Ilia Delio, Keith Warner, and Pamela Wood, *Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth* (Cincinnati OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007). The degree to which this contemporary ecological understanding of St. Francis is accurate has been questioned by some scholars - however, whether or not St. Francis departed substantially from Catholic orthodoxy, his example has played an important role in the "greening" of Christianity.

¹⁴ Drengson, "Paganism, Nature, and Deep Ecology," 19.

early modern period.¹⁵ Likewise, German and British Romantic artists - with their discovery of the sublime in solitary wild places, recovery of the folk religions of pre-Christian Europe, nostalgia for the organic unity of the Catholic Middle Ages, and protest against the disenchantment of the world brought about by mechanistic science - are counted among the most important precursors to contemporary ecocentric thought.¹⁶ Similarly organic and dynamic conceptions of the living cosmos have been detected among thinkers who rejected Christianity entirely and returned to a more pagan understanding of existence. In this respect Friedrich Nietzsche is particularly significant, with his view of nature as an unfolding will to power, his condemnation of sterile rationalism and anthropocentrism, and his injunction to "be faithful to the earth" and embrace life in the Dionysian spirit of *amor fati*.¹⁷ Martin Heidegger's later thought has also played a particularly important role in the ecocentric critique of modernity, especially his rejection of anthropocentrism, his insistence on the importance of homeland and dwelling authentically on the Earth, and his depiction of the destructive effects of industrial technology on the human essence.¹⁸ In the United States, New England Transcendentalists such as Emerson synthesized themes from Calvinist theology, German idealist philosophy, Eastern metaphysics and British Romanticism into a vision of the natural world as a mirror of divinity. Their disciples Thoreau and Muir went even further into the wilderness and came to regard the natural world itself as sacred. Finally, in the twentieth century this holistic orientation returned from almost half a millennium of scientific exile in the guise of relativity theory, quantum mechanics, chaos theory, evolutionary biology, ecology, and the Gaia hypothesis. In short, "the West" is not necessarily synonymous with modern civilization and its sins. Though many features of modern society received their first expression in the West, there are nevertheless elements within the Western tradition that have resisted them up to the present.

The purpose of this necessarily brief overview is not to argue that all of these thinkers were all in some sense proto-ecologists, or for that matter even remotely

¹⁵ Particularly in the figures of Giordano Bruno and Benedict Spinoza (Dusek, *Holistic Inspirations*, 20; Cooper, *Panentheism*, 65-70).

¹⁶ Oskar F. Walzel, *German Romanticism* (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1965), 7; Cooper, *Panentheism*, 78. Even in the more rigorous philosophical systems of German Idealism, scholars find survivals of the primordial tradition in the conception of a dynamic God or Spirit that develops in and through the world. Examples include Schelling's organic and process-oriented subjectivism as well as Hegel's objective idealism and dialectical understanding of the rational unfolding of the Absolute in history (Cooper, *Panentheism*, 90-120).

¹⁷ Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, 127; Max O. Hallman, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 13, no. 2 (1991), 99-125; Richard Brown, "Nietzsche and the Bhagavad Gita: Elective or Ironic Affinities?" in *Nietzsche and the Divine*, ed. John Lippit Jim Urpeth, (Manchester: Clinamen Press Ltd.), 2000; Graham Parkes, "Human/Nature in Nietzsche and Taoism," in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

¹⁸ Sessions and Devall, *Deep Ecology*, 98.

concerned with the preservation of the natural world. Certainly, beyond their holistic appreciation of the underlying unity of the cosmos, these disparate thinkers diverged on countless points, such as the significance of instrumental rationality and science, the relative value of the material world, and the place of humankind in the cosmic whole. However, such is the nature of ecocentric thought, admirably summarized for the *Earth First! Journal* by Jesse Wolf Hardin:

This Earthen spirituality draws from the perspectives and vocabularies of deep ecology and bioregionalism, Sheldrake's new science and morphic resonance, pantheism and neoprimitivism, Taoism and Zen Buddhism, ecofeminism and pan-tribal shamanic practice, European and AmerIndian world-views, and the veneration of the living Earth from the Dark Mother of Africa to the disturbingly conscious Gaia of Lovelock's wildest dreams.¹⁹

Likewise, a suggested reading list for early Earth First! activists provided by Edward Abbey includes not only more recent ecological thinkers such as Gary Snyder, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and Arne Naess, but also several of the aforementioned antecedents to the ecocentric outlook: the Taoists Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, Heraclitus, St. Francis, Spinoza, Heidegger, Thoreau, and Muir, among others.²⁰ Though it is unlikely that many activists are deeply familiar with these antecedents, the idea of being a part of a primordial tradition, one with a profoundly counter-modern orientation, is certainly common among them.

Needless to say, observers in the academy are often suspicious of this apparent syncretism, particularly those more accustomed to the rationalism of liberal theory as well as the postmodern suspicion of "metanarratives" and truth claims. A clearly flabbergasted Murray Bookchin, discussing the philosophy of Earth First! in 1987, complained of their "sloppy admixture of 'ancestors,' philosophical traditions, social pedigrees, and religions that often have nothing in common with one another and, properly conceived, are commonly in sharp opposition with one another."²¹ Earnest attempts by the likes of Fritjof Capra and Rupert Sheldrake to find parallels between contemporary scientific ideas and Asian religious doctrines have also been roundly dismissed by territorial experts ("with more philistine arrogance than intellectual care," as Val Dusek notes).²² And this appeal to various world traditions and religious doctrines would perhaps be worthy of scorn, if it were based upon nothing more than a trendy and superficial appropriation of the traditions in question.

However, this synthetic tendency may not be as horrifying or "sloppy" as academic specialists and the censors of the scientific community perceive it to be. Rather than

¹⁹ Jesse Wolf Hardin, "ReWilding: Earth Tribe Religion," *EF! Journal* 15, no. 6 (June 21, 1995), 25.

²⁰ Edward Abbey, "Abbey on Books - And Gurus," in *Earth First! Reader*, 157.

²¹ Bookchin, "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology."

²² Dusek, *Holistic Inspirations*, 4.

accentuating the all-too-obvious differences among these schools of thought, or cherry-picking from among them based on misunderstandings and personal preferences, the militant ecological synthesis emphasizes how each one offers, in languages and concepts adapted to different cultures and epochs, a particular way of approaching one basic truth: that the cosmos is an interconnected, organic whole, a natural order which - whether as an abode of God, the outer garment of God, a god itself, an emanation of the One, the unfolding of the Absolute, the expression of a ceaselessly striving cosmic will, or the clearing of Being - demands respect. The corollary to this outlook is a suspicion of unbridled reductionism, atomism, and a purely instrumental view of the Earth, which many environmental thinkers associate with the modern age. Therefore, even if these earlier holistic traditions did not convey any environmental concern whatsoever (which should not be surprising, given that worldwide ecological degradation is a relatively recent phenomenon) it is nevertheless implicit in them. Rather than an illustration of its immature eclecticism or relativism, this attempt to trace these seemingly disparate philosophical elements back to their common source, and to bring them together into a powerful critique of modernity and vision for the future, may in fact be one of the most unique aspects of the militant ecology outlook.

4.2 The Land Ethic and Deep Ecology

The metaphysics of holism and interconnection therefore has a solid basis in traditional thought. However, it was not until the twentieth century that a truly *ecocentric* outlook emerged as a modern iteration of this doctrine, one which would synthesize these scientific and philosophical teachings and explicitly demand that the great natural whole with its myriad forms and ecological processes be respected and preserved from human interference. The two ecocentric philosophies that have exercised the greatest influence on militant ecology are Aldo Leopold's "land ethic" and the "deep ecology" school inspired by Arne Naess.

The *land ethic*, which receives its name from the final chapter of Aldo Leopold's conservationist classic *A Sand County Almanac*, posits that moral concern for the Earth is the next step in the ethical evolution of humankind. While moral consideration has been broadened over the centuries to include ever larger classes of individuals and the human community as a whole, "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land."²³ Beyond individual plants, animals, and landscapes, a truly ecosystemic concern must take the "energy circuits," trophic processes, and evolutionary processes into account as well. Leopold enjoined humanity to relinquish its role as conqueror of the land community and become a "plain citizen" instead, judging all actions in accordance with the good of the greater ecological whole: hence his well-known injunction that "a

²³ Aldo Leopold and Curt Meine, *A Sand County Almanac and Other Writings on Ecology and Conservation* (New York: Library of America, 2013), 204.

thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”²⁴ Leopold’s land ethic is therefore, like the premodern and counter-modern traditions discussed above, profoundly holistic in outlook. Indeed, as his latter-day expositor J. Baird Callicott has claimed, “it is holistic with a vengeance,” since *all* things are subordinate to the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community - including humans. According to Callicott, it is this thoroughgoing holism that distinguishes the land ethic from the individualist paradigm of modern moral philosophy.²⁵

Though Leopold’s land ethic had a significant impact on the earliest generation of radical activists, it is *deep ecology* that is most often cited as the philosophical cornerstone of radical environmental activism. First enunciated by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973, the central intuitions of deep ecology are that there is no fundamental ontological divide between humans and nature (implying a kind of “biospheric egalitarianism”); that the well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (variously described as “intrinsic value” or “inherent worth” in deep ecology parlance); and that humans have no right to reduce the richness and diversity of life except to satisfy vital needs.²⁶

Deep ecology has been a major philosophical influence on many radical environmental organizations and activists. In the founding principles of Earth First!, Foreman declared that the core feature of the group should be “an enthusiastic embracing of the philosophy of Deep Ecology or biocentrism,” and it is difficult to read any issue of the *Earth First! Journal* printed before 1990 without seeing some reference to it.²⁷ In its first communique, the Earth Liberation Front claims to “embrace social and deep-ecology as a practical resistance movement,” while SSCS founder Paul Watson mentions it frequently: “Deep ecology puts life at the center of all things, not just human life, but all of life. So, yes, I’m a part of that movement because I support the idea that the biosphere is more important than people.”²⁸ Deep ecology is of indisputable importance in shaping the ecocentric outlook of the militant ecology movement.

However, while the ecocentric ethos of militant ecology obviously owes a great deal to Leopold and the deep ecologists and shares their holistic metaphysics, it would be a mistake to conflate the three. The outlook of militant ecology differs from these more philosophical schools of ecocentrism not only in its commitment to effective direct action but also on various theoretical points. Though some of these differences will be elaborated more fully in the later chapters, for now a brief summary will suffice.

Though Leopold’s injunction to become a “plain citizen” of the biotic community and to preserve its “integrity, stability, and beauty” remains a source of inspiration for

²⁴ Ibid., 224.

²⁵ Callicott, “The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic, in *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, 84.

²⁶ Arne Naess, “The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects,” *Philosophical Inquiry* 8, nos. 1-2 (Winter 1986), 10-31.

²⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 27;.

²⁸ Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, 10; Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 54.

militant ecologists, they nevertheless depart from his thought in significant ways. For one, as discussed in the previous chapter, the scientific grounding of Leopold's theories has been shaken (though not wholly undermined) by developments in population biology and disturbance ecology. These stress the importance of ecological upheaval and extinction to such a degree that it is now difficult to determine just what an "ecosystem" really is, let alone any hard and fast criteria for ascertaining its "integrity, stability, and beauty." The political ecocentrism of militant ecology has had to respond to this changing scientific environment. In addition, Leopold conceived of his land ethic as simply the next logical extension of human ethics. He presupposed a progressive, sequential understanding of moral development, whereby a person's ethical duties begin with those nearest and then gradually expand to encapsulate one's locality, the broader national community, humankind, and finally the biosphere as a whole. However, not all militant ecologists would agree that ethics must give preference to one's nearest or even to humanity as a whole - the very reason for the infamous "misanthropy" among certain ecowarriors is their belief that the health of the land is of *greater* importance than human welfare. On the other side, some animal liberationists take issue with the radically holistic outlook of the land ethic, which prioritizes species that contribute most to the maintenance of the biological community and does not categorically condemn hunting and meat consumption by humans. Finally, while Leopold held out some hope for reform, suggesting that the owners of private property might be persuaded to embrace their ethical obligations to the land, the later generation of militant ecologists came to believe that a far greater degree of social change is necessary in order to achieve the aims of ecocentrism, perhaps including a radical reconceptualization (or abolition) of private property.²⁹

With regard to deep ecology, this school of thought is seemingly so intertwined with militant ecological activism as to make the two appear inseparable. However, it is important to remember that when activists describe themselves as "deep ecologists," this often has a very basic meaning - connoting a view of the natural world as inherently valuable, an opposition to narrow anthropocentrism, and a recognition of the interdependence of all life and biological systems (in other words, what this study has been describing as "ecocentrism"). However, despite these points of agreement, deep ecology as formulated by its academic exponents properly describes a more specific set of beliefs, some of which are not necessarily shared by militant ecologists. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the *militant* ecocentrism espoused by activists and the *philosophical* ecocentrism of the deep ecology professors.

While philosophical deep ecologists also oppose the anthropocentrism of "shallow ecology" and espouse an ecocentric ideal, they pin most of their political hopes on a gradual change in consciousness. More progressive deep ecologists such as Michael E. Zimmerman remain insist on the need to work within a democratic framework and view radical ecology as an extension of Enlightenment aspirations for liberty and

²⁹ Leopold, *Sand County*, 214.

equality to the Earth as a whole (“emancipation writ large,” in Robyn Eckersley’s phrase).³⁰ Many militant ecological activists, by contrast, generally lack faith in democratic change, believing that ecological problems are too pressing to be left to the ponderous and corporate-dominated political process, and have instead adopted tactics involving sabotage, violence, and coercion. This reflects fundamental philosophical differences regarding ethics, perceptions of human nature, and political ideals, which will be discussed in later chapters. Several academic deep ecology theorists have in fact been profoundly disturbed by the apparently misanthropic, illiberal, and violent aspects of these militant ecology groups. Indeed, Zimmerman claims that “it is advisable to distinguish between deep ecology *theory* and its propagandistic *application* by nonphilosophers, with little concern for nuanced expression,” fearing that the failure to make such a distinction has led critics to link deep ecology theory with (allegedly) “racist, sexist, and misanthropic remarks made by a handful of Earth First! activists.”³¹ The disdain is sometimes mutual. Philosophy professor and EF! supporter Bill Devall lamented in 1987 that professors of deep ecology had gained a reputation among activists for being “effete, academic wimps because they have not engaged in civil disobedience, direct action and other activities leading to arrest and imprisonment,”³² while a recent *Earth First! Journal* article dismisses deep ecology as “an intellectual concept about putting the Earth first created by college professors who are environmentally radical but politically reactionary.”³³

In sum, though the term “deep ecology” is often used by activists to describe their worldview, as Bron Taylor points out, “Rank-and-file practitioners are less interested than are its philosophical advocates in resolving inconsistencies or in defending a particular version of deep ecology.” The generic understanding of deep ecology among radical environmentalists, he asserts, is that “*all life has value, apart from its usefulness to human beings, and thus, all life ought to be allowed to continue its evolutionary unfolding.*”³⁴ Foreman provides an even more “grassroots” definition: “Let me offer a couple of down-to-Earth definitions of Deep Ecology: Earth First! Wilderness for its own sake! Never stop howling! Over my dead body! Who speaks for the Grizzly? Resist much, obey little. Where’s the beer? Your tent or mine?” Though tongue-in-cheek, this definition evinces a far more aggressive (and irreverent) perception of the militant ecological mission than that advanced by the academic expositors of deep ecology.³⁵

³⁰ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 56.

³¹ Michael E. Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth’s Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 31.

³² Bill Devall, “Deep Ecology and its Critics,” *EF! Journal* 8, no. 2 (December 22, 1987), 18.

³³ Spike, “Cult of Ass Kissing,” *EF! Journal* 18, no. 4 (April 30, 1998), 10.

³⁴ Bron Taylor, “Deep Ecology and its Social Philosophy: A Critique,” in *Beneath the Surface*, 270.

³⁵ Dave Foreman, “Editor’s Reply,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 2 (December 21, 1986), 2. Foreman goes on to say, validating Taylor’s point: “To state it a little more seriously, the central idea of Deep Ecology is that all things - animals, plants, rocks, rivers, clouds, etc. - have a right to exist for their own sake, without needing to justify their existence by some real or imagined value to human beings. This is the concept of ‘intrinsic value.’ In other words, a Grizzly Bear or a Snail Darter has traveled the same

It should be clear by now that the ecocentrism of the militant ecology movement cannot simply be dismissed as a vague New Age pseudo-philosophy, nor explained away as a simplistic political application of deep ecology. It is, rather, a unique iteration of the traditional doctrine of holism, adapted for the present day, drawing upon contemporary trends in science and its particular political and cultural context.

4.3 Reinventing Nature?

Holistic metaphysics are not, of course, universally agreed-upon as the ideal basis for environmental activism. The remainder of this chapter will discuss two critiques of this approach, one from deconstructionist thinkers in the social sciences and humanities who deny the existence of any underlying metaphysical reality whatsoever, and another from more traditionally liberal political theorists who fear that the holistic approach will prove hostile to individual rights. While such objections are sometimes voiced by critics with little concern for the preservation of the natural world, the chief focus of this chapter will be on those who argue that the environmental cause is in fact better served by either a deconstructionist or rights-based liberal approach. Despite some valid points, it will become clear that neither alternative can provide an adequate defense of the natural world, as both ultimately devolve into an elevation of human welfare above ecological integrity.

In the deconstructionist reading, with its roots in postmodern thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida, concepts such as wilderness and even nature itself are understood principally as “social constructs” rather than expressions of any essential underlying truth. Claims about nature are merely a matter of perspective, a play of negotiated constructions mediated by culturally specific prejudices and narratives.³⁶ There is consequently no underlying scientific or metaphysical reality to which one can appeal, no means of distinguishing between what is “natural” and what is “unnatural.” What’s more, the standard environmentalist “narrative” has hitherto obscured the role played by environmental policies in dispossessing indigenous peoples and the global poor, functioning to create an artificial “museumized nature” for the aesthetic contemplation

three and a half billion years of evolution that we have and has just as much right to be here as we do. We have no right to consider them or anything else on Earth as mere resources for our use or abuse.” Rather than an assertion of absolute equality, Foreman understands deep ecology and intrinsic value to be primarily expressions of anti-anthropocentrism.

³⁶ Andrew Biro, *Denaturalizing Ecological Politics: Alienation From Nature from Rousseau to the Frankfurt School and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc. 2005), 3; Eileen Crist, “Against the Social Construction of Nature and Wilderness,” in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. Michael P. Nelson and J. Baird Callicott (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 518.

and recreation of a Western elite.³⁷ Militant ecologists must therefore resign themselves, Zimmerman opines, to the fact that their ecocentric perceptions of nature “are simply useful fictions that express nothing ‘true’ about humankind, nature, and their appropriate interrelationship.”³⁸ Any appeals to such values can only be a sinister ploy “to shortcircuit democratic politics by asserting authority from a higher power” (as Nordhaus and Schellenberger warn)³⁹ or, as Biro claims, a reactionary attempt to legislate social organization on the basis of some conception of the “natural.”⁴⁰ The postmodernist refusal to admit of any privileged moral, epistemological, or metaphysical perspectives, Zimmerman concludes, leaves militant ecologists with no choice “but to enter into a *contest* to determine which of the many competing views will shape the future of human society and the living Earth,” a contest taking place “in cultural and political arenas populated by people with very different perspectives.”⁴¹

This relativism concerning truth and nature stands in stark opposition to the holistic metaphysics of ecocentrism, which upholds the integrity of the Earth as an independent standard by which to judge human actions. Nevertheless, there are certain parallels between militant ecology and postmodernism. Indeed, militant ecology itself is sometimes classified as a postmodern phenomenon: Stark points, for instance, to their shared rejection of many aspects of the Enlightenment and the rational foundations of philosophical reasoning, while Robert Frodeman draws attention to their shared recognition of the oppressive nature of modern rationality.⁴² As the previous chapter demonstrates, despite their frequent appeal to science many radicals share the postmodernist suspicion of scientific claims to objectivity. In addition, radical ecologists of a more progressive bent are privy to the ways in which wilderness protection and environmental NIMBYism have historically been indifferent to the welfare of racial minorities and the poor; therefore, they are as likely as any postmodernist to embrace an anti-oppressive “hermeneutic of suspicion.” As Giorel Curran notes, postmodernism’s critique of “the dominatory, hierarchical, rationalist, instrumentalist and exclusivist values that underpinned modernism caught the attention of many radicals frustrated by the dominance of modernist values.”⁴³

Despite its potential appeal, few militant ecologists would be convinced by this postmodernist deconstruction of nature. As Zimmerman notes, though largely agreeing with postmodernism’s critique of humanism, linear-progressive history, instrumen-

³⁷ Carl Talbot, “The Wilderness Narrative and the Cultural Logic of Capitalism,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 330.

³⁸ Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth’s Future*, 11.

³⁹ Nordhaus and Shellenberger, *Break Through*, 144..

⁴⁰ Biro, *Denaturalizing*, 29.

⁴¹ Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth’s Future*, 104.

⁴² Robert Frodeman, “Radical Environmentalism and the Political Roots of Postmodernism: Differences that Make a Difference,” in *Postmodern Environmental Ethics*, ed. Max Oelschlaeger (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 122.

⁴³ Curran, *21st Century Dissent*, 103.

tal rationality, cultural homogeneity, and ecologically destructive technology, many radical environmentalists have resisted its denial of absolute truth and portrayal of nature as a social construct.⁴⁴ Several radical theorists have criticized the postmodern outlook both for its flawed metaphysics (or, rather, anti-metaphysics), its susceptibility to co-optation by ideological enemies, and its resignation to the anthropocentric political paradigm. These critiques from a militant ecocentric perspective offer a powerful rejoinder to those who pin their hopes for the future of environmentalism on such deconstructionist approaches.

Earth First! co-founder Dave Foreman presages the debate, offering a resolutely anti-anthropocentric rejection of the constructivist argument, identifying the locus of value not within the human mind but in the ecological whole:

Where is the real world? What is reality? Is it within ourselves - in our minds, our consciousness? Is reality only what we perceive? Are our minds paramount, with no reality apart from our heads? No! The real world is out there - independent, autonomous, sovereign, not ruled by human awareness. The real Grizzly is not in our heads; she is in the Big Outside - rooting, snuffling, roaming, living, *perceiving on her own*. Wilderness is not merely an attitude of mind; it is greater, far greater, than ourselves and our perceptions of it. We do not create reality; reality creates us. It is not 'I think, therefore I am'; it is 'I am, therefore I think.'⁴⁵

Against the supposed social construction of nature, there is in fact a whole universe of entities and processes that precedes the arrival of human consciousness, whose very existence made its emergence possible, and the slightest alteration in which could swiftly put an end to its glorious reign. As Ned Hettinger points out, "Surely we are not responsible for the existence of sunlight, gravity, or water; nor for the photosynthetic capacity of plants, the biological process of predation, or the chemical bonds between molecules; nor, more generally, for the diversity of life on the planet or its spectacular geology!"⁴⁶ To claim that nature is a product of civilization merely because humans have abstained from using their godlike powers to destroy it is akin, Val Plumwood argues, to claiming that "other people were one's creation because one refrained from murdering them."⁴⁷

One might object that this is a willful misreading of the deconstructionist argument, which does not claim that nature is literally *made* by human beings but that it is, rather, a construct in the sense of being an *interpretation*. It is therefore invariably shaped by

⁴⁴ Michael E. Zimmerman, "On Reconciling Progressivism and Environmentalism," in *Explorations in Environmental Political Theory*, ed. Joel J. Kassiola (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2003), 149-177.

⁴⁵ Foreman, *Confessions*, 52.

⁴⁶ Ned Hettinger, "Valuing Naturalness in the 'Anthropocene': Now More than Ever," in *Keeping the Wild*, 176.

⁴⁷ Val Plumwood, "Wilderness Skepticism and Wilderness Dualism," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 673.

human experiences as particular beings of a particular species residing in particular cultural epochs. Of course, it is difficult to contest to this fairly obvious assertion. It is rather the unquestioned and hubristic assumption behind it - that the natural world attains meaning through its significance for humans, that it can be somehow “reinvented” to suit human whims, and that (once again one can rely on Nordhaus and Schellenberger to articulate the view) “whether we like it or not, humans have become the meaning of the earth”⁴⁸ - it is this arrogance that militant ecologists reject. Indeed, as Paul Shepard astutely notes, “The postmodern rejection of Enlightenment positivism has about it a grander sweep of presumption than the metaphysics of being and truth that it rejects.”⁴⁹ Despite this conceit, humanity’s ability to alter the natural world does not mean that it is fully in the saddle, nor that it is the only species of consequence in historical evolution.

In addition to its narrowly anthropocentric outlook, various militant ecologists criticize the postmodern deconstruction of nature for playing into the hands of the opposition, serving as a more sophisticated form of propaganda for resource economists and the extractive industries. Earth First! activist Christopher Manes presciently described this strategy in 1990:

With nature-as-societal-category as a premise, it was possible when convenient to claim everything that humanity did - industry, farming, genetic engineering, hypertechnology - was natural. And when it was not convenient, when certain social practices caused obvious disruptions in the biosphere (like continued economic and population growth), it was possible to claim that nothing was natural and that humanity therefore had a right to manipulate the physical world in any way they wanted for their own ends.⁵⁰

In this reading, despite its claim to question the pieties of traditional conservationism, as Frodeman points out, postmodernism has in fact retained the “individualistic outlook that was the political correlate of modernist metaphysics.”⁵¹ Despite its claims to overcome modern metaphysics, postmodernism has implicitly retained the modernist conception of nature as a realm of resources. Indeed, it provides considerable intellectual ammunition to this view by arguing that the human modification of the environment is as “natural” as that undertaken by any other animal: as Callicott argues, “If man is a natural, a wild, an evolving species, not essentially different in this respect from all the others... then the works of man, however precocious, are as natural

⁴⁸ Nordhaus and Schellenberger, *Break Through*, 272.

⁴⁹ Paul Shepard, “Virtually Hunting Reality in the Forests of Simulacra,” in *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Construction*, ed. Michael E. Soule and Gary Lease (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1995), 20.

⁵⁰ Manes, *Green Rage*, 156.

⁵¹ Frodeman, “Radical Environmentalism and Postmodernism,” in *Postmodern Environmental Ethics*, 122-8.

as those of beavers, or termites, or any of the other species that dramatically modify their habitats.”⁵² This relativism is clearly at odds with the reverence for wild natural processes that informs most militant ecologists. If no boundaries exist between the natural and unnatural, between the wild and the tame, then the impetus for truly militant ecological activism - beyond an anthropocentric concern for human survival - is lost.

A third feature of postmodern deconstruction that has been criticized by militant ecologists is its chilling effect on political discourse and action. Anarcho- primitivist thinker John Zerzan, whose writings have been highly influential among the green anarchists who comprise an influential subset of the movement, has been consistently opposed to postmodernism for its nihilistic resignation to the technological world order. Noting deconstructionism’s failure to provide for any foundation for a new, truly counter-modern worldview, Zerzan laments that “the reigning cultural ethos has explicitly denied the possibility of such ground or stable locus of meaning and value. Criticism is disarmed.”⁵³ Seen in this light, Zimmerman’s demand that militant ecologists submit themselves to the contest of public opinion, while very American and democratic, might have certain unfortunate implications for activists. For one, if militant ecologists do not believe that their outlook is in some sense “privileged” (i.e., true), what possible motivation do they have to act upon it? Surely the cornucopian economists and extractive industries, with their appeals to “feeding the world” and “growing the economy” and “providing jobs,” must believe that their worldview is in some sense privileged, and that appeals to short-term human material welfare trump all other considerations. Moreover, preservationists and environmentalists have been engaged in a contest for public sympathy ever since John Muir’s campaign to establish Yosemite National Park in the 1880s. What, then, could be meant by the postmodernist’s demand for a “contest” of views? Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo give some indication as to its true import: the struggle to preserve wilderness, they insist, “must not center on issuing proclamations of divine revelations of wilderness as sacred spaces” or on “denouncements of the unimpressed as maleficent or ignorant.”⁵⁴ The banishment of privileged perspectives seems to amount, in other words, to an implicit requirement that activists restrict themselves to an anthropocentric model of public reason that forbids any appeals to the sacred. This postmodernist value relativism also serves to

⁵² J. Baird Callicott, “The Wilderness Idea Revisited: The Sustainable Development Alternative,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 351. Of course, the logical corollary of this view is that, in Worster’s words, “A cutover land can be seen as good ecologically as a forested one. A landscape riddled with opencast coal mines, bleeding acid into streams, is as ‘natural’ as any other. Only human subjectivity can decide which state of the earth is preferable to another” (Donald Worster, “Restoring a Natural Order,” in *The Wealth of Nature*, 176.)

⁵³ John Zerzan, *Twilight of the Machines* (Port Townsend WA: Feral House, 2008), 73.

⁵⁴ Though it is perfectly acceptable, it seems, to declare the aims of progressive humanism as sacred while denouncing “the unimpressed” as racist, ecofascist misanthropes (Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, “Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness,” in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On*, 212).

delegitimize any form of extralegal activity on the part of radicals, since this would also constitute an elitist appeal to a privileged higher law or a claim to act on behalf of other species. And as deep ecologist George Sessions notes, with no objective truth to be found in the sciences, and with nature conceived of as a social construct, “The fate of the Earth, and the destinies of wild creatures and ecosystems, is to be decided anthropocentrically by the desires of the affected peoples and cultures of the world: through human compromise [and] negotiation...”⁵⁵ This perspective, despite its supposed deconstruction of modernist metaphysics, nevertheless retains the modernist presumption that humans interests alone ought to dictate the fate of life on Earth.

In short, despite certain parallels between postmodernism and militant ecology, it is essential to distinguish the *constructive counter-modern* ethos of the activists from the *deconstructive postmodernism* of the academy. While the former promotes a “future primitive” social imaginary based on an alternative metaphysical, ethical, and political vision, the latter rejects metaphysics altogether, refuses to accept any distinction between the natural and the artificial, and denies any kind of underlying natural order and unity in favor of transient agglomerations of individual power perspectives. Deconstructive postmodernism is therefore profoundly opposed to the conservationist and socially transformative efforts of militant ecologists, and indeed to any genuine commitment to the integrity of wild nature. It lends itself, not only to relativism, but to co-optation by extractive industries eager to undermine any notion of the sanctity of the natural world. The value relativism of deconstructive postmodernism offers no real challenge to the materialism and narrow anthropocentrism of the modernist outlook, since, as Freya Mathews notes, “... postmodernists imply that there is no way the world is in itself, and to that extent they indirectly underwrite the message of modernity; the world has no informing meaning or purpose of its own.”⁵⁶ It can therefore provide no basis for a genuine revolt against the modern world, and despite certain similarities, militant ecology cannot be counted among its progeny. Indeed, it should be regarded as perhaps its greatest intellectual opponent. While these postmodern speculations may seem to possess “the aroma of an indoor, academic, resume-building exercise,” it would be a mistake to underestimate the damage they might do: as Michael Soule and Gary Lease warn,

“Certain contemporary forms of intellectual and social relativism can be just as destructive to nature as bulldozers and chain saws.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ George Sessions, “Postmodernism and Environmental Justice: The Demise of the Ecology Movement?” *Trumpeter* 12, no. 3 (1995), <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/viewArticle/305/456>.

⁵⁶ Freya Mathews, “Letting the World Grow Old,” in *Environmental Ethics*, 278.

⁵⁷ Soule and Lease, “Preface,” in *Reinventing Nature?*, xvi.

4.4 Rights of Man and Animal

Another criticism of the holistic metaphysics of militant ecology comes from more traditionally liberal political and ethical theorists, for whom the ecocentric critique of modernity bears certain uncomfortable similarities to that advanced by various totalitarian political movements.⁵⁸ Thus, while the holism of militant ecology is generally unobjectionable in its interpretation of the natural world, it becomes far more controversial when adopted as politically normative. Adrian Atkinson warns that this organicist philosophy has been historically associated with reactionary, hierarchical, “and even fascist” socio-political ideologies,⁵⁹ while Charles Rubin worries that its widespread adoption could lead to an ecological form of totalitarianism.⁶⁰ As Holmes Rolston III describes the problem, in the holistic ecological model “individuals are ephemeral and dispensable... But moving from *is* to *ought*, this priority counters the respect for individual autonomy that has become the trademark of liberalism. Community dominance becomes a totalitarian juggernaut.”⁶¹ While the “fascist” accusation is routinely tossed around as a vague term of abuse on both sides of the American political spectrum, the charge does have particular salience for militant ecologists, given their counter-modern ethos, holistic metaphysics, and rejection of the individualistic ethics that dominate contemporary moral philosophy.

This criticism might seem hyperbolic, since radical environmentalists often appeal to the “rights” of whales and trees and rivers and the like, implying their acceptance of the natural rights paradigm of classical liberalism. This is, in fact, the understanding of militant ecology offered by environmental historian Roderick Nash:

Conceived of as promoting the liberation of exploited and oppressed members of the American ecological community, even the most radical fringe of the contemporary environmental movement can be understood not so much as a revolt against traditional American ideas as an extension and new application of them... its goal is the implementation of liberal values as old as the republic...⁶²

In Nash’s understanding, militant ecologists conceive of the natural world as “just the latest minority deserving a place in the sun of the American liberal tradition.”⁶³

⁵⁸ See Don E. Marietta, Jr., “Environmental Holism and Individuals,” *Environmental Ethics* 10 (Fall 1988), 251-259; Jozef Keulartz, *Struggle for Nature*; Kristen Schrader-Frechette, “Individualism, Holism, and Environmental Ethics,” *Ethics and the Environment* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 55-69.

⁵⁹ Adrian Atkinson, *Principles of Political Ecology* (London: Belhaven Press, 1991), 148.

⁶⁰ Charles T. Rubin, *The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Environmentalism* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 25.

⁶¹ Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 181.

⁶² Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 212.

However, this conception of ecocentrism as simply an expansion of liberal individual rights to the biosphere at large is not generally shared by militant ecologists.

Christopher Manes directly addresses Nash on this point: “The biocentric civil rights movement is not just an expansion of rights, but also an appeal to a different body of law. It is thus quite subversive, Nash’s caveat notwithstanding, in a way the traditional civil rights movement could never be... It presents itself as an alternative, not an augmentation.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, Manes claims that the notion of individual rights is actually in stark opposition to ecocentrism, since in order to achieve an ecological community “the individualistic basis of society, the concept of inalienable rights, the purely self-defining pursuit of happiness, liberty as maximum freedom of action, and laissez-faire itself all require abandonment.”⁶⁵ Sea Shepherd founder Paul Watson further claims that “defending ecosystems is more important than anything else. saving the fish, the sea birds, and the plankton is more important than finding a cure for cancer. This type of position makes me politically incorrect, but that matters very little to me. I would prefer, by far, to be ecologically correct.”⁶⁶ Indeed, the most radical and controversial aspect of the early Earth First!, that which set it apart from social movements of the left, was its rejection of individual human welfare as the criterion for right action. Among the EF! founding principles is the following stipulation: “A placing of the Earth first in all decisions, even ahead of human welfare if necessary. In everything human society does, the primary consideration should be for the long-term health and biological diversity of Earth. After that, we can consider the welfare of humans. We should be kind, compassionate, and caring with other people, but Earth comes first.”⁶⁷ Despite some differences on this point, even the more philanthropic total liberationists agree that “there are no safe spaces on a dead planet” and that ultimately a Earth-centered outlook must take precedence over the individualism of liberal theory. It is therefore clear that the rights discourse sometimes adopted by militant ecologists is often simply a rhetorically palatable means of expressing their intuition that nonhuman nature possesses inherent worth or integrity, rather than any kind of continuity with classical liberal ideologies.⁶⁸

Another arena in which this holism has generated difficulties for militant ecology is the question of animal rights. Animal rights theorists Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka criticize holistic approaches to animal management for elevating a particular human view “of what constitutes a healthy, natural, authentic, or sustainable ecosystem,” and for their willingness “to sacrifice individual animal lives in order to achieve this holis-

⁶⁴ Manes, *Green Rage*, 173.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 148, 239.

⁶⁶ Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 43.

⁶⁷ Foreman. *Confessions*, 26.

⁶⁸ The Radikal Weatherman, “There are no safe spaces on a dead planet,” *EF! Journal* 28, no. 1 (November/December 2007), 12-13; Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth’s Future*, 45; Devall, “Deep Ecology and its Critics,” 18-20.

tic vision.”⁶⁹ Several scholars, particularly utilitarians and eco-feminists, have strongly objected to its disregard for domesticated animals, which fall into the ambiguous area between humans and the wild members of natural ecosystems and therefore seem to lack the moral standing of either. Holistically-minded theorists such as J. Baird Callicott have responded that, due to its individualistic focus and prioritization of sentient animals, most schools of animal rights theory cannot provide adequate protection for abstract or inanimate entities such as species, ecosystems, and landscapes.⁷⁰

It has caused some divisions within the movement as well. Some early members of EF!, while rejecting trophy hunting on ecological grounds, nevertheless regarded hunting as a perfectly natural and necessary means of population regulation in the absence of natural predators.⁷¹ In addition, the treatment of domestic animals, typically prioritized by animal rights activists, is of secondary importance to activists who concentrate their efforts on wilderness. These differences are nicely summarized by Foreman, describing his understanding of deep ecology:

DE [deep ecology] is ecological, recognizing that life depends on death, that some suffering and pain is inherent in nature, that death is not evil; AR [animal rights] is compassionate, desiring to eliminate suffering and pain, and is, if taken to its logical extreme, anti-death. DE is naturalistic, believing that nature knows best, going beyond good and evil to simply letting being be; AR in its more extreme forms is anti-nature, arguing that although ‘primitive’ peoples may have eaten meat, we as civilized humans have advanced to a point where we can change our animal natures and operate on an *ethical basis*, to even claiming that nature is not perfect, that windstorms, forest fires, and predation are bad because they cause suffering.⁷²

In sum, traditional animal rights ideology is held in contempt among more wilderness- minded ecowarriors for its denial of natural realities, its failure to distinguish between wild and domestic animals, its importation of humanist ethics into the wild world, and its conflict with their fundamental metaphysical principle: the priority of the whole to the parts. Against this harsh ecological holism, more animal-oriented activists typically evince a greater interest in the welfare of domesticated and invasive species,⁷³ and frequently reject hunting and meat consumption. As Robin Webb

⁶⁹ Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

⁷⁰ J. Baird Callicott, “Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again,” in *In Defense of the Land Ethic*.

⁷¹ Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 131.

⁷² Foreman/“Chim Blea,” “Individualism and Ecology,” 21.

⁷³ Such as feral horses; see Karan DeBraal: “While it is easy, from an ecological standpoint, to say that ecosystems must be preserved at all costs, the rights of the feral animals shouldn’t be brushed aside any longer. Those creatures hold rights too - and it isn’t their fault that they ended up in their

writes, animal liberation “covers *all* abuse and exploitation. It is the *ultimate* freedom movement, the ‘final frontier.’ [...] (after all, humans are animals, too).”⁷⁴ Nor is this debate confined to the early days of the organization. Michael D. Novack, in a letter written to the *Earth First! Journal* in 2007, describes the division between animal welfare and environmental activists as “akin to a difference in religions.”⁷⁵ Panagioti Tsolkas has recently pointed to the potential conflicts over the issue within Earth First!, asking whether the philosophy of animal rights might actually contradict ecocentrism by prioritizing sentient animals over plants, mountains and rivers.⁷⁶ These differences are thus very significant on a theoretical level and have also been responsible for serious divisions within the movement.

However, upon closer examination it becomes clear that a holistic ethic need not rule out concern for individual animals, though it does prioritize the welfare of the whole. Within the militant ecology movement, a concern for ecological integrity and for individual animals often go hand-in-hand: in order for wildlife to survive, habitats must be preserved; and current practices such as fur farming, industrial farming, and animal research can be regarded both as violations of individual animal rights as well as affronts to the natural order. As Bron Taylor notes, collaboration between animal liberationists and radical environmentalists tends to result in the former becoming “radically ecologized,” turning their attention more towards endangered wild species.⁷⁷ Thus, as they have developed in the United States there has been significant cross-pollination between the two subcultures: evidence of this includes the joint actions of the ELF and ALF, the ecologically-oriented animal protection activities of the Sea Shepherds, and even the otherwise hostile Foreman’s admission that some common ground might be found in opposition to trophy-hunting, trapping, predator control, animal experimentation, habitat destruction, and factory farming.⁷⁸

It is also significant that many activists do not consider these concerns are mutually contradictory. According to Rick Bernardi, who was active in both EF! and animal liberation,

There are certain Animal Rights issues that some Earth First!ers do not support - [not eating] meat, for example... But I don’t see that there is any

current position” (Karen DeBraal, “Animal Rights Vs. The Wilderness,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 5 (1 May 1987), 21).

⁷⁴ Robin Webb, “Animal Liberation - By ‘Whatever Means Necessary,’” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?*, 76.

⁷⁵ Michael D. Novack, “Dear Shit Fer Brains,” in *EF! Journal* 27, no. 6 (September/October 2007), 4-5.

⁷⁶ Tsolkas, “No System but the Ecosystem.”

⁷⁷ Bron Taylor, “Religion, Violence and Radical Environmentalism,” 20.

⁷⁸ See Paul Watson: “I don’t condone the slaughter of farm animals... [but] whales are a protected and endangered species, whereas that is not the case for cows and pigs. Whales are part of an ecosystem and they contribute to making that ecosystem function properly, and again, that is not the case for cows and pigs” (Essemlali and Watson, *Interview with a Pirate*, 200); Foreman/”Chim Blea,” “Individualism and Ecology,” 21.

difference, really, between Earth First! and Animal Rights. I can't see them as different except that in general Animal Rights doesn't get into questions of preserving trees or rivers.

Animal Rights is more focused on animals. But I don't see them 247 as separate.⁷⁹

Many animal activists in the militant ecology movement point to both the animal liberation *and* ecological significance of their activities - detailing the ecological costs of fur farming and industrial agriculture, for instance,⁸⁰ or focusing on the liberation of wild animals from fur farms or research labs.⁸¹ As Rod Coronado writes with regard to the liberation of wild animals such as lynx and mink, "Liberations are not only a blow to the profit margins of fur farmers but also a boost to North America's ravaged environment.. By responsibly releasing fur farm predators, liberators help restore wounded ecosystems."⁸² It is also worth noting the great trouble that animal liberationists often take to ensure the successful reintroduction of native animals such as mink and foxes into the wild, in order to "allow these native animals, who are virtually genetically identical to their wild cousins, the opportunity to refill their ecological niche."⁸³ Even the humane treatment of domestic animals, however one feels about the act of domestication in the first place, need not conflict with ecological concerns - indeed, the treatment of animals by industrial agriculture, fur farming, or animal research might be viewed as a crime not just for the suffering and exploitation it entails but for its contravention of the natural order. Ultimately, there is no necessary contradiction between an ecocentric orientation and a desire to minimize suffering as far as it serves no ecological function. Since the flourishing of wildlife is inconceivable without the preservation of natural ecosystems and the ecological processes that sustain them, and since anthropocentric attitudes are responsible for the maltreatment of domestic as well as wild animals, an ecocentric outlook among radical animal liberationists is a logically coherent stance to take.

Regarding possible indifference to *human* rights, the concrete issues of authoritarianism and "ecofascism" will be discussed more fully in chapter twelve. Suffice it to say for now that, despite frequent accusations of misanthropy, even the most extreme ecowarrior position does not necessarily claim that individual human welfare is *insignificant*, but rather that the integrity of the whole ecological community takes precedence.⁸⁴ It

⁷⁹ Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 117.

⁸⁰ JP Goodwin, "The Ecological Costs of Fur Farming," *EF! Journal* 17, no. 4 (April 30, 1997), 27.

⁸¹ See, for example, Coronado's memoirs of the ALF Western Wildlife Unit, wherein he decries the "war on America's wildlife" (Western Wildlife Unit of the Animal Liberation Front, *Memories of Freedom* (n.d.), <http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALF.ront/memories%20of%20freedom.pdf>

⁸² Rod Coronado, "The Ecological Impact of Mink Liberation" *EF! Journal* 18, no. 5 (June 30, 1998), 24.

⁸³ "Animal Liberation Front: Past and Present," *EF! Journal* 18, no. 3 (31 March 1998), 17.

⁸⁴ However, one can find a radically anti-individualist understanding of holism by expressed by Foreman, writing as "Chim Blea:" "Over the years, I've come to recognize that individuals are largely irrelevant, that in the great game of life, genetic variability is contained within the group, that even

certainly may appear misanthropic to those enculturated in the ethics of liberal humanism, but this is only because it does not exempt humankind from moral evaluation in relation to the whole biosphere. It seems likely that only such an ideology, which explicitly prioritizes ecological integrity over individual human rights, can avoid devolving into a compromised humanism and actually secure wild places against human exploitation. As Robert Paehlke rightly asserts, “The central value of environmentalism is... respect for the laws of nature, the conclusion that ecology is more fundamental than human wants and needs.”⁸⁵ Liberal environmentalism typically assumes that there can be no essential conflict between the two, or that individual human needs must always take precedence; yet the question therefore remains whether it is possible to “combine environmental rectitude with social justice,”⁸⁶ whether “the fulfillment of the human community is historically possible with the simultaneous fulfillment of the whole biotic community.”⁸⁷ Militant ecocentrism recognizes that the two goals can sometimes conflict, and that ecological integrity must take precedence.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the metaphysical underpinnings of militant ecology are holistic, prioritizing the health and preservation of the Earth and ecological community as a whole over narrow human concerns. It has traced the philosophical and religious antecedents of ecocentrism, locating them among various traditional indigenous practices, the nondualist doctrines of Asia, and a persistent though submerged “minority tradition” in the West. This sketch should be sufficient to show that militant ecology is not a wholly contemporary or “New Age” outlook but rather a modern iteration of an ancient tradition of holistic thought. Additionally, although the outlook of militant ecology is often held to be synonymous with the school of thought known as deep ecology, this chapter has pointed to certain discrepancies between the two which will be further explored in later chapters. Though both share an ecocentric outlook, deep ecology stresses biospheric egalitarianism and the possibility of political reform through a mass change in consciousness, while the ecocentrism of militant ecology

species pale in significance to the community of which they are a part - that a natural community is far more than the sum of its individual species *or its individuals*. That individual life is not *life*, but merely a momentary manifestation of it, a blip in a great energy field that with death will move to another blip.” (Foreman/“Chim Blea, “Individualism and Ecology,” 21). Though theoretically consistent, this does not appear to have been the mainstream view, even in those halcyon days when chants of “Fuck the Human Race” could still be heard around the Rendezvous campfire.

⁸⁵ Robert C. Paehlke, *Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 148.

⁸⁶ Roger Scruton, “Conservatism,” in *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*, ed. Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2006.

⁸⁷ Holmes Rolston III, *A New Environmental Ethics: The Next Millennium for Life on Earth* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 10.

stresses ecological integrity, subservience to natural laws, and a pessimism concerning voluntary change within the necessary timeframe. The understanding of ecocentrism among militant ecologists is unique, forged in the fire of political activism rather than the halls of the academy, and therefore particularly adapted to present political and natural realities.

This chapter has also argued that, despite the recent criticisms by deconstructionist environmental advocates, the holistic and pragmatic stance of militant ecocentrism offers a more solid foundation for safeguarding the integrity of wild nature. While having some sympathy with its critique of modern science and the ways in which the concept of nature has historically been used to justify exploitation, embracing such a relativistic outlook would be self-defeating for those truly committed to the Earth, as it provides no grounds for valuing the natural world beyond personal preference. The appreciation of natural realities is one of the great strengths of the ecology movement. Likewise, liberal critics of ecological holism either fail to acknowledge conflicts between ecological integrity and individual welfare, or decide such conflicts in favor of the latter. The danger of such liberal approaches is that, while ostensibly taking the welfare of the whole community into account, it will ultimately lend itself more to concern for the plight of the global poor and oppressed peoples and lead to a greater willingness to compromise on questions of ecological health when conflicts arise.

In short, holistic metaphysics is a philosophical pillar of militant ecology, and this examination will hopefully go to show that this idea of interconnectedness is not some frivolous “New Age” nonsense but rather a contemporary iteration of an ancient tradition, reformulated and given an ecocentric cast by militant ecologists. This holistic approach also serves as a corrective mainstream environmental ethics and political theory, which are generally informed by a variant of contemporary liberalism and are therefore often irredeemably anthropocentric and individualistic in their premises and outcomes. These holistic principles form the foundation for the ecocentric spirituality of the militant ecology movement, which views life on Earth as sacred and worthy of defense and therefore constitutes the strongest imperative to militant direct action. These religious attitudes and their ethical implications form the subject of the following chapter.

5. Ecocentric Religion and the Law of Nature

Critics of environmentalism, and militant ecology in particular, often accuse it of functioning as a new kind of religion - complete with its own priesthood and rituals, sinners and saints. In one respect, this may be true: a deep commitment to defend the integrity of the natural world is rarely motivated by scientific knowledge or philosophical reasoning alone. In terms of understanding its historical development and continuing concerns, it is difficult to disagree with Bron Taylor's assessment that "radical environmentalism is best understood as a new religious movement that views environmental degradation as an assault on a sacred, natural world," and that understanding the ethics and politics of militant ecology therefore requires a clear perception of its spiritual underpinnings.¹ Indeed, he claims that, in field research conducted since 1990, he has yet "to find an active participant in Earth First! who is not animated by one form or another, one experience or another, of what can fairly be labelled 'nature mysticism.'"²

This chapter accordingly focuses on the explicitly religious underpinnings of militant ecology and its ethical implications. While the scientific and metaphysical perspectives discussed in the previous chapters were chiefly concerned with the ecocentric understanding of reality, namely its perception of the cosmos as an interrelated organic whole in opposition to the mechanistic reductionism and anthropocentrism of modern thought, *religion* describes the means by which militant ecologists seek to reconnect with this sacred whole - whether through silent contemplation in the wilderness, shared group rituals, or in the sacrifice of direct action. In this respect, the ethical orientation of militant ecology activists flows directly from their religious perception of the universe, which inspires a commitment to uphold the laws of nature against the merely human laws of the state. This ecocentric religion thereby gives impetus to the militancy of the movement and its willingness to employ illegal tactics in furtherance of its aims. This chapter also addresses and refutes certain criticisms of the ecocentric religiosity of the movement, focusing on charges that it is politically counterproductive, incapable of providing meaningful ethical guidance, and indeed potentially dangerous, encouraging passivity or fanaticism in its adherents.

¹ The following discussion is heavily indebted to Bron Taylor's ethnographic studies of spirituality among radical environmental activists.

² Bron Taylor, "Ecological Resistance Movements; Not Always Deep but if Deep, Religious: Reply to Devall," *Trumpeter* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1996), 102.

5.1 Ecocentric Spirituality: Common Features

While militant ecologists practice a variety of religions, few become activists due to their socialization in these traditions. It is more often the case, Bron Taylor observes, that militant ecologists start off as “generic” nature mystics and only later embrace a religious tradition that provides a ritual framework for expressing their spiritual intuitions. Such nature mysticism almost invariably begins with direct experience of the natural world. Jesse Wolf Hardin speaks for many activists in claiming that, though drawing upon a variety of philosophies and religions, the primary formative influence and motivating force behind Earthen Spirituality remains the personal, subjective experiences of its adherents. These include a person’s resurfacing instincts, interpreted as a call to awareness and action; their empathy with some childhood piece of paradise covered over with asphalt; nightmares of all species banished into extinction along with human liberty and humanity’s rightful place in Nature; dreams of a happier, more authentic existence for themselves; the desperation of feeling trapped in rote habit and imposing schedule; the ecstasy inherent in day-to-day physical sensation, and the blissful satori arising from an experience of oneness with what is most certainly Gaian will.³

It is therefore unlikely that a person can be “raised up” or educated in the ways of ecocentric spirituality. It depends, rather, on a certain personal equation, an openness to the sacred in nature, drawn from direct experience of the wilderness and struggle in its defense.

Several features of this earthen spirituality have already been alluded to in previous chapters. Its central feature is a perception of the natural world as sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worthy of reverence. Even among many animal liberationists - whose activities are often understood to be motivated by *moral* objections to animal exploitation, rather than a *religious* reverence for nature - one can detect an appreciation for the sacredness of the whole. As ALF activist Rod Coronado writes, “All life is sacred. Everything on this earth is a creation of god and should be cherished and appreciated... what I attempt to live is a life where the circle of respect and reverence is extended to all of god’s creation.”⁴ Another feature of dark green religion alluded to in previous chapters is its belief in the interconnectedness and kinship of all life. This is partly scientific in nature, stemming from an awareness that all forms of life evolved from a common ancestor, as well as a cosmic perception that “since everything shares a common origin (in the big bang), and since everything is interrelated subatomically, kinship and even communion are the appropriate moral sentiments and goals.”⁵ In addition to these scientific sources, the metaphysics of interconnection also has its basis

³ Jesse Wolf Hardin, “ReWilding: Earth Tribe Religion,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 6 (June 21, 1995), 25.

⁴ Quoted in Kuipers, *Operation Bite Back*, 255.

⁵ Bron Taylor, “Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality (Part I): From Deep Ecology to Radical Environmentalism, Part II,” *Religion* 31, no. 3 (2001), 241.

in the holistic philosophical traditions discussed in the previous chapter, as well as personal experiences of the natural world.

Whatever its source, the perception of the oneness of existence encourages humility, since humans are only one part (and not a particularly important one) of the greater whole. Michael Becker points out that a sense of spiritual identity with the rest of life on Earth is a recurrent theme in many ELF communiques, and that it is in fact this sense of interconnectedness that animates their militant actions in defense of the natural world.⁶ Earth First! contributor David Abram even suggests that the mystical experiences of militant ecologists do not derive from contact with a supernatural realm, but arise out of openness to “*the rest of this world*, from that part of our own sphere which linguistic prejudices keep us from really seeing, hearing, and feeling - from, that 15, the entire non-human world of life and awareness..”⁷ This sense of interconnection constitutes the foundation for the Council of All Beings created by John Seed and Joanna Macy, a popular ritual at Earth First! gatherings that aims to help humans overcome their alienation from the Earth by experiencing their connection with other forms of life.⁸

Though sometimes perceiving a transcendental dimension to existence, activists express a sense of being “faithful to the earth,” affirming the beauty and holiness of even seemingly harsh natural realities and the experience of the sacred in everyday life.

Foreman provides a succinct illustration of this worldly focus:

If you want heaven - it is here. Walk through an aspen grove on a bright autumn day. The gold in that light is more real than in the streets beyond the Pearly Gates. If you seek total union with the cosmos, then float a river, drift into river time, let the rich red of the San Juan or the crystal of the Salmon make you part of All. If it's Valhalla you desire, stand with your bold friends before a bulldozer and then eat, drink, and make merry with them in victory celebration afterward. And reincarnation - yes, that, too. Your atoms are of the everlasting rocks, and will become buzzard, weasel, dung beetle, worm, and so on for eternity after your simple brain sleeps.⁹

Whatever their particular opinions concerning the afterlife, be it heaven or Valhalla or atomic disintegration, militant ecologists do not regard this world as a vale of tears or an arena of trial and tribulation in preparation for the afterlife. They believe, instead, that some intimation of the divine can be perceived in the beauty of the Earth and

⁶ Michael Becker, “Ontological Anarchism: The Philosophical Roots of Revolutionary Environmentalism,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 86.

⁷ David Abram, “Deep Ecology and Magic: Notes of a Sleight-of-hand Sorcerer” *EF! Journal* 8, no. 3 (February 2, 1988), 27.

⁸ See Pat Fleming and Joanna Macy, “The Council of All Beings,” in *Deep Ecology Movement*, ed. Alan R. Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 226-36.

⁹ Foreman, *Confessions*, 52.

in service to the greater whole. Whatever names might be attributed to this sacred totality - God, Nature, the One, the Absolute, Being, Brahman, the Tao, the “wild god of the world” - it is the underlying generative principle, the ground of all existence, and can be experienced directly in this life.

In addition, despite its cosmic spiritual focus and the recognition that many ecological problems are global in scale, another distinctive feature of ecocentric religion is its attunement to particular landscapes. Again, activists tend to embrace militant ecology out of personal experiences of specific wild places rather than a more intellectual understanding of global environmental problems, and are likely to retain a spiritual reverence for the *genius loci* of certain landscapes or wild animals in their activism. It was an attachment to a particular California Redwood that drove activist Julia “Butterfly” Hill to remain atop the tree as long as it was threatened by logging - 738 days - despite pressure from EF! activists to abandon it and utilize resources elsewhere.¹⁰ Another manifestation of their strong attachment to particular places and landscapes is the philosophy of bioregionalism, which has been highly influential among militant ecology circles and will be discussed at greater length in chapter nine.

While individual activists practice a number of religions (with varying degrees of syncretism), based on his field work Bron Taylor has determined that the most important spiritual experiences and practices are time spent in wild nature, Native American spirituality, Taoism, Buddhism, and neopaganism.¹¹ For some activists, ecocentric religiosity takes the form of naturalistic pantheism derived from time spent in wild nature. Foreman once described himself as a “howling-at-the-moon pantheist” who holds his “personal religious views toward Mother Earth just as strongly and sincerely as any Christian.” As he told Bron Taylor in 1993,

I think that something that we need to work on is a nonsupernatural concept of the sacred. A nontheistic basis of sacred. When I say I’m a nontheistic pantheist, it’s a recognition that what’s really important is the flow of life, the process of life... [So] the idea is not to protect ecosystems frozen in time. but [rather] the grand process. of evolution. We’re just blips in this vast energy field. just temporary manifestations of this life force, which is blind and nonteleological. And so I guess what is sacred is what’s in harmony with that flow.¹²

Edward Abbey, famed author and controversial godfather of EF!, also confessed agnosticism about supernatural matters but nevertheless identified as a pantheist: “If there is such a thing as divinity, and the holiness is all, then it must exist in everything, and not simply be localized in one supernatural figure beyond time and space.

¹⁰ Hill, *The Legacy of Luna*, 84.

¹¹ Bron Taylor, “Diggers, Wolves, Ents,” in *The Cultic Milieu*, 48.

¹² Bron Taylor, “The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2, no. 1 (2008), 43.

Everything is divine, or nothing is.”¹³ And Watson, while critical of anthropocentric religious traditions and their “monkey gods,” has advocated a biocentric religion that “incorporates all species and establishes nature as sacred and deserving of respect,” upholding the laws of ecology as sacrosanct.¹⁴ This religious outlook, though earthly and sensory in focus, is not materialistic in the usual sense of the term: rather, it sanctifies material reality by imbuing it with spirit and significance. This sets it apart from the amoral materialist reductionism of contemporary science and philosophy, bearing a closer resemblance to the naturalistic pantheism of the ancient Stoics, Spinoza, and the American poet Robinson Jeffers. It is therefore a form of religiosity, albeit of a less orthodox kind. As Foreman claimed in those early days, “All of us are religious, even atheists like Howie Wolke who deifies grizzly bears and hopes to become one.”¹⁵

Another popular form of religious practice among militant ecologist is traditional Native American spirituality. The beliefs and practices of the American Indians are deeply rooted in the North American landscape, and therefore provide a truly home-grown alternative to the centuries-long domination of Protestant Christianity and liberal capitalism. Amanda Porterfield, describing the countercultural aspects of Native American spirituality, suggests that in contrast to the aggression against both the natural environment and American Indians that they perceive to be characteristic of American culture, proponents of American Indian spirituality regard both nature and Indians with religious respect. They regard Indians as exemplars of right attitudes to nature and as spiritual guides to the natural world whom all Americans should emulate.¹⁶

Though most activists are careful to avoid perpetuating a simplistic “noble savage” stereotype, given their ancestral relationship with the land and history of opposition to the state Native Americans have long been regarded as natural allies for radical environmentalists - just as ELF activists in the United Kingdom frequently appeal to the pre-Christian peoples and mythology of ancient Britain.¹⁷ As activist Rod Coronado (himself of Yaqui Indian heritage) claims, “Whether it be called the indigenous worldview, animal rights or liberation or biocentrism, it is all the same thing, the belief that what the Creator put here on this earth was for a purpose that deserves respect and the right to a free existence.”¹⁸ Given these affinities, activists have historically

¹³ Ibid., 36.

¹⁴ Paul Watson, “Biocentric Religion - A Call For,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (New York: Continuum, 2005), 176-9.

¹⁵ Dave Foreman, “Around the Campfire,” *EF! Journal* 2, no. 7 (September 1982), 21.

¹⁶ Amanda Porterfield, “American Indian Spirituality as a Countercultural Movement,” in *Religion in Native North America*, ed. Christopher Vecsey (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1990), 152.

¹⁷ In their communiques, these activists would often adopt pseudo-mythological names such as “Tara the Sea Elf,” Gandalf, and Faradawn, while their propaganda regularly involved fairytale or Celtic iconography (Davey Garland, “To Cast a Giant Shadow: Revolutionary Ecology and its Practical Implication through the Earth Liberation Front,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 66).

¹⁸ Essemalali and Watson, *Interview*, 53; Rod Coronado, *Strong Hearts* 1 (1995), 33.

adopted many Native American-inspired ritual practices such as sweat lodges, burning sage, “talking sticks,” ritual processes like the Council of All Beings, wilderness experiences under the influence of peyote or other hallucinogens, tribal unity and war dances, and prayers to the Great Spirit.¹⁹

While particularly popular in the early days of the movement, these borrowings from indigenous rituals and practices have more recently come under fire as an insidious form of “cultural appropriation” when performed by the predominantly European-American activists. Shane Jimerfield complains that cultural appropriation has negatively impacted efforts at cross-cultural organizing:

Keep in mind, regardless of what grand rhetoric each of us comes up with for having dreadlocks, burning sage, building sweat lodges, etc. the reality is that many people of color view this activity as cultural appropriation... We compromise someone else’s cultural identity to give some stolen identity to ourselves.²⁰

A report by the EF! People of Color Caucus at the 2008 Winter Rendezvous likewise denounces “white people and their ‘tribal Earth rituals’ and dreadlocks,” “the war cries you hear at every protest,” and “the wolf howls at gatherings.”²¹ More recently, another activist was struck with the irony of a “group of mostly white people, settlers on colonized land,” who had the temerity to organize a Summer Solstice ritual to honor the Earth.²²

Whatever their motivation, these the charges of cultural appropriation, rather than simply diminishing religiosity among European-American activists, may have actually had a positive effect in forcing activists to think more deeply about their religious commitments. Some activists and thinkers have denied that many of their religious activities really constitute “appropriation” at all, since many such rituals were present all over the world before the advent of the modern era. Furthermore, they argue, religious truth is not the exclusive domain of any one culture. As Gary Snyder once claimed, when accused of appropriating American Indian shamanism, primordial spirituality is universal because it has its ultimate source in “a teaching from the nonhuman.”²³ Indeed, regarding the war dances and wolf imagery excoriated by the People of Color Caucus, one annoyed Earth First!er remarks: “Do I really need to point out that people of European descent did rituals and went to war, and that wolves are indigenous to

¹⁹ Bron Taylor, “Earthen Spirituality or Cultural Genocide? Radical Environmentalism’s Appropriation of Native American Spirituality,” *Religion* 27 (1997), 205, 198.

²⁰ Shane Jimerfield, “Toward Cross Cultural Organizing,” *EF! Journal* 17, no. 4 (April 30, 1997), 23.

²¹ People of Color Caucus, “We See Color and It Fucking Matters: A Report Back from the People of Color Caucus, at the 2008 Winter Rendezvous,” *EF! Journal* 28, no. 4 (May/June 2008), 11, 24.

²² SabiTaj Mahal, “Fishbowl at Wild Roots, Feral Futures,” *EF! Journal* 33, no. 1 (2013), 17-20.

²³ Bron Taylor, “Earthen Spirituality or Cultural Genocide,” 185.

Europe among other places?”²⁴ Some recent activists, rather than claiming to practice a specifically Native American tradition, argue that they are developing their *own* distinctive traditions and rituals based upon certain affinities with traditional American Indian beliefs.²⁵ A green anarchist defends these parallels: “We don’t try to ‘play Indian’ or superficially mimic Native-American cultural forms, but rather re-connect with the core of what it means to live as Earth-People again - regardless of race or ethnicity - since this Ancestral lineage for all of us eventually begins with Old Way peoples.”²⁶ By means of certain respectfully borrowed Native American rituals and practices, still preserved as part of a living tradition, they may be led back to the primordial consciousness of their own forebears, which they believe has been submerged since the triumph of Christianity in the West.

Charges of cultural appropriation also led some European-American activists (who still, despite the best efforts of some progressive activists, constitute the majority of the militant ecology movement) to look within their own cultural and ethnic heritage. For some, European paganism - both the historical variety and the newer Wiccan and neopagan reconstructions - points the way back to a more authentic religion rooted in the Earth. One vocal proponent of this view in *EF!* was Christopher Manes, who believed that paganism could serve as form of resistance to modernity, inculcating an ethos of authentic dwelling and attunement to natural cycles that is still recoverable in the present age; indeed, “ideas like the Gaia hypothesis and bioregionalism seem to be steps in that direction.”²⁷ Describing European-American Earth First!ers as a “displaced tribe.. .violently separated from our own indigenous roots,” Peggy Sue McRae counsels against appropriating the rituals of American Indians and suggests the ancestral paganism of Europe as an alternative: “We are still an indigenous people. Celebrating the feast days of our ancestors not only connects us to the ancient traditions of our indigenous heritage, these celebrations. connect us to our present environments by observing universal passages of fertility, life and death.”²⁸ More recently, Jesse Wolf Hardin has similarly suggested that “while the cosmologies of AmerIndians can serve as positive models of relating to this land, appropriation of Indian ritual and vocabulary can be counterproductive for those descended from Vikings and Celts. The practitioners of Earthen Spirituality need to tap the deepest wells of their inherited traditions...”²⁹ Some activists, such as an early contributor to the *Earth First! Journal*, expressed hope that an earthen neo-paganism of this sort could become a new religion

²⁴ “Dear SFB,” *EF! Journal* 28, no. 5 (July/August 2008), 4.

²⁵ Bron Taylor, “Earthen Spirituality or Cultural Genocide?” 198.

²⁶ Red Wolf Returns, “The Journey from ‘Civil’ to ‘Primitive’ Living: How to Become a Godless Savage in Three Easy Steps,” *Back to the Basics 3: Rewilding* (April 14, 2004), 2.

²⁷ Cristoph Manes, “The Cult of the Tree-Cutters,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 7 (August 1, 1986), 22; Christopher Manes, “A Ritual to Sol,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 8 (September 1987), 32; Christopher Manes, “Paganism as Resistance,” *EF! Journal* 8, no. 5 (May 1988), 22.

²⁸ Peggy Sue McRae, “The Pagan Spirit in the Earth First! Movement,” *EF! Journal* 21, no. 1 (November 1, 2000), 74.

²⁹ Jesse Wolf Hardin, “ReWilding,” 25.

in its own right: “A number of EARTH FIRST! members are neo-pagans and interested in developing the myth and ritual of a new Earth worshipping wilderness religion... Make no mistake, this is not a rehashed Eastern mysticism or urban kabalism, it is wilderness magic.”³⁰

This brief sketch should suffice as a description of the religious views of most militant ecologists. Ultimately, their particular affiliations are usually determined by their ecocentrism and reverence for nature, rather than the other way around. As Peggy Sue McRae points out, despite diverse spiritual approaches, militant ecologists are united both by a recognition that “nature is sacred and that we are a part of it” as well as a willingness to “take responsibility for defending the biotic community.”³¹ They often conceive of their ecocentric spirituality as simply the expression of a perennial tradition.³² Thus, while in their more reflective moments they might identify variously as pantheists, Zen Buddhists, Taoists, conservation biologists, Heideggerians, lapsed Calvinists, shamans, Wiccans, and neopagans (and sometimes all of the above), they generally believe that these diverse traditions are all expressive of one essential truth, the *Sophia perennis* known to primordial humankind: the unity and sacredness of the whole. Though these religious beliefs and rituals strike some skeptical observers as a faddish or eclectic,³³ closer examination reveals a deeply committed, though often unorthodox, spiritual orientation among activists.

5.2 Is Religion Necessary?

However, in this respect as in many others it would be a mistake to treat the militant ecology movement as monolithic. Critics both within and without have questioned whether the overtly religious atmosphere of the movement is truly conducive to political success or ecocentric aims.

Pointed condemnations of any religious practice (other than Christianity, for reasons discussed below) have been rare. One exception is a critique of the entire metaphysical basis of ecocentrism by W.J. Lines, who describes deep ecology as “New Age cant” that promotes a secularized version of the Fall of Man, an anthropocentric belief in a

³⁰ Editor, *EF! Journal* 1, no. 2 (December 20, 1980), 4.

³¹ McRae, “The Pagan Spirit,” 74.

³² One early *Earth First! Journal* contributor traces the “ageless Earth-religion” as it appeared in a variety of cultures, among “the Wiccae of Anglo-Saxon tradition, the Druids, Bards and Vates of northern and central Europe,” “the Minoans, Pythagoreans, Egyptian cultists, Babylonians and ancient Chinese,” “the Zoroastrians, Taoists, Eruvians, early Christians and Egyptian monotheists,” and “the pantheist Greeks, the Anasazi, the Athabaskans,” ultimately asserting that “all of these and more have served to translate the cosmic pantheon” (Tir Ariaur Aldaron, “Ele! Mellonkemmi Greetings Earthfriends!,” *EF! Journal* 1, no. 5 (May 1, 1981), 4).

³³ As in the aforementioned critique offered by Murray Bookchin, complaining of Earth First!’s “sloppy admixture of ‘ancestors,’ philosophical traditions, social pedigrees, and religions that often have nothing in common with one another and, properly conceived, are commonly in sharp opposition with one another”(Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology”).

Platonic “ultimate reality,” and an anthropomorphic conception of Earth as “mother.”³⁴ In this critique, religion by its very nature is an inherently anthropocentric form of wishful thinking, a crutch for humans who cannot come to grips with “the ambiguity and inherent complexity of our place in the natural world.” Some animal liberationists have also pointedly criticized religions whose rituals involve animals or animal products, such as Jewish kosher slaughter and Santeria, claiming that religious freedom is no excuse for such behavior: “In this world of extreme Earth and animal exploitation, it is no longer relevant what traditions and practices a particular culture adheres to,” one animal activist writes, with another asserting that “the planet is dying in the name of religion and human dominance.”³⁵ These critiques assert that religion, or at least some variants of it, is inherently anthropocentric and creates a barrier between humans and natural reality.

More commonly, some activists have worried that overt expressions of spirituality might prove politically counterproductive and alienate potential supporters. Earth First! co-founder Howie Wolke voiced this concern in the early days of the movement and questioned some of the more colorful religious rituals embraced by activists, asserting that “every time I give a talk I’m publicly expressing deep feelings for wild places, I don’t have to... create a ritual [or take part in] a Council of All Beings to do that.”³⁶ In sum, despite the overwhelmingly religious appreciation for the natural world in the movement, some critics both within and without have worried that religion (or at least some variants of it) is inherently anthropocentric or politically counterproductive. In order to achieve their goals, militant ecologists might be better off voicing scientific or moral arguments against ecological degradation.

In spite of these criticisms, many militant ecology activists continue to insist on the importance of religion to the movement as a whole. For one, they argue, the rituals and symbols of traditional religions can serve to create a sense of camaraderie among activists and foster a more receptive attitude towards the sacred in nature. As Peggy Sue McRae writes, “Ritual unlocks the rigidity of the rational observing mind and requires our physical participation. It is how we connect with and pay respect to our place in the world, and it connects us to the biotic community that sustains us.”³⁷ Spirituality, whatever its flaws, may be the only means humans possess to balance their

³⁴ W.J. Lines, “Is ‘Deep Ecology’ Deep Enough?” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 6 (May 1987), 31.

³⁵ David Barbarash, “Picking our Targets,” *Underground* 2 (November 1994), 38-9; Josh Harper, “Letter,” *Underground* 5 (Summer/Fall 1996), 41. Of course, such universal critiques have led to charges of anti-Semitism and “cultural racism”; see Devorah, “Picking our Targets: Thinking about Racism, Classism and the Animal Liberation Front,” *Underground* 1 (August 1994), 22; and Rod Coronado, “Open Letter,” *Underground* 5 (Summer/Fall 1996), 30.

³⁶ Bron Taylor, “Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality (Part I),” 185; Bron Taylor, “Resacralizing Mother Earth in the History and Future of Earth First!,” *EF! Journal* 26, no. 1 (March/April 2006), 46; Bron Taylor, “Forward,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 2.

³⁷ McRae, “Pagan Spirit,” 74.

hypertrophied rational mind and reconnect with the rest of life on Earth.³⁸ Indeed, one interpretation of the etymology of *religion* traces it to the Latin *re-ligare*, “to reconnect.” This is perhaps the chief importance of spirituality for the militant ecologist - understanding the sanctity of the Earth as something that transcends human experience alone, taking part in rituals and seasonal observances, allows humans to overcome their anthropocentric attitudes and reconnect with the greater whole around them. As deep ecologist Dolores LaChapelle writes, “All of these aspects of ritual serve to connect - to keep open the essential connections within ourselves... as well as connecting the human with the non-human - the earth, the sky, the animals and plants.”³⁹ While non-human animals do not require religion (and neither perhaps did primordial humankind, with their less mediated experience of reality), for deracinated and alienated modern humans it may be the only means of reintegrating themselves and reconnecting with the cosmic whole. For this reason, many activists remain committed to a spiritual view of their struggle. As Ayalet Hines counsels her fellow EF! activists, “If you also feel that the earth is a holy creation and eternally precious, warranting our deference, put aside the technocratic and scientific theories upon which so much of the environmental movement relies, and focus awhile on the spiritual and ethical issues at the root of the crisis at hand.”⁴⁰

In addition, many activists believe that a spiritual orientation may ultimately provide the best foundation for a truly militant ecology. They agree with English zoologist Charles S. Elton that the primary reason for conservation, “which is not usually put first,” is religious.⁴¹ They acknowledge the centrality of religious belief to the early conservation movement, particularly the post-Calvinist nature mysticism of Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir, which encouraged an aesthetic spirituality enabling its adherents to “see beyond instrumental values, to find beauty in the unaltered Creation, and to identify that beauty with goodness and truth.”⁴² It is also likely that, with the diminishment of this shared religious attitude as society and the conservation movement have grown more religiously and ethnically diverse, much of the focus has shifted away from wilderness and wildlife preservation and towards more widely-shared human welfare concerns. This is perhaps to be expected, since in the absence of the sacred in the natural world it is difficult to make a convincing case for subordinating anthropocentric issues to ecocentric ones.

Finally, a dismissal of spirituality as politically counterproductive may also fail to appreciate the important role of religious values in encouraging support for conser-

³⁸ A position expressed by Dave Foreman in “Cat Tracks: Spirituality,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 7 (August 1, 1987), 23.

³⁹ Dolores LaChapelle, “Ritual is Essential,” in *Deep Ecology Movement*, 221.

⁴⁰ Hines, “Renewing the Soul,” 3.

⁴¹ George Sessions, “Ecocentrism, Wilderness, and Global Ecosystem Protection,” in *The Wilderness Condition*, 101.

⁴² Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 199, 201.

vationism. In a survey conducted by Willett Kempton, James Boster, and Jennifer Hartley, seventy-eight percent of the American public agreed with the statement, “Because God created the natural world, it is wrong to abuse it.”⁴³ This may well indicate that, far from alienating potential supporters, certain kinds of religious appeals may in fact make people more sympathetic to the cause. Of course, the kinds of religiosity most popular among militant ecologists - neo-paganism, goddess worship, Taoism, and traditional American Indian spirituality - have rhetorical connotations that will likely prove unpalatable to the majority of the American public. Given that the majority of Americans are still at least nominally affiliated with Christianity, overt expressions of neo-pagan spirituality may only further stigmatize radical environmentalism as a “kooky,” New Age, vaguely un-American trend among the general public.

In light of these difficulties, one might ask why militant ecology has not adopted a more Christian-inspired form of rhetoric. One obstacle to such a development would be that, according to Bron Taylor, Christianity is one of the least popular forms of religious observance among militant ecologists, with the explicitly anti-Christian sentiments of many activists actually driving away potential members.⁴⁴ Several militant ecologists have rejected the institutional Christianity of their upbringing, likely agreeing with Dave Foreman’s condemnation of Christianity for its “utter absurdity” and “appalling banality and evil.”⁴⁵ Specifically, they often regard the Christian religion as hopelessly anthropocentric, life-denying, otherworldly, and chiefly responsible for the present ecological crisis as well as the extirpation of indigenous cultures throughout the Americas.

However, this oft-repeated ecological critique of Christianity, deriving from Lynn White’s 1967 article “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,”⁴⁶ has been contested by numerous scholars who point instead to the stewardship ethic in Genesis as well as Franciscan teachings on universal brotherhood to paint a more environmentally benign portrait of Christian doctrine.⁴⁷ An exclusive focus on Christian dualism and otherworldliness ignores not only the syncretic nature of early Christianity and its

⁴³ Willett Kempton, James S. Boster, Jennifer A. Hartley, *Environmental Values in American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 91.

⁴⁴ Bron Taylor “Earth First!’s Religious Radicalism,” in *Ecological Prospects*, 188-93.

⁴⁵ Foreman/Chim Blea, “Cat Tracks: Spirituality,” 23.

⁴⁶ Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967), 1203-7.

⁴⁷ For a representative sampling, see Celia Deane-Drummond, *The Ethics of Nature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004); J. Baird Callicott. *Earth’s Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Ecology and Religion* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2014); Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*; Anne Primavesi, *Sacred Gaia: Holistic Theology and Earth System Science* (London: Routledge, 2000); Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); and Larry Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For evidence of such shifts within Church doctrine, see the recent encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home, Vatican Web Site (May 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

absorption of various holistic elements of classical and indigenous thought, but also scriptural proclamations that God created a world manifesting His goodness and wisdom, granting each and every creature a purpose in the divine scheme.⁴⁸ Indeed, even Christopher Manes, despite his clear preference for northern paganism, admits that the “religious values of the Middle Ages” were “relatively benign” compared to the secular anthropocentrism of modernity.⁴⁹

Though Christians may be few and far between in the militant ecology movement, and are likely alienated by the general hostility towards their faith, a few have undertaken to provide an *apologia* of their beliefs. Wald Udo, while rejecting the stewardship ethic as too anthropocentric, embraces a Christian ecology that emphasizes the injunction to love one’s neighbors. He interprets this to mean that nothing exists merely as a resource for others; that animals have an intrinsic right to live; that the forests are not only a source of oxygen and wild plants, from which we extract miracle cures, but have a right to live on their own; that we don’t hold off species extinction just so our grandchildren have an opportunity to see rare and interesting creatures, but for the species’ own sake.⁵⁰

He also praises the Christian virtues of frugality and simple living, which “counsel us to limit our numbers” and, by rejecting materialism and consumerism, are “among the most sacred and subversive actions one can take.” A more orthodox account of Christian involvement in Earth First! comes from Anthony G. Payne, who rejects the “pagan” aspects of the movement (defined as “any act or belief that tends to deify nature or detract from the worship due God”) but nevertheless recognizes the importance of strategic alliances among those with a shared ecological outlook. Asserting that ecocentrism does not require a rejection of Christianity, and that ecotage is perfectly in accord with Christian principles, he claims that “the perspective and tools of EF! are not alien to God at all. In fact, they are very much in harmony with His revealed nature.”⁵¹

Despite these potentially positive features, many activists will probably remain uncomfortable with Christianity and find greater fulfillment in the more self-evidently “eco-friendly” religions of the world. It may be possible, in fact, that no existing religion can truly reflect the ecocentric intuitions of militant ecology, and least of all institutionalized Christianity, with its historical denial of the sacred in the natural world and unfavorable political associations. Indeed, Christianity would merit little discussion in relation to militant ecology if not for the obvious point mentioned above: given its predominance in the United States, rhetorical appeals to stewardship or defending

⁴⁸ Mark Stoll, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 3.

⁴⁹ Manes, “Paganism as Resistance,” 22.

⁵⁰ Wald Udo, “Be Sacred and Subversive: Proclaiming a Gospel of Hope and Eco-Prophetic Activism,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 6 (June 21, 1995), 26.

⁵¹ Anthony G. Payne, “An EF!er and a Devout Christian,” *EF! Journal* 16, no. 4 (February 2, 1996), 25.

the creation against human greed are likely to gain more traction than invocations of Gaia, the Goddess, the Great Spirit, or the rights of trees. A perception of the Earth as God's creation, which humans are called upon to preserve and respect, provides a powerful motive for environmental protection that may be at least as strong as pantheistic or animistic perspectives. There may therefore be some benefit, as a few militant ecologists have suggested, in employing Christian language and imagery in their rhetorical appeals and symbolism. As one animal liberation activist notes, "It is said to be the most righteous act to protect the most vulnerable creatures; as long as we aren't hurting people, I can't see how the church [sic] could condemn us. If we had 'religious' support, the majority of the American public might take another look at our activities."⁵²

These spiritual appeals - if couched in an open-ended or Judeo-Christian language that is palatable to the American public - might actually attract more people than they repel, and would serve to emphasize the positive aspects of the militant ecology vision rather than the misanthropic, pessimistic, and violent ones that are so often in the spotlight. While some might regard this as a cynical and insincere rhetorical ploy, in the perennialist view shared by most militant ecologists (to quote the *Rig Veda*) "there is one truth, reached by many paths." Since there are many different paths to an ecocentric understanding, and many means of expressing the same fundamental intuitions, it makes no sense to alienate potential supporters by insisting on one semantic expression or another of these beliefs. Given their small numbers and the enormity of their task, militant ecologists cannot afford to be too doctrinaire. Those who oppose religious appeals may risk repeating the mistake of the historical left, which often dismissed traditional religion as a childish illusion or opiate of the masses without ever offering much but materialism and ideology to replace it.⁵³ As a consequence, they have ceded an essential aspect of human culture into the hands of their opponents. Warning against such a development, Ayalet Hines argues in the *Earth First! Journal* that the political right (i.e., the distinctively American alliance of free-market neoliberals and conservative evangelical Protestants) should not be allowed to "co-opt and define the search for spirituality," imploring militant ecologists to "let people in search of higher meaning find it expressed in our movement."⁵⁴ The true opponents of militant ecology are not the adherents of one religion or another, but rather those who would act, in contravention of all traditional religious and moral teachings, to dominate the Earth in the service of human greed and lust for power.

⁵² INGO, "Letter," *Underground* 16 (Spring 2000), 5.

⁵³ Frederic L. Bender, *The Culture of Extinction: Toward a Philosophy of Deep Ecology* (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 352.

⁵⁴ Ayalet Hines, "Renewing the Soul of the Environment," *EF! Journal* 17, no. 2 (January 31, 1997), 3.

5.3 The Expansive Self and the Law of Nature

Of course, most critics do not particularly care what spiritual beliefs militant ecologists profess; they do, however, fear the ethical and political implications of such ideas. Some have expressed concern that nature mysticism provides no reliable ethical guidance to its practitioners. Jerry A. Stark, for one, claims that their ecocentric outlook “rejects not only the Enlightenment ethical tradition of personal responsibility, morality, and rights, it also rejects *the possibility of ethical reasoning itself*,” offering only “quaint spiritualistic assertions about nature” in its place.⁵⁵ And is true that philosophical ecocentrism, by its very nature, is opposed to both deontological (duty- or rights-based) and utilitarian (consequence-based) models of moral reasoning. This is due in part to individualistic focus of these models, which excludes a concern for abstractions such as species and ecosystems as entities possessing inherent value. It is also related to their historical restriction of moral consideration to the “higher mammals” who are “subjects- of-a-life” (as in Tom Regan’s animal rights theory) or capable of experiencing pain.⁵⁶

Thus, while militant ecologists often invoke the “rights of nature” or cite Peter Singer’s utilitarian animal liberation theory to justify their actions, more often than not this is just a convenient shorthand for expressing their belief that other natural beings have inherent worth, rather than a source of clear ethical guidelines.

However, the rule-based ethical model that dominates modern moral philosophy is not the only one conceivable. One might also envision ethics as a kind of *right action* or *virtue*, wherein proper behavior arises from a particular state of being rather than adherence to a code of conduct.⁵⁷ Indeed, the very word *ethics*, with its root in the Greek *ethos*, traditionally did not connote the complicated moral calculus of modern ethical theory but rather living in harmony with the character, mores, and “genius” of a particular community. Ultimately it is this form of ethics - a shared moral orientation which emerges naturally from their spiritual commitment to defend the integrity of life on Earth - that motivates the majority of radical activists, rather than the more legalistic and systematic moral reasoning of modern ethical theory. As journalist Rik Scarce concluded, “Most eco-warriors have no interest in a well-conceived philosophy or any other explicit guideposts to tell them how to live their lives.”⁵⁸ Far from an admission of relativism or incoherence, this reflects a commitment to right action that proceeds from an inward, deeply spiritual orientation rather than adherence to externally-imposed rules. Such a morality may indeed be highly personal

⁵⁵ Jerry A. Stark, “Postmodern Environmentalism: A Critique of Deep Ecology,” in *Ecological Resistance Movements*, 270.

⁵⁶ For a critique animal rights and liberation theory from an ecocentric perspective, see J. Baird Callicott, “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,” in *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

⁵⁷ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 49.

⁵⁸ Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 31.

and situational, but this does not make it reducible to “quaint spiritualistic assertions” or relativistic incoherence. As Foreman wrote, “I am no moral relativist. I believe that some things are good and some are bad. I have a value system. But I passionately believe that there are many ways to do good, countless methods to defend things of value.”⁵⁹

Of course, this raises the obvious question: how can right action be known, since it is not codified in any holy scripture or philosophy textbook and, indeed, frequently stands in opposition to the laws of society and conventional morality? One way of envisioning the ecocentric ethic is the concept of a “natural law” or “higher law” that dictates one’s actions, going beyond a merely scientific understanding of physical and ecological limits and more often expressing a spiritual conception of what nature demands. Speaking for most militant ecologists, Paul Watson once declared that “it is my duty as a citizen of the Earth to uphold the sacred trust of the Earth and obey her laws... Natural law is supreme.”⁶⁰ In part, according to Watson, this natural law consists of certain physical laws that circumscribe the actions of all natural beings, such as the laws of thermodynamics. These cannot be broken by any known life form. It also includes “ecological laws” that “govern the interrelationships of all life,” which may be temporarily ignored by human beings - but only to their peril: “When the human species ignores the logical implications of these laws of ecology, we are guilty of crimes against the Earth. We will not be judged by men for these crimes, but with a terrible justice rendered against us by the Earth itself.” Obedience to the law of nature therefore consists partly, and most obviously, in acknowledging these physical and ecological limitations on human behavior.

While shared by all militant ecologists, this understanding of physical and ecological limits really amounts to little more than common sense (though some political and business leaders might disagree). Indeed, it can be quite easily reconciled with a Malthusian outlook that prioritizes human survival, as in the survivalist and apocalyptic ecology promoted during the Cold War years by Garrett Hardin, Paul Ehrlich, Robert Heilbroner, and William Vogt, and need not imply any reverence for the natural world at all.⁶¹ Therefore, while for some militant ecologists “natural law” may simply describe an awareness that “if you pour oil in the river, the fish will die,”⁶² most go beyond the scientific idea of natural limits in expressing a more transcendental belief in a “natural” or “higher” law, though conceptions of it differ.

One means of coming to know the law of nature and reintegrating with it, popular among the early Earth First! activists strongly influenced by deep ecology, is the

⁵⁹ Foreman, *Confessions*, ix.

⁶⁰ Paul Watson, “On the Precedence of Natural Law,” *Environmental Law and Litigation* 3 (1988), 79.

⁶¹ For instance, see Garrett Hardin: “Let me only say that I am not one of this class of naturelovers; my view is definitely anthropocentric” (Garrett Hardin, *The Immigration Dilemma: Avoiding the Tragedy of the Commons* (Washington DC: Federation for American Immigration Reform, 1995), 75).

⁶² Erik Haughland, “Dear Shit Fer Brains,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 7 (August 1, 1987), 3.

notion of the *expansive self*. Propounded by deep ecology founder Arne Naess, this describes a method for attaining self-realization through a gradually widening sense of identification with the cosmos: “From identifying with ‘one’s nearest,’ higher unities are created through circles of friends, local communities, tribes, compatriots, races, humanity, life, and ultimately, as articulated by religious and philosophic leaders, unity with the supreme whole..’”⁶³ In Naess’ formulation, elaborated upon by other deep ecologists, when the individual self has enlarged into a more expansive “ecological self” it is no longer necessary to rely on altruism in order to encourage environmentally benign behavior. As Earth First! activist Christopher Manes explains, “In the concept of the Ecological Self, human interests and natural interests become fused and there is no need to appeal to the traditional discourse of rights and values. The integrity of the biosphere is seen as the integrity of our own persons.”⁶⁴

Variations on this theme abound in the writings of militant ecologists. Prominent rainforest advocate John Seed employs similar language to describe the spiritual conversion that often accompanies environmental actions, whereby “‘I am protecting the rainforest’ develops to ‘I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking.’”⁶⁵ The expansive self idea, in fact, has also been employed as a justification for ecologically-motivated sabotage, or “monkeywrenching.” As Foreman writes, “When we fully identify with a wild place, then, monkeywrenching becomes self-defense, which is a fundamental right. The ecodefender is not a superior being protecting something less than himself, but is an antibody of the wildland acting in self-defense, and drawing on the forest or desert or sea for wisdom, strength, and strategy.”⁶⁶

However, this expansive self ethic does have its critics. Environmental ethicist Eric Katz, in fact, goes so far as to deem the expansive self approach “anthropocentric,” since it assumes that one’s human interests can be meaningfully attributed to the entire natural world, and indeed that humans are even *capable* of expanding their sense of selfinterest to understand the interests of all other entities.⁶⁷ Taken to its logical extreme, since identity with “the supreme whole” would presumably include aligning one’s selfinterest with *all* that exists, there would seem to be no grounds for distinguishing between the shopping mall and the primeval forest, between the coal-burning power plant and the tallgrass prairie, other than one’s subjective preferences. And since most militant ecologists do, of course, make these distinctions and generally

⁶³ Arne Naess, “Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes,” in *Radical Environmentalism: Philosophy and Tactics*, ed. Peter C. List (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1993), 30.

⁶⁴ Manes, *Green Rage*, 148.

⁶⁵ John Seed, “Beyond Anthropocentrism,” in *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*, ed. John Seed, Joanna Macy, Arne Naess and Pat Fleming (New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, 1988), <http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/Anthropo.htm>

⁶⁶ Foreman, *Confessions*, 140.

⁶⁷ Eric Katz, “Against the Inevitability of Anthropocentrism,” in *Beneath the Surface*, 33.

purport to base them upon something more than personal taste, their ethics must involve something other than a purely personal sense of identification with the whole. There must exist some grounds for differentiating between good and bad, natural and unnatural, wild and tame, oppression and liberation. Thus, despite the frequent use of expansive self rhetoric among militant ecologists, to uncover the true foundations of their ethical beliefs it is necessary to go deeper. It is not enough merely to identify with all that exists: it is only by recognizing nature as a higher authority that humans can become open to the wisdom of the Earth and understand their own place in the greater whole. Perhaps then might they truly say, with John Seed, "I am part of the rainforest protecting myself."

One means of self-overcoming and becoming natural again is through experience of the wild, emptying oneself of purely human and selfish attachments in order to become receptive to the wisdom of the whole. As EF! activist Stephanie Mills writes,

Becoming vulnerable to and tender toward the planet's heartbreaking and beautiful truths of death, transformation, and regeneration; and of evolution's teaching of the inconsequence of the individual relative to the species, is a soul-cracking experience.

Absolute compassion with Mother Earth - suffering her pangs of creation and destruction - demands inordinate strength of spirit, a strength nurtured by a sense of one's interpenetration with wild nature, a sense most often renewed in the very wilderness whose defense is being mounted.⁶⁸

Indeed, through "becoming a part of the wild," Foreman claims, activists can recover a "courage far greater than ourselves, a union that gives us boldness to stand against hostile humanism, against the machine, against the dollar, against jail, against extinction for what is sacred and right; the Great Dance of Life."⁶⁹ An example of this self-overcoming is offered by Julia "Butterfly" Hill, who famously lived atop a threatened California Redwood for 738 days between 1998 and 1999. After experiencing a violent storm from her 180-foot perch, she realized that "by letting go of all attachments, including my attachment to self, people no longer had any power over me^ I was no longer going to live my life out of fear, the way too many people do, jolted by our disconnected society. I was going to live my life guided from the higher source, the Creation source."⁷⁰ Unlike the expansive self promoted by Naess's deep ecology, this approach entails the recognition of a higher law in wild nature, an object of reverence and a means of distinguishing between the natural and unnatural, good and bad. There are, of course, disagreements within the movement as to what precisely the law of nature demands, but it is nevertheless clear that the nature mysticism of militant ecology does have a powerful ethical content, though it differs strongly from the ethical paradigm of modernity.

⁶⁸ Stephanie Mills, "Thoughts from the Round River Rendezvous," in *The Earth First! Reader*, 166.

⁶⁹ Foreman, *Confessions*, vii, 9.

⁷⁰ Hill, *The Legacy of Luna*, 114-5.

5.4 Quietism, Fanaticism, and Violence

Most critics do not deny that the natural mysticism of militant ecology has definite ethical implications; they simply find them abhorrent. While some critics worry that their intuitive perception of the natural law might lead militant ecologists to commit unsavory acts in its name, others have expressed an opposite concern, claiming that this nature mysticism can only lead to quietism and passive resignation, a withdrawal from the impurity of political and social life. “Anti-rational, anti-humanist, supernatural, parochial, and atavistic moods are a frightening foundation on which to build a movement for a new society,” frets Murray Bookchin; “Such perspectives can lead all too easily to the extremes of political fanaticism or a passive social quietism.”⁷¹

With respect to passive social quietism, Bookchin again provides a characteristically entertaining elaboration of the charges:

Not surprisingly, assorted environmental groups who have made biocentricity a focal point in their philosophies tend toward a passive-receptive mysticism. Heidegger’s numbing “openness to Being,” Spinoza’s fatalism, and various Asian theologies that enjoin us to yield to a mindless quietism have attained a trendy quality that beclouds ecological issues with mystical overtones... The result is that action as such becomes suspect irrespective of the social conditions in which it occurs.⁷²

Such an indictment might seem ridiculous, given the highly aggressive and political tenor of militant ecology, but it may nevertheless pose a real possibility for certain forms of nature mysticism, particularly those that prioritize personal purity or the “wisdom of the Earth” above the artificiality and corruption of modern society. Militant ecologists might seem particularly susceptible to withdrawal from mainstream society, with their pessimism and contempt for modernity leading to a rejection of wide-scale political action in favor of the establishment of insular ecological communities to wait out the inevitable collapse. This tendency was present in the early years of Earth First!, heightened no doubt by the tensions of the Cold War: an advertisement in the second issue of the *Earth First! Journal* states that “all retreaters and survivalists are not rightwing religious fanatics. Several EARTH FIRST! members have formed a retreat group and plan to survive World War III.”⁷³ Given the national and, indeed, global scope of many environmental problems, an isolationist policy would seem to be doomed to failure and at any rate unable to resist state repression should it prove too successful. However, the formation of intentional ecological communities, paired with other more

⁷¹ Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman, *Defending the Earth: A Debate* (New York: Black Rose Books, 1991), 39. <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-and-dave-foreman-defending-the-earth-a-debate#toc4>

⁷² Murray Bookchin, “The Population Myth,” in *Which Way For the Ecology Movement? Essays by Murray Bookchin* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1994), 39.

⁷³ *EF! Journal* 1, no. 2 (December 20, 1980), 4.

traditional political activities, may nevertheless be indispensable in the establishment of a future primitive society, as environmental theorists such as Rudolf Bahro, Robert Nisbet, Theodore Roszak, and bioregionalists such as Kirkpatrick Sale have argued. As activist Bob Greenberg writes, "If we build geographically concentrated communities of people who share a common vision, we stand a greater chance of sustaining ourselves through certain state repression, potential starvation and potentially violent chaos."⁷⁴ In other words, the formation of intentional communities can be an integral part of the militant ecology political program, provided that it does not degenerate into mere survivalism and rule out other forms of necessary political action.

The philosophical, religious, and ethical outlook of militant ecology is therefore unlikely, as critics like Bookchin fear, to lead its adherents down the dead end road of quietism and passivity, since any form of ethics that eschews effective action in the world cannot be reconciled with the militant ecocentrism at the core of the movement. As Jessie Wolf Hardin proclaims,

While religion has been used as an escape from the responsibilities of re-alpolitik, it remains that Spirit and manifestation, intent and action, are as indivisible as mind and body, light and dark, life and death. I have little hope for any well-intended activity devoid of spirituality, or, for that matter, any spiritual system that fails to manifest itself as resistance to the degradation of this sacred Earth...⁷⁵

While their mysticism might prevent some activists from engaging in necessary political struggles, more often than not the opposite is true: it is their spiritual commitment to defend the Earth that galvanizes them to action, even when resistance seems hopeless. As Bron Taylor observes, even the most utopian of Earth First! activists are quite pessimistic about the chances of actually averting ecological catastrophe.⁷⁶ Many, in fact, appear to be motivated by an ideal of honor, faithfulness, duty, or love without regard for the outcome, rather than the likelihood of success. In the early years Foreman acknowledged that "perhaps [defending the wilderness] *is* a hopeless quest. But one who loves the Earth can do no less."⁷⁷ Paul Watson, though acknowledging that the struggle for nature is "a constant battle and I don't know what the outcome will be," nevertheless affirms that "the losing battles are the ones that are worth fighting."⁷⁸ He claims to have imbibed this warrior ethos, which has guided the mission of the Sea Shepherd since its beginnings, from traditional Native American spirituality: "I have learned from the Lakota - an American Sioux people - that warriors must always focus

⁷⁴ Bob Greenberg, "The Urbanization of Earth First! New Directions for the Movement," *EF! Journal* 19, no. 5 (June 30, 1999), 3.

⁷⁵ Jesse Wolf Hardin, "ReWilding," 25.

⁷⁶ Bron Taylor, "Review Commentary: Green Apocalypticism: Understanding Disaster in the Radical Environmental Worldview," *Society and Natural Resources* 12 (1999), 380.

⁷⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, vii, 9.

⁷⁸ Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 37, 27.

on the action rather than the result. We do what we do because we cannot imagine not doing it. It is the only right thing to do.”⁷⁹ Drawing an explicit connection to the grim ethos of the ancient Norsemen, Tom Stoddard muses that

at present, the forces for conservation seem analogous to the virtuous gods of the ancient Viking religion who live in Valhalla and fight heroically against the forces of evil, but are ultimately overwhelmed and fall in defeat. I do not see any way conservationists will win; the forces of doom and evil are too powerful. We must continue to fight anyway.⁸⁰

Jonathan Paul, an activist affiliated with the ELF and ALF who was indicted during Operation Backfire, similarly claims that “even if I were told we would lose the fight to save this planet, I would not give up. To save this planet and all of her species upon her is the ultimate struggle that trumps any other issue.”⁸¹

This points, it would seem, to a major tension in the militant ecology worldview: their sense of moral responsibility demands that they undertake *effective* action in defense of wild nature, while their pessimistic appraisal of humankind and their limited political prospects forces them to recognize that these actions have only a slim chance of success.

In many ways, this approach has parallels to certain traditions of mystical thought - the Taoist conception of *wu-wei*, for instance, typically translated as “acting without acting,” which enjoins adherents to act without attachment to ends;⁸² or Meister Eckhart’s teaching on detachment, which insists that though people should be inwardly empty and receptive to the divine, they must nevertheless act within the world.⁸³ Heidegger also drew upon this conception of detachment in his later philosophy. Bookchin’s interpretation notwithstanding, Heidegger’s well-known conception of “letting be” does not enjoin a mindless passivity but is, rather, the very openness to Being that makes it possible to act authentically in the world. As Manes puts it, synthesizing the visions of Heidegger and Aldo Leopold, “Heidegger doesn’t absolve humans from the technological crisis to wallow in mystic impotence: authentic existence demands that we take responsibility for the past in order to strive to think like mountains again...”⁸⁴ In short, based on these other philosophical examples it is clear that a high religious enthusiasm or pessimism concerning worldly prospects need not translate into an ethic of quietism, but in fact can provide a powerful impetus to action in the world.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 37, 27.

⁸⁰ Tom Stoddard, “Islands to Islands to Dust,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 3 (February 2, 1987), 22.

⁸¹ Jonathan Paul, “The Beginning of the End,” in *This Country Must Change: Essays on the Necessity of Revolution in the USA*, ed. Craig Rosebraugh (Portland: Arissa Media Group, 2009), 136.

⁸² Laozi, “The Daodejing,” trans. Philip J. Ivanhoe, in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), section 10, 9, 48.

⁸³ Meister Eckhart, in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 253.

⁸⁴ Christoph Manes, “Technology and Mountain Thinking,” in *Earth First! Reader*, 132.

However, for some this very militancy is the most alarming feature of ecocentric spirituality. As indicated earlier, these critics have attacked the ethical outlook common among militant ecologists - by which right action follows from an intuitive apperception of the law of nature - for encouraging fanaticism in its adherents, serving to justify any number of heinous crimes in its name. Liberal deep ecologists such as Zimmerman have pointed to the naturalistic ethics of National Socialist Germany, which invoked conceptions of natural law and natural order, in order to argue that “neopagans and radical environmentalists are insufficiently aware of the potentially dark side of [their] immanentistic view the divine.”⁸⁵ Mathew Humphrey also shares this fear of ecofascism, concluding that their ethics of self-realization, valorization of rootedness and authentic dwelling, and privileging of “beautiful actions” over mere morality constitutes an “ethically worrying basis for human action.”⁸⁶ And as Jozef Keulartz points out, the assertion that “nature knows best” raises the question of who, exactly, is authorized to speak in nature’s name.⁸⁷ Similarly, social ecologists such as Murray Bookchin have insisted that “it is very important that we keep the ecology movement from degrading [ecological spirituality] into a required or expected belief in an atavistic, simple-minded form of nature worship...”⁸⁸ According to his left-anarchist critique, religion might not just be politically counter-productive but positively dangerous to an egalitarian, democratic society. In this vein, erstwhile social ecologist Janet Biehl has criticized ecofeminist variants of militant ecology for rejecting the “emancipatory legacies” of Western culture and acting as a “force for irrationalism” in their embrace of goddess worship, glorification of the Neolithic, and evocation of metaphors and myths.⁸⁹

While a more in-depth discussion of these individual issues, as well as the threat of “ecofascism” in general, will be reserved for chapter twelve, it is worth asking here whether the naturalistic ethics of ecocentrism are truly as dangerous as its critics allege. It is true that, as with most other conceptions of natural or higher law, activists perceive a moral obligation to uphold it even when doing so might violate the laws of the state. As Rod Coronado writes, “At a time when ecological and cultural destruction is commonplace within the perimeter of the law, it becomes necessary to adhere to the

⁸⁵ See Zimmerman, *Contesting*; also Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism*: “This notion of ‘natural laws’ or ‘natural order’ has long been a mainstay of reactionary environmental thought. Its concomitant is anti-humanism...”

⁸⁶ He points to the similarities between the ecocentric ethic and conservative nationalist ideologies: “It conjures up the image of an elite of deep ecologists who have the wherewithal to fully understand the nature of the ecological crisis, overthrow existing norms, and substitute for them the ontology of deep ecology that the masses can internalize...” (Mathew Humphrey, “Ontological Determinism and Deep Ecology: Evading the Moral Questions?” in *Beneath the Surface*, 85, 99).

⁸⁷ Keulartz, *Struggle for Nature*, 141.

⁸⁸ Bookchin and Foreman, *Defending the Earth*.

⁸⁹ Janet Biehl, *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (New York: Black Rose Books, 1991), 2, 61.

higher laws of nature and morality.”⁹⁰ Though in an ideal world human laws and natural laws would be complementary, Paul Watson admits that such is not the case today, and that conservationists have a duty to obey the latter over the former: “I respect the laws of a nation-state only to the extent that such laws respect the higher order... Our birthright as natural creatures and as citizens of the Earth gives us that right. It is our right to uphold and to defend the laws of nature.”⁹¹ However, the primacy of natural law to the laws of the state is ironically one of the more widely-accepted aspects of the militant ecology ethic, with parallels to other beloved figures of civil disobedience such as Thoreau, Gandhi, and King, and a pedigree stretching back to St. Augustine’s *lex iniusta non est lex*: an unjust law is no law at all. At any rate, it is certainly true that this perception of a higher law of nature provides a major justification for the militancy of these activists, their willingness to do whatever is effective and necessary - no matter the legal consequences - in order to defend the integrity of life on Earth.

Of course, an intuitive conception of natural law - though certainly not “relativistic,” as some allege - is more flexible and situational than the kind of guidance offered by divine commands or categorical imperatives. Several militant ecologists have acknowledged that adopting an anti-anthropocentric, ecosystemic point of view can blur the lines of traditional humanistic morality. Jeff Poneiwaz, for instance, defended famed primatologist Dian Fossey, who notoriously held a poacher’s child hostage to secure the release of a captive gorilla, by asserting that “only human centrism makes that tactic (which succeeded) seem ‘vigilante’ or wrong. There are billions of humans, and only a handful of Gorillas left.”⁹² In contrast to the morality of liberalism or Christianity, which upholds the supreme moral importance of the human individual, in this ecological outlook greater moral consideration is allotted to the gorilla due to its reduced numbers and ecological significance.

The use of violence has also received a similar justification. One activist writes that pacifism “is based on the extremely unbalanced morals of modern human civilization. We know that we are part of the Earth and that the web of life which allows for our survival is immanently threatened, but we often forget the moral implications of this biological fact.”⁹³ The question of acceptable levels of violence in militant ecology activism is a highly controversial one, and certain interpretations of ecocentrism might justify, in theory, direct violence against human beings. While the strategic viability of extreme tactics - ranging from sabotage to physical violence - will be evaluated in chapter thirteen, the following discussion will focus on the moral and ethical dimensions of the debate.

Certain voices within the movement have always abjured violent or destructive tactics on moral grounds, claiming that they are wholly contradictory to an ecocentric

⁹⁰ Rod Coronado, “Spread Your Love Through Action: An Open Letter from Rod Coronado,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 4 (March 21, 1995), 8.

⁹¹ Watson, “On the Precedence of Natural Law,” 86.

⁹² Jeff Poneiwaz, “On the Death of Dian Fossey,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 3 (February 2, 1987), 23.

⁹³ Snap Dragon, “Beyond Civil Disobedience,” *EF! Journal* 18, no. 4 (April 30, 1998), 9.

outlook that holds all life to be sacred. Some activists, like Robert Aiken, claim that the use of violence will simply perpetuate a vicious cycle, since “it is the adversarial attitude, us against them, that exploits our wilderness, and when you advocate guns and dynamite you are just playing their game.”⁹⁴ Opponents of violence typically believe that “nonviolent civil disobedience reaffirms our commitment to peace and freedom, not just for human animals, but for those nonhuman animals oppressed, enslaved, tortured and killed because of their species.”⁹⁵ Poet and deep ecologist Gary Snyder even claimed that he would be as distressed by the destruction of a bulldozer as by the death of a human, on the grounds that “all materials, all organisms, all machines, all parts and wholes are worthy of respect.”⁹⁶ However, despite activist Mikal Jakubal’s claims that “Earth First! is not a violent movement,”⁹⁷ neither EF! nor the militant ecology movement at large has ever explicitly renounced violence in defense of wild nature. Nor have many activists adopted the nihilistic attitude of one EF! activist, who goes so far as to admit that “my fatalistic view is that if violence is what it takes to affect change, we’re such a flawed species we aren’t worth it.”⁹⁸ This is because the truly ecocentric among them are not simply interested in saving the human species; the aim of their activism is to defend the *rest* of the Earth against humanity.

Many of the movement’s founders therefore had few moral objections to property destruction, though harm to humans and other living beings was often considered strategically mistaken (if not necessarily immoral). Paul Watson confesses to believe that, in theory, “violence is morally wrong and nonviolence is morally right,” while nevertheless acknowledging that “few changes on this planet have taken place solely because of nonviolent action. To remain nonviolent totally is to allow the perpetuation of violence against people, animals, and the environment.”⁹⁹ He compromised by committing violence against property but never against living beings. EF! co-founder Howie Wolke went further, claiming that “violence is as American as motherhood, apple pie, baseball, gas guzzlers, TV game shows, wilderness and the fading ideal of individual liberty,” insisting that violence has been an important instrument of historical social change and that philosophical non-violence is therefore “unrealistic and unnatural.”¹⁰⁰ Dave Foreman was even more open to violence, claiming that it is “as human as the opposable thumb” and that “I am still an animal; still a caveman despite my Levis and boots. I cannot turn the other cheek.” He too argues that to abjure violence is to give the Earth over to the tyranny of evil men, and that one is therefore justified in using

⁹⁴ Robert Aiken, “Letter,” *EF! Journal* 2, no. 5 (May 1982), 2.

⁹⁵ Crescenzo Vellucci, “Should You Risk Arrest? Civil Disobedience is a Viable Tactic for Change,” *No Compromise* 1, no. 3 (June 1996), 14.

⁹⁶ Gary Snyder, “Dear Dave,” *EF! Journal* 2, no. 7 (August 1982), 2-3.

⁹⁷ Mikal Jakubal, “Nonviolence Forever,” *EF! Journal* 18, no. 4 (April 30, 1998), 9.

⁹⁸ Michael Donnelly, “Is There Any Other Option,” *EF! Journal* 18, no. 4 (April 30, 1998), 7.

⁹⁹ Paul Watson and Warren Rogers, from “Sea Shepherd, My Fight for the Whales and Seals,” in *Radical Environmentalism: Philosophy and Tactics*, ed. Peter C. List (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1993), 171, 167.

¹⁰⁰ Howie Wolke, “The Grizzly Den: On Violence,” *EF! Journal* 3, no. 7 (September 1983), 12.

any means necessary to defend the Earth “against those who would destroy her for their *short-term profit and power thrills*.”¹⁰¹ Though rejecting personal violence for strategic reasons, he would claim that acts of property destruction were morally justified by both by a right of “self-defense” (when one fully identifies with a wild place) as well as a “biophilic” love of the wilderness, concluding that “it boils down to the question of whether private property (and the dollars or jobs the property represents) or natural ecosystems are more valuable. Although most people in this country (myself included) respect the concept of private property, life - the biological diversity of this planet - is far more important.”¹⁰²

Thus, while most militant ecologists accept the legitimacy of tactical property destruction and sabotage, a recurring question among scholars and analysts is whether or not their ideology condones violence towards *humans* in pursuit of ecological aims. Many activists, particularly those associated with the major groups - EF! , SSCS, ELF, and ALF - go out of their way to avoid inflicting harm on any living being, human or otherwise. After spiking trees in a timber cell in Monroe, Colorado, one ELF cell widely publicized the action “in order to prevent injury to any timber workers who might be working in the area,” insisting that “it is not our intention to harm anyone.”¹⁰³ Another, while affirming that “the ELF wholeheartedly condones the use of violence towards inanimate objects to prevent oppression, violence, and most of all to protect freedom,” nevertheless maintains that “all ELF actions are nonviolent towards humans and animals.”¹⁰⁴ Among other features of the militant ecology movement that have prevented it from pursuing intentional violence towards humans, Bron Taylor mentions the widespread perception among activists that all life is sacred, and the related sense of identification with the rest of life on Earth. Thus, “The politics and metaphysics of the sacred, which permeates radical environmental groups, helps erode the kind of absolutist- Manichean demonizing of the ‘enemy’ that otherwise might more forcefully emerge in these movements, given their apocalyptic urgency.”¹⁰⁵ The belief that the cosmos is an interconnected whole and that all life is sacred might therefore seem to categorically repudiate personal violence.

However, the fact remains that certain groups and individuals acting beneath the ecological banner have, in fact, perpetrated violence against humans. These cannot simply be written off as manifestations of mental illness or as departures from a genuine ecocentric outlook. Theodore Kaczynski (the “Unabomber”) comes most obviously to mind, whose seventeen-year letter bombing campaign, targeting research scientists and business figures involved with modern technology, claimed the lives of three people and injured twenty-three others. Other groups, splinter cells from the main militant ecology family, have also expressed a willingness to target humans, such as the Ani-

¹⁰¹ Dave Foreman, “Violence and Earth First!” *EF! Journal* 2, no. 4 (March 20, 1982), 4.

¹⁰² Foreman, *Confessions*, 139 - 143, 121.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰⁵ Bron Taylor, “Religion, Violence and Radical Environmentalism,” 1-42.

mal Rights Militia (which sent letter bombs to Margaret Thatcher in 1992) and the Justice Department (which mailed razor blades to eighty-seven American scientists working on primates in 1999).¹⁰⁶ One particularly visible and well-known campaign was Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, founded by Greg Avery and Heather James in 1999, whose tactics included harassing phone calls; intimidating research industry employees, business partners, and their families; firebombing private cars; and spraying individuals with chemicals.¹⁰⁷ Are these groups mere aberrations within the militant ecology movement, rejecting the nonviolence that is inseparable from a genuine ecocentrism? Or is this widespread commitment to nonviolence merely, as Charles Rubin worries, “a tactical judgment, not a deep principle”?¹⁰⁸

Ackerman notes many of the features of the militant ecology movement that might, in fact, lend themselves to an escalation in violent tactics: their tendency to demonize opponents, their penchant for bellicose statements, their rejection of the legitimacy of the state, the large proportion of young, male members among their ranks, and their perception of the natural world as imperiled by corporate greed.¹⁰⁹ In addition, while Taylor believes violence from the radical environmental movement to be unlikely, he does admit that it could arise should activists deem such tactics as necessary to defend their sacred values: “It is certainly possible that some troubled soul or souls will decide that God or Gaia is calling them to defend their given sacred space through a terrorist holy war.”¹¹⁰ He also admits that the holistic worldview of ecocentrism is theoretically amenable to the use of mass violence, since humanity at large might be regarded as a disease upon the Earth and violent defense of the whole might be justified as a natural and appropriate response.¹¹¹ Thus, the outlook of militant ecocentrism contains a few possible justifications for violence: the conviction that wild nature is imperiled by human activities; the belief that its defense is a sacred calling; and an emphasis on the integrity of the whole over human welfare. Are these capable of outweighing the moral commitment to the sacredness of all life, humanity included?

The rationalizations of violence offered by some in the movement do have a hard logic to them. One animal liberationist admits that violence towards humans might indeed contradict the movement’s emphasis on preserving life, but concludes that “we must acknowledge that a war is going on, and it is a very one-sided war... *we* need to remain open to any approach that might alter the course of the war, including approaches that might contradict or violate our ethical code.”¹¹² Likewise, a communique

¹⁰⁶ Liddick, *Eco-Terrorism*, 37-44.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰⁸ Charles T. Rubin, *The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Environmentalism* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 190.

¹⁰⁹ Ackerman, “Beyond Arson?” 145-49.

¹¹⁰ Bron Taylor, “Religion, Violence and Radical Environmentalism,” 10.

¹¹¹ Bron Taylor, “Threat Assessments and Radical Environmentalism,” in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2003), 180.

¹¹² Devil’s Advocate, “Violence Towards Humans,” *Out of the Cages* 8 (1994), 17.

from the Revolutionary Cells of the Animal Liberation Brigade notes that “nonviolence against animal exploiters is in fact a pro-violence stance that tolerates their blood-spilling without taking adequate measures to stop it.”¹¹³ In a similar vein, one ELF communique notoriously declared that

In pursuance of justice, freedom, and equal consideration for all innocent life across the board, segments of this global revolutionary movement are no longer limiting their revolutionary potential by adhering to a flawed, inconsistent ‘non-violent’ ideology. While innocent life will never be harmed in any action we undertake, where it is necessary, we will no longer hesitate to pick up the gun and implement justice, and provide the needed protection for our planet that decades of legal battles, pleading, protest, and economic sabotage have failed so drastically to achieve.¹¹⁴

On balance, then, it would seem that a moral commitment to nonviolence is not an integral component of militant ecology. While a theoretical commitment to the sanctity of life is certainly present, this does not necessarily apply to *all* individual life but to the health and integrity of the ecological whole, which may demand sacrifices in its defense. For the moment, other incidental features of the movement as well as the relative stability of the American political and economic system have prevented such violence from coming to the fore. However, as Taylor notes, given the religious dimensions of the militant ecology ethic, it is not inconceivable that some activists could come to view themselves as holy warriors fighting in defense of the Earth against a sinful humankind; if violent action is viewed as a realistic means of defending the sacred, then all bets are off.

A willingness to employ violent tactics for political ends rarely goes over well in the United States, and chapter thirteen will discuss whether the use of violence is *strategically* justified at this point in time. Suffice it to say that, while this propensity to violence might make ethicists uncomfortable, it need not inevitably lead to inhumane or totalitarian outcomes. Just as it might allow violence under certain circumstances, by the same token the ecocentric law of nature does *prohibit* certain tactics which cause needless suffering or work counter to the good of the whole. And in principal, the good of the whole includes the good of all beings, even humans. However, since the good of one species is subordinate to that of the ecological whole, it may require a radical reinterpretation of modern notions of the “good life,” with their emphasis on freedom from natural limits, material consumption, and frantic avoidance of discomfort, and perhaps a return to premodern understandings of happiness and human dignity. At any rate, as Foreman claims, for the militant ecologist the end does indeed justify the

¹¹³ Steven Best, “It’s War! The Escalating Battle Between Activists and the Corporate-State Complex,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?*, 300.

¹¹⁴ Pickering, *Earth Liberation Front*, 38-9.

means - “so long as the means are consistent with the end,”¹¹⁵ the defense of wild nature and the creation of a future primitive society.

5.5 Conclusion

The religious attitude can remain a powerful source of inspiration even among those who reject its institutional and orthodox manifestations, and militant ecology is no exception. The reverence for the natural world expressed by many activists reflects an outlook that can only be described as spiritual. One may still question whether this religious orientation is really of much political significance, given its private and marginalized character. However, it is in fact this earthen and life-affirming religiosity that provides the strongest source of strength and purpose for militant ecologists, surpassing scientific and philosophical concerns as the driving force behind their militancy and justifying their extreme tactics in defense of the sacred whole.

It is also clear that militant ecologists take ethics seriously, contrary to what some critics have to say, demonstrating in every article they write and action they undertake a powerful moral concern for the integrity and flourishing of life on Earth. It is true, of course, that their conception of right action is no mere “environmental ethic,” no moral calculus performed from the comfort of the desk or library, but a religious expression of their overflowing love for the wild Earth and its creatures. Nor is it a simple acknowledgement of physical laws or an anthropocentric recognition that human survival depends upon the continued functioning of Earth’s regulatory systems, but a thoroughgoing sense of attunement to and reverence for the ecological whole. Their powerful sense of duty, of absolute right and wrong, of commitment to the Earth, cannot be dismissed as an ethically incoherent intuitionism or nihilistic delight in destruction. Though it is admittedly at odds with the mainstream currents of modern moral philosophy in its religious tenor and holistic focus, it cannot be denied that the ethical orientation of militant ecology is a clear spur to action. As this chapter suggests, it may in fact provide the most effective foundation for any kind of ecocentric action, yet another advantage of the militant ecology outlook over its mainstream philosophical alternatives.

With regard to its long-term political goals, it is clear that the earthen religiosity of militant ecology conflicts with several tenets of contemporary liberal thought, namely its insistence on secularism, public reason, and neutrality to the good. Indeed, it may call into question the modern Western separation of church and state: as green theorist Daniel Deudney notes, earth religion makes claims on “all aspects of life and asserts the need to subordinate the secular to the sacred. Secular civilization has violated the

¹¹⁵ Dave Foreman/“Chim Blea,” “Cat Tracks: What are we Fighting For?” *EF! Journal* 4, no. 2 (December 22, 1983), 17.

earth and saving the earth requires recovering its sacredness.”¹¹⁶ Since among militant ecologists the highest good is conceived of as the integrity of the Earth, its wild places and life processes, public neutrality to the good has no place here - requiring either a radical revision of traditional liberalism or, perhaps, its abandonment.¹¹⁷ Deudney acknowledges that such a religion, in the unlikely event that it were backed by state power, could prove inhospitable to individual freedom. However, he also suggests that a more widespread earthen spirituality could reduce the need for such coercion, since “religiously-inspired self-discipline would obviate the need for externally imposed discipline.”¹¹⁸ Despite the frequent charge of ecofascism, it is clearly the latter scenario that most militant ecologists would prefer. Indeed, the achievement of a bioregionalist future primitive society will require far more than the collapse of the present social order, the development of sustainable technologies, or even the establishment of more egalitarian and democratic institutions: its success will ultimately depend upon a widespread acknowledgement that the natural world possesses inherent worth, a belief that is likely to take on a more religious than scientific or ethical complexion among the majority. As Dave Foreman wrote, “For bioregionalism to last, to present a clear alternative, to create a world beyond the collapse of the industrial state, it must be concerned with much deeper matters than alternative technology and non-hierarchical human society. Our philosophy, our worldview, our *religion* must be one of Deep Ecology. Biocentrism.”¹¹⁹ Propounding their ecocentric religion, and discovering the greener dimensions of world religions, may prove to be an essential step towards preparing the ground for a future primitive society.

Nevertheless, this ecocentric ethic does seem to have one significant drawback: its sense of religious mission may encourage a contempt for compromise and involvement in the political process. This might partially explain the militant ecologist’s disdain for the corrupt, debasing, fundamentally dull work of partisan politics and preference for political expression through art, spectacles such as civil disobedience and tree-sitting, and even violent acts such as sabotage and arson - such extreme activities allow activists to engage in the world, to defend the Earth, without losing their ideals and their souls amidst the tedium and compromise of the democratic process. However, given that the cornerstone of militant ecology is *effective* action in defense of the natural world, it seems that some means must be found to retain the warrior spirit even in the midst of the most mundane activities. In addition, while lost in raptures over wild nature, it becomes easy to ignore the members one’s own species. The ambiguous role

¹¹⁶ Daniel Deudney, “In Search of Gaian Politics: Earth Religion’s Challenge to Modern Western Civilization,” in *Ecological Resistance Movements*, 284.

¹¹⁷ Avner de-Shalit, “Is Liberalism Environment Friendly?” in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993).

¹¹⁸ Deudney, “Gaian Politics,” in *Ecological Resistance Movements*, 291.

¹¹⁹ Dave Foreman, “Reinhabitation, Biocentrism and Self Defense,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 7 (August 1, 1987), 22.

of humankind in the natural order, and the motivations behind militant ecology's firm rejection of anthropocentrism, form the subject of the following chapter.

6. Anti-Anthropocentrism

In addition to their unorthodox tactics and spiritual reverence for the Earth, militant ecologists are perhaps most well-known for their dim view of the human species. Their scientific, metaphysical, and religious views lead them to reject *anthropocentrism*, which, as one EF! activist defines it, “refers to a view that humans are at the center, superior, or in sole possession of what is right and valuable.”¹ In other words, humans are not the crown of creation, the paragon of animals, the pinnacle of earthly evolution, or even all that important from an ecological or cosmic perspective. Nor is human welfare the paramount social concern: as Sea Shepherd founder Paul Watson claims, “Our priority lies in solving ecological problems. Each decision we make we must take into account the interests and needs of other species; we can no longer embrace the anthropocentric thinking that dictates that our interests are the only ones that count.”² Opposition to anthropocentrism therefore constitutes one of the most widely-held and enduring values among militant ecologists, shared by all groups and individuals deserving of the name. In addition to its importance to Paul Watson and the Sea Shepherds, in the early years of Earth First! Dave Foreman likewise insisted that “we are biocentrists, not humanists,”³ while the green anarchist outlook underlying much of contemporary activism also stands in opposition to anthropocentrism, “the dominant worldview of western culture, [which] places our primary focus on human society, to the exclusion of the rest of life.”⁴ Finally, animal liberation activists are particularly vehement in their denial of human supremacy, challenging the arbitrary limitation of moral concern to humankind alone.⁵

Due to its central role in the movement’s ideology, as well as the strong critical response it has received, this chapter is chiefly concerned with the perception of humankind among militant ecologists. One significant question in this regard is whether their rejection of anthropocentrism is synonymous with misanthropy. Perhaps, as some critics allege, a more humanistic outlook might serve as a better foundation for radical environmental politics. Also, does the understanding of humanity as an “animal

¹ Lance Olsen, “How We Think About Animal Thinking,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 6 (June 21, 1986), 23.

² Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 44.

³ Dave Foreman and Nancy Morton, “Good Luck, Darlin’, It’s Been Great,” in *Earth First! Reader*, 265; Foreman, *Confessions*, 30.

⁴ The Green Anarchy Collective, “What is Green Anarchy? An Introduction to Anti-Civilization Thought and Practice,” *Back to Basics 4: What is Rewilding?* (2004), 2.

⁵ Best and Nocella, “Behind the Mask: Uncovering the Animal Liberation Front,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters*, 26.

like any other,” common among activists, actually lend itself to environmental preservation? And, finally, how do radical activists themselves fit into this conception of human nature - if humans are simply animals like any other, what enables the ecological vanguard to surmount the limitations of their species and take the side of the Earth? These questions form the core of this chapter. While the anti-anthropocentric ethos of militant ecology provides a stronger foundation for the defense of ecological integrity than its humanist alternatives, the deflationary view of humans as “animals like any other” might play into the hands of those who would use such an excuse to justify any kinds of human behavior as “natural.” For this reason, a more distinctive view of humankind, which envisions the species as a guardian and appreciator of life on Earth, might prove more conducive to the movement’s aims.

6.1 Humanism or Barbarism?

For many critics, the rejection of anthropocentrism constitutes one of the most objectionable features of militant ecology. “The effect of the moral philosophy adopted by radical environmental and animal rights activists,” bemoans Don Liddick, “has not been to extend equal consideration to the Earth and its nonhuman animals but to devalue human life... This is misanthropy taken to its limit.”⁶ Luc Ferry likewise suspects that the main objective for the “new zealots of nature” is to destroy humanism by recasting humanity as simply one animal among others - “and the least *sympathetic* one at that, being the least *sympiotic* with the harmonious and orderly universe.”⁷

Certainly, a handful of extreme comments have contributed to this brazenly misanthropic image, particularly in the early days of Earth First!. Pete Dustrud notoriously claimed in an early *Earth First! Journal* article that “the heart and soul of EARTH FIRST! philosophy is that the human race resembles a cancer, which is rapidly devastating the Earth and Her community of life, and leading toward a massive ecological breakdown.”⁸ Foreman similarly proclaimed that “in our decimation of biological diversity, in our production of toxins, in our attack on the basic life-support system of Earth, in our explosive population growth, we humans have become a disease - the Humanpox.”⁹ Watson likewise enjoined his readers to “think of our species as the AIDS of the earth,”¹⁰ elsewhere claiming: “I know who my enemy is. It is me and it is each one of us. It is the human species, this hyper-glorified naked primate..”³⁸⁵ Similar pronouncements abound in the literature of militant ecology.

⁶ Liddick, *Eco-Terrorism*, 3, 21.

⁷ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, xx.

⁸ Pete Dustrud, “Recreating,” *EF! Journal* 2, no. 3 (February 2, 1982), 6.

⁹ Foreman, *Confessions*, 57.

¹⁰ Paul Watson, “On the Precedence of Natural Law,” *Environmental Law and Litigation* 3 (1988), 79-90.

¹¹ Essemli and Watson, *Interview with a Pirate*, 55.

These vocal condemnations of the human race have led some critics to conclude that opposition to anthropocentrism is virtually indistinguishable from misanthropy, and that in order to achieve lasting success the ecology movement must adopt a different tone. In addition to the reformist liberal environmentalists discussed in the previous chapter, for whom human rights will always trump moral concerns about the land, some theorists suggest that a humanistic framework may actually provide a better foundation for ecological politics than the ecocentrism propounded by militant ecologists, with its misanthropic connotations.

This more humanistic approach was taken by Murray Bookchin in his articulation of social ecology. He argued that the “ecocentric versus anthropocentric” dichotomy could be transcended “in an ethics of complementarity, in which human beings - themselves products of natural evolution, with naturally as well as culturally endowed capacities that no other lifeforms possess - can play an actively *creative* role in evolution to the benefit of life generally.”¹² Social ecology can therefore be distinguished from militant ecology by the former’s insistence that ecological politics must be “firmly committed to a clear, coherent set of anticapitalist, democratic, antihierarchical views” with “firm roots in the internationalism of the left and the rational, humanistic, and genuinely egalitarian critique of social oppression that was part of the Enlightenment.”¹³ This insistence that ecological politics must have a certain humanistic social outcome as its ultimate concern (rather than, say, wilderness preservation) is also shared by some variants of eco-socialism: prominent theorist David Pepper accordingly calls for “a radical, socially just, environmentally benign - but fundamentally anthropocentric - perspective on green issues” as an alternative to the mystical, misanthropic, and politically counter-productive biocentrism of militant ecology.¹⁴ This more humanistic orientation is also predominant in the contemporary environmental justice movement, which critiques the elitist, spiritualized, and wilderness-oriented ethos of traditional conservationism (as well as its overwhelmingly white membership) and focuses on environmental issues affecting the poor and communities of color, such as toxic waste exposure, famine, poverty, and occupational health and safety.¹⁵

The case for an ecological humanism rests upon a two key points: the assertion that appeals to social justice will prove more politically viable than a near-misanthropic rejection of human supremacy; and the conviction that working for human welfare also necessarily advances ecological welfare, since the two are in fact indistinguishable.

¹² Bookchin, “The Future of the Ecology Movement,” in *Which Way For the Ecology Movement?*, 3.

¹³ Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism*.

¹⁴ However, he is quick to insist that his eco-socialist anthropocentrism is a “long-term collective anthropocentrism,” rather than the short-term individualist anthropocentrism of neoclassical economics (David Pepper, *Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xi, 31, 222, 233).

¹⁵ See *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*, ed. Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2007).

It is necessary to look closer in order to determine whether these contentions are rooted in reality or are, rather, simply dogmatic assertions popular among the ecological left.

The assumption that a human-centered environmentalism will prove more broadly attractive, while intuitively appealing, seems at least debatable when one considers that even the relatively anthropocentric and commonsensical environmental policies enacted in the United States have incurred such ire from industry and landowners. Given the mainstream environmental movement's broad affiliations with the political left - an association only deepened by its increasing advocacy of left-wing social justice issues - it seems likely that no amount of humanistic rhetoric will ever endear it to its enemies on the corporate or religious right, for whom environmentalism will always be the domain of "watermelons" (green on the outside, red on the inside), "treehuggers" and "eco-terrorists."

Perhaps more importantly, even if anthropocentric environmentalism does indeed attract more supporters than it repels, one can also question whether this new support will actually lead to the preservation of wild nature. Militant ecologists would argue that only a thoroughgoing ecocentrism, which regards the continued flourishing of the wild biosphere as a good in itself and to which human welfare is secondary, is capable of placing hard constraints on human behavior and supporting wide-scale ecological preservation. One might imagine a cornucopian future in which humans have achieved technological sustainability, a massive reduction in waste, a high standard of living, greater health and longevity, and a vast increase in global population - at the cost of transforming most remaining wilderness into residential areas or industrial farms. One might even imagine a virtual reality so advanced that those rare humans who require wilderness or solitude for their mental and spiritual well-being could get their "fix" merely by plugging into a computer ("authenticity" being an elitist concern, after all). Such a society might successfully maximize human welfare, by almost every modern standard, but only at the cost of complete humanization of the biosphere. Unlikely as it may be, this scenario only goes to show that even the most enlightened anthropocentric environmentalism can degenerate into a technocratic nightmare in the absence of any independent concern for the Earth and its wildlife.

Perhaps more significantly, a social focus on human welfare over ecological integrity also obscures the necessary sacrifices that might need to be made in the name of wilderness and wildlife preservation. For instance, the creation of wilderness areas and parks has historically required the relocation of certain human groups and residences, and will sometimes cost jobs when the trees cannot be cut and minerals mined; taking drastic measures to curb population growth, such as those adopted in China, may violate certain human rights as conceived by liberalism. Of course none of these methods are necessarily the most effective means towards an ecological society, and the "jobs vs. the environment" dichotomy is often exaggerated by industry propagandists; but the fact remains that, as DeLuca claims, "If the environmental movement adopts the human-centered perspective of the environmental justice movement, they will be unable to make the hard decisions that increase human suffering, that require putting other

beings and ecosystems, not humans, first.”¹⁶ In short, a more anthropocentric outlook may indeed bring more people on board, but it will probably be for the wrong reasons. Such a perspective would risk turning the militant ecology movement into merely another variant of progressive politics lacking any deep concern for wild nature.

Be that as it may, it is possible that this “humanism versus ecocentrism” dichotomy is indeed be a false one, as Bookchin claimed, though not quite in the way he imagined. Despite their seemingly misanthropic pronouncements, most militant ecologists are deeply concerned with a true and authentic human dwelling on this planet.

Their apparent misanthropy therefore conceals a kind of humanism, one which regards the overcoming of anthropocentrism - and belief in a greater whole transcending humankind alone - as necessary components of a fulfilling human life. As Dave Foreman declared, “My chosen task is to argue the case of non-human nature... Yet this does not mean I hate human beings. It does not follow that I am unmoved by human suffering, economic injustice, imperialism, or abuses of human rights.”¹⁷ More recently, another Earth First! activist has expressed similar reasons for his rejection of anthropocentrism. “I am a misanthrope,” he writes, not because I hate AIDS ridden Africans or the Salvadoran campesino, but because I see my species, myself and my family included, as one that has been permitted to expand far beyond its means for sustainable survival within an intact ecosystem. My misanthropy comes not from an enhanced version of the “man/nature” split. but from the fact that I see the interconnectedness between my race and nature and unfortunately, the horrors that excessive humanity has unleashed on it. I am a misanthrope not because I hate humans individually, but because I hate the culmination of humanity’s imperialism on the natural world. I hate seeing the depravity of underprivileged humans in cities the world over. I hate war. I hate genocide and ethnic cleansing. I hate toxic water and barren hillsides. I am a misanthrope because I love humans as much as coyotes, kitty cats and Pileated woodpeckers and see that the only way for all of the aforementioned to live sustainably is to allow for a drastic decline in the population of the species *Homo sapiens*. I am a misanthrope because I love the Earth and all its inhabitants. I am a misanthrope because I love.¹⁸

Of course, one cannot deny the widespread sentiment within the militant ecology movement that humanity has drastically overstepped its bounds and set itself at odds with the continued flourishing of life on Earth. Nevertheless, many who criticize the movement on these grounds are guilty of what Warwick Fox has called “the fallacy of misplaced misanthropy”: opposition to anthropocentrism and human-centeredness is logically distinct from the hatred of humans *per se*.¹⁹ Although militant ecologists

¹⁶ Deluca, “Wilderness Environmentalism,” in *Environmental Justice*, 34.

¹⁷ Bookchin and Foreman, *Defending the Earth*, 68.

¹⁸ Speckled Ohm Moonbeam and Phil Werrei, “In Defense of Misanthropy,” *EF! Journal* 19, no. 7 (September 30, 1999), 21.

¹⁹ Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1990), 19.

sometimes indulge in misanthropic rhetoric, for the majority of activists this language serves primarily to deflate the oversized human ego and to highlight humanity's disastrous effects on the biosphere, rather than express an actual hatred for humankind. A chief component of their ethical and political project is to combat the exclusive attachment to human welfare that has dominated the philosophy and science of the modern period and to reaffirm humanity's proper role in the natural order. However they understand anthropocentrism, all militant ecologists agree that it is antithetical to a genuine concern for the flourishing of life on Earth and, indeed, to authentic human happiness, fulfillment, and even survival. The normative upshot of this antianthropocentrism is a conviction that humanity must become natural again, a "plain member and citizen" of the biotic community, returning to its proper role in the ecological order, both in order to preserve the integrity of the whole and ensure the genuine well-being of the human species itself.

6.2 "Humans are Animals, Too"

The rejection of anthropocentrism within the militant ecology movement is therefore not premised upon a hatred of humankind, but the conviction that humans are simply animals like any other, with no God-given right to dominate the Earth. All activists would likely agree with Dave Foreman that "human beings are primates, mammals, vertebrates... We *are* Animal."²⁰ This location of humankind firmly within the biosphere rather than above it, viewing humanity as "a plain member and citizen" of the biotic community rather than its lord and master, represents a rejection of humankind's privileged place in the world. It functions to deflate humanity's longtime pretensions to superiority based on its supposedly unique possession of reason or soul, and its self-understanding as a favored creation of God or end point of terrestrial evolution: "Taken seriously," as Christopher Manes writes, "evolution means there is no basis for seeing humans as more advanced or developed than any other species. Homo sapiens is not the goal of evolution, for as near as we can tell evolution has no telos - it simply unfolds, life-form after life-form."²¹ This perception of humans as plain members and citizens is, in other words, an antidote to the pervasive anthropocentrism of modern culture.

However, this seemingly ultra-ecological view of humans as "animals like any other" presents certain problems from a practical perspective. While the common understanding among militant ecologists is that humanity is merely one component of the "web of life" - and therefore has no right to arrogate itself to the role of master of the Earth - this postulate lends itself to more than one interpretation. If humans are simply animals like any other, why should they not alter their environment to suit their every need, as any other animal species presumably would if given the chance? Why not

²⁰ Foreman, *Confessions*, 34.

²¹ Manes, *Green Rage*, 142.

maximize their reproductive fitness by having as many offspring as possible, without regard to the impact on other species or ecosystems? Indeed, why should a city or a nuclear reactor or a space station be seen as any less natural than an anthill or a mountain? From this perspective, as J. Baird Callicott contends,

The cultural works of man are evolutionary phenomena no less than are other massive structures created by living things like, say, coral reefs... And if entirely natural, then the works of man, like those of bees and beavers, in principle *may be*, even if now they are usually not, beneficial - judged by the same objective ecological norms - to the biotic communities which we inhabit.²²

This view that humans are wholly natural products of evolution and therefore capable of contributing to evolution - perhaps even improving upon it - is also a controversial feature of Murray Bookchin's social ecology. Bookchin emphatically rejected the depiction of human works as unnatural, which he associated with Earth First! "eco-brutalists" such as Dave Foreman. He insisted to the contrary that "the ecology movement will get nowhere unless it understands that the human species is no less a product of natural evolution than blue-green algae, whales, and bears."²³ As a product of evolution, humankind is therefore able to "contribute to the diversity, fecundity, and richness of the natural world... more consciously, perhaps, than any other animal" (a position ironically quite similar to the New Age mystics Bookchin attacked so viciously). Thus, while Bookchin's thought was also premised upon an understanding of humans as wholly natural products of evolution - just like his "eco-brutalist" nemeses in Earth First! - the end result of this logic was not humility before nature but rather a *laissez-faire* approach to the human manipulation of nature. As Robyn Eckersley points out, by assigning humans a creative role in fostering natural evolution, Bookchin fails to say where the line should be drawn. Are biotechnology and geoengineering suitable expressions of human evolutionary creativity?²⁴ However, in Bookchin's defense, he acknowledged that this depiction of humans as the "voice of nature" was an ideal, an expression of human *potential* rather than reality. Indeed, he confessed that contemporary human societies are just as likely to "exploit the whole web of life and tear down the planet in a rapturous, cancerous manner."²⁵ In less circumspect hands, however, this faith in the ultimate "naturalness" of any and all forms of human behavior might lend itself to a more sinister conviction that the exploita-

²² J. Baird Callicott, "The Wilderness Idea Revisited: The Sustainable Development Alternative," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 351.

²³ Bookchin and Foreman, *Defending the Earth*, 21.

²⁴ Robyn Eckersley, "Divining Evolution: The Ecological Ethics of Murray Bookchin," in *Social Ecology After Bookchin*, ed. Andrew Light (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), 68, 69.

²⁵ Bookchin and Foreman. *Defending the Earth*, 21, 22.

tion and destruction of wilderness is a wholly natural and acceptable expression of humanity's animal nature.²⁶

This seemingly benign depiction of humans as products of natural evolution like any other might therefore lead down roads few militant ecologists are willing to travel. Ironically, it may serve to rationalize just about anything humans do, simply by virtue of their status as “natural” animals. Whereas humans formerly justified their domination of the Earth on the grounds that they had transcended the inferior realm of mere nature, now they can do so on the grounds that they are simply animals like any other, acting as any other animal would. The greatest flaw in this logic, from an ecocentric perspective, is that it radically understates the qualitatively different nature of human interference in the natural world, and overstates the human capacity to “improve” upon nature: as David Ehrenfeld notes, this latter belief is unwarranted “considering that we have taken a world which was perfectly fit for human life... and turned it into a world that by either rational or emotional criteria is unfit (opulent for some, stressful, inhuman, and lacking peace for nearly all, and offering multiple threats of vast and terrible destruction).”²⁷ As Eileen Crist plaintively notes, it seems more likely that “humanity is not penning another interesting chapter of natural history, but heralding the end of a sublime one.”²⁸

Since understanding humans as animals like any other might lead to such unsavory consequences, perhaps a better foundation for radical activism could be sought in humanity's *uniqueness* among Earth's creatures. At first glance this conception might seem unthinkable to militant ecologists, for whom any expression of human uniqueness (even in the seemingly benign guise of “gardener” or “steward”) is simply another manifestation of the anthropocentrism they reject. In fact, many would argue that it this very belief in humanity's distinction from the rest of nature that has done the greatest ecological harm, due to its historical associations with dualism and indifference to the material world. However, there are important differences between the anthropocentrism of modern thought and the kind of differentiation implicit in the ecocentric outlook.

To illustrate the potential of such a perspective, one might consider Heidegger's later thought concerning the place of humanity in the cosmic scheme. Heidegger rejected the purely naturalistic conception of humanity as the “rational animal” attributed to Aristotle, which - while biologically correct - does not truly get at the essence of what it means to be human.²⁹ This belief in human uniqueness should not be conflated with a belief in human *supremacy*, however. Unlike proponents of narrow humanism, Heideg-

²⁶ David W. Kidner, “The Conceptual Assassination of Wilderness,” in *Keeping the Wild: Against the Domestication of Earth*, ed. George Wuerthner, Eileen Crist, and Tom Butler (Washington: Island Press, 2014), 12.

²⁷ David Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance of Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 143-4.

²⁸ Eileen Crist, “Ptolemaic Environmentalism,” in *Keeping the Wild*, 23.

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 226-7.

ger does not locate humanity's uniqueness in its possession of a soul, or instrumental rationality, or capacity for technological domination. Humanity is not "the lord of beings," and its essence lies not in controlling other beings nor in transforming them into "standing reserve" to be used and manipulated at humanity's convenience, but rather in humankind's potential role as the "shepherd of Being." Heidegger emphasizes that abandoning the narrowly humanistic ethic, which locates humankind's uniqueness in its capacity for rational control and manipulation, does not degrade the human being as his critics feared it would: "Rather, he gains in that he attains the truth of Being. He gains the essential poverty of the shepherd, whose dignity consists in being called by Being itself into the preservation of Being's truth.. ."404 In his admittedly obscure manner, Heidegger thereby points the way to a "higher humanism" that leads beyond the anthropocentric, dualistic humanism of domination and enables authentic ways of dwelling on the Earth. Though this outlook retains a distinction between humankind and the rest of nature that militant ecologists may find unpalatable, it does avoid the pitfalls of previous forms of anthropocentrism built around humanity's rational superiority. Humankind does not exist to dominate the Earth and all beings, but in order to serve that which transcends it. As Charles Taylor comments, "Our goals here are fixed by something we should properly see ourselves as serving. So a proper understanding of our purposes is to take us beyond ourselves."³⁰31

In addition, though the later Heidegger was not particularly concerned with politics or ecological preservation, his ideas of "letting be" rather than technological domination, of "safeguarding" the essence of living beings rather than exploiting them, and of dwelling authentically upon the Earth have frequently been read as expressing a kind of deep ecological sensibility. Behind Heidegger's characteristically abstruse language, it is difficult to read such admonishments without sensing their ecological import: as Bruce Foltz argues, Heidegger's conception of "saving the earth" entails "learning to dwell upon it, to cultivate and tend the earth instead of exploiting it.. ."406 Even if Heidegger was chiefly concerned with the human essence rather than with the rest of life on Earth, and even if he regarded humankind as radically different from other animals, the practical outcome of this outlook should be much the same as that promoted by militant ecologists - a move away from the dominance of manipulative technology and towards openness to the unfolding of life on Earth, wherein lies humanity's highest dignity.

Some theorists affiliated with militant ecological activism have similarly argued that anthropocentrism's negative consequences are not confined to nonhuman nature alone, but also extend to humans themselves, as it rejects what is an "essential and authentic way of being human. an existence that opens itself to nature rather than aggressively reconstructing it according to personal ends." George Sessions asserts that

³⁰ Ibid., 245.

³¹ Charles Taylor, "Heidegger, Language, and Ecology," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 126.

“our abilities to understand and identify with Life on Earth suggest a role primarily as *appreciators* of the biotic exuberance and evolutionary processes on earth, rather than as conquerors, dominators, manipulators, or controllers and ‘business managers’.”³²³³

Though it may grate on the egalitarian sensibilities of militant ecologists, this more unique perspective on humankind improves upon the “plain member and citizen” notion in acknowledging a basic difference between humankind and the rest of earthly life - in *role* if not in dignity.

In short, rather than the understanding of humankind as an “animal like any other” so often propounded by militant ecologists (and, ironically, by their opponents who would use it to justify all manner of ecological exploitation), perhaps the more distinctive image of humanity as an appreciator, observer, or guardian of the Earth may be more conducive to the protection of wild nature. This would entail a rejection of the narrowly anthropocentric understanding of humans as masters of the Earth, to use its resources however they see fit; but it would also take account of the qualitatively different effects of human activities - and, by the same token, the depths of human responsibilities - relative to the rest of known animal life.

6.3 The Ecological Vanguard

This revised perception of humankind is therefore likely to be more conducive to ecocentric outcomes than either the anthropocentric environmentalism propounded by certain liberal theorists or the depiction of humans as “plain members and citizens” and “animals like any other” that is popular among militant ecology circles. Moreover, their rejection of humanity’s unique role in the natural world is belied by the very existence of militant ecology itself, which calls upon certain humans to behave as no other animals are known to do, to “defend Mother Earth” or show “solidarity with the oppressed” in ways that extend far beyond any kind of individual or group evolutionary advantage. Thus, militant ecologists do seem to admit by their very activism that certain humans *can* strive to become guardians of life on Earth. This is the essence of the ecological vanguard.

Militant ecologists vary in how they understand their role. Activists sometimes envision themselves as the spiritual remnants of primordial human race, striving to free the Earth from a human domination dating back to the beginnings of agriculture.³⁴

³² Bruce V. Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature* (Atlantic Highlands NJ, Humanities Press International, 1995), 15.

³³ George Sessions, “Arne Naess and the Union of Theory and Practice,” in *Deep Ecology Movement*, 56.

³⁴ Bron Taylor describes a common myth acted out at EF! gatherings: after the enslavement of primal humans by agriculturalists and corporate elites, “A group of feral humans, led by children waving monkeywrenches (the archetypal sabotage symbol) rise up in rebellion. Empowered by the earth’s sacred energy, they dismantle the oppressive regime and bring back to life all repressed creatures, restoring harmonious lifeways on earth” (Bron Taylor, “Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality (Part II),” 228).

Some activists identify themselves with the elves of European lore, drawing upon pre-Christian folklore as well as Tolkien's mythology, siding with the forests and rivers against a degraded humankind.³⁵ Employing an organismic analogy to describe their task, other activists describe themselves as the "antibodies" or "white blood cells" of the Earth.³⁶ Dave Foreman gets the award for creativity with his suggestion of a "wilderness gene," possibly derived from Neanderthal interbreeding with Cro-Magnons in the Middle Paleolithic.

As the Humanpox has metastasized from a simple, uncomfortable, localized skin rash to a systemic life-threat, Gaia has reached into the disease itself for antibodies. That long-buried Neanderthal gene has been pulled to the surface, and in grim retribution for the slaughter of Neanderthals by modern humans (Cro-Magnons), a new race of Neanderthals, humans who love the wild, whose primary loyalty is to Earth and not to *Homo sapiens*, have been born, and they will fight like antibodies and phagocytes for the wild, for the precious native diversity of our planet.³⁷

Some activists simply see themselves as a cadre of particularly dedicated individuals fighting for the wilderness, after the manner of Leopold's people "who cannot live without wild things," Bob Marshall's "spirited people who will fight for the freedom of the wilderness," and Ed Abbey's "monkeywrench gang."³⁸

Further distinctions concerning the composition and role of the ecological vanguard will be discussed in chapter thirteen, with ecowarriors understanding it as a spiritually elite cadre of warriors and total liberationists as a mass movement standing in solidarity with the oppressed of the Earth. Despite these differences, the very admission that such a vanguard exists and is capable of surmounting its all-too-human attachments would seem to belie the more unrelentingly misanthropic sentiments within the movement, as well as the contention that humankind is simply an animal like any other.

6.4 Conclusion

One object of this chapter has been to demonstrate that, misanthropic rhetoric to the contrary, militant ecologists are not motivated primarily by a hatred for the human race but rather by a love for the Earth and its life. Nevertheless, they all agree that humanity is responsible for the present degradation of the biosphere. For this reason,

³⁵ This was particularly the case among British ELF activists ("elves"), who strongly identified with Celtic figures, pre-Christian British culture and mythology, and the mythic creations of J.R.R. Tolkien (Davey Garley, "To Cast a Giant Shadow," in *Igniting a Revolution*," 66.

³⁶ Screaming Wolf, *A Declaration of War: Killing People to Save Animals and the Environment* (Grass Valley, CA: Patrick Henry Press, 1991) http://www.animalliberationfront.com/Philosophy/Legal/declaration%20of%20war_files/declaration%20of%20war.htm#chap%203.

³⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 58.

³⁸ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, xvii; Bob Marshall, "The Problem of the Wilderness," *Scientific Monthly* 30 (February 1930), 141-8; Edward Abbey, *The Monkeywrench Gang* (New York: Avon Books, 1975).

despite the desire of some environmental political theorists to embrace a more anthropocentric approach to ecological politics, it seems likely that the non- anthropocentric outlook of militant ecology provides a more solid foundation for wilderness and wildlife preservation - the central concerns of a truly ecocentric outlook - as well as a bracing corrective to the pervasive anthropocentrism of modernity. However, the deflationary view of humans as “animals like any other” may backfire on activists, since in certain hands it could serve to justify virtually anything humans do. A more distinctive view of humankind, which re-envision humanity as a guardian and appreciator of life on Earth, might prove more conducive to ecocentric outcomes, and is in fact more compatible with the perception of the ecological vanguard present within the movement itself. Indeed, it may be even more dangerous from an ecological perspective to treat humans as simply one animal among others, since this denies the unique position of humankind on Earth and would seem to place the needs and activities of human beings on par with those of the greater whole.

Ultimately, even if militant ecologists do not recognize the supremacy of abstract human rights over ecological realities, they nevertheless retain a strong idea of human *dignity* - a dignity that comes from accepting humanity’s place in the cosmos, not as overlords or managers, but as appreciators of the beauty of the Earth. In this respect, true human welfare is served not by the counterfeit humanism of the modern world, but rather by a recognition of humanity’s true role as observer and guardian, in service to something greater than itself. Even from a purely anthropocentric perspective, it is likely that far more lives would be lost to a short-sighted humanitarianism that prioritizes human welfare over ecological integrity than to even the most misanthropic forms of ecocentrism. Anti-anthropocentrism may well be the truest form of humanism.

7. Ecowarriors and Total Liberationists

So far, this study has focused upon the general philosophical principles of the militant ecology movement, those which can more or less be attributed to all who fight under its banner. This enabled a more direct comparison of militant ecology with other contemporary schools of green political thought, concluding that - by virtue of its thoroughgoing ecocentrism and commitment to effective action in defense of ecological integrity - militant ecology offers a unique and valuable perspective on environmental politics within the American scene. However, the movement is by no mean monolithic. All militant ecologists are, by definition, opposed to the anthropocentric and ecologically destructive paradigm of the modern world, and uphold an ecocentric outlook as the only viable alternative. However, starting from the same basic ecocentric premises, considerable differences have developed within the movement concerning their meaning and political applications. Though strategic and demographic differences exist as well, given the chiefly theoretical focus of this study, the most significant division discussed here concerns their contrasting interpretations of ecocentrism and the flaws of the modern world.¹

All agree that modernity is, in some sense, unnatural. For one camp, the “ecowarriors,” the fundamental failing of modernity is its contravention of the *natural order*, elevating humanity above its rightful place on Earth, denying ecological limits and instituting a reign of artifice and destruction in its stead. For the “total liberationist” wing, the fundamental flaw of modernity is rather its denial of the *natural equality* of all living things, giving rise to regimentation, hierarchy, and oppressive systems in place of the freedom and spontaneity of wild nature. Ecowarriors therefore understand ecocentrism as a religious calling to uphold the natural order and its laws that the modern world has shamelessly flouted, while total liberationists emphasize its message of natural equality and freedom for all living beings, demanding a struggle against the oppressive hierarchies and ideologies of modernity. Their goals overlap at many points, but differences concerning these basic goals have given rise to several disagreements within the movement. Indeed, as the following discussion will show, despite their shared commitment to the principles of militant ecocentrism, they differ so greatly in their

¹ Another important disagreement that cuts across both ends of the spectrum is strategic, concerning not so much the meaning of ecocentrism but rather the most effective means of achieving a future primitive society. These significant differences, which ultimately reflect tactical rather than ideological disagreements, are discussed in chapter thirteen.

understanding of them as to constitute two wholly separate tendencies within militant ecology.

This distinction may appear redundant or simplistic, given that the environmental movement has already been dissected and dichotomized too many times to mention: conservation versus preservation,² shallow versus deep ecology,³ environmentalism versus ecology,⁴ progressivism versus ecofascism,⁵ rural nostalgia versus scientific ecology,⁶ apocalypticism versus millenarianism,⁷ deep versus social ecology,⁸ and ecological holism versus animal rights,⁹ to name only a few. All of these distinctions have some truth to them, but the categorization adopted here differs for a number of reasons. Most obviously, since this study deals specifically with *militant* ecology groups, many of these aforementioned conflicts of principle simply do not apply - all are, in theory, opposed to anthropocentrism, reformism, and a managerial stance towards nature.

From the perspective of militant ecology, some of these previous distinctions are more apt than others. The *biocentrism versus social justice* dichotomy, which classifies radical activists depending upon whether their concern is chiefly with ecological problems or with human welfare issues, was suggested by some Earth First!ers as well as historian Martha Lee as the reason for that group's acrimonious split in 1990.¹⁰ However, while partially correct, this distinction does not tell the whole story. As this chapter demonstrates, *both* camps are ecocentric in orientation and also (for that very reason) concerned with some version of justice, though their conceptions of it differ widely. Bron Taylor's more subtle *holies versus wilders* distinction, which di-

² This distinction dates back to the very beginnings of American nature protection, with the more utilitarian conservationist tendency typified by U.S. Forestry Chief Gifford Pinchot, and the more spiritual- aesthetic preservationist current represented by nature writer John Muir. For a discussion, see Stephen Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981).

³ A distinction between the reformist, anthropocentric shallow ecology and a "deeper" ecology that acknowledges the intrinsic value of all life was famously made by Arne Naess in "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement," *Inquiry* 16 (1973), 95-100.

⁴ Murray Bookchin contrasted ecology, which questions the human domination of nature, with more technocratic environmentalism, which "seeks to *facilitate* [human domination] by developing techniques for diminishing the hazards caused by the reckless despoliation of the environment" (*The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto: Cheshire Books, 1982), 21.

⁵ A distinction explored by Michael Zimmerman in "The Threat of Ecofascism;" see also Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism*.

⁶ A contrast between ruralism, imbued with nostalgia for pre-industrial times, and a more progressive, urban scientific environmentalism is drawn by Avner de-Shalit, "Ruralism or Environmentalism?" *Environmental Values* 5, no. 1 (February 1996), 47-58.

⁷ A schism within Earth First! described by Martha F. Lee in *Earth First! Environmental Apocalypse*.

⁸ Murray Bookchin paints this contrast, with great vigor, in "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology."

⁹ For a perceptive analysis of this debate, see J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980), 311-328.

¹⁰ See Dave Foreman and Nancy Morton, "Good Luck, Darlin', It's Been Great," in *The Earth First Reader*, 263; Lee, *Earth First! Environmental Apocalypse*.

vides the movement between those who believe wilderness protection is of paramount importance and those who believe a more “holistic” socio-political approach to the contemporary ecological crisis is required,¹¹ is closer to the mark. However, it does not adequately capture the fact that, despite differences of emphasis, *all* militant ecologists are “holistic” in acknowledging the interplay of social and ecological problems. They differ only in their opinions concerning what aspects of modern society need to be changed. The ecowarrior/total liberationist distinction contains and goes beyond these previous dichotomies, recognizing that the ultimate source of contention among militant ecologists is their understanding of the true meaning of ecocentrism and the failings of modernity.

It is necessary to reiterate that this distinction refers to theoretical tendencies that cut across the movement *as a whole*, based around different interpretations of ecocentrism, and therefore cannot be attributed to particular groups. Indeed, given that these are obviously ideal types, not every activist is going to fit into the mold described here - some activists may be less interested in ideological consistency and mix the views of both camps; others may simply be single-issue activists who do not tie their activism to a broader social vision. However, as the following will demonstrate, such activists are likely in the minority, and this divide has been a pivotal feature of the movement’s history and development over the past four decades.

7.1 Ecowarriors: Defending the Natural Order

Ecowarriors understand ecocentrism as a moral and religious commitment to uphold the natural order against human greed and ignorance. Though the principal object of defense is generally depicted as unspoiled wilderness and endangered wildlife, this commitment goes much further in its social implications. Ecowarriors conceive of the cosmos as an ordered whole in which all beings, including humanity, occupy their rightful niche, adhering to the laws of nature and recognizing ecological limits. Their greatest objection to modernity is that, with its mechanistic science, pervasive technology, and anthropocentric political and economic ideologies, it has contravened the natural order by elevating humans above their rightful place on Earth and freeing them from the laws of nature. Indeed, this is the primary reason behind the ecowarrior’s rejection of anthropocentrism. While total liberationists view it as a form of “speciesism,” on par with other forms of hierarchy and oppression, ecowarriors regard anthropocentrism as qualitatively different from all others, the *primary* cause of environmental degradation rather than simply one cause among many. Christopher Manes, in a discussion of the deep ecology philosophy that inspired Earth First! in its early days, tellingly describes anthropocentrism as “the *root* of our troubled relationship with nature [emphasis added].”¹² In short, ecowarriors find anthropocentrism objectionable not so much

¹¹ Bron Taylor, “The Religion and Politics of Earth First!” 258-266.

¹² Manes, *Green Rage*, 142.

because it is “oppressive” but because it is *hubristic* - humankind’s arrogant attempt to rise above its proper place in the natural order.

Since humanity is uniquely capable of disregarding the laws of nature, in this understanding of ecocentrism it is wild, uncultivated nature that is upheld as the purest and most authentic expression of the natural order and prioritized over humanized landscapes or domesticated animals. Foreman accordingly speaks of “humans who love the wild, whose primary loyalty is to Earth and not to *Homo sapiens*, [who] will fight like antibodies and phagocytes for the wild, for the precious native diversity of our planet.”¹³ Such individuals will prioritize the preservation of wilderness and wildlife, since they understand that “wilderness is the real world... the natural world, the arena for evolution, the caldron from which humans emerged, the home of the others with whom we share this planet.”¹⁴ This is not to deny the importance of other social issues, since “ecology teaches us that all things are connected, and in this regard other matters become subsets of wilderness preservation.” However, it does mean that all such issues are secondary to the preservation of wild nature. Consequently, as an early EF! statement of principles reads, “The only true test of morality is whether an action, individual, social, or political, benefits Earth.”¹⁵

In addition, due to their greater concern with wilderness preservation, and the fact that many of the early ecowarriors were dissidents from mainstream conservation organizations, this camp tends to be more strongly influenced by the biological sciences than their counterparts. In addition to Paul Watson’s aforementioned pledge of allegiance to physical and ecological laws,¹⁶ Foreman also expressed a belief that “an Earthcompatible lifestyle must be grounded on the solid bedrock of a worldview in harmony with ecological law.”¹⁷ The early years of EF! and SSCS, which were the heyday of ecowarrior activism, were also for that reason the most scientifically-grounded years of the movement, concerned with applying ecological and biological principles to the preservation and restoration of vast tracts of wilderness. This reliance upon science may seem to contradict their counter-modern orientation. However, ecowarriors are ultimately concerned with effective action and, given their focus upon the natural world over the human one, tend to regard the sciences such as ecology and conservation biology (whatever their flaws) as the best means of preserving wild nature.

Though informed by science, the ecowarrior’s conception of natural order is also strongly molded by the holistic metaphysical tradition discussed in chapter four. However, while total liberation tends to follow deep ecology in interpreting the ultimate normative import of ecocentrism to be a kind of “biospheric egalitarianism,” whereby all species and beings are fundamentally equal in worth (including humankind), ecowarriors do not generally accept these premises. Ecowarriors understand nature as an

¹³ Foreman, *Confessions*, 58.

¹⁴ Foreman, “Whither Earth First!?” *EF! Journal* 8, no. 1 (November 1987), 20-21.

¹⁵ Lee, *Earth First!*, 39.

¹⁶ Watson, “On the Precedence of Natural Law,” 79.

¹⁷ Dave Foreman, “Nonviolence?” *EF! Journal* 3, no. 7 (September 23, 1983), 11.

ordered hierarchy in which the ultimate significance of a species depends upon its role in the ecosystem: as Foreman writes, “A Grizzly Bear snuffing along Pelican Creek in Yellowstone National Park with her two cubs has just as much right to life as any human has, and is far more important ecologically.”¹⁸ This is because, while total liberation tends to place the welfare of the individual on par with the integrity of the whole, for ecowarriors the good of the whole is absolutely paramount. This fixation upon ecological integrity betrays the greater influence of Aldo Leopold’s holistic land ethic within the ecowarrior camp. It should therefore come as no surprise that Leopold’s writings were enormously influential in the early days of Earth First!. Mike Roselle claims that, along with Edward Abbey and Henry David Thoreau, Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac* was required reading for all activists, and Foreman once described their organization as “a fundamentalist revival, an attempt to get back to the roots of Muir, Leopold, [Bob] Marshall. To say that wilderness has a right to exist for its own sake.”¹⁹²⁰

In keeping with this ruthless ecological holism, ecowarriors take the mantra that “nature knows best” to harsher extremes than their counterparts. Foreman accordingly described his outlook as “naturalistic, believing that nature knows best, going beyond good and evil to simply letting being be..”⁴³² As Alan R. Drengson explains, militant ecologists, like their pagan forebears, accept the world “and try to align themselves with it. Nature is already perfect as it is.”²¹ Of course, humanistic ethicists often point to the existence of predation, disease, death and suffering to argue against this proposition, claiming that “nature” is simply the name that humans bestow upon a blind and random collection of elements and processes, possessing neither integrity nor sanctity.²² However, ecowarriors deny this modernist presumption. In response to a letter from one activist who insisted that “nature is not perfect” and argued in favor of a more individually-focused environmental ethic,²³ Reed Noss replied that such a view betrayed a profound ignorance of ecology. He went further, claiming that such sentimental objections to the holistic ethic were generally put forth by “urbanites with little experience in the wilderness,” deeming such misguided activists as “counterproductive to conservation because they distract attention away from critical issues like habitat destruction, vanishing wilderness, and species extinction.”²⁴ Dave Foreman likewise dismissed suggestions that “nature is not perfect” as “hogwash” that had no place in Earth First!.²⁵ This brutally holistic perspective renders ecowarriors more generally averse to

¹⁸ Foreman, *Confessions*, 4.

¹⁹ Mike Roselle with Josh Mahan, *Tree Spiker*, 41..

²⁰ Foreman/“Chim Blea,” “Individualism and Ecology,” 21.

²¹ Drengson, “Paganism, Nature, and Deep Ecology,” 19-20.

²² : “The sacralization of nature is *intrinsically* untenable,” as Luc Ferry claims (Ferry, *New Ecological Order*, 133).

²³ Ron Baker, “Dear SFB,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 3 (February 2, 1986), 3.

²⁴ Reed Noss, “Dear SFB,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 4 (March 20, 1986), 3.

²⁵ Wintry Sylvan. “Dear SFB.” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 5 (May 1, 1986), 3.

animal rights, and has even led some to celebrate incidents of famine and epidemics as means of “nature finding a balance,” which will be discussed at greater length in chapter twelve.

This variant of militant ecology therefore explicitly deemphasizes human welfare, the struggle for more egalitarian social arrangements, and indeed the whole emancipatory heritage of the Enlightenment, believing these to be secondary to the preservation of wild nature and the evolutionary processes that give order to life on Earth. Ecowarriors, in fact, tend to have a rather more pessimistic view of the human species than their counterparts, viewing ecological devastation as the work not of a few particularly destructive groups or socio-economic systems, but rather as a consequence of some flaw in human nature itself.

This raises the obvious question: what *is* the role of humankind in the natural order? Given their greater propensity to misanthropy, critics, including their total liberationist counterparts, sometimes accuse ecowarriors of perpetuating the very dualism between humanity and nature that ecology was meant to overcome.²⁶ However, while it might seem that ecowarriors regard humans as *ontologically* different from the rest of creation, metaphysically transcending the animal state, they do not go so far in their claims. Ecowarriors cannot deny that humans are obviously “natural” beings in a biological sense, since humans “no doubt evolved and flourished as part of the natural world,” as one activist points out. Indeed, even in their opportunistic reproduction and frantic avoidance of death humans are simply behaving as any other species would, given the chance. However, “they have now stepped outside the bounds of what is ‘natural’... humans no longer contribute to the balance and cycles of the Earth. We have tipped it, and we have been slowly tipping it farther and farther over the past 10,000 years.”²⁷

The question, of course, is how this alienation came to pass. Ecowarriors often express a belief that at some point in their evolutionary history, humans developed a selfconsciousness and calculative intelligence that set them apart from the rest of earthly life, giving them desires shared by no other known animal as well as unnaturally efficient means of attaining them. “Something happened to make humans different from almost all other animals,” as George Wuerthner muses; “We substituted cultural flexibility and technological innovation for biological evolution.”²⁸ In this ecological version of “the Fall of Man,” the emergence of rationality and self-consciousness precipitated humanity’s alienation from the natural order as well as its own primordial wholeness. Humans began substituting their own conscious will for the physical and ecological processes that had previously governed evolution, and for this reason, as Foreman once exclaimed, “Our fall was our ‘emergence out of the natural order.’”²⁹

²⁶ Bron Taylor, “Deep Ecology and its Social Philosophy,” in *Beneath the Surface*, 276.

²⁷ KAT, “Dear Shit Fer Brains,” *EF! Journal* 30, no. 2 (January/February 2010), 4-5.

²⁸ George Wuerthner, “An Ecological View of the Indian,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 7 (August 1, 1987), 20.

²⁹ Quoted in Bron Taylor, “Deep Ecology and Its Social Philosophy: A Critique,” in *Beneath the Surface*, 298, fn. 65.

This disastrous consequences of this alienation from the natural order extend beyond the human psyche. As R.F. Mueller contends, it has also imperiled the biosphere itself, which “is threatened when any species becomes dominant and attempts to exert its own form of order... In the case of our species, this usurpation, acting through both excessive numbers and high energy technology, creates disorder of the type that clashes with natural order.”³⁰ Thus, it is not so much an *ontological* difference between humankind and the rest of nature but, rather, the evolutionary development of reflexive self-consciousness, abstract thought, instrumental rationality, the domestication of plants and animals, and transmissible culture that has enabled humanity to step outside the natural order. While primordial hunter-gatherers presumably lacked either the means or (perhaps) the desire to inflict massive ecological damage, at some point - generally located at the dawn of the Neolithic - human culture changed. Rather than a metaphysical transcendence of nature, this alienation might be better understood as a “temporary divorce,” enabled by advances in agriculture, social organization, medicine and industry that allowed humans to escape most natural checks on their numbers and activities.³¹

Though reluctant to posit a strict metaphysical divide between humanity and the rest of earthly life, then, ecowarriors nevertheless convey a sense of human alienation from the natural order, one which justifies their occasional forays into a more thoroughgoing misanthropy. The ultimate root of anti-anthropocentrism among ecowarriors is their belief that humans are no longer behaving in a harmony with continued speciation, evolution, and the ecological processes that give order to life on Earth - no longer behaving, in other words, “naturally.” Unlike the “plain member and citizen” story, this perception of humanity’s fundamental *unnaturalness* gives much stronger grounds for treating humans as a kind of evolutionary aberration, whose flawed nature has led inexorably to the modern ecological crisis. This point of view is the source of some of the more notoriously misanthropic statements recounted in the previous chapter, as well as the ecowarrior’s focus on wilderness and wildlife and general indifference to broader humanitarian concerns.

In attempting to define this overall tendency, which is quite unique even by the standards of radical politics, a few other labels were considered. This orientation may be deemed *conservative*, since many of the more wilderness-oriented activists like to claim with Paul Watson that “all conservationists are conservative in the strictest sense of the term. Our goal is to conserve the ecological status quo.”³² In their preference for the natural order over natural equality or ending oppression, ecowarriors might well be regarded as the “right wing” of militant ecology, though crossovers with the political right in America are almost nonexistent. Indeed, politically speaking, their opposition to modernity goes far beyond even the most reactionary of conservatives. Their hostility

³⁰ R.F. Mueller, “Of Pipedreams, Science and the Wilderness,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 3 (February 2, 1987), 27.

³¹ Dave Foreman, “Wilderness Areas for Real,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 404.

³² Essemalali and Watson, *Interview*, 43-4.

to the alliance of neoliberals and religious fundamentalists that passes for conservatism in the United States is perhaps too obvious to mention, but ecowarriors also differ from more traditionalist conservatives in their focus on wild nature over human culture, their pragmatic reliance on science, and the extremism of their political approach.³³ They are perhaps best understood, David Wells suggests, as “ideational conservatives” but “situational radicals.”³⁴

Ecowarriors, in short, often regard themselves as knights of a chivalric order with a sworn duty to defend Earth and the natural order against the ravages of humankind. This tendency is most marked among the founders and early members of Earth First! and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, as well as some of the more misanthropic anarcho-primitivists within the underground. It is exemplified by the motto of the early Earth First! activists, “No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth.” Though constituting a minority within the contemporary movement, ecowarriors gained a disproportionate degree of attention in the early years of militant ecology due to the presence of vocal movement leaders and theorists among their ranks, as well as the audacity and controversial nature of their views.

7.2 Total Liberationists: Restoring Natural Equality

In the opposite camp is the ecology of *total liberation*. While the cardinal value for ecowarriors might be understood to be natural order, for the total liberationist it is natural equality. Total liberationists seek to restore the natural equality that has been stifled by the oppressive structures of modernity - hierarchy, racism, patriarchy, technologism, speciesism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, statism, fascism, white privilege, and industrial capitalism, to name only a few - by ending the exploitation and oppression of all life on Earth. Total liberationists believe that ecocentrism demands a struggle against the domination of any living being, including other species. As one green anarchist author puts it, “Green anarchists... extend ideas of non-domination to all life, not just human life.”³⁵

These different understandings of ecocentrism can also be traced back to their primary intellectual influences, with ecowarriors more informed by the holistic land ethic of Aldo Leopold, and total liberationists by the biospheric egalitarianism of deep ecology. Total liberationists often take issue with the seemingly totalitarian implications

³³ For an insightful discussion of these parallels, see Bruce Pilbeam, “Natural Allies? Mapping the Relationship between Conservatism and Environmentalism,” *Political Studies* 51 (2003), 490-508.

³⁴ David Wells, “Radicalism, Conservatism and Environmentalism,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 2 (1978), 299.

³⁵ Green Anarchy Collective, “What is Green Anarchy? An Introduction to Anti-Civilization Anarchist Thought and Practice,” *Back to Basics 4: What is Rewilding?* (2004), 6.

<http://greenanarchy.anarchyplanet.org/2013/09/05/back-to-basics/>

of the land ethic, which prioritizes species that contribute most to the maintenance of the biological community and does not categorically condemn hunting and meat consumption by humans. As Faith Walker and Roxane George wrote in 2000, “Fuck Aldo Leopold... [the land ethic is] just a fancy way of saying he makes it seem cool to kill as many beautiful, wild free critters as you want as long as there’s more where that came from.”³⁶ Even if this was written in jest, it nicely captures the hostility among total liberationists towards the ecosystemic hierarchy and ruthless holism of the ecowarriors, which prioritizes wild species and natural processes over human environments and artifacts.

By contrast, total liberationists tend to subscribe to the biospheric egalitarianism of deep ecology, which (in principle) attributes as much intrinsic worth to humans and domestic animals as to wild nature. Of course, the concept of biospheric egalitarianism has been criticized by ethicists for creating intractable dilemmas: if everything is equal and intrinsically valuable, how can death and predation in the natural world be justified, let alone the kinds of exploitation necessary to human survival?³⁷ Deep ecologists have responded by claiming that, rather than an absolute equality of individuals, biospheric egalitarianism connotes a relative equality in worth between humankind and other species.³⁸ This interpretation of ecocentrism accordingly makes much more room for human welfare concerns. Indeed, since the oppression of nature and humanity are believed to go hand-in-hand - “all oppression is linked” is the common refrain - a total liberation approach is the only means to achieve the emancipation of both.³⁹ While total liberationist ecology remains adamant in its refusal to elevate humankind over the rest of nature, it does shy away from the more overtly misanthropic pronouncements of its counterpart, as well as the latter’s hierarchical focus on ecosystem function and antipathy to animal rights.

As a result of their divergent understandings of ecocentrism, ecowarriors and total liberationists also conceive of anthropocentrism differently. Total liberationists usually envision anthropocentrism as a form of “speciesism,” which former ALF activist Peter Young defines as “a foundational belief system maintaining humankind’s position over life on earth” and “a prejudice in every way analogous to sexism, racism, and every social

³⁶ “20th Anniversary Definitive Millennium Round River Rendezvous Article,” *EF! Journal* 21, no. 1 (November 1, 2000), 40).

³⁷ Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 55.

³⁸ Quoted in Salleh, “Class, Race, and Gender Discourse in the Ecofeminism/Deep Ecology Debate,” *Environmental Ethics* 15, no. 3 (1993), 226.

³⁹ This view is traceable to the Frankfurt School, and became an important postulate of left-wing ecological thought through the writings of Murray Bookchin: “Social domination, particularly hierarchy as well as class exploitation, has given rise to all the religious, moral, and philosophical justifications for the domination of nature, the destruction of wildlife, and the destruction of human life. Every ecological problem that we face today apart from those caused by nature itself has its roots in social problems” (Murray Bookchin, “Yes! - Whither Earth First?” *Green Perspectives* 10 (1987), <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-yes-whither-earth-first>).

inequity of our time.”⁴⁰ This aligns closely with the total liberationist belief concerning the linkage of all oppression, thus making speciesism simply one among many forms of oppression in contemporary society. For ecowarriors, by contrast, anthropocentrism is qualitatively different from other forms of systematic discrimination, and is the *primary* source of environmental degradation rather than simply one cause among many. Thus, while ecowarriors oppose anthropocentrism primarily for its hubristic assumption that humanity can rise above its place in the natural order, total liberationist charges of “speciesism” entail a rejection of *all* forms of hierarchy and domination.

In light of their egalitarianism, total liberationists hold a less pessimistic view of human nature and have vehemently denounced the perceived misanthropy of their ecowarrior compatriots. One reason for this, which will be discussed at greater length in chapter twelve, is that they do not agree that humankind as a whole is responsible for ecological devastation, attaching responsibility to a few select human groups and socioeconomic systems instead. They also fear that blanket condemnations of the human race might hamper their efforts at cross-cultural organizing: as Gerrard Winstanley opines, “Misanthropy is the ‘white guilt’ of radical ecology. While it may reflect a deep and legitimate frustration with the human species, it is not helpful or beneficial for the goal of creating a holistic resistance movement that will take on industrial civilization..”⁴¹

On a more philosophical level, total liberationists reject misanthropy because they simply do not believe that humans actually are “unnatural” or alienated from nature. Total liberationists maintain that contemporary problems stem not from some defect in human nature but rather from an oppressive system of domestication. “We may be tempted to feel ashamed of ourselves for being a part of the human species, and to feel guilty for our complicity,” as Jesse Wolf Hardin writes; “But wild and rewilded humans are an integral part of the biological fabric. The problem is not the nature of humanity, but the abrogation of our true human nature.”⁴² Writing in *Live Wild or Die*, Mike Jakubal likewise critiques the ecowarrior’s misanthropic understanding of ecocentrism for supposing that humans are irredeemably estranged from nature, insisting that “humans are not separate from nature... Our human nature is our wild, free animal instincts and subjectivity.”⁴³ He even goes so far as to deny that “anthropocentrism,” properly understood, is actually the cause of the modern ecological crisis: the oppressive modern paradigm is not truly *human-centered* at all, “not done to meet human needs, not done as a result of the fulfillment of wild human desires.” Other total liberationists have made similar pronouncements, declaring that “humanity is a part of nature,”

⁴⁰ Peter Young, “The Master Race Revolutionary: Deck Chairs, Sinking Ships, and the Human Reich,” in *This Country Must Change*, 94.

⁴¹ Gerrard Winstanley, “Evolving Earth First!,” *EF! Journal* 26, no. 6 (September/October 2006), 34-5.

⁴² Jesse Wolf Hardin, “The Re Wilding: Roots of the Term, Primal Perception and Personal action,” *EF! Journal* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2011), 81-83.

⁴³ Mike Jakubal, “Biocentrism: Ideology Against Nature,” *Live Wild or Die* 1 (1989), 10.

that “it is our social systems that create the problem, not the fact that we exist,” that “misanthropy is a manifestation of the nature/human split” and that “one cannot be earth-centered and yet hate one’s own species.”⁴⁴ In the total liberationist view, humankind is not some inherently flawed evolutionary aberration but truly a wild, natural animal like any other, and the aim of their activism is therefore to restore the wildness, spontaneity, and natural freedom of all of Earth’s creatures - humans included.

While sharing some of its counterpart’s roots in deep ecology and romantic primitivism, the ideology of total liberation draws more upon classical Marxism, utopian socialism, the Frankfurt School, the sixties counter-culture, critical race theory, feminism, and the peace and civil rights movements. Their philosophy also owes much to ecofeminism, Murray Bookchin’s social ecology, and theories of “intersectionality” that have been influential among the radical left.⁴⁵ Perhaps for this reason, total liberation might seem to be more easily identifiable on the traditional political spectrum than its counterpart, as the ecological arm of the New Left. In some ways, indeed, total liberationists offer a critique of the mainstream left in the name of its own stated principles, with green anarchists in particular claiming that the centralizing, anthropocentric, and technocratic tendencies of historical leftist ideology contradict its purported commitment to egalitarianism and non-domination.⁴⁶ This camp might therefore be thought of as the “left wing” of the militant ecology movement, given its emphasis on equality and non-domination. However, it would be a mistake to treat this variant of militant ecology as merely a “newer, greener” left, since it rejects the preoccupation with human welfare and material progress that characterize most historical leftist movements, extending its concern to nonhuman life and adopting a more skeptical attitude towards progress and technology.

In contrast to the martial orientation of the ecowarriors, total liberationists think of themselves as allies standing in solidarity with the oppressed of all species. This tendency gained a foothold among the California Earth First! outfits of the nineties, which were strongly influenced by Judi Bari’s syndicalism and Bookchin’s social ecology. Since then it appears to have become the dominant outlook throughout the move-

⁴⁴ Jim Page, “Tieing the Knot: Hug a Racist, Save a Whale - An Opinion,” *EF! Journal* 19, no. 4 (April 30, 1999), 6; Anne Peterman, “Tales of a Recovering Misanthrope,” *EF! Journal* 19, no. 6 (July 31, 1999), 3.

⁴⁵ For an alternate laundry list of influences, the Green Anarchy Collective traces the roots of green anarchism to “anarchists, primitivists, Luddites, insurrectionalists, Situationists, surrealists, nihilists, deep ecologists, bioregionalists, eco-feminists, various indigenous cultures, anti-colonial struggles, the feral, the wild, and the earth” (Green Anarchy Collective, “What is Green Anarchy?” 6).

⁴⁶ See this discussion by The Green Anarchy Collective: “Not only has the Left proven itself to be a monumental failure in its objectives, but it is obvious from its history, contemporary practice, and ideological framework, that the Left (while presenting itself as altruistic and promoting ‘freedom’) is actually the antithesis of liberation. The Left has never fundamentally questioned technology, production, organization, representation, alienation, authoritarianism, morality, or Progress, and it has almost nothing to say about ecology, autonomy, or the individual on any meaningful level” (Ibid., 5).

ment, particularly in Earth First! and among the underground. The attitude is ably summarized by Molly Jane in the *Earth First! Journal*: “Biocentrism + Deep Ecology + Anti-Oppression + Solidarity = Eco-Liberation!”⁴⁷ Rather than working to uphold a natural order that has been flaunted by modernity, these militant ecologists believe that a continual struggle is necessary in order to transcend modernity and extend the emancipatory ideal of natural equality to all of life on Earth.

7.3 Conclusion

The foregoing survey of the fundamental philosophical principles of militant ecology has hopefully served to counteract certain pervasive stereotypes, particularly its typical portrayal as wholly focused direct action or, at most, guided by a simplistic understanding of deep ecology and biocentrism. The preceding chapters have argued that the guiding outlook of militant ecology is ecocentrism, a commitment to the integrity and flourishing of the totality of life on Earth which has its roots in the contemporary sciences, a perennial tradition of holistic metaphysics, a religious reverence for the ecological whole, and a counter-modernist rejection of anthropocentrism. Growing out of their understanding of ecocentrism - particularly their knowledge of the threat posed to the Earth by humankind, recognition of the holistic interrelation of all things, suspicion of humanity’s capacity for reform, and perception of the Earth as sacred and worthy of defense - is a militant commitment to *effective* direct action in defense of wild nature, by any means necessary.

A comparison with a few other leading schools of environmental political thought indicates that, by virtue of its very militancy and uncompromising elevation of the ecological whole, militant ecology upholds the most thoroughgoing version of ecocentrism on the political scene and offers a unique and valuable perspective on environmental politics. To those who argue that ecological activism should base itself primarily upon scientific trends, including the recent critiques of natural preservation, militant ecologists reply that the ultimate motives for ecodefense transcend scientific understanding alone. To those who argue that ecocentrism is unacceptably “kooky,” rooted in an unsophisticated belief in “metanarratives” and objective values, or hostile to human rights, militant ecologists reply that their holistic metaphysical outlook in fact has a long and illustrious pedigree - though it is certainly against the current in this age of mechanism and individualism. They also insist that neither postmodern deconstruction nor liberal theories of human rights can provide a firm basis for the defense of wild nature, since both ultimately place human welfare on par with the good of the ecological whole. For the same reason, to those critics who contend that a more humanistic foundation for environmental activism would prove more politically effective, militant ecologists reply that such an approach will invariably detract from their commitment to the

⁴⁷ Molly Jane, “Eco-Liberation: The Renewal of Radical Environmentalism,” *Earth First! Journal* 33, no. 1 (June 27, 2013), 3.

integrity of wild nature and the welfare of all beings, of hawks and trees and rivers and wolves. Finally, to those who argue that the mystical focus of ecocentric religion is either politically counterproductive or conducive to resignation or fanaticism, militant ecologists reply that a belief in the sacred provides the greatest impetus for their activism and may, in fact, be the best means of convincing others to support their cause. It is therefore clear that the ecocentrism of militant ecology, devoted to the defense of ecological integrity and wild nature by any means necessary, offers a truly unique response to the ecological crisis of the modern world. The other major forms of contemporary environmental political thought - reformist liberalism, environmental justice, ecosocialism, the "new conservation" movement, sustainable development - all ultimately conduce, whether intentionally or not, to elevate the welfare of the human species over that of the whole.

Though there are very real differences within the movement concerning the meaning and application of their ecocentric principles, it is this shared ethical commitment to defend the integrity and flourishing of life on Earth by any means necessary that puts the "militant" in militant ecology, and indeed constitutes the greatest difference between this outlook and the other holistic or ecocentric philosophies that have influenced it. Unlike its ancient and modern forebears, militant ecology is uniquely political and uniquely concerned with direct action in defense of the Earth, because such a militancy was not necessary until recent times. This ethical militancy stems not from abstract moral reasoning or sentimental intuitionism. It is, rather, an integral expression of their views concerning science, metaphysics, religion, and the place of humanity in the cosmos.

The remainder of this study focuses on the political application of these ecocentric principles, examining the movement's position on anarchism, economics, technology, wilderness preservation, social justice, and strategy. It also more thoroughly discusses the different political prescriptions offered by the ecowarrior and total liberationist camps, particularly their divergent understandings of anarchism, the relative priority of social justice to wilderness preservation, the means of combatting overpopulation, and approaches to political organizing. Recent studies of militant ecology have minimized the ecowarrior strain or treated it as an aberration within the inherently progressive militant ecology milieu, often viewing its adherents as reactionary holdovers from a darker age.⁴⁸ However, this study concludes that, despite the preponderance of total liberationists among contemporary activists and the leftward drift of the movement as a whole over the last two decades, ecowarriors remain an important though submerged

⁴⁸ Among recent scholars, David N. Pellow devotes considerable attention to the total liberationist strain, only briefly detailing the views of its critics within the movement, in *Total Liberation*. Mark Dowie classifies Earth First! among the fourth-wave of American environmentalism, whose central concern is social justice, in *Losing Ground*. Finally, Richard J. Ellis, though offering highly critical view, claims that the core of radical environmentalism is a commitment "to a radical egalitarian vision of human relationships," an assessment that would probably surprise many ecowarriors, in *The Dark Side of the Left*.

force within militant ecology and the source of its most original ideas. Total liberation, on the other hand, by virtue of its willingness to place human concerns on par with those of the ecological whole, contains the seeds of contradiction that logically lead to the elevation of social justice above ecological health and the movement's inevitable absorption by the left. Its dominance within the movement has served to exacerbate the inherent weaknesses of militant ecology's political program, leading to the loss of the very quality that makes it a radical and unique force on the American political scene.

8. Politics of the Future Primitive

Militant ecologists are often accused of harboring the naive desire to return to a pristine Golden Age, located at some indefinable point in history, in which humans lived in perfect harmony with the natural world. While such romantic notions probably do have their proponents, they cannot be accurately attributed to the movement as a whole. The political program of militant ecology is in fact far more coherent and pragmatic than this stereotype suggests, and is directly informed by the movement's underlying scientific, metaphysical, and religious principles. To summarize the previous chapters, the ecocentric outlook affirms that 1) the cosmos is a living and interconnected whole; 2) the natural world is sacred and possesses an inherent worth; 3) the survival and flourishing of earthly life is threatened by human activity; and 4) humankind has overstepped its bounds in asserting dominance over the rest of life on Earth. Together, these principles lend a particular sense of urgency to the activism of militant ecology, a demand to do whatever is necessary to combat the anthropocentric civilization of modernity and usher in a more ecologically sound human society. For most activists it is therefore not simply a question of "going back" to some lost paradise - nor, for that matter, of forging ahead to the millennial future - but rather of reconnecting with a past which has never fully vanished. Despite some differences in approach between total liberationists and ecowarriors, which are discussed throughout the following chapters, militant ecocentrism demands an ultimately *achievable* alternative to modernity.

The following chapters discuss some key features of the future primitive society envisioned by militant ecologists. These include 1) a rejection (in principle) of the modern nation-state in favor of anarchic or tribalist political arrangements, as well as decentralized "bioregional" communities that maximize meaningful human freedom and minimize ecological damage; 2) an aversion to heavy technology, industrialism, and growth-oriented economic systems (particularly capitalism); and 3) a priority on wilderness preservation. Common approaches to political change among activists, ranging from civil disobedience to sabotage to revolution, are also evaluated. In addition, the contrasting positions of ecowarriors and total liberationists on a variety of political issues are discussed throughout these chapters, particularly their different conceptions of anarchism, disagreement over the relative priority of wilderness preservation and social justice, and approaches to political organizing.

In the end, the following chapters will reveal that despite many valid critiques of the contemporary political system and promising ideas for a future primitive society, certain aspects of the militant ecology program are in fact incompatible with the movement's own foundational principles. This is particularly true of its rejection of

the state and political power, which will most likely prove counter-productive to the establishment of an ecocentric polity and the effective defense of wild nature. These inconsistencies in its political program have been exacerbated by the triumph of the total liberationist perspective over the last two decades. Taken to its logical conclusion, the outlook of total liberation unwittingly reinforces an anthropocentric and modernist moral viewpoint, leading slowly but surely to the subordination of wild nature in favor of social justice. In doing so it subverts the radical core of militant ecology and has lead this unique movement - which is in principle “above left and right” - to become little more than an ecological appendage of the radical left.

8.1 “The False Siren of Progress”

The first question to be considered when evaluating the political program of militant ecology is: why a future *primitive*? Environmentalism is typically regarded as part and parcel of the progressive worldview, one more step in the expansion of ethical concern from privileged human groups to the ecological whole, a kind of “emancipation writ large.”¹ However, while many militant ecologists do champion ostensibly progressive ideals such as liberty and egalitarianism, they almost invariably hold that these conditions will not arise through the progress of reason, science, or universal enlightenment, but were already present deep in the human past. Following the revisionist anthropology of Paul Shepard and Marshall Sahlins, with its intellectual roots in the primitivism of the Romantic period, many militant ecologists hold early hunter-gathering life to have been freer, more intimate, more egalitarian, more leisurely, and less ecologically destructive than life in later agricultural and industrial civilizations.²

Though differences exist among militant ecologists as to what aspects they emphasize, all would likely agree with the following green anarchist assessment:

Prior to civilization there generally existed ample leisure time, considerable gender autonomy and equality, a non-destructive approach to the natural world, the absence of organized violence, no mediating or formal institutions, and strong health and robusticity. Civilization inaugurated warfare, the subjugation of women, population growth, drudge work, concepts of

¹ Partisans of this “progressive” view of radical ecology include Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*; Nash, *The Rights of Nature*; Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth’s Future*; Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*; Biehl, *Finding our Way*; Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, “Should Environmentalists Reject the Enlightenment?” *The Review of Politics* 63, no. 4 (Autumn 2001), 663-692; de-Shalit, “Ruralism or Environmentalism?”; and Frances Moore Lappe and J. Baird Callicott, “Marx Meets Muir: Toward a Synthesis of the Progressive Political and Ecological Visions” *Tikkun* 2, no. 4 (September-October 1987), 16-21.

² See Paul Shepard, *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996); Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972).

property, entrenched hierarchies, and virtually every known disease, to name a few of its devastating derivatives.³

Similarly, the early EF! principles included an assertion that “life in a hunter-gatherer society was on the whole healthier, happier, and more secure than our lives today as peasants, industrial workers, or business executives.”⁴ Far from the steady march of progress, for the militant ecologist human history represents a decline from this primordial state of freedom and authenticity.

Accounts vary as to the cause of this fall from grace. While some activists of a more left-revolutionary bent, such as former ELF spokesman Craig Rosebraugh, locate the chief source of environmental destruction and human domination in a “capitalist ideology,”⁵ most tend to trace its roots much further back to the Neolithic, with the beginnings of agriculture and domestication as well as the patriarchy, division of labor, urbanization, and population growth that accompanied them. As an EF! activist writes, “While capitalism is awful, it is hardly the root cause... Agriculture was the original ecological and cultural sin. With it came the widespread domestication and commodification of animals, the origins of patriarchy, and fuel for the population crisis.”⁶ The culture of domination and irreverence for wild nature were henceforth strengthened by the transcendental and anthropocentric focus of Greek philosophy and the Abrahamic religions.⁷ These tendencies were amplified in the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution, whose science and technology rejected the holistic natural philosophy of earlier ages and gave humankind unprecedented power over the Earth, leading inexorably towards industrialism and runaway population growth. “Early civilized man (agrarian man) covered the landscape with his crops, cabins, and castles,” as Tom Stoddard notes, “but scourges, disease and wars kept the population under control. On the whole his impact was tolerable. Modern man since 1900 has become an awesome scourge riding the wings of science, personal productivity, medicine, accumulated wealth and unbridled reproduction and survival..”⁸ Thus, while its seeds were planted long ago in the Neolithic, the modern era represents humanity’s most decisive break with the natural order.

Militant ecologists typically denounce this broad complex of ideas - agriculture, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, rationalism, mechanistic science, political economy, and industrialism - as “Western civilization.” For Dave Foreman, Western civilization is less a culture than an *idea*, one that now “encompasses the whole world from Peking

³ Green Anarchy Collective, “What is Green Anarchy?” 2.

⁴ Foreman, *Confessions*, 28.

⁵ Craig Rosebraugh, “Linking Social Justice Movements Towards an Actual Societal Revolution,” *Resistance: Journal of Grassroots Direct Action* 1 (Summer 1999), 11.

⁶ Keyote, “We are the ones we’re waiting for,” *EF! Journal* 29, no. 2 (January/February 2009), 13.

⁷ Dave Foreman/“Chim Blea,” “Cat Tracks: The Heritage of Western Civilization,” *EF! Journal* 2, no. 5 (1982), 6.

⁸ Tom Stoddard, “Wilderness and Wildlife,” *EF! Journal* 4, no. 2 (December 22, 1983), 11.

to Timbuktu, from Kiev to Alice Springs, from Managua to Boston.”⁹ It represents a synthesis of all that is wrong in human history, beginning with the stratified agricultural empires of ancient Mesopotamia:

Empire from Babylon. God-like rulers from Egypt. Male hierarchy from Israel. Rationality from Greece. Western civilization came on horseback in opposition to the ancient Earth goddesses, to living in harmony with the flow of the seasons, to cooperative egalitarian small tribes and communities, to seeking wisdom intuitively from the Earth. By definition, Western Civilization was anti-Earth, antiwoman, anti-equality, anti-peace. Christianity, Capitalism, Communism, Industrialism, Humanism, Scientism are merely sects debating the number of demons dancing on warheads.¹⁰

Likewise, animal liberation scholars Best and Nocella claim that the Western world “has created few social forms deserving the name ‘civilization,’” despite a “few sparkles of democracy, egalitarianism, and enlightenment.”¹¹ Of course, as Christopher Manes notes, this demonization of *Western* civilization is somewhat unfair. In addition to romanticizing non-Westerners (whose relatively benign ecological impact was probably due “more to a lack of means than any spiritual inclination”), this denunciation ignores the authentic cultures of old Europe in “the glory-days of the West, when Homer sang his epics, druids communed in sacred groves, and the tragic myths of the North were incubating... The finest spiritual values of the West - fascination with the world, self-sacrifice in a just cause, acceptance of fate - developed here...”¹² In short, despite frequent condemnations of Western civilization among militant ecologists, what is really meant is *modern* civilization, with its roots in the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution. Since this civilization, with its empirical science and applied technology and universalist political doctrines, has long since become global in extension, perhaps it should not even be considered particularly Western at all. It is the aspiring global monoculture of modernity that is the true opponent of militant ecology, the ecocidal civilization it strives to overcome, not the authentic historical cultures of Europe.

It should be obvious by now that militant ecologists are unhesitating in their rejection of what Tom Stoddard calls “the false siren of progress.”¹³ Rather than viewing modernity as an imperfect but necessary dialectical stage towards a better future, militant ecologists consider modern industrial societies “a fleeting, unpleasant mirage on the landscape rather than a vision of the future to be emulated.”¹⁴ Accordingly, the

⁹ Foreman, “Cat Tracks: The Heritage of Western Civilization,” 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ Best and Nocella, “A Fire in the Belly of the Beast” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 9.

¹² Christopher Manes, “In Defense of *Western* Civilization,” *EF! Journal* 5, no. 3 (February 1985), 19.

¹³ Stoddard, “Wilderness and Wildlife,” 11.

¹⁴ Manes, *Green Rage*, 32.

founding principles of Earth First! included “a deep questioning of, and even an antipathy to, ‘progress’ and ‘technology’... For every material ‘achievement’ of progress, there are a dozen losses of things of profound and ineffable value.”¹⁵ Hence, also, one of the earliest EF! slogans, “Not blind opposition to progress, but wide-eyed opposition to progress!”¹⁶ That being said, few would go so far as to posit the possibility - or even the desirability - of a complete return to hunter-gatherer ways. As Foreman notes, an anti-progressivist stance “does not mean that we must immediately eschew all facets of technological civilization. We are *of* it; this does not mean that we can’t critique it.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, there is a pervasive sense that modern civilization has largely been a blot on human history.

Though somewhat unique on the contemporary American political scene, militant ecology is hardly alone in its underlying primitivism and forebodings of decline. Such concerns have a long and venerable history in human thought, dating back to the lost Eden of the Hebrew Bible and the Golden Age of Hesiod. The particular version of decline most often associated with radical environmental thought, which is concerned not with the decay of religious faith or political authority but, rather, with the loss of harmony between humankind and nature, can be traced back to the ancient Stoics but has its modern origins in the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In Rousseau’s anthropological theory, human existence prior to the advent of civilization was marked by an absolute unity, self-sufficiency, and simplicity of desires. However, at some point humans developed instrumental reason, status-consciousness, utilitarian calculation, and excessive self-regard (*amour-propre*), and as a result humankind lost its natural spontaneity and acquired artificial desires that could never be wholly satisfied.¹⁸ This account of humanity’s decline from natural authenticity to civilized decadence and misery has remained a perennial theme in environmental thought, and as Joseph H. Lane and Rebecca R. Clark point out, Rousseau’s “Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality” might be counted as the first of many “decline narratives” that reappear continually throughout the history of the environmental movement.¹⁹ Indeed, the (arguably) idealized depiction of hunter-gatherer life promoted by Sahlins and Shepard might be understood as a continuation of this tendency, which can also be detected in the anarcho-primitivist and green anarchist portrayals of a peaceful and egalitarian tribal society before the dawn of civilization.

Another important source for this rejection of progress among militant ecologists is Martin Heidegger, who contended that the history of Western metaphysics - beginning

¹⁵ Foreman, *Confessions*, 28.

¹⁶ *EF! Journal* 1, no. 1 (1 November 1980), 1.

¹⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 28.

¹⁸ This is a highly condensed summary of Rousseau’s well-known “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” published in 1755. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Joseph H. Lane and Rebecca R. Clark, “The Solitary Walker in the Political World: The Paradoxes of Rousseau and Deep Ecology,” *Political Theory* 34, no. 1 (February 2006), 66.

with the Greeks - is a story of decline away a primordial authenticity and openness to Being. This fall from grace has culminated in the modern elevation of humankind to the "lord of nature," the sole source of value, the measure of reality and truth.²⁰ In addition to Heidegger's considerable importance to the development of deep ecology, his analysis of technology was highly influential among early militant ecologists thanks to the efforts of Christopher Manes, who like Heidegger believed that modern civilization had culminated in the reign of industrial technology, transforming "the entirety of existence [into] a standing reserve of raw material valuable only insofar as it augments human power."²¹

Thus, like many prominent thinkers of late modernity, militant ecologists suspect that something is rotten in the present world and that the march of progress has involved the loss of things of incomparable value - and that, when all is said and done, it may not have been worth it. Indeed, despite the progressivist mantle in which contemporary mainstream environmentalism has cloaked itself, the founders of the wilderness preservation movement, such as John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Benton MacKaye, Robert Sterling Yard, and Bob Marshall, were strongly driven by antimodernist concerns.²² Stephen Fox characterizes these early years of American conservation as oriented towards rural and wilderness areas, strongly religious, aesthetic and spiritual in values, middle- and upper-class in sympathy, and informed by a view of history as decline and regression.²³ Much of this applies (with the possible exception of the class bias, though some environmental justice advocates might disagree) to the militant ecology movement today, particularly activists in the ecowarrior camp.

Despite its importance in the development of environmental thought, many environmental political theorists of a left-liberal bent have criticized these attitudes. Michael Zimmerman fears, for instance, that this depiction of Western history as one of "ontological degeneration" and a denial of "any progressive or evolutionary dimension" to nature might lead, as it did for Heidegger, to fascistic political views.²⁴ Likewise, Janet Biehl worries that the antimodern ethos of ecofeminism, with its embrace of goddess worship, glorification of the Neolithic, and metaphors and myths, entails a rejection of the "emancipatory legacies" of Western culture, and insists on "the importance of reason, science, and technology in creating both a progressive ecological movement and an ecological society."²⁵ Lewis and Sandra Hinchman fear that the antiEnlightenment

²⁰ Michael E. Zimmerman, "Towards a Heideggerian *Ethos* for Radical Environmentalism," *Environmental Ethics* 5, no. 2 (1983), 99-131.

²¹ Manes, *Green Rage*, 226.

²² Dave Foreman, *Man Swarm and the Killing of Wildlife* (Durango, CO: Raven's Eye Press, 2011).

²³ Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy*, 354-5. For a broader discussion of the antimodernist tradition in American thought, see T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

²⁴ Michael E. Zimmerman, "Possible Problems of an Earth-Based Religiosity," in *Beneath the Surface*, 170-8; Zimmerman, "Rethinking the Heidegger-Deep Ecology Relationship," *Environmental Ethics* 15 (Fall 1993), 224.

²⁵ Biehl, *Finding Our Way*; Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism*.

ecological critique runs the risk of “dissociating ecological goals and justifications from mainstream humanitarian ethics.”²⁶ And of course, one might well question the rosy view of the Pleistocene and pre-modern societies painted by theorists such as Shepherd, Sahlins, and Zerzan, responding that the advances of modern science, humanism, and democratic political arrangements do indicate real progress for the human 487 species.²⁷

The fears of ecofascism will be more adequately addressed in chapter twelve, after the other philosophical and political views of the movement have been discussed. For now, it bears repeating that while previous prophets of doom fixated primarily on the loss of religiosity, authority, and human dignity in the modern world, militant ecologists have a fundamentally different concern: the degradation of the freely evolving natural world. As Christopher Manes asks, “What will be the meaning of progress when progress itself leads to the end of the natural processes” on which human existence depends? The prospect of biological meltdown, indeed, “forces us to admit what thinkers in the tradition of Rousseau and Thoreau have long suggested: that civilization is a fake, a vast pyramid scheme in which privileged groups use concepts such as ‘progress’ to control nature and human nature for their own benefit.”²⁸ The reality of ecological degradation, of mass deforestation and species extinction and catastrophic climate change, is perhaps the greatest possible rebuke to the civilization of modernity.

In its willingness to question the entire complex of modern civilization, militant ecology is a truly unique presence on the political scene in the United States, the modern state *par excellence*. Unlike virtually every current on the mainstream left and right, which can scarcely contain their enthusiasm for the progress of science and technology, militant ecologists recognize the very real losses of modern civilization - those which cannot be remedied by more efficient machines and more equitable resource distribution. However, despite its opposition to modern notions of progress and much of modern civilization as a whole, this is no mere utopian longing for a lost world. Militant ecology is more appropriately classified as a *counter*-modern movement, based not upon a nihilistic deconstruction of modern principles nor a nostalgic yearning for the past, but rather a positive doctrine stressing the sacred in nature and the need for a new society in greater harmony with the wild Earth. Accordingly, the more reflective militant ecologists do espouse a cogent (if occasionally flawed) political platform. Though its great differences from the contemporary American situation doubtless make it seem an impossible dream to many, in reality this vision is not so very different from the way humankind lived in the past - not just the deep past of the Pleistocene, but in the United States a mere one or two hundred years ago, before the widespread adoption of industrial technologies and a distant, bureaucratic governing power. A rejection of these aspects of contemporary political life, and embrace of the

²⁶ Hinchman and Hinchman, “Should Environmentalists Reject the Enlightenment?”

²⁷ For a critique of the anthropological underpinnings of this neo-primitivist thought, see Douglas P. Fry, *War, Peace and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁸ Manes, *Green Rage*, 41, 42.

ideals of anarchy and decentralization, are among the most important features of the militant ecology political program, forming the subject of the following chapter.

9. Anarchism and Bioregionalism

In justifying their extreme tactics, militant ecologists often claim that the political system of contemporary America is hopelessly flawed, prone to capture by special interests and unable to guarantee either genuine democratic rule or lasting protection for wild nature. This analysis dates back to the earliest days of Earth First!, with ecowarriors such as Dave Foreman lamenting that “our representative democracy has broken down. Our government primarily represents the big money boys and stacks the deck against reform movements. Playing only by the system’s rules limits you.”¹ Moreover, due to the system’s ability to co-opt and moderate dissent, the political vision of the mainstream conservation movement is nowadays virtually indistinguishable from that of the establishment, with both accepting “a global population of ten to twelve billion human beings, nation-states, multinational corporations, the private automobile, and people in business suits on every continent.” In addition, due to the power wielded by wealthy corporations and the bureaucratic nature of policy implementation, the American representative liberal state can hardly even be deemed democratic in any meaningful sense.²

This skepticism regarding the American political system only increased among later earth and animal liberation activists. According to a 2009 ELF communique, in which activists claimed responsibility for fire-bombing the GOP headquarters in Bloomington, Indiana,

We have no faith in the present system of electoral politics where every candidate, both Republican and Democrat, is funded with corporate blood money. Because there are no viable options on the ballot [sic], we must find another means of voting. Our nonparticipation in, and active resistance against this system, controlled by the rich, is our means of voting.³

Thus, many militant ecologists reject liberal representative democracy, at least as it is currently practiced in the United States, for a variety of reasons - its domination by corporate and political elites, its ability to co-opt and neutralize dissent, its short time horizon, and its inability to implement the necessary measures to preserve wild nature. Since the system is “irredeemably corrupted by money, power, cronyism, and privilege,” Best and Nocella write, direct action movements must “bypass pre-approved

¹ Bookchin and Foreman, *Defending the Earth*, 45-6.

² Foreman, *Confessions*, 122.

³ Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, 19.

efforts to influence the state in order to immediately confront the figures of power they challenge.”⁴ While the strategic implications of this position are analyzed in chapter thirteen, it also has important implications for the political program of militant ecology, leading many activists to reject political power altogether and embrace various forms of anarchism.

9.1 Two Anarchisms

Militant ecologists often trace the roots of the modern ecological crisis to the rise of centralized political power, beginning with the agricultural empires of ancient Mesopotamia and intensified in the modern era by the advent of militaristic, bureaucratic nation-states. Many therefore believe that part of the solution lies in the reduction, if not the outright elimination, of the state itself. As one activist writes, “A vibrant ecosystem needs to be in tandem with a long-lasting biocentric culture. Anarchism is a system that can do this. Anarchism works to alleviate the oppression of the environment and people.”⁵ While the precise version of anarchy promoted has changed over time, it is undeniable that, as one activist writes, “from the very beginning, activists exhibited many anarchist ideals and natural impulses against authoritarian elites, formal organizations, and bureaucratic institutions,” dovetailing with “an ecocentric philosophical orientation that opposed corporate capitalism, urban-industrialism, the bureaucratic state and consumerist culture for their roles in the oppression and exploitation of wild nature.”⁶ Despite the chaotic and self-indulgent connotations of the term in the popular mind, the form of anarchy envisioned by militant ecologists is not usually of the Molotov-tossing punk rock variety: anarchism, as Edward Abbey notes, does not really mean no *rule* but no *rulers*. Nevertheless, while a commitment to anarchism is common among militant ecologists, there are some basic differences in how the two camps conceive of it. Ecowarriors often envision a more *tribal* form of anarchy, one that stresses communitarianism and shared mores, while total liberationists typically promote a *revolutionary* anarchism that emphasizes egalitarianism and non-domination.

Though the ecowarrior founders of Earth First! often described themselves as anarchists, they do not appear to have been strongly influenced by the classical anarchist theories of William Godwin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, or Peter Kropotkin, nor were they driven by a celebration of chaos or lifestyle anarchism associated with the “circle-A” anarchists of the punk underground. Their version of anarchy should be more properly deemed *tribalism*, upholding an organic, communitarian society governed by the ecocentric mores of the tribe rather than laws imposed by a political authority. As Foreman once explained,

⁴ Best and Nocella, “Beneath the Mask,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?*, 17.

⁵ E. Chiaravalli, “Solidarity in a Biocentric Movement,” *EF! Journal* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2012), 38-9.

⁶ Dakarti, “Ecocentric Anarchy,” *EF! Journal* 21, no. 1 (November 1, 2000), 66.

I consider myself a tribalist, not an anarchist. I think if you look at any primal society, individuals within that society had a great deal of personal freedom, but it was freedom in the context of the tribal culture. The details of that tribal culture and the customs are not important. What is important is that cultural matrix and that there are values and ethical guidelines that you operate within.⁷

This more communitarian form of anarchism was promoted by Edward Abbey, the notorious godfather of Earth First!, whose Master's thesis at the University of New Mexico analyzed the relationship between anarchism and political violence. Anarchism, he claims, "simply means the maximum possible dispersal of power: political power, economic power, and force - military power."

An anarchistic society would consist of a voluntary association of self-reliant, self-supporting, autonomous communities. An anarchist community would consist (as it did in pre-agricultural, pre-industrial times) of a voluntary association of free and independent families, self-reliant and self-supporting but bound by friendship, kinship, and a tradition of mutual aid.⁸

This form of anarchism would necessarily depend upon citizen militias and vigilantism to maintain order, with each citizen "armed, trained, and capable when necessary of playing the part of policeman or soldier." With the collapse of corporate capitalism and the bureaucratic military-industrial state, the wide-scale destruction of the wilderness would also diminish, and any remaining crimes against nature would be dealt with by citizen militias or private individuals rather than state police or regulatory agencies.

This model might seem vaguely reminiscent of the agrarian republicanism promoted by Thomas Jefferson in the early days of the American nation. It should therefore come as no surprise that a number of early ecowarriors strongly admired this agrarian ideal, believing that the triumph of the Federalists and the centralized state over the decentralized Jeffersonian model was a tragic misstep in American history. Though Jefferson was obviously no eco-radical, Christopher Manes writes, "Had this country followed the path he suggested, of minimal industry and an emphasis on the small-scale rural freehold, of creating a harmonious community rather than a powerful empire, we might have been spared the environmental trauma now under way."⁹ And though this early American ideal has faded among some of the more recent generation of total liberationists, there are still some ecowarriors in the movement whose political ideals owe more to traditional American thought than contemporary left-anarchist theory. As Chris Irwin explains, "I believe that which governs best, governs least. I have an

⁷ Foreman, interview with Rik Scarce (October 20, 1989), in *Ecowarriors*, 38.

⁸ Edward Abbey, "Response to Schmookler on Anarchy," *EF! Journal* 6, no. 7 (August 1, 1986), 22.

⁹ Manes, *Green Rage*, 246.

inherent distrust of government and corporations. And, you know, historically, that used to be called ‘being an American.’”¹⁰

In keeping with their loyalty to the American soil and early political ideals, ecowarriors, especially in the early days of Earth First!, embraced certain aspects of the historic American nation. They frequently employed the American flag as well as the Gadsden Flag (“Don’t Tread On Me”) as symbols of their love for the land, sang patriotic songs like “America the Beautiful” and “Home on the Range” at rallies, invoked the Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence in their articles and speeches, likened their enemies to the Tories of yesteryear and themselves to the Boston Tea Party, and held their annual meeting on Fourth of July, the anniversary of American independence. In addition to American Indian warriors defending their homeland, they included visionaries like Jefferson, Thoreau, Muir, and Leopold among their pantheon as representatives of the “paths not taken,” agrarian or spiritual alternatives to the industrial exploitation of the natural world.¹¹ Like its nineteenth-century Romantic defenders, they spoke of wilderness as a particularly American heritage, with Foreman once claiming that “wilderness is America. What can be more patriotic than love of the land? We will be Americans only as long as there is wilderness. Wilderness is our true Bill of Rights, the true repository of our freedoms, the true home of liberty.”¹² In addition to betraying their more traditionalist and conservative leanings (Foreman himself was an ex-Marine and former Goldwater supporter), this flag-waving was above all an attempt to wrest the historical American ideal away from the corporations and land-destroying elites, to affirm that true patriotism was inseparable from love of the land.

It might seem inconsistent for any militant ecologist to so wholeheartedly embrace these early American political ideals and symbols, given the seemingly insurmountable distance between the hunter-gatherer tribes of the Pleistocene and the Jeffersonian civic republicanism of early America (with its obvious debt to Enlightenment liberalism). However, the two models have certain things in common: a high degree of individual freedom linked to strong communitarian ethos, a reliance on shared mores rather than laws and coercion, and a life lived close to the land. This agrarian civic republicanism, with its emphasis on self-sacrifice in furtherance of the common good, might in fact be the only truly American political expression of the holistic metaphysical ideal - especially in comparison to the more atomistic and mechanistic model of classical liberalism that came to prevail after the Revolutionary era.¹³ Of course, whether one

¹⁰ Quoted in Pellow, *Total Liberation*, 99.

¹¹ Manes, *Green Rage*, 245.

¹² *EF! Journal* 1, no. 7 (August 1, 1981), 1.

¹³ It is instructive to consider the antimodernist interpretation of the American Revolution offered by Gordon Wood, who contends that “republicanism as the Americans expressed it in 1776 possessed a decidedly reactionary tone. It embodied the ideal of the good society as it had been set forth from antiquity through the eighteenth century” (Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 59). In other words, against the

ultimately prefers archaic tribal societies or Jeffersonian agrarian republicanism, both have the potential to be quite conservative (indeed, even “oppressive”) by total liberationist standards. There is no guarantee that such a society would be as egalitarian as these activists would prefer, and the invocations of vigilante justice doubtless reeks of “machismo” to many. In addition, such an insular society might display a high degree of ethnocentrism in the name of cultural and ecological preservation.

For this reason, while total liberationists also envision the future primitive society as anarchic, their model stresses not so much its tribal and communitarian aspects but, rather, its egalitarian and emancipatory ones. Best and Nocella have therefore aptly described this form of anarchism as *revolutionary ecology*.¹⁴ The emergence and ascendancy of revolutionary anarchism can be traced back to the influx of younger urban activists into the movement in the early 1990s. Many of these were more overtly anticapitalist and anti-American than the founders, and had typically begun their activist careers in anti-war or social justice campaigning rather than conservationist causes.¹⁵ These later anarchists were consequently more focused on social justice, and - despite the protestations of one of their chief figures, Judi Bari - were noticeably more left-wing in sympathy than their ecowarrior counterparts.¹⁶ Indeed, in the nineties their political program was strongly influenced by Murray Bookchin’s philosophy of social ecology, which was grounded in the tradition of socialist and anarchist thought. Social ecologists condemn all forms of hierarchy and domination, such as patriarchy, centralized nationstates, concentrated economic power, and authoritarianism, which they believe hinder the evolutionary development of humankind. Their ultimate goal is the creation of an egalitarian, decentralized, anarchic society living in harmony with the natural world. While holistic in orientation, social ecology does not view the ecological whole as ontologically prior to or more significant than its constitutive parts - the good of the whole and that of the individual are inseparable.¹⁷ In addition, though counting themselves among the heirs of the Enlightenment and socialism, social ecologists reject the statist, technocratic communism of Marx in favor of a libertarian socialism that

liberalism that became predominant in American culture, with its emphasis on rational self-interest and economic competition, for many early Americans “the sacrifice of individual interests to the greater good of the whole formed the essence of republicanism and comprehended for Americans the idealistic goal of their Revolution” (ibid., 53). This is an apt description of the holistic communitarian political ideal of the ecowarriors.

¹⁴ Best and Nocella, “A Fire in the Belly of the Beast,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 21.

¹⁵ Bron Taylor, “Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front,” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (New York: Continuum, 2005), 520.

¹⁶ Judi Bari claimed that they were not leftists, since “we are not trying to overthrow capitalism for the benefit of the proletariat. In fact, the society we envision is not spoken to in any leftist theory that I’ve ever heard of. Those theories deal only with how to redistribute the spoils of exploiting the earth to benefit a different class of humans.” Nevertheless, her greater concern with racism, sexism, and the plight of the working class definitely places Bari and her total liberationist comrades among the “left” wing of militant ecology (Judi Bari, *Timber Wars* (Monroe ME: Common Courage Press, 1994)).

¹⁷ John Clark, “A Social Ecology,” in *Environmental Philosophy*, 422.

is “decentralized, stateless, artistic, collective, and sweepingly emancipatory.”¹⁸ Brian Tokar and Chaia Heller credit Bookchin’s writings with precipitating a major shift in the movement, away from the “misanthropic cult of the lone ‘eco-warrior’” towards “the emergence of a new consciousness rooted in feminism, respect for working people and urban issues, and active solidarity with the ecological struggles of nonindustrial peoples and city-dwellers alike.” They likewise argue that Bookchin’s insistence on the need for “profound social revolution... to overturn the forces of capitalism, greed and empire” helped lead EF! away from holding actions in defense of wilderness and towards a more holistic political program.¹⁹

While certain themes from social ecology remain central to the outlook of total liberation, it has been partially superseded in more recent decades by a different school of anarchist thought, one that is even more extreme in its condemnation of hierarchy and modern civilization. While Bookchin regarded social ecology as a legitimate heir of the Enlightenment, embodying its best virtues of reason, progress, and scientific inquiry, this new school of *green anarchist* thought rejects the trappings of historical civilization altogether. “Division of labor and domestication, the pillars of the doomed civilized world, must be overturned, along with patriarchy, which is fundamentally synonymous with civilization,” writes one green anarchist; “Thus we are neither Deep Ecologists nor ‘green’ leftists, since both parties avoid such basic challenges.”²⁰ Green anarchism is strongly intertwined with another subset of thought known as anarcho-primitivism, originating in the late 1970s and developed largely by John Zerzan, which teaches that humanity took a wrong turn with the advent of symbolic thought, animal domestication, and sedentary agriculture in the Neolithic, leading to social hierarchy and the exploitation of the Earth.²¹

Of course, this dim view of domestication, agriculture, and civilization is also shared by many ecowarriors - one well-known early EF! motto was “Back to the Pleistocene!” - but it is generally taken as a distant *ideal*, balanced by an acknowledgement that working within the system is necessary in order to achieve their overriding goal: the preservation of wilderness. For insurrectionary green anarchists influenced by anarcho-primitivism, however, sabotage and violence are the only truly revolutionary acts, and any efforts at publicly organized resistance or politicking are regarded as hopelessly “leftist,” a term of abuse associated with reformism and compromise.²² As one green

¹⁸ Bookchin, “What is Social Ecology,” in *Environmental Philosophy*, 104.

¹⁹ Brian Tokar and Chaia Heller, “Remembering Murray Bookchin,” *EF! Journal* 26, no. 6 (September/October 2006), 48.

²⁰ “Where We’re At,” *Green Anarchy* 11 (Winter 2003), 2.

²¹ John Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2002).

²² Tsolkas, “No System but the Ecosystem.”

anarchist writes, “The Left is not radical and never really was. Its adherents challenge none of the underlying givens of this rotten, massified antilife world.”²³

Despite the considerable theoretical differences between social ecology and green anarchism, their broad orientation and practical implementation is sufficiently similar to categorize them both as forms of *revolutionary ecology*, following Best and Nocella:

Revolutionary environmentalists recognize the need for fundamental changes on many levels, such as with human psychologies (informed by anthropocentric worldviews, values, and identities), interpersonal relations (mediated by racism, sexism, speciesism, ageism, classism, homophobia, and elitism), social institutions (governed by authoritarian, plutocratic, and corrupt or pseudo-democratic forms), technologies (enforcing labor and exploitation imperatives and driven by fossil-fuels that cause pollution and global warming), and the prevailing economic system (an inherently destructive and unsustainable global capitalism driven by profit, production, and consumption imperatives). Revolutionary environmentalists see “separate” problems as related to the larger system of global capitalism...

They repudiate the logics of marketization, economic growth, and industrialization as inherently violent, exploitative, and destructive, and seek ecological, democratic, and egalitarian alternatives.²⁴

The influence of revolutionary anarchism is particularly strong within the earth and animal liberation underground, with one activist writing that “the ELF saw a holistic link between earth, animal, and human liberation. Instead of getting into endless discussions of deep vs. social ecology, it praised revolutionary ecology.”²⁵ The Animal Liberation Front also evolved in the United States from a single-issue animal rights group into one that is “opposed to the entire system which perpetrated animal abuse” as well as institutions that thrive on human abuse and control, environmental destruction, and the exploitation of indigenous peoples.²⁶ Indeed, “from a broad perspective,” Best and Nocella write, “revolutionary environmentalism is a class, race, gender, and culture war that aims to abolish every system of domination, including that of human beings over nature.”²⁷ Despite certain overlapping concerns, then, a basic commitment to end *all* forms of hierarchy is what sets the revolutionary anarchism of the total liberationists apart from the tribalism of the ecowarriors.

Due to their resolute rejection of hierarchy in all its forms, total liberationists often regard the United States as hopelessly flawed from the very beginning, founded upon

²³ Green Anarchy Collective, “The Nature of the Left,” *Back to Basics 2: The Problem of the Left* (2004), 1. <http://greenanarchy.anarchyplanet.org/2013/09/05/back-to-basics/>

²⁴ Best and Nocella, “Fire in the Belly,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 21.

²⁵ “From Partisans to Fire Elves,” *Underground* 9 (Winter 1997), 4-5.

²⁶ Western Wildlife Unit of the ALF, *Memories of Freedom*.

²⁷ Best and Nocella, “Fire in the Belly,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 23.

slavery, genocide, and oppression and therefore lacking any redeeming value.²⁸ Total liberationists such as Judi Bari routinely criticized ecowarriors for their celebration of “white-man land rapers like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams” and patriotic support for “the dominant culture of our corrupt society.”²⁹ Even the heroes of the wilderness preservation movement, such as John Muir, do not escape condemnation: as Best and Nocella write, “Many of the early founders of amerikan [sic] environmentalism were classist, racist, and sexist” and embraced an “apolitical and even misanthropic” attitude that ignored questions of social justice.³⁰ By 1989, the date of the annual rendezvous had been changed from Independence Day to the summer solstice, and hitherto unprecedented incidents of flag-burning became commonplace. Against the patriotism of the founding members of EF!, Bari approved of the latter, commenting that “if we’re going to try and pretend that we can continue to espouse such revolutionary concepts and still fly the flag... we’re dooming ourselves.”³¹ The typical total liberationist attitude is probably best captured by ELF activist Jeff Luers’s admission that “most of all, I regret that I am an American citizen, that my privilege and lifestyle has been the root cause of oppression and suffering for so many.”³² For all of these reasons, total liberationists have typically regarded patriotism and national identity (at least insofar as they are American) with utter suspicion.

Whatever their differences, it is clear that a significant number of militant ecologists believe that anarchic social arrangements would be more conducive not only to greater freedom for humankind, but to the good of the Earth as a whole. While acknowledging that the Pleistocene tribal societies they valorize are unlikely to reappear any time soon, militant ecologists strive to capture some of the positive aspects that characterized hunter-gatherer existence, such as its relative autonomy and equality. These anarchic commitments are therefore one aspect of the future primitive outlook, capturing what is best in the ancestral past and reviving it in the present day.

9.2 From States to Bioregions

Another related feature of this “future primitive” outlook is *bioregionalism*, in which attachment to local systems and landscapes, as well as shared culture, replaces the artificial political boundaries and centralized power of modern nation-states. Theorists of bioregionalism trace its philosophical and spiritual roots variously to “pantheists, Wobs, Reformed Marxists... Diggers, liberterreans [sic], Kropotkinites... animists, alchemists... lefty Buddhists, Situationists. syndicalists, Provos, born-again Taoists,

²⁸ Tim Haugen, “Property Rights and Wrongs,” *EF! Journal* 16, no. 4 (March 20, 1996), 26.

²⁹ Bari, *Timber Wars*, 104.

³⁰ Best and Nocella, “Fire in the Belly,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 12.

³¹ Lee, *Earth First!*, 129; Bari, quoted in Pellow, *Total Liberation*, 118.

³² Jeffrey ‘Free’ Luers, “From Protest to Resistance,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 222-3.

general outlaws, and others drawn to the decentralist banner by raw empathy.”³³ However, the beginning of the intellectual and political movement known as bioregionalism is generally thought to be Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann’s 1977 article, “Reinhabiting California,” containing ideas later developed by thinkers such as Jim Doge, Kirkpatrick Sale, David Haenke, and Brian Tokar.³⁴ As described by Dodge, the defining element of bioregionalism is the importance given to natural systems both as a “source of physical nutrition and as the body of metaphors from which our spirits draw substance.”³⁵ Bioregionalism is also commonly associated with anarchistic political ideals, understood to mean “political decentralization, self-determination, and a commitment to social equity, based upon a sense of interdependent self-reliance.”

This exact size and determining characteristics of a bioregion are open to debate. It is generally agreed that a bioregion should be small enough to facilitate widespread civic participation, perhaps the size of a small American state, a Swiss canton, or an Indian tribe. It is also generally agreed that the natural systems around which the bioregion is determined should include watersheds, defined ecosystems and habitats, and spiritually important landmarks such as mountains, lakes, and waterfalls.³⁶ What is perhaps most politically significant is the emphasis placed upon local control, local attachments, and attunement to the local landscape: as Doug Aberly describes, “The focus here is on a ‘tribe of ecology’ instead of the nation-state; a campfire circle instead of the nuclear furnace; localized rituals instead of consumerized Christmas; touch, song and shared experience instead of the narcosis of television-induced monoculture.”³⁷ For this reason, as Chet A. Bowers points out, bioregionalism differs strongly from contemporary faith in technological progress and the moral primacy of the autonomous individual. In their place, bioregionalists espouse a “cultural bioconservatism” that prioritizes knowledge of place and community, renewed cultural practices and natural systems, and a suspicion of hard technology.³⁸

Bioregionalist ideas have been a central feature of the militant ecology platform from the very beginning. Earth First! activists initially styled themselves as “warriors of the bioregional tribe,” and shared many features of the earlier movement: a rejection of progress and technology; an acknowledgement of human embeddedness in the local ecosystem; and a desire to evolve from hierarchical to tribal social arrangements.³⁹ Foreman went further than many bioregionalist thinkers and activists, however, by insisting that a truly bioregionalist vision had to extend beyond “composting toilets, organic

³³ Jim Dodge, “Living by Life: Some Bioregional Theory and Practice,” in *Radical Environmentalism: Philosophy and Tactics*, ed. Peter C. List (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1993), 113.

³⁴ Doug Aberley, “Interpreting Bioregionalism: A Story from Many Voices,” in *Bioregionalism*, ed. Michael Vincent McGinnis (New York: Routledge, 1999), 22.

³⁵ Dodge, “Living by Life,” in *Radical Environmentalism*, 108.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 112, 110-1.

³⁷ Aberley, “Interpreting,” in *Bioregionalism*, 19.

³⁸ Chet A. Bowers, “The role of education and ideology in the transition from a modern to a more bioregionally-oriented culture,” in *Bioregionalism*, 198.

³⁹ Foreman, “Reinhabitation, Biocentrism, and Self Defense,” 22.

gardens, handicrafts, recycling, solar collectors, wind generators, barter systems, wood stoves,” and include the defense of the land itself: “And that is where the warrior society of Earth First! comes into the bioregional world. In reinhabiting a place, by dwelling in it, we become that place. We are *of* it. Our most fundamental duty is selfdefense. WE are the wilderness defending itself.”⁴⁰ In the *Earth First! Journal*, bioregionalist theorist David Haenke composed a magisterial analysis of the bioregional principles that ought to inform ecological activism, insisting that “cities, towns, houses, agricultures, economics, governments, and transport must be designed or redesigned according to ecological principles.”⁴¹ Kirkpatrick Sale more recently contributed an article to the journal discussing the possible role of secession in bioregionalist politics.⁴²

Another indication of the continuing importance of bioregionalist ideas in the movement is the fact that many EF! groups identify themselves by their bioregion, rather than their city or state: examples include Green Mountain (Vermont), Cross Timbers (Oklahoma and Texas), Piedmont (North Carolina), Glacier’s Edge (Indiana), Chatahoochee (Georgia), Everglades (Florida), and Sierra Nevada (California). In addition, much of the opposition to immigration restrictions on the part of total liberationists, discussed at greater length in chapter twelve, also stems from their understanding of bioregionalism. They believe that “government-imposed borders have no place in our vision of a bioregional future” and that “there is no way to be a committed biocentrist in support of a colonial border regime, walls through bioregions and the fortification of a police state intended to keep the current system intact.”⁴³ It is clear that bioregionalist ideas of decentralization and attunement to place continue to play a major role in the movement.

A central feature of the future primitive political program, then, is a basic commitment to anarchic social arrangements and decentralized bioregional communities. Any attempt to grasp the historical development and political prospects of militant ecology must understand how these central commitments have shaped its political ideals - and consider whether an anarchic bioregionalism that dispenses wholly with centralized political power is really the most effective means of defending wild nature.

9.3 The Anarchy Debate

In response to anarchist and decentralist tendencies within the broader environmental movement, many scholars and critics have argued that the stated goals of ecological

⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁴¹ David Haenke, “Bioregionalism and Earth First! Bioregionalism for the Sonoran/High Desert and Everywhere Else,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 2 (December 1986), 28.

⁴² Kirkpatrick Sale, “Secession: The True Bioregional Way,” *EF! Journal* 27, no. 5 (July/August 2007), 20-21.

⁴³ Gerrard Winstanley, “Evolving Earth First,” *EF! Journal* 26, no. 6 (September/October 2006), 34-5; “Razing Arizona: The Ecological Battle Against Borders,” *EF! Journal* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 345.

preservation cannot be achieved without some coercive state apparatus to enforce them. Such arguments typically evince a more pessimistic (or realistic) assessment of human nature, arguing that anarchism is unduly sanguine about the human capacity for cooperation and will fail to provide the necessary protection for wilderness and biodiversity. Robyn Eckersley has been particularly critical of the reflexive anarchism typical of the ecological left, arguing that a wholesale rejection of the state would deprive the ecology movement of the most effective means of achieving its aims. The state is the most legitimate and the most powerful social institution, already ideally situated to assume the role of public ecological trustee, and given the seriousness and urgency of many ecological problems (i.e., global warming), building on the state governance structure that already exists seems to be a more fruitful path to take than any attempt to move beyond or around states in the quest for environmental sustainability.⁴⁴

This criticism points to the naivete of an ecological politics that denies the need for a central governing authority of some kind, one that rests upon a rosy picture of human nature that is in stark contrast to the reality of human behavior, particularly with regard to the natural world - a sordid history with which militant ecologists should be all too familiar. It also makes the compelling argument that, if environmentalists are truly concerned with an *effective* defense of wild nature, they would be foolish to reject the most powerful instrument at their disposal.

An important debate occurred in the pages of the *Earth First! Journal* that speaks to this issue of state authority. In addition to shedding more light upon the reasons for their anarchic commitments, this debate also illuminates a paradox of militant ecology: how do its adherents reconcile their radical distrust of the human species (bordering on misanthropy) with their commitment to a political system that would free humans of most fetters on their behavior? This internal debate is also significant because, rather than focusing on human rights concerns, this one specifically addresses how anarchism might in fact be inimical to the effective defense of wild nature itself.

The debate began in 1985, with the publication of a review by one “Australopithecus” of a book by Andrew Bard Schmookler entitled *Parable of the Tribes*. The thesis of this prize-winning work, which developed out of Schmookler’s doctoral research, posits a “race to the bottom” theory of civilization’s origins: once a few tribes began dealing with others by means of aggression and deadly force, all were eventually forced to adopt similar strategies in order to survive. In a series of articles in the *Earth First! Journal*, the author explained how this theory related to the concerns of the radical environmental movement. In the beginning, humankind existed within a *natural order* of evolutionary and ecological processes that placed natural limitations upon the destructive power of individuals and groups. Anarchy, in the sense of action ungoverned by any lawful order, truly became possible only when humankind transcended these

⁴⁴ Robyn Eckersley, *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 12, 91.

natural limitations on its behavior.⁴⁵ All of the ills that militant ecologists decry - the state, patriarchy, environmental destruction - are therefore a symptom of humankind's emergence out of the natural order. However, simply returning to the tribal societies of the Paleolithic or decentralized bioregionalist communities will not solve this problem, since such conditions existed at the beginning of human existence and yet did nothing to stop humanity's descent into the nightmare of technological civilization. This is because, once humanity has overcome the natural limits on its behavior, the stateless, decentralized tribal system affords no lasting protection against the depredations of the powerful: "Unless everyone is good the special evils of power and domination will spread through the system like a contaminant." The emergence of civilization, in other words, made *power* into a perennial concern of humankind. And as the statesmen and political thinkers of the early American republic were well aware, power can only be resisted by power. If humankind is to survive, it must reinstitute a measure of order - not a fruitless attempt to return to the natural order out of which it emerged, but another framework of *human* devising that places limits on human activity and forestalls the violence and ecological degradation that civilized anarchy can produce.

In a debate that raged for almost two years, various Earth First! activists and supporters offered their criticisms of Schmookler's views, providing highly interesting insight into the political theory animating the early militant ecology movement. Perhaps the most effective replies came from Christopher Manes, who understood Schmookler's main objection to anarchy to be that it would lead to violence and repression. In response, Manes insisted that there is a qualitative and quantitative difference between violence in a decentralized community and violence in a centralized state - "between a revenge killing in Iron Age Sweden and the nuclear arms race."⁴⁶ Even more important, from an ecocentric perspective, are the high ecological costs of government, which requires the concentration of power, economic development, road construction, armaments, communication technologies, and a litany of other ecological ills. As a consequence, the very existence of a centralized governmental authority, no matter how noble its intentions, will have detrimental consequences for wild nature. The ecological costs of even a humane and ecologically enlightened government are therefore much higher than that of the most violent tribal societies:

Now, humanists might deplore pre-Columbian tribes going on the warpath, or Vikings sacking Lindisfarne. From an ecological perspective, however, these conflicts are neutral. I think there will always be physical violence among people, which they will have to deal with as it affects them... But one thing is clear: violence that doesn't stem from an organized government

⁴⁵ Andrew Bard Schmookler, "Schmookler Replies to Australopithecus," *EF! Journal* 6, no. 2 (December 21, 1985), 25; Andrew Bard Schmookler, "Schmookler on Anarchy," *EF! Journal* 6, no. 5 (May 1, 1986), 22.

⁴⁶ Christoph Manes, "Ascent to Anarchy," *EF! Journal* 6, no. 7 (August 1, 1986), 21.

which mobilizes resources is no threat to Earth, and therefore has the same status as the 'wars' between bees and wasps.⁴⁷

Manes's response, therefore, hinges upon his relative indifference to modern notions of human rights: "Anarchy, as I conceive it, is not so much concerned with social justice as it is with preventing the despoliation of Earth which inevitably follows the establishment of any centralized power, representative or otherwise."⁴⁸

Manes' response is perhaps the most compelling, since it sidesteps the (ecocentrically irrelevant) issue of small-scale interpersonal violence altogether and focuses specifically on the effect of the state apparatus on the Earth, however noble its intentions. Nevertheless, one could respond that ecological degradation - particularly the localized destruction of wilderness and wildlife that concerns militant ecologists - is not exclusively caused by centralized politics. The worst has been the result of overgrazing and deforestation, both consequences of the "tragedy of the commons" that arises in the *absence* of a central governing authority.

Though Manes does make a good point about the high ecological cost of centralized government, in the end Schmookler comes off the best in the whole debate, pointing out a number of problems with ecological anarchism that have never really been resolved - either by its academic proponents or its defenders in the militant ecology movement. For one, how can an eco-friendly anarchic system be defended against those who would use violence, either to tyrannize others or destroy wild nature? One EF! correspondent suggests that a truly anarchic society will have "abolished material deprivation" and will therefore be immune to the evils of power-seeking; but this reveals a simplistic understanding of human motivations and limited historical knowledge.⁴⁹ Somewhat more realistically, Manes invites readers to "imagine a community based on kinship ties, perhaps tribal-communal, perhaps made up of small landholders. They have laws, but no executive power. Those whose rights are violated must deal with the situation as they see fit."⁵⁰ This vigilante justice solution, also promoted by other ecowarriors like Edward Abbey, might work on an individual or small-scale level; but it seems unlikely to deal with more organized gangs of marauders or eco-criminals, and certainly not with larger paramilitary orders that might rise from the ashes of civilization. As Schmookler insists, the chief problem of the anarchist is "*how will you stop those who would use technology to serve their own ends at the costs of destroying nature?*"⁵¹ Ecoanarchists clearly do not intend to make the world prey to the likes of Genghis Kahn, "but without state power arrayed against them, what will stop the unfettered expansion of

⁴⁷ Manes, "Ascent," 21.

⁴⁸ Christoph Manes, "An Anarchist Reply to Schmookler's Reply to the Anarchists," *EF! Journal* 7, no. 8 (September 23, 1987), 25.

⁴⁹ Schmookler, "Schmookler Replies to the Anarchists," *EF! Journal* 7, no. 2 (December 21, 1986), 24-25.

⁵⁰ Manes, "Ascent," 21.

⁵¹ Schmookler, "Schmookler Replies to Anarchists' Replies to Schmookler's Reply to the Anarchists," *EF! Journal* 7, no. 8 (September 23, 1987), 26-7.

their power at the expense of the well-being of both humans and the biosphere?" A future primitive anarchist society, composed of a few close-knit communities lacking any central governing authority even on the most basic matters of self-defense, would have no way to protect itself against societies lacking such scruples.

A related question for the partisans of anarchy is how, even if such a blissful state were reinstituted after the collapse of industrial civilization, one could be sure that the whole sordid spectacle would not simply repeat itself. One activist asserted that humans would never willingly reenter the nightmare of technological hierarchical civilization simply because they would remember how bad it was. Christopher Manes insisted, only slightly more plausibly, that citizens and communities - "*knowing what [they] know*" - would be quick to mobilize against those suspected of accruing power or destructive technology.⁵² However, to both these assumptions Schmookler rightly replied that "learning lessons is not enough. We cannot depend SOLELY on the transformation of human consciousness... So long as even a few may deviate, we need a political order with sufficient scope to contain everyone."⁵³

Implicit in Schmookler's critique of eco-anarchism is his insistence that hierarchy and authority, rather than being the chief cause of ecological degradation and human oppression, are in fact essential to defend humans and nature against the forces of chaos. While the more communitarian ecowarrior model of anarchism remains open to certain forms of benevolent authority (such as tribal elders or religious figures), this critique seems particularly applicable to total liberationists, for whom all forms of hierarchy and authority are by their very nature oppressive and ecologically unsound. This association of human domination with that of the environment is, again, traceable to Murray Bookchin's social ecology, which holds that social domination, particularly hierarchy as well as class exploitation, has given rise to all the religious, moral, and philosophical justifications for the domination of nature, the destruction of wildlife, and the destruction of human life. Every ecological problem that we face today apart from those caused by nature itself has its roots in social problems.⁵⁴

Total liberationists therefore view social inequality itself as "a form of ecological imbalance" and believe that all forms of hierarchy and oppression must be eliminated before humanity can repair its destructive relationship with the natural world.⁵⁵ Many consider the struggle *for* wilderness and *against* domination to be two integral sides of the quest for total freedom: as Feral Faun exclaims, "When I fight for the wild earth against civilization, I am fighting for myself, for the freeing of my own wildness, for the realization of my own repressed desires."⁵⁶ The problem is not simply to preserve wild nature against human interference but to liberate all of life, to bring about "the

⁵² Manes, "Ascent," 21.

⁵³ Schmookler, "Schmookler to Sayen," *EF! Journal* 7, no. 8 (September 23, 1987), 24.

⁵⁴ Murray Bookchin, "Yes! - Whither Earth First!?"

⁵⁵ Molly Jane, "Eco-Liberation," 3, 32, 60.

⁵⁶ Feral Faun, "To Be in Love with Everything that Lives: The Orgy that Is the Earth," *Live Wild or Die* 1 (1989), 29.

end of domination and boredom along with a solution to the ecological crisis,” as Mike Jakubal explains.⁵⁷

Despite its frequent repetition, this dogmatic insistence that social hierarchy is the chief source of ecological degradation calls for further scrutiny. One might point to the many hierarchical societies throughout history that more or less lived in harmony with their surroundings: Benedictine monasteries, feudal Europe and Japan, and the vast majority of pre-industrial communities. None of these societies even approached the levels of anarchism and egalitarianism that total liberationists call for, but nevertheless avoided the kinds of ecological disaster that have plagued the ostensibly emancipatory and democratic societies of modernity. By the same token, there is no reason to assume that a more egalitarian society would automatically become more ecologically benign; the environmental record of the ideologically egalitarian Soviet Union speaks for itself.⁵⁸ Additionally, in their blanket condemnation of hierarchy as “oppressive” and ecocidal, total liberationists ignore its potentially beneficial forms, such as the relationships between parents and children or mentors and apprentices, which promote the good of both. Indeed, as the strategists behind Deep Green Resistance have realized, a hierarchical command structure is necessary in order to mount an organized and effective resistance against the modern industrial state: “The more authoritarian methods of decision making - the hierarchies of business or the military - are common for a reason: they get things done.”⁵⁹ Some forms of hierarchy are therefore both natural and necessary to the defense of ecological integrity. The ultimate question for the militant ecologist should not be whether a society or organization is *egalitarian* but whether it is *ecocentric* - whether its predominant culture is one that cultivates humility and respect for the Earth.

The issues raised in this debate have important implications for the viability of ecological anarchy, though it seems to have had little impact on the outlook of the movement as a whole. It may be true that, from an ecocentric perspective, anarchy is preferable to the centralized nation-state in terms of ecological impact, though its record on human suffering and social justice is mixed. Nevertheless, the central question here is how an anarchic community could possibly prevent the rise of a strong power, either within or without, that desires to dominate and exploit humankind or the natural world. This is a question that is never adequately addressed by the partisans of anarchy. Vigilantism and citizen militias would be wholly inadequate to counter an organized gang of armored marauders or warriors on horseback; and those who claim that humans will have “learned their lesson” fail to appreciate the fact that, for many, the horrors of civilization may well seem rather tame in comparison to the

⁵⁷ Mikal Jakubal, “Why I Did it, Why I’ll Never Do it Again...” *Live Wild or Die* 1 (1989), 2.

⁵⁸ See *Environmental Justice and Sustainability in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Julian Agyeman and Yelena Ogneva-Himmelberger (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009) and D.J. Peterson, *Troubled Lands: The Legacy of Soviet Environmental Destruction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

⁵⁹ Aric McBay, Lierre Keith, and Derrick Jensen, *Deep Green Resistance: Strategy to Save the Planet* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), 307.

return to physical insecurity that its collapse would entail. The total liberationist emphasis on non-domination and egalitarianism is unlikely to be sufficient to counteract anthropocentric attitudes, and might prevent the emergence of the moral authority and coercive power necessary to keep human greed in check. Radical theorist Derek Jensen assures readers that “this was a one-time blowout,” since once the surplus energy supplied by fossil fuels vanishes, humans will simply no longer possess the power necessary to exploit the Earth and each other.⁶⁰ While this may be true to a certain point, it fails to appreciate just how long this might take to come about, as well as the amount of ecological and human damage that might be done in the meantime or with relatively primitive instruments, with fire and axes and knives. Barring a complete and irreversible transformation in the collective human consciousness, anarchy has little to recommend it.

9.4 Small Is Not Always Beautiful

Bioregionalism, the decentralist corollary of ecological anarchy, is also open to critique for its simplistic understanding of human communities as well as the potentially unsavory consequences of its radical cultural particularism. One common critique of bioregionalism is that, with its strong emphasis on local autonomy and cultural particularism, it denies universal notions of democracy and human rights. Kirkpatrick Sale’s remarks to this effect raised many eyebrows among his readers: “Different bioregions would inevitably move in different ways, develop different resources and different forms of government,” he writes:

Bioregional diversity, it must be understood, means exactly that. It does not mean that every community in a bioregion, every subregion within an ecoregion, every ecoregion on a continent, would construct itself along the same lines, evolve the same political forms. Most particularly it does not mean that every bioregion would be likely to heed the values of democracy, equality, liberty, freedom, justice, and the like, the sort that the liberal American tradition proclaims.⁶¹

Many critics of bioregionalism have been quite horrified by statements like these, which deny the universality of modern liberal principles in favor of a genuine diversity of political and cultural norms. Thus Murray Bookchin points out, quite correctly, that a simple commitment to decentralization is not intrinsically emancipatory: “Few societies were more decentralized than European feudalism, which was structured around smallscale communities, mutual aid, and the communal use of land. Yet few societies

⁶⁰ McBay, Keith, and Jensen, *Deep Green Resistance*, 306.

⁶¹ Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1985), 108-110.

were more hierarchical or oppressive.”⁶² These concerns have been exacerbated by similarities between the bioregionalist emphasis on local control and the traditional American discourse of states’ rights, which - given its importance to antebellum Southerners such as John Taylor of Caroline and John C. Calhoun, as well as twentiethcentury defenders of racial segregation - are sometimes invoked in order to illustrate the dangers of political decentralization.

These concerns about localism and diversity are certainly important for social ecologists, ecosocialists, ecofeminists, and others on the ecological left for whom humanitarian issues and social justice are equal in importance to ecological integrity. The Marxist tradition, from which many of these thinkers derive their socio-economic analysis, historically derided “the idiocy of rural life” and regarded the parochial, small-minded, politically reactionary village-dweller as wholly lacking in revolutionary potential. Indeed, it points to an important paradox (or perhaps just a contradiction) in the total liberationist view in particular, as Pellow insightfully points out: such activists tend to favor “nonheteronormative, racially, ethnically, and economically diverse populations,” but fail to realize that such conditions are historically more prevalent within the large, urban, bureaucratic states they seek to destroy; “Accordingly, activists seeking total liberation simultaneously embrace the heterogeneity and reject the system that produces and controls it.”⁶³ However, while there is no guarantee that decentralized bioregional communities would be as enlightened and socially progressive (or as culinarily diverse) as some on the ecological left would prefer, from a purely ecocentric perspective this is no argument against it. With ecological integrity the paramount concern, the precise system of government and its distribution of power may well be of little importance, so long as necessary measures are taken to ensure the health of the natural world.

However, while these potential departures from the modern liberal notions of human rights and procedural democracy may be of relatively little concern from an ecocentric perspective, this does point to one significant drawback in bioregional thought: there is no guarantee that such a society will be *ecologically* sound, either. Though Sale insists that, “as countless eons testify,” decisions made at the local level “stand at least a fair chance of being correct,”⁶⁴ many environmental scholars do not share his confidence in the wisdom of local control. One can point, for instance, to the fact that the U.S. federal government has historically been far more proactive than most state and local political bodies with regard to wilderness preservation, pollution, and wildlife management. This irony was not lost on the early EF! activists, who despite their principled support for bioregionalism were nevertheless forced to rely upon the federal government to protect endangered lands from short-sighted state politicians, ranchers, and industrialists. As Dave Foreman complained in 1987, lambasting the ecological indifference typically displayed by the “know-nothing, provincial, resource-exploiting

⁶² Bookchin and Foreman, *Defending the Earth*, 40.

⁶³ Pellow, *Total Liberation*, 113.

⁶⁴ Sale, *Dwellers*, 95.

bumpkin proletarian of North America's rural areas," While local control of the land is fine in theory and as a long-term goal (after rustics are enlightened to biocentrism), let us remember that we would not have one area of protected Wilderness or other natural areas in most of the western states if it were up to the state level politicians or rural residents of those states... Congress is a shining beacon of biocentric enlightenment when compared to any state legislature in the West, or worse yet, to a rural county 553 commissioner.⁶⁵

Interestingly, and in blatant contradiction to bioregionalist principles, the earliest issue of the *Earth First! Journal* proposed "that the *state* lands be returned to the federal government" in response to demands by Western ranchers and politicians that protected federal lands be returned to the states for development.⁶⁶ Thus, despite the freewheeling anarchism and localism embraced by many of these early ecowarriors, they recognized that wild nature must be defended by whatever means necessary, even if it involved sacrificing their bioregionalist preferences. This pragmatism is, of course, the core of the militant ecology outlook.

In short, however conceived, both anarchy and bioregionalism remain pervasive but inconsistent ideals within the militant ecology movement. Bioregionalism might be the more workable of the two at some point in the distant future, but without a considerable and widespread shift in attitudes towards a more ecocentric outlook, local control may only lead to greater exploitation of the natural environment in the name of increased short-term gain. As Foreman warned his compatriots, "Bioregionalists must take care not to let an idealistic goal of local control and self-sufficiency destroy the higher goal of continuation of wild natural diversity."⁶⁷ Bioregionalism is what lies on the other side of modernity, once the great juggernaut of industrial civilization has collapsed beneath its own weight. Until that point, logically consistent militant ecologists cannot refuse to use all tools at their disposal, including the levers of the federal government, in order to preserve the integrity of wild nature.

The ideal of anarchy, whether of a tribalist or revolutionary nature, is even more problematic. Even after a cataclysmic change, the aforementioned critiques of anarchism and local myopia still seem to indicate the need for a higher authority than the locality or tribe in order to avoid descending back into the morass of environmental exploitation. Perhaps something akin to the United States federal system or medieval Holy Roman Empire might be optimal, allowing a wide degree of variation in local governments, culture, and mores while enforcing certain shared values regarding ecological preservation. Barring an unlikely universal and lasting change in human attitudes towards the natural world, such a system would require some form of authority and coercive power in order to sustain itself and to defend what wilderness has been

⁶⁵ Foreman, "Reinhabitation," 22.

⁶⁶ *EF! Journal* 1, no. 1 (November 1, 1980), 6.

⁶⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 47.

preserved. It is difficult to see how an anarchic, tribal, or libertarian community of freeholders could achieve this result.

A more likely basis for a truly ecological future primitive society might be found in the steady state depicted by William Ophuls. In his model, like that of the militant ecologists, there is an emphasis on ecological stewardship, humility, acceptance of natural limits, holistic metaphysics, and earthen spirituality; but he also argues for greater communalism, authority, and discarding the radical egalitarian models prominent in the ecology movement in favor of a “natural aristocracy” based on competence and wisdom.⁶⁸ Such a society bears many similarities to the ideals of pre-modern societies as well as the political outlook of Edmund Burke and other traditionalist and religious conservatives. It would avoid the pitfalls of authoritarianism by securing a high degree of local autonomy and constitutional protections of individual privileges, and rejecting the hard technology and expansionism typically associated with such states. In addition, it avoids the dangers of anarchy because it is based upon a more realistic acceptance of human limits and imperfections, instituting the central authority necessary to check aggressive self-interest and preserve the balance and harmony of the whole social order. In many ways it is the ecowarrior understanding of anarchy as tribalism that comes closer to this ideal, in that it stresses the communitarian and social aspects of the future primitive society and does not condemn all forms of authority out of hand. The anarchism of the total liberationists, however, which is wholly opposed to hierarchy and authority of any kind, cannot escape the problems discussed above, and is unlikely to achieve a lasting protection for wild nature. It therefore abandons the core of militant ecology, the effective defense of ecological integrity above all.

The fact that so many activists espouse anarchy as an ideal (despite little actual evidence in its favor) does indicate that a genuine commitment to human freedom and dignity lurks beneath the surface of even the most seemingly misanthropic among them. Ironically, while this might provide some reassurance to their critics, this suspicion of political power and authority may in fact prove to be the Achilles heel of the militant ecology political program, the aspect most in conflict with its guiding principles and its commitment to the effective defense of wild nature.

⁶⁸ William Ophuls and A. Stephan Boyan, Jr., *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity Revisited: The Unraveling of the American Dream* (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1992), 285-292.

10. Economics and Technology

Given their struggle against globalism and the transformation of living beings into exploitable resources, as well as their suspicion concerning the role of “corporate blood money” in contemporary political debates, anti-capitalist attitudes among militant ecologists are hardly surprising. Scholars such as Pellow are therefore correct to deem this opposition to capitalism as a cornerstone of the contemporary movement.¹

Interestingly, this was not always the case. The earliest statement of principles for Earth First! in fact insisted that “our platform could easily be justified economically, socially, and biologically within existing American society without even causing its downfall.”² There are a number of reasons for this muted resistance to capitalism in the movement’s early years. For one, the ecowarrior founders of Earth First! were careful to avoid associating themselves too closely with the political left, in an effort to stymie the fifth-columnist, tree-hugging hippie stereotype painted by the Sagebrush Rebellion and the Reagan administration (an effort which was not wholly successful). Then there was the fact that Foreman, Wolke, Koehler, Abbey, and the rest of the early gang simply did not believe that capitalism was the chief problem facing the planet, reserving most of their criticism for industrialism and the ideology of anthropocentrism.³ However, despite their lack of interest in anti-capitalist social analysis (one doubts that any of them would have willingly traded their Leopold and Thoreau for Marcuse and Gramsci), there was always a latent anti-capitalist streak even among these early ecowarriors. This expressed itself in their opposition to the extractive industries and ecologically irresponsible corporations, their support for federal regulations on industry, and their contempt for the artificial needs and desires created by the cancerous “grow or die” ideology of late capitalism. Foreman himself admitted as much during a debate with Murray Bookchin: “I know we are talking radical, anti-capitalist social change here.”⁴ However, unlike many on the political left, their opposition to capitalism centered upon its destructive effects on the natural world rather than its inequity.

With the departure of Foreman and his fellow “rednecks for wilderness” and the rise in total liberationist tendencies within the movement, these anti-capitalist attitudes

¹ Pellow, *Total Liberation*, 6.

² *Nature More: The Journal of Earth First* (July 1980), 1.

³ “No, capitalists are not the only problem,” wrote Foreman in 1987 (Foreman, “Around the Campfire,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 6 (June 21, 1987), 2.

⁴ Bookchin and Foreman, *Defending the Earth*, 25.

⁵ *Ibid*, 38.

became much more pronounced. Many activists would come to agree with Bookchin that “corporate capitalism is *inherently* anti-ecological. Sooner or later, a market economy whose very law of life is structured around competition and accumulation - a system based on the dictum ‘grow or die’ - must of necessity tear down the planet...”⁵⁶¹ One important figure in this evolution towards a more avowedly anti-capitalist stance was EF! leader Judi Bari, who insisted that capitalism was directly opposed to all forms of biocentrism, due to its sanctification of private property and the tyranny of the bottom line: “This system cannot be reformed. It is based on the destruction of the earth and the exploitation of the people... This is why I believe that serious ecologists must be revolutionaries.”⁶ These attitudes became even stronger in later iterations of Earth First!, with some newer activists going so far as to suggest that the struggle against capitalism is in fact “the only revolution,” to which ecological concerns are subordinate.⁷ The newly-emerging Earth Liberation Front also made opposition to capitalism an integral part of its platform, with one ELF communique promising “an escalation in tactics against capitalism and industry” in the years ahead.⁸ While the anonymous and leaderless nature of the ELF makes it difficult to attribute any concrete ideology to its activists,⁹ this broadly anti-capitalist sentiment is in keeping with the content of their communiqués as well as trends within the movement as a whole, away from single-issue ecodefense and towards a more all-encompassing resistance to oppression. The same might be said for the animal liberation arm of the movement, with some activists arguing that a single-issue focus on animal rights or liberation will never achieve the necessary social transformation: “Capitalism is the totalitarianism of economics over life. All life becomes a commodity in this society... For animals and ourselves liberation must be total or it will be nothing.”¹⁰

However, despite their widespread opposition to corporate capitalism, unfettered property rights, and the commodification of life, it would be a mistake to conflate militant ecology with socialism or communism. Even the former union organizer Judi Bari explicitly denied that Earth First! was a *leftist* organization, insisting that we

⁶ Judi Bari, “Revolutionary Ecology: Biocentrism and Deep Ecology,” *Judi Bari Web Site of the Redwood Summer Justice Project* (1995), <http://www.judibari.org/revolutionary-ecology.html>.

⁷ “Of course the ecological issues of the day are important, but, ecology is inexorably intertwined with social relations. It’s OK to concentrate on Earth first if the efforts are within a greater common strategy to choke the life out of capital/consumerism. Yuppies and the upwardly mobile are antithetical to the real revolution, the only revolution, of which ecology must be a driving force but not the only driving force. If you’re not willing to fight capital you’re not willing to stop ecological disaster” (Brian McCarvill, “Dear Shit Fer Brains,” *EF! Journal* 27, no. 1 (November/December 2006), 4-5).

⁸ Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, 26.

⁹ Indeed, the overtly anti-capitalist aspects of the ELF may be partially attributable to the rhetoric of its self-appointed spokesmen, Craig Rosebraugh and Leslie James Pickering. The latter once insisted that the ELF ideology rested upon a belief that “capitalism and the mindset that allows it to exist . is creating the various injustices on this planet and ultimately the destruction of life” (Pickering, *Earth Liberation Front*, 46), while Rosebraugh argued that the chief culprit behind all forms of oppression is the ideology of capitalism (Craig Rosebraugh, “Linking Social Justice Movements,” 11).

¹⁰ “Animal Rightism and the Ideology of the Single Issue,” *Underground 1* (August 1994), 23.

are not trying to overthrow capitalism for the benefit of the proletariat. In fact, the society we envision is not spoken to in any leftist theory that I've ever heard of. Those theories deal only with how to redistribute the spoils of exploiting the earth to benefit a different class of humans.¹¹

Elsewhere, she claimed that biocentrism was in opposition to both capitalism and communism, both of which depict the relationship of humankind to the Earth as "that of a gluttonous consumer."¹² In short, despite its anti-capitalist orientation, militant ecology also rejects most features of communism or socialism, theoretical and applied: its emphasis on central planning, use of mass production technologies, anthropocentric and utilitarian attitudes towards the natural world, and progressive conception of history. Militant ecology opposes both capitalism and communism in the name of bioregionalism, the steady state, ecocentric spirituality, and limited government on a more human scale. In this respect, it bears a greater resemblance to the "Romantic anti-capitalism" identified by Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy, whose opposition to capitalist modernity was grounded upon a nostalgia for pre-capitalist institutions rather than support for scientific socialism or communism.¹³ By and large, despite some changes over time, militant ecology can still claim to be politically "neither left nor right" but ecocentric, prioritizing wild nature and ecological integrity over any particular economic or political system.

Another feature shared by militant ecologists and the major figures of Romantic anti-capitalism is a suspicion of technology. "A deep questioning of, and even an antipathy to, 'progress' and technology" was included among the first principles of Earth First! upon its formation in the early eighties, with the defiant proclamation that "we accept the pejoratives of 'Luddite' and 'Neanderthal' with pride."¹⁴ Anti-technology polemics were a particular hobbyhorse of Christopher Manes. He noted that, even if technology were planned and its benefits distributed more democratically than at present (as Cornucopians such as Julian Simon hoped), it would still be pose a great danger from the perspective of ecocentrism. Echoing Heidegger's ideas in *Question Concerning Technology*, Manes writes, "Technology represents a relationship between humanity and the world, a portrayal of the entirety of existence as a standing reserve of raw material valuable only insofar as it augments human power."¹⁵ However, militant ecology's critique of technology goes even further than Heidegger or later critical theorists such as Marcuse. While these thinkers focused primarily on the detrimental effects of technology on the human community and psyche, Manes insists that technology is incompatible with a long-term concern for ecological integrity. He emphasized that technology is *not* simply a tool, to be used for good or for ill; "It is the demon

¹¹ Bari, *Timber Wars*, 57.

¹² Bari, "Revolutionary Ecology."

¹³ Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," *New German Critique* 32 (Spring-Summer 1984), 42-92., 46.

¹⁴ Foreman, *Confessions*, 28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

in our souls, the pestilence in our blood, the worm in our brains, but it is not mere machinery... [it is] the rationalization of our relationship to nature and ourselves into a series of barren techniques.”¹⁶ There is, in short, no such thing as “appropriate” technology: “There are merely crafts, on the one hand, which tap into the abundant creativity of the Earth; and on the other, technology, which always seeks to dominate it.”¹⁷ In addition to these detrimental psychic influences, technology has also had deleterious practical affects, insofar as it has enabled humankind to surmount natural limitations on its activities and numbers. Manes’ proposal for overcoming the technological modern society includes the following provisions: replace technology-based economies with crafts; reintegrate human societies into natural cycles; reestablish natural mortality rates (obviously a highly controversial point, requiring the dismantling of the technological network that supports medical science), and impose a moratorium on the export of technology into areas that have not yet been exposed to it.¹⁸

Though many aspects of Manes’ argument would be modified by later generations of militant ecologists, the basic suspicion of technology remains strong. Among the earth and animal liberation underground, biotech and medical research are seen as two particularly insidious technological applications of contemporary science. As one ELF commune writes, following an attack on a University of Idaho laboratory, “Biotechnological research may be intended for good ends by the scientist, as was nuclear research, but in our free enterprise police state society it will be used almost solely for greed and control.”¹⁹ As Michael Becker notes, in his analysis of the ELF and ALF communiques, these activists seem to understand technology as a mechanism for turning living beings (such as research animals) into mere resources:

Bringing to consciousness the exploitative character of modern technical appropriation of the Earth comprises, in large part, the truly revolutionary character of the ELF and similar groups. These are the only ‘environmental’ groups that have fully grasped that the current integration of modern technics and corporate capital results in systematic violence against all nature, including animals and human beings.²⁰

In short, whether their attitudes can be traced back to the antimodern Romantic conservationists of the nineteenth century or contemporary green anarchist theory, the approach to economics and technology among militant ecologists is largely the same. They struggle for an end to any economic system that demands infinite growth and the reckless exploitation of nature; and they reject, in principle at least, almost all modern forms of technology for being destructive of the human spirit and the Earth.

¹⁶ Christopher Manes, “Technology-Free Zones,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 1 (November 1, 1986), 8.

¹⁷ Christopher Manes, “Technology and Mountain Thinking,” *Earth First! Reader*, 129.

¹⁸ Miss Ann Thropy (Christopher Manes), “Technology and Mortality,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 1 (November 1, 1986), 18.

¹⁹ Pickering, *Earth Liberation Front*, 34.

²⁰ Becker, “Ontological Anarchism,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 74-78.

10.1 Appropriate Technology, Sustainable Development, and Ecological Modernization

This dismissive attitude towards technology and economic development has been criticized by many thinkers in the environmental movement, who insist that a truly ecological society will only be gained by means of *better* technology within a system of *sustainable* development. Against the militant ecologist's preference for more primitive lifestyles and crafts, critics have pointed out that - given the current human population - a return to hunting, gathering, rural living, and wood-burning would in all likelihood be disastrous for wilderness and wildlife. These critics suggest that the development of more "appropriate" technologies in order to decouple human needs from the natural world would be better for wilderness preservation in the long run. Martin Lewis shares with militant ecologists a concern with wilderness, wildlife, and renewable energy, but questions the means typically promoted by activists, arguing that a political program of "total decentralization, deurbanization, economic autarky, a ban on most forms of high technology, and the complete dismantling of capitalism, would not only prevent future improvements in solar power but would actually destroy the gains that have already been made."²¹ Indeed, he asserts, the technological advances necessary for an ecological society will likely not come about through "self-proclaimed deep ecologists affirming their communion with nature through shamanistic rituals," but rather through the efforts of high-tech corporations.²² Peter Huber makes a similar case, arguing that greater technological development is the best way to limit humanity's effects on the Earth's surface and preserve large areas of undisturbed wilderness.²³ Likewise, acolytes of the school of "New Conservation" such as Steward Brand, Ted Nordhaus, and Michael Schellenberger share an enthusiasm for recent innovations in biotechnology, synthetic biology, nuclear power, and geoengineering as means of ensuring a prosperous human future within a clean and healthy natural world.

Many of these critics also assert that technological innovation will only occur within an environment of economic growth and prosperity. To this end, some advance a form of free-market environmentalism, arguing that the best solution for environmental degradation is through privatization, pricing resources, quota systems, and competitive bidding. Martin Lewis is also grudgingly supportive of capitalism, which "despite its social flaws, presents the only economic system resilient and efficient enough to see the development of a more benign human presence on the earth."²⁴ Others favor the *ecological modernization* model, which also endeavors to reconcile economic growth and ecological preservation while giving a larger role to the state in encouraging techno-

²¹ Martin W. Lewis, *Green Delusions: An Environmentalist Critique of Radical Environmentalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 16.

²³ Peter Huber, *Hard Green* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

²⁴ Lewis, *Green Delusions*, 9.

logical innovation and the more efficient use of resources, primarily through subsidies, investment, and regulations.²⁵ The advocates of both approaches deem them vastly superior to the primitivist and bioregionalist orientation of militant ecology due to their practical and solution-oriented nature, requiring little in the way of major structural changes and offering “a relatively politically and electorally painless or ‘win-win’ policy choice.”²⁶

This policy is nowadays more broadly known by another name: *sustainable development*. As the name implies, sustainable development posits the need for economic growth and rising living standards while simultaneously preserving the ability of nature to provide the “ecosystem services” upon which humankind depends. As defined by *Our Common Future*, released by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development and widely known as the “Brundtland Report,” “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”²⁷ Its defenders claim that it is only in a context of sustainable development, which pragmatically endeavors to balance human and ecological welfare, that a lasting symbiosis with the natural world can be achieved.²⁸

While admirable in its goals, militant ecologists have good reason for questioning several aspects of the contemporary sustainable development paradigm, particularly its faith in technological development, market incentives, and “win-win” solutions to problems of global ecological degradation. Regarding the long-term prospects of “appropriate technology,” several environmental thinkers have admitted that alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, nuclear, hydrogen, and natural gas all suffer from significant drawbacks. Most are considerably more expensive than present sources and still in a developmental stage, requiring government subsidies and large-scale investment as well as substantial waiting periods before their efforts bear fruit. Green favorites such as solar, wind, and biofuels are also unlikely to produce the amount of energy necessary to sustain contemporary consumption and population levels, and might well cause considerable ecological damage themselves - one must take account of the toxic materials used in the manufacturing of photovoltaic cells and their potential harm to desert ecosystems, risks of avian death and habitat destruction posed by wind turbines, and the waste of otherwise productive land in the growth of biofuel

²⁵ John Barry, “Ecological modernization,” in *Debating the Earth: An Environmental Politics Reader*, 2nd Edition, ed. John S. Dryzek and David Schlosberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 308; David Schlosberg and Sara Rinfret, “Ecological modernization, American style,” in *Environmentalism in the United States: Changing Conceptions of Activism*, ed. Elizabeth Bomberg and David Schlosberg (New York: Routledge, 2009), 68.

²⁶ Barry, “Ecological modernization,” in *Debating the Earth*, 310.

²⁷ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²⁸ For a comprehensive and up-to-date discussion of sustainability, see Jeffrey Sachs, *The Age of Sustainable Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

crops.²⁹ More importantly, as many militant ecologists point out, even if an entirely clean and socially conscious energy source were discovered, this alone would be insufficient to protect the rest of wild nature. As Dave Foreman mused later in life, “Nothing would wreck and tame the wild Earth quicker and more thoroughly than would clean energy too cheap to meter.”³⁰ A writer in the *Earth First! Journal* similarly condemns the enthusiasm for “clean energy” shown by a few militant ecologists, reasoning that “the last thing we should be doing is adding more power to the US electric grid... If we finally build enough wind farms, will all of the dead zones in the oceans magically spring back to life? Will all of the species that have been driven extinct return?”³¹ Clean, cheap, unlimited power will simply give humanity even greater capacity to destroy inconvenient ecosystems, wilderness, and wildlife with impunity, particularly if anthropocentric moral and social values remain unchanged. Militant ecologists therefore believe that modern civilization, with its high population and consumption levels, is simply incompatible with lasting ecological integrity - regardless of whether it draws its power from fossils, split atoms, hydrogen molecules, or the sun.

In addition, militant ecologists are generally suspicious of the corporations and political elites who wield the greatest technological power, no matter how seemingly clean or beneficial it may appear on the surface. For instance, in her discussion of genetic engineering Ayalet Hines freely admits that “transgenic organisms are not inherently dangerous,” but points to the potentially insidious applications of this technology and the disingenuous “feed the world” argument typically advanced by its proponents.³² Another editorial concerning climate change emphasizes that Earth First! is obviously not fighting against carbon itself, or even against climate change for that matter, which under certain circumstances is completely natural: “We are against the system that created anthropogenic climate change and we certainly can’t trust the corporations who run that system with any other energy supply (not hydrogen, nuclear, biofuels, tidal, geothermal, wind, or solar).”³³

In short, the militant ecologist’s case against techno-fixes for contemporary environmental problems rests not only upon some esoteric Heideggerian concern for “authenticity,” but also upon the very practical question of how that technology is to be used. For related reasons, militant ecologists also have compelling reasons for rejecting the mainstream fascination with sustainable development, green capitalism, and ecological modernization. When the idea of sustainable development is raised, the obvious question to ask, as Reed Noss points out, is “what are we sustaining?” Is the goal sim-

²⁹ David Ehrenfeld, “The Fable of Managed Earth,” in *Keeping the Wild*, 91-96.

³⁰ Foreman, *Man Swarm and the Killing of Wildlife*, 152.

³¹ Root Force, “Any Compromise in Defense of Civilization?” *EF! Journal* 29, no. 2 (January/February 2009), 20.

³² Ayelet Hines, “Genetic Engineering for Beginners,” *EF! Journal* 18, no. 1 (December 31, 1997), 1.

³³ “Evolving EF! II,” *EF! Journal* 28, no. 2 (January/February 2008), 11.

ply to sustain current human population and consumption patterns?³⁴ Environmental historian Donald Worster also outlines a few key flaws in the sustainable development paradigm as currently envisioned: it is based upon an anthropocentric view that the natural world exists primarily to serve the material demands of human species; and it assumes that humans can reliably calculate the carrying capacity of local and regional ecosystems.³⁵ He convincingly argues that the sustainable development paradigm has only managed to achieve such any level of popular acclaim by sacrificing its ecological dimension, offering an opportunity for latter-day environmentalists to escape the miasma of misanthropy and apocalypticism that characterized their mid-twentieth century forebears. However, lacking respect for the natural world as something possessing inherent value, the proponents of sustainable development generally end up relying upon economic, utilitarian, and anthropocentric definitions of sustainability.³⁶ Similar critiques might be made of the green capitalist and ecological modernization trends, which for all their *bona fides* are nevertheless highly reliant on the economic language of cost-benefit analysis. Moreover, they are focused primarily on pollution and energy consumption to the detriment of biodiversity and wilderness, lack any recognition of the intrinsic value of nature, provide no compelling reason for corporate oligarchs to care about future generations, and promise a “win-win” solution to the environmental crisis without any serious economic or political costs.³⁷

In the end, it is this latter point that is perhaps most important to understand about the militant ecologist’s attitude towards economics and technology. Aside from the most doctrinaire Heideggerians among their crew (and it seems inconceivable that there could be many), most militant ecologists accept that a certain degree of technology is inevitable, both in the transition to a future primitive society and as a lasting feature of it. This is the very essence of the *future* primitive, which strives to unite the best of the present with the ecological, spiritual, and political wisdom of the past. As with their approach to science in general, most militant ecologists would therefore acknowledge the need for a technology whose purpose is not to enable humans to exploit the biosphere with impunity, but rather to *keep humankind in check*, to repair the damage it has done, and to further its knowledge of the Earth and the cosmos. Such an application of technology would bear a greater similarity, in spirit of not in form, to the “crafts” identified by Heidegger and Manes, which humbly draw upon the powers of nature rather than harness and dominate them. Of course, since such a high-minded approach is unlikely to prevail under the current anthropocentric political and economic system, militant ecologists are reluctant to pin all their hopes on

³⁴ Reed F. Noss, “Sustainability and Wilderness,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 411.

³⁵ Donald Worster, “The Shaky Ground of Sustainable Development,” in *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 154.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁷ John Barry, “Ecological modernisation,” in *Debating the Earth*, 315-6; Schlosberg and Rinfret, “Ecological modernization,” in *Environmentalism in the United States*, 69-70, 83; Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 206.

technological or institutional fixes to the problems of ecological degradation. In order for such technologies to serve a benign function in society, William Ophuls points out, a change in human values, living patterns, and numbers must occur *in addition* to technological advances: “The goal of economic life must be redefined as plenitude for a reasonable number of people rather than as affluence for an ever-growing population... Thus a technological future in reasonable harmony with the laws of ecology and thermodynamics is attainable, *but it depends on a political decision to live a different kind of life.*”³⁸

This is the ultimate reason behind the general antipathy towards “techno-fixes,” sustainable development, and green capitalism among militant ecologists. All of these alternatives seem to hold out hope that anthropocentric modern civilization can continue largely unchanged, with a few modifications here and there but no deep cultural, political, or economic transformations. Of course, it may indeed be possible for great advances in clean energy, pollution control, and human living standards to occur without any momentous socio-political shifts - this is, in essence, the technocratic cornucopian ideal painted by Julian Simon and his successors. However, no matter how much they might benefit material human welfare, such developments would likely prove disastrous for the class of beings most important to militant ecologists: the wild, the undomesticated, the ungovernable. In order to ensure that the free play of evolutionary and ecological processes continues on a grand scale without being subordinated to human aesthetic or utilitarian desires, something more than electric cars and cap-and-trade schemes will be needed. There must be a drastic change in culture and politics, away from the anthropocentric fixation on human material welfare and towards a respect for the integrity of life on Earth. A wide variety of economic systems, and many different forms of technology, may be compatible with such a goal. The idea is to restore a culture and society in which economic concerns are not paramount.

³⁸ William Ophuls, *Requiem for Modern Politics: The Tragedy of the Enlightenment and the Challenge of the New Millennium* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 10.

11. Wilderness

Robyn Eckersley identifies the “litmus” ecopolitical issues - those which distinguish ecocentric thinkers from mainstream environmentalists - as an overriding concern with wilderness preservation, on the one hand, and human population reduction, on the other.¹ Few environmental thinkers of any stripe believe that the human population can continue to grow unabated without a negative impact on the natural world, disagreeing primarily as to the means of reducing it. Since this is also the grounds for significant internal debate within the militant ecology movement, a discussion of population reduction has been reserved for the following chapter on social justice. This chapter examines the reasons behind militant ecology’s commitment to wilderness defense, arguing that many of the criticisms directed at wilderness preservation over the past few decades - that it reinforces the “man-nature” dualism of Western metaphysics, that it rests upon a delusional belief in pristine nature, and that it is indifferent to social justice - are all either inapplicable or irrelevant to the concerns of militant ecocentrism.

Among all environmental groups active in the late twentieth century, Earth First! was probably the most deeply committed to wide-scale wilderness preservation, particularly in the decade following its inception. As founding member Howie Wolke explained, “We founders were primarily about the wilds, and for the first few years EF! reflected our bias. In fact, most of the early activists... had backgrounds and experience in conservation, not social change.”² Foreman went so far as to insist that EF! was not actually an environmental group at all, because “environmental groups worry about environmental health hazards to human beings, they worry about clean air and water for the benefit of people and ask why we’re so wrapped up in something as irrelevant and tangential and elitist as wilderness.”³ For EF! and the new militants, however, wilderness was to be the central issue, the “basic unit” of radical environmentalism. Thus the Earth First! statement of principles reads:

The preservation of wilderness is the fundamental issue. Wilderness does not merely mean backpacking parks or scenery. It is the natural world. The arena for evolution, the caldron from which humans emerged, the home of the others with whom we share this planet. Wilderness is the real world;

¹ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 29.

² Wolke, “A Founder’s Story.”

³ Quoted in Manes, *Green Rage*, 72.

our cities, our computers, our airplanes, our global business civilization are all but artificial and transient phenomena.⁴

The EF! definition of wilderness, outlined by activist Christopher Manes, includes the following characteristics: no permanent human habitation except indigenous peoples; no mechanized equipment, logging, mining, water diversion, industrial activity, agriculture, or grazing; no chemical substances; no suppression of wildfires; no overflights by aircraft; and no priority placed on the safety and convenience of human visitors.⁵ On a more positive note, as Howie Wolke writes, “Wilderness is the matrix that supports all life on Earth, all known life in the universe. Wilderness is the unique seething cauldron of evolution - a dynamic mix of physical and biotic processes that continues to create, destroy and hone life.”⁶ Wilderness deserves defense because it possesses *inherent worth*, because it is the arena of evolution, “the real world,” and humanity’s first home on Earth, whose very presence challenges the anthropocentric illusions of human dominance. For this reason, as Foreman explains, the idea of wilderness is “the most radical in human thought - more radical than Paine, than Marx, than Mao. Wilderness says: Human beings are not dominant, Earth is not for *Homo sapiens* alone, human life is but one life form on the planet and has no right to take exclusive possession.”⁷

In light of this commitment, much of the activism in EF!’s first two decades was focused on defending America’s remaining old-growth forests. As Wolke explains, We were specialists, focused upon the wildlands... We perceived this to be an empty niche and filled it. The niche was narrow, but we were lions; we planned to make a difference. We would work toward common goals with other conservation groups and with other movements, but we weren’t the anti-nuclear, animal rights, labor or woman’s movement.⁸

These activists realized that it would not be sufficient merely to defend existing wilderness areas; it was necessary to create more, withdrawing “huge areas as inviolate natural sanctuaries from the depredations of modern industry and technology.”⁹ As described in the earliest issue of the *Earth First! Journal* (briefly and ill-advisedly entitled *Nature More*, after a line of Lord Byron), “Within each reserve, all existing developments (roads, towns, nukes, etc.) will be obliterated by the same implements of technology that put them there. We intend to help nature reclaim the earth.”¹⁰ Over time their platform grew more sophisticated, culminating in a comprehensive proposal for the “Earth First! Wilderness Preserve System” released in 1983 by Howie Wolke, Bart Koehler, Shaaron Netherton, and Dave Foreman. This first-of-its-kind

⁴ Foreman, *Confessions*, 27.

⁵ Christopher Manes, *Green Rage*, 74.

⁶ Howie Wolke, “Wilderness: The Matrix of Life,” *EF! Journal* 21, no. 1 (November 1, 2000), 6.

⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 19.

⁸ Wolke, “A Founder’s Story.”

⁹ Foreman, *Confessions*, 19.

¹⁰ *Nature More: The Journal of Earth First* 0, volume 0 (July 1980), 1.

blueprint for a national system of ecological preserves, at least on such an enormous scale, called for the protection of all roadless areas and old-growth forests, the restoration of landscape-level ecosystems, and the intact preservation of wilderness areas much larger than most currently in existence.¹¹

While some of the early fixation on wilderness has diminished in the militant ecology movement, and nowadays is often balanced by concerns with urban infrastructure and social justice, the commitment to broad wilderness protection and “rewilding” remains a powerful motivation. Many ELF and ALF actions, for instance, have been directed at companies and government agencies that pose a threat to wilderness and wildlife, either through development, urban sprawl, trapping, or research.

Even the more philanthropic among them recognize that “there are no safe spaces on a dead planet,” and that consequently

In all of our endeavors, we must strive to put the Earth first... Working for the Earth and life means ending all oppression everywhere, securing the liberation of all beings. At the same time, let us remember the core of Earth First’s very being: the uncompromising defense of wilderness and biodiversity - the very source of all that is sacred, real and irreplaceable.¹²

The greatest disagreement between ecowarriors and total liberationists, which is discussed in the following chapter, is not over whether wilderness preservation *should* be a top priority but whether it should be the primary focus of the militant ecology movement.

11.1 The Trouble with Wilderness

Over the last two decades, there has been substantial debate among environmental theorists as to whether the so-called “received wilderness idea,” the quasi-religious conception of wilderness as a pristine natural area “where man is a visitor who does not remain,”¹³ is still valid. This debate, which had been brewing since the mid-1980s but is generally agreed to have come to national prominence with the 1995 publication of William Cronon’s essay “The Trouble With Wilderness; or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” in the *New York Times*, has resulted in this formerly beloved American idea being derided as “ethnocentric, androcentric, phallocentric, unscientific, unphilosophic, impolitic, outmoded, even genocidal.”¹⁴ However, while these debates caused

¹¹ Dave Foreman, *Rewilding North America: A Vision for Conservation in the 21st Century* (Washington: Island Press, 2004), 158.

¹² The Radikal Weatherman, “There are no safe spaces on a dead planet,” *EF! Journal* 28, no. 1 (November/December 2007), 12-13.

¹³ In the words of the 1964 *Wilderness Act*.

¹⁴ As Callicott and Nelson write in the introduction to their anthology, *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 2.

quite a stir within certain academic circles and the board rooms of a few prominent environmental foundations, a brief overview of these charges will confirm that they are either inaccurate or, at the very least, irrelevant to the kind of wilderness that militant ecology is interested in preserving.

11.1.1 Dualism

One recent critique of the wilderness concept is that, in the words of J. Baird Callicott, it “perpetuates the pre-Darwinian Western metaphysical dichotomy between ‘man’ and ‘nature,’ albeit with an opposite spin.”¹⁵ In other words, whereas the dominant tradition in Western metaphysics regarded humankind as superior to the rest of nature due to its possession of a soul or reason, the classic wilderness idea simply inverts this judgment: it is *humanity*, with its sinful greed and cruelty and moral depravity, that is irredeemably alienated from the holy realm of pure nature. This quasi-religious attitude is commonly believed to be a holdover from America’s Puritan days, which furnished the religious impetus in the nature writing of the New England Transcendentalists and John Muir. The classical wilderness idea, which emphasized the separation of humankind and pure nature and the necessity of preserving natural sanctuaries away from urban civilization, therefore denies the Darwinian insight that humans are themselves a part of nature. Though accepting that wilderness preserves are an essential holding action against further biodiversity loss, Callicott and others advocate a “sustainable development” approach - in which economic activity and biological conservation are integrated - as a more effective long-term solution.

This critique of the “man-nature” dualism implied by the very existence of wilderness areas, while providing much fodder to historians and academic ethicists, is of minimal relevance to the real-world defenders of wilderness areas. For one, even those who call for a revaluation of the “received wilderness idea” acknowledge that, at humanity’s current level of industrial and technological development, wilderness preserves may indeed be the only effective means to protect diminishing biodiversity against an encroaching human civilization. The successful implementation of Callicott’s sustainable development model would require a nearly unthinkable change in the economy and culture of industrialized nations, and a moratorium on industrial development in all others. To be sure, even for militant ecologists, wilderness sanctuaries are a distant second to the Pleistocene ideal of a low-impact, tribal humankind ranging over a rewilded Earth. Nevertheless, at the present historical moment they are likely to be more effective, and certainly more politically feasible, than calls for a massive reorientation of human existence - particularly considering the fragility of these areas and the irreversibility of their loss. Rejecting wilderness in favor of the chimera of sustainable development is a rejection of a workable, if flawed, ideal in favor of the near-impossible.

¹⁵ J. Baird Callicott, “The Wilderness Idea Revisited: The Sustainable Development Alternative,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 348.

In addition to its pragmatic difficulties, this criticism of the wilderness idea in favor of sustainable development radically misunderstands the true source of humannature dualism. As David Johns perceptively writes, "It is not the advocates of placing some lands and waterways off limits to human exploitation who have separated humans from the rest of the world. Agriculture and civilization did that."¹⁶ This split is both material and spiritual, and to merely stop thinking in terms of the wilderness/civilization dichotomy will do nothing to heal it. It seems apparent that if Callicott's sustainable development model is applied without massive changes in human economy, technology, numbers, and ecological attitudes, the inevitable result will not be the reintegration of humanity into nature but rather the total humanization of the Earth. As Eileen Crist observes, amidst all the talk of human separation from nature little attention is paid to the virtuous face of separation... This sense of separation does not stem from an ideology of humanwilderness dualism, but from the cultivation of an ecological ethic as Aldo Leopold understood it: a self-imposed limitation on our actions flowing from love, respect, and admiration of the land.¹⁷

To this extent, when not treated solely as a playground or museum but chiefly as an arena for natural evolution, where non-human lives and forces can continue to flourish relatively free of human interference, wilderness areas in fact represent a major step *towards* human reintegration with and respect for the Earth - on a spiritual, if not a physical, level.

Lurking in this rejection of "man-nature dualism" and enthusiastic embrace of sustainable development is the assumption that, since humans are a product of evolution and part of nature like any other, their works are basically indistinguishable from those of other animals. Such an assumption, which has already been critiqued at some length in chapters three and six, ignores the highly differential impact of human activities on the natural world. There is no logical contraction or metaphysical dualism in recognizing these differences: as Holmes Rolston III writes, "Animals take nature ready to hand, adapt to it by natural selection, fitted into their niches; humans rebuild their world through artifact and heritage, agriculture and culture, political and religious decisions."¹⁸ By injecting the human will into natural evolutionary processes, by transforming the Earth into a "rambunctious garden," the essential quality of wilderness - its very existence as "self-willed" land - would be lost. Some, of course, do not find this wild quality particularly valuable or appealing, and these are the attitudes which lovers of the wilds must necessarily combat in the political sphere; but militant ecologists would find it disingenuous to claim support for biodiversity and wild nature while denying the very conditions that make their preservation possible. From the per-

¹⁶ David Johns, "With Friends Like These, Wilderness and Biodiversity Do Not Need Enemies," in *Keeping the Wild*, 39.

¹⁷ Eileen Crist, "Against the Social Construction of Nature and Wilderness," in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On*, 518.

¹⁸ Holmes Rolston III, "The Wilderness Idea Reaffirmed," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 370.

spective of ecocentrism, there is nothing unscientific or metaphysically suspect about differentiating between the impacts of humankind and other animals. Indeed, this may be the only way, certainly at present, to preserve the integrity of the wild Earth.

11.1.2 Human Impacts and the “Pristine”

Another objection to the traditional wilderness idea concerns its typical depiction of wildlands as “pristine,” “virgin,” “untouched,” “untrammelled,” and so forth. This romantic notion ignores the historical role played by aboriginal peoples, particularly in the New World, in altering their ecosystems through agriculture, seasonal burns, and hunting. Indeed, scholars such as Paul Martin have attributed the massive Pleistocene extinctions in North America to the newly-arrived Paleoindians, though this is highly controversial.¹⁹ As William M. Deneva claims, “The Indian impact was neither benign nor localized nor ephemeral, nor were resources always used in a sound ecological way... What they did was to change their landscape nearly everywhere. in important ways that merit attention.”²⁰ The wilderness idea also ignores the fact that human activity has by now impacted virtually every place on Earth, leaving no pristine lands left to protect. Therefore, these critics argue, since wilderness nowadays only still exists by virtue of human intervention - as “a piece of nature that has been withdrawn from the natural order in which human transformative activity plays such a crucial part”²¹ - even wilderness itself is now a human artifact of sorts. “Even when they establish national parks and wilderness areas,” Nordhaus and Schellenberger complain, “environmentalists see what they have done not as acts of *creation* but rather as *preservation*. They see themselves as *preventing nature’s destruction* not *creating new kinds of nature*.”²² While some critics of the traditional purity doctrine are simply calling for a more scientifically-grounded and historically-conscious model of biological preserves, others have taken up these incendiary mantras - that nothing is pristine, that nature is resilient, that human impact is ubiquitous - in order to argue that the traditional conservationist goal of biological preservation is hopelessly misguided and should be abandoned.²³

Like the critique of the “man-nature dualism” in the wilderness idea, this theoretical attack on the “pristine” misses the larger point of wilderness preservation. From the historical point of view, these arguments in favor of massive aboriginal impact on the environment have been subject to scrutiny. In the case of North America, the question of Indian population and environmental impacts before European arrival has been a

¹⁹ Discussed in Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 29.

²⁰ William M. Deneva, “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 415.

²¹ Steve Vogel, quoted in Carl Talbot, “The Wilderness Narrative and the Cultural Logic of Capitalism,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 326.

²² Nordhaus and Schellenberger, *Break Through*, 127.

²³ For a discussion, see Paul Kingsnorth, “Rise of the Neo-Greens,” in *Keeping the Wild*, 7.

particularly contentious issue, driven as much by ideological concerns as by scientific and historical research.²⁴ Ultimately, this critique fails to acknowledge the qualitative difference between the ecological impact of traditional peoples and that of modern civilization. The fact remains, as Donald Worster argues, that however numerous or scarce they were or however distributed, [American Indians] were a Stone Age people, lived by hunting and gathering or, where they were agricultural, cultivating their scattered, shifting fields with bones and digging sticks; by far their most potent technology was fire, which they used liberally but undoubtedly controlled even less effectively than we control our nuclear reactors and pesticides. To describe their relationship with the whole continent as ‘management’ would be a considerable exaggeration. Without bogging down in pedantic wrangles over definitions, we can say that before contact the native peoples were dwelling on a largely undomesticated continent, wild or nearly wild over much of its extent.²⁵

Even if the most extreme assertions of aboriginal impacts on the natural world were true, it is hard to see how this could undermine the cause of wilderness preservation. If low-tech and low-population cultures could have a massive and occasionally malign ecological impact, this only strengthens the case for preserving areas beyond human control, guided by natural evolutionary processes and without conscious human intervention.

More significantly, pointing to historical or ongoing human impacts on the environment does nothing to undermine the contemporary cause of wilderness preservation. The very assumption of “pristine nature” is a straw man, a belief which might have been held by early nature enthusiasts such as Thoreau and Muir but certainly does not constitute the sole ground for wilderness defense today, either among mainstream or radical groups. The important question for contemporary wilderness defenders is not whether these areas have ever been “marred by the hand of man,” but whether they still represent large-scale and functioning ecosystems primarily governed by ecological rather than human processes. The 1964 Wilderness Act itself uses the word “untrammeled,” which connotes a lack of domestication but certainly not the complete absence of historical human activity. Thus the popular claim that wild nature no longer exists, as David Johns points out, is wrong on two points: it assumes that human influence so dominates every part of the Earth that nothing wild remains, and it assumes that this situation is historically inevitable and that wilderness restoration is therefore impossible.²⁶ On the first point, while humans have probably had at least a marginal influence on most biomes, this hardly means that they have thereby irredeemably altered everything on Earth - there are still intact and naturally-functioning ecosystems whose nutrient flows have been relatively unaffected by pollution, in which a majority of native species still exist in large numbers, playing the same functional role as before

²⁴ Krech, *The Ecological Indian*, 84.

²⁵ Donald Worster, “The Nature We Have Lost,” in *The Wealth of Nature*, 5.

²⁶ David Johns, “With Friends Like These,” in *Keeping the Wild*, 34.

extensive human settlement.²⁷ And insofar as protecting wilderness from exploitation is indeed a kind of “management” of the natural world, as its critics slyly like to point out, this is true only in the most banal sense. In the words of Wilderness Act pioneer Howard Zahniser, the wilds must be “managed so as to be left unmanaged,” and it is sophistry to claim that humans have “created” wilderness areas by magnanimously abstaining from their exploitation.²⁸ Moreover, the assumption that modern technological civilization and the “death of nature” are here to stay bespeaks a hubris and fatalism that are historically unwarranted, given the very recent development and uncertain prospects of humanity’s current levels of technology and population - and indeed, the geologically ephemeral tenure of the human species on Earth.

In short, the objection to wilderness based on historical and ongoing human impacts is irrelevant to the actual preservation of wild lands. Such places are worth preserving not because they are pristine or unsullied but because they represent areas on Earth that are not consciously managed by humankind, where ecological and evolutionary processes may persist and life flourish in relative freedom. To deny the qualitative difference between places under human control and those that are still undomesticated, as one *Earth First! Journal* contributor presciently noted in 1987, eventually leads to a *reduction ad absurdum* in which wilderness “will become a city park or perhaps a suburban lawn. Historiographically, wilderness will cease to be a place or even an idea and become only a word. Maybe it already has.”²⁹

11.1.3 Indifference to Social Justice

The movement for wilderness preservation, despite forming an alliance with health and anti-pollution activists in the second half of the twentieth century and thereby giving birth to the contemporary environmental movement, has never been able to fully shake its early reputation for elitism. Some of its early defenders were driven by a desire to preserve the wilderness as an arena for affluent white men to test their mettle in hand- to-hand struggle against the forces of nature. This naturally required the removal of any pesky natives and impoverished homesteaders who might sully the experience with their crass subsistence hunting; it also involved, by its focus on manly heroic action, the *de facto* exclusion of women. Even its more spiritually refined champions resented the incursion of the vulgar multitudes into their temples: as the ethereal John Muir wrote in 1870,

All sorts of human stuff is being poured into our valley this year, and the blank, fleshly apathy with which most of it comes in contact with the rock

²⁷ Tim Caro, Jack Darwin, Tavis Forrester, Cynthia Ledoux-Blom, and Caitlin Wells, “Conservation in the Anthropocene,” in *Keeping the Wild*, 110.

²⁸ Quoted in Doug Scott, *The Enduring Wilderness: Protecting Our Natural Heritage Through the Wilderness Act* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2004), 125.

²⁹ Morgan Sherwood, “The End of American Wilderness,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 5 (May 1987), 24.

and water spirits of the place is most amazing. They climb sprawlingly to their saddles like overgrown frogs pulling themselves up a stream-bank through the bent sedges, ride up the valley with about as much emotion as the horses they ride upon... and long for the safety and flatness of their proper homes.³⁰

Pointing to these early attitudes - pretty well personified by the figure of Theodore Roosevelt - critics allege that its historical fixation on wilderness has blinded the environmental movement to human welfare and habitats, including health, labor, and civil rights issues.³¹ Ramachandra Guha has also argued that the wilderness ideal is ethnocentric, anti-human, and inimical to the interests of the poor in developing countries, who are sometimes forcibly removed from wilderness areas.³² Many ecofeminist thinkers question the conceptual foundations of wilderness preservationism, which according to Linda Vance has historically conflated women and wild ("virgin") nature as objects requiring rational, masculine control.³³ Finally, there is concern that fixating on faraway wilderness will lead environmentalists to disregard problems closer to home, problems of occupational health and safety, toxic waste exposure, famine, and poverty - "problems, in short, of environmental justice."³⁴

Compelling though these arguments may be, most of them are not really applicable to the contemporary environmental or militant ecology movements. There is no necessary connection between a concern for wilderness and an indifference to pollution, human suffering, and other matters of social justice (unless the two conflict, which will be discussed below). For all their squeamishness about dualism, these critics themselves tend to view wilderness protection as a kind of zero sum game, wherein commitment to wilderness implies a complete indifference to all the other problems of late-modern industrial society. Militant ecology provides ample counter-evidence to this critique, wishing to preserve wilderness *and* bring human society into line with the continued integrity of wild nature.

In addition, unlike some early wilderness advocates, for whom aboriginal residents of the wilderness were inconvenient obstacles to their virile exertions and spiritual raptures, contemporary wilderness defenders do not seek to exclude all human inhabitants from the wild. Even Earth First!, the most extreme of all wilderness groups, called for

³⁰ Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy*, 14.

³¹ Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, "Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness," in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On*, 190.

³² See Ramachandra Guha, "The Authoritarian Biologist and the Arrogance of Anti-Humanism: Wildlife Conservation in the Third World," *The Ecologist* 27, no. 1 (January-February 1997); Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (Spring 1989), 71-83.

³³ Linda Vance, "Ecofeminism and Wilderness," in *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1997), 61.

³⁴ William Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 489.

no permanent human habitations in wilderness areas *except* for indigenous peoples. It is true, of course, that permanent residents of these areas would have to live by pre-modern standards - no mechanized equipment, logging, mining, industrial activity, agriculture, and so forth³⁵ - and that some critics have condemned this prohibition as an “unfair and unrealistic imposition forced upon them by the Western, dominant society.”³⁶ It is also true that, in many ecosystems, almost no degree of human presence is currently compatible with the integrity of the biosphere, especially for megafauna that cannot long coexist in the same area with any but the fewest humans, such as grizzly bears, tigers, orangutans, and elephants.³⁷ In such cases, from an ecocentric perspective, the needs of the wild will take precedence. This will naturally be resisted by those for whom short-term human welfare is paramount, whatever the ecological cost; but it is necessary to admit that, in some cases, a “win-win” scenario is not always possible.

This points to the final charge against wilderness preservation: that it is an elitist concern, of interest only to the few, enjoyable only by the few. In one sense this patently untrue, since the chief concern for contemporary wilderness preservation is not simply to preserve playgrounds for trophy hunters and temples for neo-Transcendentalists. Earth First! was among the first organizations to reject the earlier “museum piece” and “playground” approaches to conservation, those which emphasize its scientific, aesthetic, or recreational uses, and to argue instead that its chief purpose is the preservation of biodiversity and free evolutionary processes.³⁸ As Foreman once asserted in a speech to the Sierra Club International Assembly,

We aren’t talking about scenery. We aren’t talking about aesthetics. We aren’t talking about non-motorized, primitive, recreational opportunities. We’re talking life. We talking about three and a half billion years of life on this planet. The whole flow and flowering and blossoming of evolution on this planet for a longer time than any one of us can imagine.³⁹

Wilderness should be preserved not for the amusement or adulation of some privileged human group, but for its own sake: “A wolf or a redwood or a grizzly bear doesn’t think wilderness is elitist,” Foreman once remarked; “Wilderness is the essence of everything. It’s the real world.”⁴⁰ This is why a truly ecocentric outlook cannot accept the sustainable development and working landscape compromises, for militant ecologists believe that only in large and interconnected biological preserves, with as little human

³⁵ Manes, *Green Rage*, 74.

³⁶ Fabienne Bayet, “Overturning the Doctrine: Indigenous Peoples and Wilderness - Being Aboriginal in the Environmental Movement,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 318.

³⁷ David M. Johns, “The Relevance of Deep Ecology to the Third World: Some Preliminary Comments,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 248, 251.

³⁸ Reed Noss, “Recipe for Wilderness Recovery,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 8 (September 23, 1986), 22.

³⁹ Quoted in Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs*, 399.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Manes, *Green Rage*, 72.

agricultural and technological impact as possible, that this essential feature of wilderness can be preserved - not just the native species, but the ecological and evolutionary processes that gave rise to such biodiversity in the first place.⁴¹ “Rather than posing a serious threat to responsible environmentalism,” Donald Waller argues, “Wilderness defined as large, connected, and relatively intact ecosystems should form the backbone of any ecologically informed program to conserve our natural heritage.”⁴² Thus, far from being an elitist hobbyhorse, the defenders of wilderness act from an all-encompassing ecocentric concern with the integrity of wild nature and the continued flourishing of earthly life, preserving wilderness as “places beyond good and evil, places where being can simply be.”⁴³

This is not to say that the human “uses” of wilderness are insignificant. Indeed, there is an important human dimension to wilderness that goes beyond aesthetics or recreation, one which for lack of a better word might be deemed spiritual. Wilderness serves as a reminder to humans of where they came from, the evolutionary and ecological processes that gave them being, the conditions under which their minds and instincts and reflexes developed.⁴⁴ Indeed, the existence of truly self-willed land outside of human control, a place without electric lights or televisions, filled with dangerous and unpredictable animal life, serves to counter the modern faith in human omnipotence. Wilderness is therefore “a philosophical acknowledgement, at least in some fashion, that we don’t know everything.”⁴⁵

Of course, these recreational, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions of wilderness are not likely to be appreciated by everyone, so in one sense perhaps the charges of elitism are correct. As early wilderness defender Bob Marshall admitted, “At present only a minority of the genus *Homo* cares for wilderness recreation, and only a fraction of this minority possess the requisite virility for the indulgence of this desire.”⁴⁶ However, as Marshall rightly notes, the fact that more people prefer swimming to aesthetic contemplation does not mean that all art galleries should be converted into swimming pools. Wilderness could therefore be conceived of as a “minority right,” which like other such rights enshrined in the laws of the United States “is valid even though its exercise may encroach slightly on the fun of the majority.” In addition to its obvious benefits for nonhuman life, it may be that wilderness is an essential bastion of aristocratic values in a mass age - of independence and solitude, discipline and struggle, spiritual elevation and artistic contemplation. Militant ecology combines an ecocentric appreciation for the inherent value of wilderness with a recognition of the centrality of wilderness

⁴¹ Wuerthner, “Why the Working Landscape Isn’t Working,” in *Keeping the Wild*, 166.

⁴² Donald M. Waller, “Getting Back to the Right Nature: A Reply to Cronon’s ‘The Trouble With Wilderness,’” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 558.

⁴³ Foreman, *Confessions*, 49.

⁴⁴ For an argument to this effect, see Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*.

⁴⁵ Wuerthner, “Why the Working Landscape Isn’t Working,” in *Keeping the Wild*, 172.

⁴⁶ Robert Marshall, “The Problem of the Wilderness,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, 92.

experience to the healthy human psyche, as something that should be preserved rather than sacrificed to economic development. As Foreman writes,

Most conservationists and biologists recognize today that the primary value of wilderness is not as a proving ground for young Huck Finns and Annie Oakleys... Nevertheless, preserving a quality wilderness experience for a human visitor, letting him or her flex Paleolithic muscles or seek visions, remains a tremendously important second purpose.⁴⁷

This also goes to show that militant ecologists are not as indifferent to human welfare some allege; their understanding of it simply differs from that of their critics.

In sum, despite these criticisms of the wilderness concept in the name of linguistic deconstruction and social justice, a commitment to preserve and restore wilderness areas is an indispensable part of any political program dedicated to ecological integrity - and, for that matter, to genuine human well-being. Militant ecology was the first political movement to defend large wilderness areas not solely for the sake of human recreational, aesthetic, or spiritual values (though these have their place), but because of its inherent worth. As the early Earth First! slogan goes, "Wilderness for its own sake." Recognizing that modern civilization is incompatible with the large-scale preservation of wilderness and natural evolutionary processes, and insisting that vast social changes are needed in order to make such wilderness possible, is the most distinctive contribution of militant ecology to American political discourse.

⁴⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 63.

12. Ecocentrism and Justice

Though almost all activists are committed to the uncompromising defense of wilderness and wildlife, the question of whether or not these issues should be the *chief* concern of the militant ecology movement has proven highly divisive over the years. While ecowarriors unequivocally prioritize the integrity of wild nature over human welfare, total liberationists reject an “either/or” view of the matter. Hence their oft-repeated assertions that “all oppression is linked,”¹² that “biodiversity includes humyn [sic] diversity,” and that “working for the Earth and life means ending all oppression everywhere, securing the liberation of all beings..”⁶⁴³ This disagreement centers upon a perennial question in political thought: when do the needs of the community trump those of the individual? While the resolutely holistic ecowarriors believe that the good of the ecological whole always takes precedence, total liberationists insist that there is no need to subordinate the one to the other - they are, in fact, synonymous. The defense of wild nature is therefore incomplete if it does not include a concern for human liberation in every sense, since humans are themselves an inseparable part of the wild. Total liberationists conceive of militant ecology as “a class, race, gender, and culture war that aims to abolish every system of domination, including that of human beings over nature.”³⁴ This requires an abandonment of the old-time misanthropy and a greater focus on human rights and social issues, delving into the socio-political roots of domination rather than persisting in a myopic defense of wilderness that “excludes the plight and struggles of women, people of color, workers, children, and other victims of oppression..”⁶⁴⁵ As one activist writes in the *Earth First! Journal*, “It is of utmost importance that Earth First! address all these manifestations of oppression (racism, ageism, classism, shall I go on?). We can’t end the oppression of the earth until we end our own oppressive roles.”⁵

Thus, against the misanthropic rhetoric and wilderness fetishism of the ecowarriors, total liberationists argue that a truly ecocentric activism requires far more social analysis and concern with human oppression and social justice. As one activist writes,

Biocentrism actually means that our view of how the Earth should be treated parallels how humans should be treated, because humans are not

¹ Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, 35.

² The Radikal Weatherman, “There are no safe spaces on a dead planet,” 12-13.

³ Best and Nocella, “Fire in the Belly,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 23.

⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵ Hazel, “Revolutionizing the Movement,” *EF! Journal* 17, no. 5 (June 30, 1997), 3.

separate from nature. Keeping us feeling safe and dignified is just as important as the 'natural world' or ecodefense. Fighting against oppression against people is biocentrism...⁶

In keeping with their egalitarian commitments, total liberationists believe that the central focus of militant ecology politics should be environmental *and* social justice, working for the elimination of all forms of oppression.

Ecowarriors often dismiss these appeals to social justice as a distraction from the more pressing struggle for wilderness defense. In the early years of the movement, Christopher Manes argued that social justice rhetoric would simply cloud the environmental debate, explaining that "unless it is directed against that culture in its totality, a commitment to justice becomes just another way for technology to propagate its power relations."⁷ In other words, without a profound rejection of anthropocentrism, the shibboleth of "social justice" becomes merely another (and especially insidious) means of undermining the movement's priorities, preventing activists from taking the controversial stands necessary to defend wild nature. To more recent representatives of the ecowarrior ethos, the growing fixation upon human oppression represents an abandonment of the ecocentric struggle, an admission on their part that "we give up... We can't save the planet. But let's go deal with our own shit, and then maybe the Earth will get saved as a result."⁸ In short, activists of an ecowarrior bent often believe that this concern with social justice betrays an abandonment of the ecocentric principles that the movement was founded upon.

It might appear at first glance that the total liberationists hold the moral high ground in this debate - and perhaps the only claim to a truly holistic socio-political program - for their insistence that social justice and ecological integrity are inextricably linked. However, does the seemingly narrow focus on wilderness and wildlife preservation among ecowarriors really signify an indifference towards *justice*, properly speaking? Not according to Paul Watson, who once affirmed that "we are revolutionaries. We seek to replace the present system of thought with a system that is more caring, more loving, and more logical about our role in the natural order of things. We believe in the sanctity of life and reverence for the Earth. Above all, we believe in justice."⁹ Rather than envisioning this debate as a conflict between ecocentrism and justice, then, perhaps it is more helpful to consider it as a contest between two divergent understandings of ecocentrism and the different models of justice they entail. Since total liberationists understand ecocentrism in terms of "biospheric egalitarianism," their version of justice is accordingly more in keeping with contemporary conceptions of social justice as fairness and equality, expanded to include the entire biosphere. A different

⁶ Rockdove, "Dear SFB," *EF! Journal* 28, no.3 (March/April 2008), 5.

⁷ Christopher Manes/"Miss Ann Thropy," "Overpopulation and Industrialism," *EF! Journal* 7, no. 4 (March 20, 1987), 29.

⁸ Ben Pachano, "Dear SFB," *EF! Journal* 27, no. 5 (July/August 2007), 5.

⁹ Watson, "On the Precedence of Natural Law," 86.

model of justice can be detected in the ecowarrior's valorization of wild nature and rejection of anthropocentrism, hearkening back to ancient notions of justice as *order* or *harmony*. In this classical or Platonic conception, revised for the ecological age, justice demands that each species and individual occupy its proper niche in the natural order and respect the natural limits upon its behavior. This applies particularly to humans, who among all animals are uniquely capable of overstepping their bounds. As William Ophuls writes, invoking Plato's ideal republic, "True justice requires the establishment of controls to maintain the balance and harmony of the whole."¹⁰ In short, while often indifferent to the egalitarian and distributive aspects of social justice that undergird much of contemporary liberal theory as well as total liberationist discourse, ecowarriors promulgate their own version of justice, one that draws upon a premodern understanding of harmony and humankind's proper place in the natural order. These different conceptions of justice stem directly from their contrasting understandings of ecocentrism. These disagreements are highlighted in two of the most longstanding and rancorous debates within the movement, concerning the proper allocation of responsibility for global ecological problems as well as the means of confronting human population growth. These different understandings of justice are also relevant to the frequent accusations of "ecofascism" that have been directed against the ecowarriors in the movement, which are addressed at the end of this chapter.

12.1 Who is to Blame?

One manifestation of this disagreement is the long-running debate over who ought to be held accountable for the contemporary ecological crisis. Due to their perception of humankind as alienated from the natural order by some inherent flaw or original sin, ecowarriors are much more likely than their total liberationist counterparts to hold all of humankind responsible. A foundational principle of Earth First! was its "unwillingness to set any ethnic, class, or political group of humans on a pedestal and make them immune from questioning."¹¹ Ecowarriors insist that anthropocentrism and greed are universal features of modern humanity, regardless of class or culture: "There is no such thing as the rich and the poor," as Paul Watson once claimed; "There are the rich, and there are those who aspire to becoming rich." In response to the inevitable accusations of racism and sexism from leftist critics, he insisted that "white males share guilt equally with all other males and females of all other races and cultures."¹² Rather than treating workers in the extractive industries as victims of capitalism, ecowarriors maintain that "industrial workers, by and large, share the blame for the destruction of the natural world... Workers are victims of an unjust economic system, but that

¹⁰ Ophuls and Boyan, *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity Revisited*, 295.

¹¹ Foreman, *Confessions*, 31.

¹² Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview with a Pirate*, 48; Paul Watson, "THE BULLSHIT THAT MUST END: Hominid Triviality and Ecology," *EF! Journal* 25, no. 4 (May/June 2005), 12.

does not absolve them of what they do.”¹³ Finally, while total liberationists tend to idealize indigenous peoples, particularly American Indians, as “the first ecologists,” ecowarriors take a more skeptical approach. George Wuerthner critiques the “unwritten code of mythology that permeates the environmental movement that suppresses any critical examination of the behavior of indigenous peoples with regard to environmental issues,” arguing that the relative harmony of Native Americans with the land was due primarily to their primitive technology, which checked population growth and limited environmental impacts.¹⁴ “Of course, there were Indians who loved the land,” he concedes, “but they represent the typical attitudes of Indians no more than John Muir represents typical attitudes of Americans of European descent.”¹⁵ Christopher Manes argues that, regardless of their ecologically harmonious past, these tribal societies have been and continue to be corrupted by the modern West to the point that “most of the world now mimics our dissolute ways.”¹⁶ None of this should be understood to mean that ecowarriors invariably take the side of the capitalist, the patriarch, or the colonizer against the workers, women, or indigenous peoples. These oppressors are condemned - not least of all for the negative ecological impact of their activities - but, by the same token, the oppressed are not immune from scrutiny. When it comes to crimes against the Earth and the natural order, all bear some share of the responsibility.

While ecowarriors believe that humans are alienated from the natural order, tainted by an inherent flaw that has made anthropocentrism and ecological devastation inevitable developments in human history, total liberationists follow Murray Bookchin in arguing that such an emphasis on universal guilt masks the fact that “the social forces that are tearing down the planet are the same social forces which threaten to degrade women, people of color, workers, and ordinary citizens... It masks the fact that our ecological problems are fundamentally social problems requiring fundamental social change.”¹⁷ The dominant outlook among total liberationists is therefore not blanket misanthropy, but rather an insistence that “some humans are much more to blame than others.”¹⁸ As Anne Peterman argues, “Humanity is not the problem. The privileged patriarchal ruling elite with their unsustainable systems of accumulation perpetuated through insidious psychological manipulations and outright blunt force, are the problem.”¹⁹ One group in particular is typically singled out for blame: “Problems in society don’t originate within the communities of people of color. The root of the problems that are leading to the destruction of the planet reside in the suburbs and

¹³ Foreman, *Confessions*, 32; Jeffrey Shantz, “Judi Bari and ‘The Feminization of Earth First!’: The Convergence of Class, Gender and Radical Environmentalism,” *Feminist Review* 70 (2002), 110.

¹⁴ George Wuerthner, “The Indian Curtain: Mythology and the Media,” *EF! Journal* 16, no. 6 (June 20, 1996), 10.

¹⁵ Wuerthner, “An Ecological View of the Indian,” 20-23.

¹⁶ Quoted in Bari, *Timber Wars*, 82-3.

¹⁷ Bookchin and Foreman, *Defending the Earth*, 20.

¹⁸ Kelpie Willsin, “Are We Not Cows?” *Live Wild or Die* 1 (1989), 6.

¹⁹ Peterman, “Tales of a Recovering Misanthrope,” 3.

in gated communities filled with scared, rich, white folks.”²⁰ Another activist writes, “It is largely white people that create the policies that destroy our planet. It is largely white people that initiate and carry out policies of genocide.”²¹

By contrast, other groups bear little or no responsibility for ecological destruction. Indigenous peoples in particular are often upheld as the blameless victims of EuroAmerican capitalist imperialism. As Judi Bari noted, “You cannot blame the destruction of the Earth on, for example, the Quiche tribes of Guatemala or the Penan of Borneo,” insisting that when such groups do adopt Western ways it is invariably through coercion rather than free choice.²² While ecowarriors only tend to ally with indigenous traditionalists in support of wilderness preservation, total liberationists are more sympathetic to the contemporary plight of indigenous peoples and willing to support them on social justice issues. Mira Goldberg and Brian Tokar urge an alliance with indigenous activists, even on issues that are more seemingly “human-centered,” in order to support indigenous liberation and bring about the end of colonialism - though this may require sacrificing federally-protected nature preserves and returning wilderness to native rule.²³

Total liberationists absolve women from complicity in the present ecological crisis as well: as Bari insisted, atrocities attributed to the human race such as massacres, wars, ecocide, holocaust - are not the works of women. Of course a few women can be found and paraded out who participate in the male power structure. But by and large, throughout history, wars and atrocities have been the territory of men, in the interest of men, and against the interests of women.²⁴

She condemns the thoroughgoing misanthropy of the ecowarrior faction as *androcentric* (male-centered), since the supposedly universal human traits it denounces are in fact confined to only one half of the species. In its unwillingness to lay the blame for environmental destruction and social injustice squarely at the feet of the *patriarchy*, rather than humanity as a whole, the rhetoric of anthropocentrism preserves the status quo by failing to distinguish between the oppressor and the oppressed.

These contrasting views of human nature and responsibility for ecological degradation are one of the greatest sources of contention between ecowarriors and total liberationists. And to be sure, the more misanthropic outlook of the ecowarrior has its flaws. Though blanket misanthropy may be an understandable reaction to humanity’s historical exploitation of its own species and the Earth as a whole, when taken to such

²⁰ Shane Jimerfield, “Toward Cross Cultural Organizing,” *EF! Journal* 17, no. 4 (April 30, 1997), 23.

²¹ Kris Lynch, “Two Responses to ‘The Bullshit that Must End,’” *EF! Journal* 25, no. 6 (September/October 2005), 20.

²² Bari, *Timber Wars*, 82-3.

²³ Mira Goldberg, “Toward Stronger Alliances: A Response to ‘Rethinking Environmental-First Nations Relationships,’” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 3 (February 2, 1995), 3; Brian Tokar, “Respect Native Struggles,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 3 (February 2, 1995), 26.

²⁴ Bari, *Timber Wars*, 83.

extremes it is incompatible with a truly nondualist, holistic ecocentrism. For one, as total liberationists rightly object, humanity is for better or for worse a part of the ecological whole, so any solution that simply wishes away the existence of the human species altogether is destined for failure. Moreover, the ecowarrior's belief in humanity's "total depravity" fails to explain one very important aspect of militant ecology - the very existence of the activists themselves. If all humans are irredeemably tainted from birth by anthropocentrism and greed, how is it that certain, albeit small, groups of humans are driven to struggle against these attitudes and fight in defense of the Earth?

However, the total liberationist position suffers from a few contradictions of its own, rendering it even more incompatible with a genuinely ecocentric outlook. Rejecting the notion that human nature suffers from inherent flaws, flaws which render the species particularly dangerous to the rest of life on Earth, they generally envision ecological and social domination as the work of a select few human groups and socio-economic structures: Europeans, Americans, males, capitalists, and so forth. One cannot refute this position by pointing - as many ecowarriors do - to the complicity of women in ecological degradation; or the role played by the global poor in wildlife extinction and habitat destruction; or the fact that an Americanized consumer-culture has successfully subverted many traditional cultures and spread to every corner of the globe. Total liberationists invariably blame these counter-examples on the sinister machinations of a patriarchal white elite, which forced capitalism, industrialism, ecologically unsound lifestyles, and "false consciousness" upon the oppressed peoples of the world. However, they cannot account for the emergence of such an elite, nor for its ability to enforce its will upon humankind, without acknowledging some universally dangerous aspects of human nature itself. In other words, they deny the obvious fact that there is a quality inherent to certain humans, regardless of race, sex, or class, that leads them to seek domination; and that in order for them to succeed the vast majority of humankind must possess the complacency, cowardice, or self-interested pragmatism that leads them to accept it. These flaws - the will to power and the docile capitulation to it - would appear to any student of history to be perennial features of humankind, not simply the recent products of an oppressive socio-economic system, which no degree of social reorganization or re-education can eliminate. And just as ecowarriors might long wistfully for a world cleansed of "the humanpox," total liberationists dream (even more unrealistically) of creating a free and equal human society purged of domineering and complacent humans. It is this lack of realism in the total liberationist view that renders it more logically inconsistent with a truly militant ecocentrism, which demands effective measures in defense of wild nature. It also prevents militant ecologists from honestly examining those areas where the good of the natural world might conflict with the aims of total liberation - particularly with regard to the issue of overpopulation, which has been so contentious within the movement that it is worth examining at greater length.

12.2 Population and Immigration

All militant ecologists generally agree that the integrity of the wild Earth and human dignity both demand a substantial reduction in the human population. However, they differ strongly concerning the specific means of confronting population growth, with ecowarriors typically advocating more extreme methods - such as “one-child” policies, the reduction of foreign aid, and immigration restrictions - and total liberationists insisting that education, women’s liberation, and increasing prosperity will lead over time to a demographic transition and global population equilibrium.

In an approach that clearly sets them apart from both total liberationists and the ecological left, ecowarriors insist that human population reduction is a top political priority, without which every other every other social and environmental reform is for naught. “I take it as axiomatic that the only real hope for the continuation of diverse ecosystems on this planet is an enormous decline in human population,” writes Christopher Manes; “Conservation, social justice, appropriate technology, etc., are great to discuss and even laudable, but they simply don’t address the problem.”²⁵ Indeed, since many social and ecological problems are either directly caused or exacerbated by overpopulation - pollution, resource depletion, war, tyranny, the destruction of natural diversity, and animal exploitation - ecowarriors sometimes argue that a smaller human population will make it much simpler to deal with other social problems as well.²⁶

However, unlike many on the ecological left who are usually reluctant to make the connection between environmental degradation and overpopulation and instead place the blame for environmental degradation on maldistribution and corporate malfeasance, ecowarriors put overpopulation front and center. As Dave Foreman wrote,

Although there is obviously an unconscionable maldistribution of wealth and basic necessities of life among humans, this fact should not be used - as some leftists are wont to do - to argue that overpopulation is not the problem. It *is* a large part of the problem; there are far too many of us *already* - and our numbers continue to grow astronomically. Even if inequitable distribution could be solved, six billion human beings converting the natural world to material goods and human food would devastate natural diversity.²⁷

For these reasons, in combination with their penchant for describing humanity as a “cancer” and their emphasis on the preservation of large wilderness areas devoid

²⁵ Christopher Manes/”Miss Ann Thropy,” “Population and AIDS,” *EF! Journal* 7, no 5 (May 1, 1987), 32.

²⁶ Dave Foreman/”Chim Blea,” “Cat Tracks: Reducing Population,” *EF! Journal* 3, no. 6 (August 1983), 3; A VHMNT Supporter, “The Most Neglected Animal Rights Issue,” *No Compromise* 4 (October 1996), 12; Tom Stoddard, “Oh, What a Wonderful Famine!” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 5 (May 1, 1986), 26.

²⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 28.

of human habitation or industry, ecowarriors typically prioritize population reduction over any other human issue.

Given their belief that drastic and immediate population reduction is necessary in order to safeguard wilderness and biodiversity, ecowarriors have sometimes proposed highly controversial measures to achieve it. To take one example, Dave Foreman, writing under the pseudonym "Chim Blea," posited in a 1983 article that the human population ought to be reduced to fewer than a billion worldwide, and suggested several rather extreme measures toward this end. In addition to relatively uncontroversial methods such as reproductive education and free contraception, he also called for state-subsidized sterilization after having one child, tax penalties for parents, the restriction of life-support technology, capital punishment for violent crimes, and - perhaps most uncomfortably for his critics - "mandatory sterilization for all people with genetic defects or those unfit to be parents."²⁸ Foreman has long since repudiated these views, at least their harsh formulation here, conceding the need for "economic justice and an end to maldistribution of land, food, and other necessities of life as well as for the humane and long-term reduction of the human population."²⁹ However, whether all these prescriptions were meant to be taken seriously or not, it is clear that ecowarriors consider overpopulation a far too pressing threat to ecological integrity to be adequately remedied by piecemeal and voluntary solutions alone.

Alongside these draconian measures, one of the most controversial means by which early ecowarriors advanced the cause of population control was their portrayal of natural disasters, particularly famine and pandemics, as a necessary and natural means of reducing human numbers. In possibly the most controversial article ever published in the *Earth First! Journal*, Christopher Manes - writing under the pseudonym "Miss Ann Thropy" - claimed in 1987 that "if radical environmentalists were to invent a disease to bring human population back to ecological sanity, it would probably be something like AIDS."³⁰ Such pandemics are particularly promising, he argued, since they could effect a relatively peaceful reduction of the human population that would inflict far less damage on the natural world than war or nuclear holocaust. Others also called for ending foreign aid to impoverished countries suffering drought or famine, claiming that "we must stop the madness of developed nations providing funding for undeveloped nations to rape their resources" and that "the ultimate solution may lie in a mass triage where whole human populations are left to die to save Earth from becoming a wasteland."³¹ Others argued that foreign aid would only make humanitarian problems worse in the long run, since it artificially supports an unsustainably high population.³²

²⁸ Dave Foreman/"Chim Blea," "Cat Tracks: Reducing Population," *Earth First! Journal* 3, no. 6 (August 1993), 3.

²⁹ See Bookchin and Foreman, *Defending the Earth*.

³⁰ Manes/"Miss Ann Thropy," "Population and AIDS," 32.

³¹ Stoddard, "Oh, What a Wonderful Famine!," 26.

³² Foreman/"Chim Blea," "Cat Tracks: The Question of Babies," *EF! Journal* 6, no. 7 (August 1, 1986), 25.

Thus, other than enthusiastically supporting family planning aid to other countries, the ecowarrior solution to global population growth outside the United States was a counsel of non-interference, letting nature “take its course” whenever disaster struck.

In addition to their support for birth control and suspicion of medical technology, another highly controversial suggestion for alleviating population pressures in the United States was through immigration restriction. Alongside increased local pressures on fragile ecosystems through population growth, pollution, and urban sprawl, ecowarriors express concern that immigrants to the United States will seek to gain a higher standard of living, thereby increasing their ecological impact.³³ As Paul Watson warned, “The cost of immigration is massive sprawl, damming up every river and using every square foot of land to feed more and more people in the materially comforting style that they expect to enjoy in this most materialistic of nations.”³⁴ In addition to the ecological costs of this historically high immigration rate - now the principal driver of U.S. population growth - many ecowarriors believe that massive immigration, particularly illegal immigration, serves “as an overflow safety valve to get rid of dissidents in Latin America and to provide a source of cheap, nonunion labor for corporations here at home.”³⁵ This critique of high immigration levels reveals a humanitarian concern that it will only delay much-needed political reforms in developing countries and contribute to the devaluation of American workers.³⁶

While most of these arguments against immigration deliberately avoided its ethnic or cultural dimensions, focusing primarily on its numerical contribution to U.S. population growth, the ever-controversial Edward Abbey also voiced concern about the *demographic* impacts of mass Latin American immigration. In one particularly ill-received statement, he opined that “it might be wise for us as American citizens to consider calling a halt to the mass influx of even more millions of hungry, ignorant, unskilled, and culturally-morally-genetically impoverished people. At least until we have brought our own affairs into order.”³⁷ Though such sentiments were roundly criticized and probably not widely shared within the movement, they provided considerable ammunition to total liberationist critics as well as outside observers, who were able to castigate any opposition to high immigration levels among environmentalists as nothing more than a thinly-veiled expression of racial prejudice and bigotry. Despite these charges, most ecowarriors who dare to broach the topic regard immigration as yet another form of population pressure upon delicate local ecosystems and the chief driver of U.S. population growth, regardless of where the immigrants originate.

The total liberationist approach to overpopulation, needless to say, differs significantly from that of its counterpart. Total liberationists are critical of the myopic focus

³³ Dave Foreman, “Is Sanctuary the Answer?” *EF! Journal* 8, no. 1 (November 1, 1987), 22.

³⁴ Watson, “The Bullshit that Must End,” 12.

³⁵ Foreman and Bookchin, *Defending the Earth*, 27.

³⁶ Foreman, “Is Sanctuary the Answer?” 22.

³⁷ Edward Abbey, “Immigration and Liberal Taboos,” in *One Life at a Time, Please* (New York: Holt, 1988), 43.

on sheer human numbers common among ecowarriors, insisting that overpopulation is not a strictly arithmetical question and that “less people overall won’t necessarily create less wilderness destruction.”³⁸ The two most common arguments against the harsh population measures advocated by ecowarriors are that they shift the blame away from the overconsumption of the rich and that they place an undue burden upon women.

Regarding the first point, one activist observes that by fixating on global population reduction “white people remain blind to the racist, colonialist, and anti-choice historical baggage that comes with mostly white movements presuming to know what’s best for non-white families.”³⁹ In short, the tendency of some ecowarriors to concentrate on foreign aid, African famine, and immigration restriction ignores the vastly disproportionate culpability of Europeans and Americans for global ecological degradation: “In terms of use and abuse of the resources of the Earth WE, Canadians, Europeans, and European Russians are the culprits... the White race should be triaged.”⁴⁰ Another activist points to the injustice of treating the world’s population as a homogenous unit, since “placing blame for the eco-crisis on undifferentiated humanity puts equal responsibility on white people and people of color, rich and poor, men and wimmin [sic], and those living in the Global North and Global South.”⁴¹ In order to overcome the racist, sexist, and classist dimensions of earlier population control methods, total liberationists often downgrade population concerns altogether. Instead, they focus on consumption levels in the developed world, reasoning that “it is more justifiable to emphasize limiting development and consumption of resources in wealthier countries, in order to hold them accountable.”⁴² Justice demands that affluent Europeans and Americans put their own house in order before lecturing the poor and the oppressed of the world on the evils of overpopulation.

Condemning the undue burden placed upon women by population control measures, one activist writes that “the anti-breeding onus for ‘zero-population growth’ rests upon the womyn [sic]” and argues that that in order to address human overpopulation “we have to recognize and confront its root causes: the domination of wimmin [sic] through patriarchal ideology and institutions..”⁶⁸⁴ For this reason, many total liberationists believe that the true solution to overpopulation rests upon greater education and empowerment for women, rather than the coercive and inhumane methods suggested by some ecowarriors. This objection also appeals to a notion of justice as fairness, since many total liberationists hold men disproportionately culpable for ecological

³⁸ “Practical Ideas for an Anti-Racist Radical Ecological Movement,” *EF! Journal* 29, no. 6 (September/October 2009), 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁰ Joanne in New Mexico, “Dear SFB,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 6 (June 21, 1986), 3.

⁴¹ Steph Boston, “What’s Missing from the Popular ‘Population Limitation’ Theory,” *EF! Journal* 28, no. 5 (July/August 2008), 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.

degradation and insist that “wimmin are not responsible for cleaning up after what is ultimately a male-created mess.”⁴³

In addition their more moderate population reduction measures, total liberationists stringently reject any attempt to connect ecological issues with immigration. Even in the ecowarrior heyday of the 1980s, there were already many activists who categorically denied the association: in 1987 a group calling itself “Alien Nation” published an article in the *Earth First! Journal*, entitled “Dangerous Tendencies in Earth First!,” which condemned the group’s use of the American Flag, centralized power structure, and opposition to immigration.⁴⁵ Total liberationists critics generally oppose immigration restriction for two reasons: based on their understanding of bioregionalism, they insist that national borders are arbitrary; and they generally believe that opposition to immigration is nothing more than misanthropic racism with an ecological veneer.

Total liberationists regard national borders as wholly artificial, existing only to serve the interests of political and economic elites. One frequently reads assertions that “government-imposed borders have no place in our vision of a bioregional future” and that “there is no way to be a committed biocentrist in support of a colonial border regime.”⁴⁶ They frequently draw attention to the gross hypocrisy with which European-Americans - themselves “the descendants of immigrants” who “stole” the land from its native inhabitants - justify the closure of an “artificial border to a predominantly native population to our South.”⁴⁷ This hypocrisy is only compounded upon considering that these forced migrations are often the result of American political and corporate intrigues, which have exacerbated instability and poverty throughout the developing world. One activist writes that “complaining about the illegal aliens flooding into our country without examining the causes of poverty in Central America and the deadly results of US military intervention is inexcusable.”⁴⁸ Given that national borders are merely the artificial impositions of colonial regimes, there is no justification for restricting human migration from one side of an arbitrary line in the sand to another.

Regarding the opposition to immigration among the early ecowarriors, one activist complains that “Earth First! has had racist overtones since it dropped its first banner on the Glen Canyon dam...”⁴⁹ This author expresses a common sentiment among total

⁴³ Annie, “Bitchin’ Times: Rants from Wild Womyn: To Breed or Not to Breed. That IS Not the Question,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 8 (September 23, 1995), 19.

⁴⁴ Ariel Salleh, “Class, Race, and Gender Discourse in the Ecofeminism/Deep Ecology Debate,” *Environmental Ethics* 15, no. 3 (1993), 233.

⁴⁵ Lee, *Earth First!*, 106.

⁴⁶ Winstanley, “Evolving Earth First!,” 34-5; “Razing Arizona: The Ecological Battle Against Borders,” *EF! Journal* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 34-5.

⁴⁷ Peterman, “Tales of a Recovering Misanthrope,” 3.

⁴⁸ A. Mary Praxter, “The Wilds Ones Fight Back: Some Thoughts on Strategy,” *Live Wild or Die* 2, 11.

⁴⁹ Problem Animal, “The Peace that Must End: White Supremacy and Ecology,” *EF! Journal* 25, no. 3 (March/April 2005), 38.

liberationists, attributing critical attitudes about immigration to sheer racism rather than any genuine ecological concern. Rather than viewing their ecowarrior counterparts as acting out of a legitimate concern for the Earth, total liberationists often question their motives, regarding them as closet racists and crypto-fascists who have no business calling themselves “radicals.” These activists were likely influenced by social ecologist critics such as Murray Bookchin, Janet Biehl, and George Bradford, who feared that the antiimmigration sentiments of Foreman and Abbey represented racist and fascist incursions into the otherwise progressive ecology movement.⁵⁰

In short, the total liberationist argument against stringent population control measures - particularly where the poor and non-white are concerned - rests upon two points. The first is essentially an appeal to *hypocrisy*, the indignant insistence that hyperconsuming white males in the wealthy Western world have no right to lecture women, the global poor, and ethnic minorities on the need to reduce their numbers. A reduction in the consumption levels of developed countries is therefore the only fair solution. The second is an argument from *pragmatism*, a conviction that reducing raw human numbers alone is not sufficient to preserve wild nature. This second point, which emphasizes education and the alleviation of global poverty as important measures to end ecological degradation, is strongly akin to the “demographic transition” model of human population. In simplest terms, this theory stipulates an inverse correlation between birth rates and economic development - with greater prosperity, education, and women’s empowerment, fertility rates will decline and global population will reach an equilibrium.

In many ways, this more nuanced appreciation for the complex social and economic causes of overpopulation and environmental degradation among total liberationists is laudable, and lends itself to a more effective defense of ecological integrity. As erstwhile social ecologist George Bradford (the pen name of David Watson) points out, “At some point in population growth, neither natural integrity nor human freedom is possible. But despite Malthusian numerology, that point is not self-evident... Ecology reduced to ideology tends to simplify what is complex when its analysis ignores the inter-relations within human society.”⁵¹ In this respect, many total liberationists have wisely recognized that population reduction, education, economic justice, and reduced consumption are all necessary components of a future primitive political program.⁵² However, as Bradford rightly notes, ecology reduced to ideology does indeed tend to simplify what is complex - and this critique applies equally well to the total liberationist position. An exclusive reliance upon reduced consumption, education, and a projected “demographic transition” is, by itself, unlikely to achieve the reduction in

⁵⁰ Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism*; Bookchin, “Yes! - Whither Earth First!” George Bradford (David Watson), *How Deep Is Deep Ecology? A Challenge to Radical Environmentalism* (Ojai, CA: Times Change Press, 1989).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Bill McCormick, “Towards an Integrated Approach to Population and Justice,” *EF! Journal* 6, no. 7 (August 1, 1986), 23.

human population levels necessary to safeguard large tracts of wilderness and biodiversity. By the same token, a refusal to even *consider* the possible ecological risks of massive immigration into the United States represents the triumph of egalitarian ideology over an ecocentric concern with the integrity of wild nature, revealing yet another instance in which the total liberationist wing has slowly transformed militant ecology into an appendage of the radical left.

Those who place their hopes in education and poverty alleviation typically ignore other important factors in human population growth. As John Gray points out, the demographic transition model is in many ways a piece of “economic imperialism” that downplays the influence of moral attitudes and religious traditions on fertility rates.⁵³ In addition, its relevance to environmental protection hinges upon the assumption that downward fertility trends will continue fast enough to ward off ecological catastrophe - which is certainly not guaranteed.⁵⁴ Perhaps most importantly, this paradigm assumes that population levels will stabilize around nine or ten billion. The Earth may indeed be able to support such numbers, but as Eileen Crist points out,

Earth as a biosphere with abundant numbers and kinds of free nonhumans, with connected and thriving wild places, with a richly textured biogeography, with domesticated Earthlings not chained to a sickening industrial ‘food’ system, with horticultures healthy for people and friendly to wildlife, with human denizens not living in terror of the specters of hunger, war, and rape, and with the world’s oceans allowed to rebound into a semblance of their former largesse and beauty: *that* earth can support far fewer than billions of people - people who will, almost undoubtedly, want to enjoy many of the amenities of the consumer age.⁵⁵

While those who triumphantly proclaim that “Malthus was wrong” have so far been mostly correct with respect to food and resource shortages, they ignore the cost of continued high population levels on the rest of life on Earth.

Many total liberationist arguments against population reduction hinge not so much upon whether it is *necessary*, but rather *who* is advocating it: as Kris Lynch writes in the *Earth First! Journal*, “We do need to question what roles humyn [sic] populations play throughout the world, but what questions are asked, and who is asking them, and who feels entitled to answer?”⁵⁶ Their position ultimately rests upon an appeal to hypocrisy, an indignant insistence that affluent developed countries - with their legacy

⁵³ John Gray, *Beyond the New Right: Markets, Government and the Common Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 144.

⁵⁴ Eileen Crist and Philip Cafaro, “Human Population Growth as if The Rest of Life Mattered,” in *Life on the Brink: Environmentalists Confront Overpopulation*, ed. Philip Cafaro and Eileen Crist (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 12.

⁵⁵ Eileen Crist, “Abundant Earth and the Population Question,” in *Life on the Brink*, 150.

⁵⁶ Kris Lynch, “Response to ‘The Bullshit that Must End,’” 10.

of colonialism and far higher rates of consumption - have no right to question the population levels of the developing world. However, this imposes a false dilemma between reducing overpopulation and reducing overconsumption, and obscures the difference in environmental impact between the rich and the poor. While the destructive reach of the affluent is global (climate change and ozone depletion, for instance), that of the poor is often local, resulting in deforestation, poaching, overfishing, desertification, and localized pollution.⁵⁷ Though one might blame these effects on global poverty or the legacy of European imperialism, it seems undeniable that high population rates only serve to exacerbate them. An exclusive focus on overconsumption or climate change, which effectively shifts the blame for ecological degradation entirely to the developed world, ignores the fact that these are significant but not the *sole* source of ecological problems.

Moreover, if justice demands that Americans reduce their consumption to the level of developing countries before addressing global population growth, then such a condition will probably never be voluntarily realized. As Philip Cafaro and Winthrop Staples III point out, "Re-engineering the world's largest economy and changing the consumption patterns of hundreds of millions of people are immense undertakings that will be difficult, expensive, and (we may assume) only partly successful."⁵⁸ While one might imagine Americans voluntarily reducing their consumption to the levels of western Europeans or Japanese - and even that is a stretch - it seems unlikely that a majority would ever willingly adopt the lifestyle of developing countries; "Barring universal enlightenment or dire catastrophe, these aren't live political options, and it is pointless to pretend otherwise."⁵⁹ In other words, the militant ecologist must determine which is likely to be a more *effective* means of safeguarding ecological integrity: promoting lower global fertility rates through reproductive education and family planning aid, or embarking upon a likely quixotic crusade to drastically lower U.S. consumption rates and end global poverty for all time? Important as the latter might be in the long run, given the vulnerability of Earth's wildlife and the great threat posed by human population growth, the former course is probably the most viable at this point. Thus, total liberationists who deny the need for proactive steps to reduce global population are effectively denying one of the most important means of safeguarding the flourishing of wild life on Earth.

Likewise, total liberationists frequently claim that there is no logical connection between overpopulation and immigration, and that the injection of immigration into the population debate is simply a form of covert racism. However, the most important question for the militant ecologist is not *who* is immigrating, but rather *how many*. Viewed from this perspective, the connection between high rates of immigration and overpopulation is fairly clear. While the birthrate of native-born Americans has leveled

⁵⁷ Crist and Cafaro, "Human Population Growth," in *Life on the Brink*, 5-6.

⁵⁸ Philip Cafaro and Winthrop Staples III, "The Environmental Argument for Reducing Immigration into the United States," in *Life on the Brink*, 180-3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 180-3.

off since the middle of the twentieth century, immigration levels have been at a historic high since the 1960s, and immigration is now the main driver of U.S. population growth.⁶⁰ Most total liberationists would agree that their goals of clean air and water, livable cities, and flourishing wildlife and wilderness are incompatible with continued levels of population growth; it would therefore seem self-evident that they should seek to change any and all policies that encourage it - including current immigration policies.

Otherwise, any gains in wildlife preservation and reduced consumption are at constant risk of being negated by rising population pressures. For this reason, it seems fair to say that support for continued high levels of immigration, and thereby for continued U.S.

population growth, means that you also support more cars, more houses, more malls, more power lines, more concrete and asphalt. You support less habitat and fewer resources for wildlife; less water in the rivers and streams for native fish; fewer forests, prairies, and wetlands; fewer wild birds and wild mammals (except perhaps for house sparrows, rats, and a few other human commensals). You support replacing these other species with human beings and our economic support systems.⁶¹

One cannot so easily dismiss immigration concerns within the environmental movement as raw outbreaks of racial bigotry, as many total liberationists are wont to do. Of course the immigration question is fraught with racial tensions, and militant ecologists who supported greater restrictions might indeed find themselves allied to more conservative political elements - as EF! activist Garth Kahl admits, "There are times when putting the Earth first may mean alienating many in the liberal community."⁶² However, he argues, rather than acknowledging that three million additional American consumers a year is an ecological disaster, total liberationists in the movement have elected instead to "parrot the 'racist' line being spewed by progressives" and thereby "quell even this modest dialogue about US population growth."⁶³ In refusing to even consider the ecological impact of America's historically high immigration rates, both legal and illegal, total liberationists have allowed their egalitarian ideology to triumph over their ecocentrism, which prioritizes the effective defense of ecological integrity and wild nature against human population pressures.

Total liberationists also often argue that immigration restriction contradicts their political ideals, because current national borders are wholly arbitrary from a bioregionalist perspective. This may be a fair point in certain parts of the Americas, though in many places throughout the world national borders tend to follow cultural lines, which are determined partially by geography but also by language, culture, shared history, and ethnicity. In addition, it ignores the fact that a mass influx of people into American bioregions, whatever their origins, poses a threat to fragile local ecosystems, and hardly seems like a sustainable long-term solution to humanitarian or ecological

⁶⁰ Ibid., 173.

⁶¹ Ibid., 186.

⁶² Kahl, "Rethinking," 3.

⁶³ Ibid., 3.

problems abroad. Moreover, while total liberationists often insist that national borders are nothing more than tools of the nefarious corporate establishment, existing only “to create a global economic system where labor is cheap, environmental protection is weakened, and everyone and everything is a possible target of violence,”⁶⁴ precisely the opposite may be true. A world with no political or cultural boundaries, where humans were reduced to interchangeable cogs in a massively expanding and increasingly powerless pool of labor (courtesy of rampant population growth) would in all likelihood serve the interests of these corporate elites quite well.⁶⁵ Moreover, continued population growth, whatever its source, practically ensures that most environmental gains will eventually be reversed - to the benefit of these very same elites. As Tim Palmer points out, if one wanted to guarantee that the heedless exploitation of Earth’s resources and wildlands would continue indefinitely, you wouldn’t have to do anything except make sure that population growth did not stop. In the end, people will demand to be accommodated. Endangered frogs are no match against human suffering, real or imagined. A growing population is, in fact, so important to anti-environmentalist’ success that they would be well served if there were a taboo on even discussing population growth and the ways to limit it.⁶⁶

Ultimately, by suggesting that all forms of political boundaries are arbitrary and inherently oppressive, and by denying the ecological costs of population growth (and its primary driver in the U.S., historically high immigration levels), total liberationists are simply playing the useful idiots for the neoliberal establishment they claim to oppose.

In the end, the chief reasons behind the total liberationist’s reluctance to take a hard line on population growth centers upon either historical injustices or the unpalatably racist, classist, and misanthropic connotations of the population question. While these are certainly significant concerns, neither should be allowed to trump the chief aim of militant ecology, which is the effective defense of ecological integrity by whatever means necessary. The refusal to even consider the possible impacts of global population growth and immigration on the natural world, and fixation on first-world sins of consumption and colonial oppression, bespeaks an ultimate commitment to egalitarianism and “fairness” over the integrity of wild nature, sacrificing the radical core of militant ecology and adopting the concerns of the political left. Those who adopt this perspective, both within the movement and without, often condemn the ecowarrior outlook - with its more thoroughgoing commitment to militant ecocentrism - as an inhumane and totalitarian form of “ecofascism.” This accusation has been so commonplace over the years that it requires further examination.

⁶⁴ Kris Lynch, “Two Responses to ‘The Bullshit That Must End,’” 10.

⁶⁵ As one EF! activist pointed out in 1999, “In fact, the corporations can’t wait for hundreds of thousands of desperate (read: easily exploitable) workers to come into northern workplaces on the NAFTA wave. They will work for a third the money in half the conditions and help destroy the already atrophied remains of organized labor in the North” (Moonbeam and Werrei, “In Defense of Misanthropy,” 21).

⁶⁶ Tim Palmer, “Beyond Futility,” in *Life on the Brink*, 103.

12.3 A Note on “Ecofascism”

Most who criticize the politics of militant ecology, whether their perspective is the economic libertarianism of the American right or the democratic socialism of the American left, share a basically liberal commitment to liberty, equality, and the rights of the individual. Robyn Eckersley argues, for instance, that the emancipatory political theory uniting most green thinkers is “post-liberal” rather than anti-liberal, ensuring a balanced appreciation for human rights as well as ecological integrity.⁶⁷ But in light of the extremely urgent ecological problems facing the world, particularly when rampant deforestation, habitat destruction, and species extinction are taken into account, the halfmeasures and compromises offered by liberal democracy seem rather tame in response. Indeed, many of the criticisms of the American political system levied by militant ecologists - its domination by oligarchs, its dependence upon compromise, its latent anthropocentrism, and its deftness at co-opting the opposition - might be inescapable aspects of liberal democracy itself. Given the pressing nature of ecological problems and the high moral seriousness of their rhetoric, one might wonder why militant ecologists, and ecowarriors in particular, do not advocate *authoritarian* solutions to these problems.

Such a scenario is at least plausible, in theory. Barring any kind of mass human extinction, and given the inability of anarchic social arrangements to prevent some enterprising segment of humankind from scrambling back up the ladder of technological domination, one could argue that the only possibility for a successful and long-term implementation of ecocentric principles would be for those most sympathetic to them to seize state power. The results would probably look very little like the peaceful bioregional tribalism envisioned by most radical activists. It would most certainly be *less* egalitarian and democratic than the present day, not more so, given that most people lack ecological sensibilities and therefore cannot be trusted to make the proper decisions. There would be more stringent birth control laws, more frequent confiscations of land and private property, some version of sumptuary laws, perhaps forced relocations out of wilderness areas. Internationally, corridors of immigration would likely be closed off and a great deal of humanitarian aid would cease (except for the euphemistically-titled “family planning” and biodiversity protection aid). In other words, one possible solution to the ecological crisis might look a great deal like the “ecofascism” advocated by Finnish conservationist Pentti Linkola.⁶⁸

If militant ecologists were to advocate such authoritarian solutions for ecological problems, it would hardly be unprecedented. Such regimented “iron governments” were seen as the only possible solution to the ecological and population crisis by Robert Heilbroner during the apocalyptic days of the 1970s, when Garrett Hardin called for a regime of “mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon” in response to the tragedy of the

⁶⁷ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, 30.

⁶⁸ Pentti Linkola, *Can Life Prevail? A Radical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (Vermont: Integral Tradition Publishing, 2009).

commons and the only choice for humanity seemed to lie between “Leviathan or oblivion.”⁶⁹ More recently, David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith have argued that the continued dominance of liberal democratic capitalism guarantees the worsening of the environmental crisis, while an “altruistic, able, authoritarian leader, versed in science and personal skills,” at least stands a fighting chance of improving the situation.⁷⁰ While old-school eco-authoritarians generally admired the “military-socialist” model of the Soviet Union, latter-day enthusiasts place greater hope in the Chinese model, in which government does not act as central economic planner but is nevertheless able to intervene in the personal and economic activities of citizens without the limitations imposed by private or democratic rights.⁷¹ Such supporters often point, for instance, to China’s remarkable success at lowering its population levels (in contrast to the abject failure of democratic India) in order to assert the superior capacity of authoritarian governments to impose unpopular but necessary policies.

Why should militant ecologists - and particularly ecowarriors, given the strong emphasis they place on ecological integrity and their deeply pessimistic attitudes concerning human nature - not also advocate such eco-authoritarianism? In fact, despite these frequent accusations of “ecofascism,” it is notable that almost all radical environmentalists in the United States explicitly reject identification with the alternative right: Bron Taylor notes, based on his research, that “there is *no* overlap in the kinds of journals, novels, and even spiritual literature participants in these different subcultures read.”⁷² In fact, “radical environmental subcultures are among the most militantly egalitarian, anti-hierarchical and feminist” he has encountered in his decades of ethnological study. However, perhaps militant ecology has simply attracted activists of a left-wing temperament who do not understand the harsh demands of a thoroughgoing ecocentrism, whose egalitarianism is merely incidental rather than an essential component of their political program.

Might “ecofascism” therefore be a likely outcome of the militant ecology outlook, when taken to its logical conclusions? It is certainly not true to claim, like Janet Biehl, that militant ecologists eschew authoritarian solutions because “there are some things that cannot be sacrificed... Human freedom, for one, is too important to be erased by appealing to the need for ecological stability.”⁷³ In fact, one of the central pillars of militant ecocentrism is the recognition that certain aspects of human freedom as

⁶⁹ Robert L. Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect: With “Second Thoughts” and “What Has Posterity Ever Done for Me?”* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975); William Ophuls, “Leviathan or Oblivion?” in *Toward a Steady State Economy*, ed. Herman E. Daly (San Francisco: Freeman, 1973); Garret Hardin, “Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* 162, 3859 (December 13, 1968), 1243-1248.

⁷⁰ David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith, *The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy* (London: Praeger, 2007), 14.

⁷¹ Dan Coby Shahr, “Rejecting Eco-Authoritarianism, Again,” *Environmental Values* 24, no. 3 (June 2015), 345-366.

⁷² Bron Taylor, “Diggers, Wolves, Ents,” in *The Cultic Milieu*, 62.

⁷³ Biehl, *Finding Our Way*, 98.

presently conceived will likely have to be curtailed if the integrity of wild nature is to be preserved. Nor is it true, as Robyn Eckersley claims, that democratic procedures are just as important as ecological integrity due to the intrinsically emancipatory nature of green politics. She insists that “authoritarianism is ruled out at the level of green principle (rather than on purely instrumental grounds) in the same way that it is ruled out according to liberal principle: it fundamentally infringes on the rights of humans to choose their own destiny.”⁷⁴ Unlike liberalism, however, a militant commitment to ecological integrity does not enshrine the inviolable right of humans to choose their own destiny (though it is not categorically opposed to such a freedom, within ecological bounds). Whatever procedural means are most effective at achieving its primary goal of a healthy and flourishing biosphere are acceptable. For this reason, as Terence Ball admits, “There is no logically or conceptually *necessary* connection between a commitment to the natural environment and a commitment to democracy.”⁷⁵ In fact, as Kevin DeLuca argues,

Democracy is not an a priori condition for environmental integrity. Social justice and human rights around the globe are not a priori conditions for environmental protection. Indeed, the protection of endangered species around the globe often requires the violation of human rights and social justice.”⁷⁶

One is free to deny that such sacrifices are worth the cost, but to deny that such choices will have to be made at all is simply wishful thinking.

Nor is the ecocentric outlook of militant ecology inherently egalitarian, despite the proclivities of its total liberationist adherents. This is why Richard J. Ellis’s attempts to place militant ecology among the ranks of America’s “illiberal egalitarian” movements ultimately rings hollow: as he claims, “For the great majority of Earth First!ers, a commitment to radical egalitarianism goes hand in hand with a commitment to saving the Earth.”⁷⁷ Unlike the other movements he analyzes, egalitarianism is *not* the primary focus of militant ecology, it is not what makes it radical, but it is rather a means to an overriding end - the defense of wild nature. Properly speaking, egalitarianism is therefore only incidental to militant ecology, secondary to its ecocentric aims. Even the apparent “biospheric egalitarianism” of deep ecology and its adherents does not imply, as Jerry A.

Stark points out, “an equality between *persons* but rather an equality in moral and political standing between human and nonhuman *species*. This leaves the question of

⁷⁴ Eckersley, quoted in Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 27.

⁷⁵ Terence Ball, “Democracy,” in *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*, ed. Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 132.

⁷⁶ Kevin DeLuca, “A Wilderness Environmentalism Manifesto: Contesting the Infinite SelfAbsorption of Humans,” in *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism*, 34.

⁷⁷ Ellis, *The Dark Side of the Left*, 232.

equality between human beings entirely open to question.”⁷⁸ For activists who take their ecocentric principles seriously, it is entirely conceivable that those who grasp the truth concerning humankind’s place in the cosmos are spiritually, morally, and intellectually superior to those who have not. Indeed, this appears to be the rationale behind militant ecology’s extremism in defense of the natural world - for if they were truly as committed to radical democracy and egalitarianism as some allege, it is difficult to understand how activists could justify using sabotage or violence to enforce their will upon a recalcitrant populace. Nor is it likely that more democracy would actually solve the problem. As Best and Nocella recognize, implicit in the ecological sabotage of the ALF is the belief that

Far too many are unreasonable and closed-minded, rendering the force of reason and persuasion insufficient... Those who champion education and legislation as the sole tools of struggle project a rationalist belief that discounts the irrational forces often ruling the human psyche, the sadistic pleasure all too many derive from torture and killing, the deep psychological mechanisms human beings use to resist change and unpleasant realities, the mechanisms of detachment and compartmentalization that allow them to ignore the enormity of animal suffering, the vested interests they have in exploiting animals, and their identities as members of a species they believe is the preordained master of the earth.⁷⁹

Expand the concern from animals to the Earth as a whole, and this is probably a fair description of the rationale underlying most acts of ecological sabotage, democratic and egalitarian rhetoric to the contrary. There is no reason to assume that more democracy or an end to hierarchy or would serve as a panacea for ecological ills. Given the nature of environmental issues, particularly those less directly tied to human welfare such as wilderness and wildlife preservation, there seems to be a widespread sense within the movement that “the mass of civilized people will never be on our side.”⁸⁰

There is, in short, nothing about the ecocentrism of militant ecology that renders it inherently egalitarian, democratic, or “post-liberal.” Indeed, such scruples may stand in the way of effective action in defense of the natural world. Thus, concerns about a latent “ecofascism” within the militant ecology movement may not be so ill-founded after all. Theorists such as Michael Zimmerman, Janet Biehl, and Peter Staudenmaier have already pointed to affinities between the ecological condemnation of a “materialistic, greedy, anthropocentric, soul-less, abstract, arrogant, urban-oriented modernity” and

⁷⁸ Jerry A. Stark, “Postmodern Environmentalism: A Critique of Deep Ecology,” in *Ecological Resistance Movements*, 270.

⁷⁹ Best and Nocella, “Behind the Mask,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?*, 29.

⁸⁰ Derrick Jensen, *Endgame, Volume 1: The Problem of Civilization* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 324.

that of historical Fascism and National Socialism,⁸¹ as well as the “appropriation” of ecological themes by the European New Right. As Biehl summarizes the case:

When “respect for Nature” comes to mean “reverence,” it can mutate ecological politics into a religion that “Green Adolfs” can effectively use for authoritarian ends. When “Nature,” in turn, becomes a metaphor legitimating sociobiology’s “morality of the gene,” the glories of “racial purity,” “love of *Heimat*,” “woman equals nature,” or “Pleistocene consciousness,” the cultural setting is created for reaction. “Ecological” fascism is a cynical but potentially politically effective attempt to mystically link genuine concern for present-day environmental problems with time-honored fears of the “outsider” or the “new,” indeed the best elements of the Enlightenment, through ecological verbiage. Authoritarian mystifications need not be the fate of today’s ecology movement, as social ecology demonstrates. But they could become its fate if ecomystics, ecoprimitivists, misanthropes, and antirationalists have their way.⁸²

One might set aside the fact that these accusations invariably depend upon a *reductio ad Hitlerum* as a cudgel to browbeat those who do not subscribe to their views. Of course, if one is simply deploying “fascist” as a loaded synonym for “anti-liberal” (which, one suspects, is often the case) then perhaps there is some truth to these accusations; but if one is aiming for any sort of definitional accuracy, then this identification needs to be questioned. There are, in fact, a number of compelling reasons why fascistic or authoritarian solutions might in fact prove just as inimical as anarchism to the ecocentric aims of militant ecology, not only for the avowedly egalitarian total liberationists but also for the more ruthlessly holistic ecowarriors.

For one, there are several pragmatic objections to eco-authoritarianism. Most obviously, there is the danger that a benevolent ecological dictatorship cannot be guaranteed to remain either benevolent *or* ecological. Another common argument is that the absence of free and open public discourse makes it easy for authoritarian administrators to get locked into narrow, rigid ways of thinking, and that more inclusive institutions are better at providing necessary information and feedback regarding policy implementation.⁸³ In addition to these pragmatic objections, there are also many theoretical incompatibilities between Fascist/Volkisch/National Socialist ideologies and the ecocentric outlook of militant ecology.

In these totalitarian ideologies it is the *Volk* or the state that is supreme, whose survival is prioritized above all else; while in the ecocentrism of militant ecology it is

⁸¹ Michael E. Zimmerman, “Ecofascism: An Enduring Temptation,” in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, 4th Edition (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2004), 14.

⁸² Janet Biehl, “Ecology and the Modernization of Fascism in the German Ultra-Right,” in *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1995).

⁸³ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 63.

the integrity of the natural world. Thus, while Fascism might enthusiastically develop any number of military or industrial technologies in order to secure the existence of the fatherland (as the National Socialists did, despite their ostensible commitment to ruralism), such displays of nationalism and militarism cannot be justified by appeals to ecocentrism. The overwhelming primacy of the nation-state would also be likely to lead to a subordination of ecological goals in pursuit of competitive advantages. Secondly, despite the aforementioned accusations that the ecocentric position on wilderness and population is “genocidal” or “racist,” closer examination reveals how obfuscatory and inaccurate such charges really are. Militant ecology aims for lower populations across the board, rather than targeting any particular groups as being particularly “undesirable.” If their wilderness preservation and population reduction programs have detrimental effects on certain groups, this is an incidental rather than an intentional outcome of their policies. Finally, with regard to the heavy-handed authoritarianism typically practiced by historical Fascist regimes, militant ecologists generally prefer the idea of cultural change to the sort of top-down reforms promoted by eco-authoritarians, which would likely lead to instability and backlash over time. Thus, while they believe that education and consciousness-changing activism are themselves insufficient in light of the grave threats posed by ecological degradation, their ultimate hopes for a future primitive society rest upon such cultural changes, which are likely to be the only effective means of ensuring long-term ecological health.

In the end, despite their elevation of the whole above the individual, despite their tendencies to misanthropy, and despite their acknowledgement of the need for extreme solutions, militant ecologists - even ecowarriors - almost invariably reject an authoritarian response to the environmental crisis. This is not simply a result of the latent leftist sympathies shared by many total liberationists. It is a recognition that totalitarianism is a poor foundation on which to build the lasting social and cultural consensus required for the future primitive society to take root. It is also an acknowledgement that, since humans constitute a small part of the whole, any search for the good of the biosphere cannot exclude human welfare, dignity, and freedom altogether. Indeed, in a future primitive society in which people are more at home in the world, many militant ecologists believe there will be more genuine freedom, relative equality of conditions, and a greater sense of fulfillment and community than humanity has known since the dawn of the Neolithic.

This discussion does, however, point to an uncomfortable contradiction in the militant ecology worldview, one shared by many radical political movements: a discrepancy between means and ends, between the ideal and the human material, between the benign prospect of a cultural rebirth and the unsavory means necessary to bring it about. This is the revolutionary’s paradox, and perhaps it will never be satisfactorily resolved. This commitment to the effective defense of wild nature by any means necessary, ranging from civil disobedience to sabotage and even violence, forms the subject of the next chapter.

13. By Any Means Necessary

The final aspect of militant ecology under consideration, and certainly the most controversial, is its approach to political change. While the mainstream environmental movement has typically concentrated its efforts on the legislative or judicial arenas, or at most confined itself to acts of non-violent civil disobedience, the militant ecology movement is distinguished by its “every tool in the toolbox” philosophy, ranging from lobbying and protest to tree-spiking, vandalism, and arson. The earliest militant ecology activists - Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherds, Ronnie Lee of the Animal Liberation Front, and the founders of Earth First! - were exiles from more moderate organizations such as Greenpeace, the Hunt Saboteurs Association, and the Wilderness Society, driven to extremism out of frustration with the compromises and limited results of the mainstream movement. This willingness to employ extreme tactics is, of course, an expression of their commitment to use any effective means necessary in order to safeguard the integrity of wild nature. Though there are many debates as to the definition of these terms, for the purpose of this study “illegal” will apply to any tactics outside of sanctioned legislative and judicial channels, including nonviolent civil disobedience; “extreme” will refer to acts that go a step further and involve sabotage or property destruction; and “violent” will be reserved for physical harm inflicted upon living beings.

The morality of political violence was discussed in chapter five, concluding that while militant ecologists are unlikely to intentionally harm any living being (human or otherwise), a more physically violent approach could gain ground if a small minority of activists came to regard themselves as soldiers in a holy war. However, mass and indiscriminate violence against humans would contradict the central value of ecocentrism, which entails a concern for the integrity and dignity of *all* life on Earth. This chapter, by contrast, focuses on the *strategic* dimensions of this militancy. It examines why many activists refuse to limit themselves to the lobbying and litigation of mainstream environmental groups as well as more moderate tactics such as nonviolent civil disobedience, and why they feel compelled to resort to more extreme tactics such as sabotage and arson. Several objections to the efficacy of these illegal and occasionally violent tactics will also be evaluated, concluding that - with a few exceptions - at this point in time a genuine commitment to militant ecocentrism demands that activists focus primarily on legal paths to environmental preservation and political change.

For many activists, their distrust of normal legal channels is related to their rejection of the representative liberal state. Both are dominated by political, media, and corporate elites who work to stifle and moderate dissent through co-optation, disin-

formation, and outright intimidation. Foreman describes how mainstream wilderness advocates like himself learned to moderate our opinions along with our dress. We learned that extremists were ignored in the councils of government, that the way to get a senator to put his arm around your shoulders and drop a Wilderness bill in the hopper was to consider the conflicts - mining, timber, grazing - and pare back the proposal accordingly.¹

After witnessing the dilution of countless such wilderness bills into hopelessly compromised versions of their former selves - not to mention the threat posed by the Reagan presidency, the newly-appointed Secretary of the Interior James Watt, and a burgeoning anti-environmental clique out West calling itself the "Sagebrush Rebellion" - Foreman and other disillusioned conservationists decided "it was time for a new joker in the deck: a militant, uncompromising group unafraid to say what needed to be said or to back it up with stronger actions than the established organizations were willing to take."² The result was Earth First!.

Paul Watson found himself similarly repelled by the reluctance of his Greenpeace co-founders to take more direct steps against illegal whaling and fishing, preferring to focus on lobbying and nonviolent civil disobedience in order to generate awareness and raise funds. He and his allies therefore decided to start a new organization, one that would take the fight to the whalers and "go beyond the limit of petitions, lobbying, demonstrations and hanging up banners... our goal is not to protest against whale hunting; our goal is to put an end to it."³ While the SSCS has for tactical reasons confined itself to acting under the auspices of the United Nations World Charter for Nature, which authorizes NGOs and individuals to implement international conservation laws (Watson often asserts that "Sea Shepherd does not break the law; we respect the law"), it is nevertheless regarded by governments around the world as a vigilante order, employing extreme tactics in defense of the global marine ecosystem.

Both the Earth Liberation Front and their counterparts in the Animal Liberation Front, which tend to be united by a shared culture of green anarchism, go even further than the EF! or SSCS founders in rejecting reject "the mythical propaganda that state-sanctioned means are the only way social change has ever been achieved."⁴ As the *ALF Primer* states, "We are not going to get animal liberation through legislation - GOVERNMENT IS PART OF THE WHOLE PROBLEM."⁵ This green anarchist attitude has also crept into Earth First! over the last decade, with a few activists coming to believe that any civic participation at all, from voting to litigation, serves only to legitimize a broken and immoral system:

¹ Foreman, *Confessions*, 12.

² *Ibid.*, 17.

³ Watson and Essemmlali, *Interview*, 70.

⁴ Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, 5.

⁵ *An Animal Liberation Primer: Third Edition*, ed. by @nu (2002), 27.

If one is looking to abolish capitalism, industrialism, and statism, there is no excuse for voting. If one is looking for temporary relief for oppressed wildlands or wildlife then go ahead and pull that lever. But given that the political climate could easily turn against your cause at any time, with that vote you may be perpetuating the next crisis of extinction, or the next drug war, or the next private prison, simply by legitimizing the system that makes it all possible.⁶

The very militancy of the movement is clearly born out of frustration with the inevitable compromises and limited successes of mainstream environmental and social justice organizations.

For the same reason, many militant ecology activists (though certainly not all) are reluctant to limit themselves to nonviolent civil disobedience, popularized by the peace and civil rights movements and adapted to ecological and animal liberation politics by organizations such as Greenpeace and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Foreman and Watson, though admitting that carefully planned and executed civil disobedience has its place, share a skepticism about its overall efficacy, with Foreman explaining that “I’ve always been concerned about an over-reliance on civil disobedience... It’s news the first time you do a banner hanging or blockade a bulldozer or do a tree-sit. When does it cease being news?”⁷ Another founding member of EF!, Mike Roselle, expressed doubt about the effectiveness of protest marches: “I tired of these events in the 1960s and never once saw them have a serious impact on anything. They were more parade than protest, more speech than action, a convergence of the believers, by the believers, for the believers.”⁸ Civil disobedience is viewed by many activists as too limited in scope to accomplish the goals of militant ecology, a socially-acceptable release valve for green rage that ought to be channeled into more effective actions. While proponents of nonviolent protest did attain some influence within Earth First!, particularly among total liberationists, it is notable that this organization has never explicitly adopted a nonviolent ideology.⁹

Implicit in this critique of nonviolent civil disobedience is the assumption that its proponents are more concerned with education, publicity, and “raising awareness” than achieving concrete results. Its defenders, by contrast, often point to the success of the Indian independence and U.S. civil rights movements, insisting that militant ecology ought to follow a similar strategy rather than resorting to sabotage or violence. Recent studies, such as the work of Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, would appear to back up such arguments for the greater efficacy of nonviolent resistance.¹⁰ However, as

⁶ “Only Sheep Need Leaders,” *EF! Journal* 20, no. 8 (October 31, 2000), 30.

⁷ Foreman, interview with Rik Scarce, in *Eco-Warriors*, 72.

⁸ Roselle and Mahan, *Tree Spiker*, 224.

⁹ Winstanley, “Evolving Earth First!” 34-5.

¹⁰ Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

Bruce Friedrich points out, the lessons of these earlier nonviolent movements may not be readily transferable to militant ecology. For one, such movements typically involve massive numbers of followers fighting for *their own* liberation (a crucial difference); they usually rely upon the compassion or guilt of others, which is rarely extended to such a degree to nonhuman animals or ecosystems; they depend upon the power of global opinion, which is presently united in regarding militant ecology activists as dangerous fanatics; and they can usually claim enough followers to “fill the jails,” which militant ecology certainly cannot. He concludes,

With so much economic pressure against the animal movement (think about advertising, just for starters), so little support, no voices from the oppressed themselves (at least not in the streets, getting arrested and demanding justice), nothing like the international support commanded by Gandhi or King, few willing to go to jail involuntarily (let alone voluntarily), etc., strategic nonviolence (proposed as the best or only alternative) seems naive and misguided.¹¹

In arguing for the necessity of more extreme tactics, militant ecologists often cite the anti-slavery movement and anti-Fascist resistance during World War II, asking - as one ELF communique does - “How many successful movements in history can you think of off the top of your head that came about only by education? How do you ‘protest’ against slavery? Holding signs and handing out flyers on southern plantations?”¹² In assuming that education or awareness alone can cure the ills of deforestation, habitat destruction, and animal abuse, critics ignore the fact that the ultimate cause of these travesties is not ignorance but *indifference* - indifference compounded by complacency and greed. Thus, many militant ecologists view awareness-raising civil disobedience as a waste of time and energy.

Civil disobedience may be a waste of time in another sense as well: there simply are not enough activists for their arrest and incarceration to make much of a difference, politically speaking. Thus, while traditional civil disobedience is carried out by protestors willing to bear legal responsibility for their actions, relying upon the media-generating power of mass arrests, the ecoteur aims to avoid detection and incarceration.¹³ The rationale is that, given their small numbers and urgency of their cause, the aims of militant ecology are better served through escaping to fight another day rather than rotting in a jail cell for a few moments of publicity. As one ELF spokesman puts it, “Civil disobedience is a fucking bullshit lie, a filtration device to sort out dissidents and place them in the hands of the courts. It never got me anything but a criminal record and a few more knocks over the head.”¹⁴ Given their small numbers and slim chances

¹¹ Bruce G. Friedrich, “Defending Agitation and the ALF,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?* 254-6.

¹² Pickering, *Earth Liberation Front*, 26.

¹³ Vanderheiden, “Eco-terrorism or Justified Resistance?,” 437.

¹⁴ Leslie James Pickering, “People Ain’t Feeling This Bullshit,” in *Igniting a Revolution*, 302.

of success working within a system that is so heavily weighted against them, many militant ecologists feel that the best hope for achieving their aims is to take matters into their own hands. However, this does not mean that all legal means or forms of civil disobedience are to be dispensed with, since these can play an important role as part of a larger campaign. The important thing is to avoid turning a useful tactic into a counterproductive devotion to nonviolence as an end in itself.

13.1 From Tree-Spiking to Revolution

Though most activists believe that illegal or extreme tactics are sometimes necessary in pursuit of their ultimate aim - a future primitive society in which wild nature and humanity coexist in greater harmony - they frequently disagree as to what means are most effective towards this end.

One of the earliest justifications for extreme tactics was to point to their shortterm value as *holding actions*, a last resort when legal means had been exhausted or did not provide adequate protection to animals and ecosystems. This rationale was often cited by the early defenders of tree-spiking and other acts of ecological sabotage (known as “monkeywrenching” or “ecotage” among the early EF! activists) which, according to Foreman, were generally accepted within the movement as “legitimate tool[s] for defense of the wild” and “effective in stopping timber cutting, road building, overgrazing, oil and gas exploration, mining, dam building, power-line construction, off-road-vehicle use, trapping, ski area development, and other forms of destruction of the wilderness, as well as cancerous suburban sprawl.”¹⁵ In outlining the principles of monkeywrenching, Foreman insisted that it should be small-scale and focused in its extent (eschewing mindless vandalism), that it was only acceptable as a last-ditch effort when other means had failed, and that it should never target human beings or other lifeforms. He was particularly adamant that it should not be employed when other means such as protests or delicate political negotiations were taking place, since it could put the whole campaign in jeopardy: “The Earth warrior always asks, Will monkeywrenching help or hinder the protection of this place?”¹⁶

From this perspective, monkeywrenching is conceived of as a holding action, defending wild places when legal means have been exhausted (or when existing laws are being ignored with impunity). Similar actions among animal protection groups also fit this description. For instance, the Sea Shepherds decided early on to concentrate primarily on illegal whaling and fishing, allowing them to claim that their actions were merely upholding the law. One might also point to the early ALF practice of liberating animals from research laboratories and collecting evidence of illegal animal abuse, which inflicts little damage on the industry but nevertheless generates publicity and rescues innocent lives from destruction. This understanding of ecotage places the bulk of the

¹⁵ Foreman, *Confessions*, 113.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

burden on achieving success through legal, aboveground means. There was also some hope among early EF! members that its extreme tactics would make mainstream environmental groups look more moderate and increase their negotiating power, a tactic known as the “radical flank effect.”¹⁷ Ultimately, this kind of ecotage functions as a form of politics by other means, and does not reject the possibilities of legal reform.

Another, more long-term purpose of ecotage is to inflict economic damage on offending businesses and industries. Thus, in addition to its function as a holding action to preserve old-growth forests in danger of immediate clear-cutting, some early EF! activists believed that tree-spiking would put a financial strain on the logging industry. Manes estimated the cost of ecotage to be around twenty to twenty-five million per year around 1990, and pointed to the cancellation of various timber sales, as well as the bankruptcy of a small-scale logging operation, as evidence of its effectiveness.¹⁸ Likewise, a principal aim of Sea Shepherd actions is to increase operating costs and diminish profits for the illegal fishing enterprises. One of the most notorious acts of ecological sabotage in history occurred in November 1986, when SSCS activists Rod Coronado and David Howitt sank two of Iceland’s unoccupied whaling vessels and sabotaged the country’s only whale processing station, causing over two million dollars in damage.¹⁹ Activist Rod Coronado claims that these economic considerations also played a role in the ALF’s changing priorities over the years, away from “its Robin Hood persona, whisking animals to freedom with much public support” towards a “campaign of economic sabotage intent on costing animal abusers millions in expensive security improvements and increased insurance premiums as well as maximum property destruction.”²⁰ As a later edition of the *ALF Primer* enjoins,

Yes, full scale animal/human liberation is our goal and the image of the black clad agent of mercy with beagles and bolt cutters is heartwarming. Still, given the enormity of the enemy and the staggering numbers of animals abused, we must consider if putting forth huge efforts to free a handful of creatures is really worth it. Live liberations require larger teams and much more time, plus you leave with more evidence than you go in with. An act of sabotage is quicker, requires less follow-up, less people, less evidence and gets ‘em where it hurts the most - their funding!²¹

This focus on economic sabotage is born of the belief that the awareness-raising methods of civil disobedience and political campaigning, as well as the short-term

¹⁷ As Howie Wolke claims, “When I helped found Earth First!... I thought that it would be the ‘sacrificial lamb’ of the environmental movement; we would make the Sierra Club look moderate by taking positions that most people would consider ridiculous” (Manes, *Green Rage*, 18).

¹⁸ Manes, *Green Rage*, 9.

¹⁹ Despite admitting responsibility and demanding that charges be brought, neither Coronado nor Howitt - nor Paul Watson, who admitted his role as co-conspirator - were ever charged for any crime (Paul Watson, “Raid on Reykjavik,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 2 (December 21, 1986), 1, 6).

²⁰ Western Wildlife Unit of the Animal Liberation Front, *Memories of Freedom*, 13.

²¹ *Animal Liberation Primer*, 25.

relief offered by holding actions and animal liberations, will never achieve the necessary results. As one activist writes, “Unlike many other direct action activists, the A.L.F. do not engage in symbolic actions designed to increase public awareness, but calculated attacks of sabotage meant to cripple, disrupt, and eventually eradicate industries of exploitation.”²² A similar motive informs the activities of underground ELF activists: “The ELF realizes that the profit motive, caused and reinforced by the capitalist society, is destroying all life on the planet. The only way, at this point in time, to stop that continued destruction of life is to by any means necessary take the profit motive out of killing.”²³ While not wholly eschewing legal routes, this justification for ecological sabotage - which seeks to use the mechanisms of capitalism against the system itself, putting offending industries out of business by hurting their bottom line - is more skeptical of the efficacy of such means. “If the abusers and destroyers of earth’s future care only about money and cannot be swayed by mass protests or legal pressure,” Rod Coronado writes, “then we must drive a stake through their economic heart.”²⁴

Despite differences of emphasis among these approaches (Foreman and Watson, for instance, denounced the arson-happy methods of the ELF as feckless and politically counterproductive²⁵) - all entail a disciplined and targeted approach that Howie Wolke describes as “thoughtful radicalism.” Such tactics should altogether avoid “juvenile thoughtless unnecessary acts that make us look like criminals,” including pointless vandalism, drug use, and excessively *outré* behavior (a suggestion that was not entirely taken to heart).²⁶ Foreman was particularly adamant that monkeywrenching is not revolutionary, since “it does not aim to overthrow any social, political, or economic system... It is aimed at keeping industrial ‘civilization’ out of natural areas and causing its retreat from areas that should be wild. It is not major industrial sabotage.”²⁷ For later generations of militant ecologists, this limited and reformist approach began to feel a little too much like acquiescence - or worse, collaboration. Some, like the founders of Deep Green Resistance, began to call for a targeted but much broader and more ruthless campaign against the very roots of industrial civilization, reasoning that its continued existence was incompatible with the integrity of the biosphere. Similarly, in an editorial written for the *Green Anarchy* magazine, Theodore Kaczynski (popularly known as the Unabomber) advised serious militant ecologists to strike at the vital organs of the industrial system, including the electric power grid, the communications and computer industries, biotechnology, and the media.²⁸

²² Shadow Activist, *No Compromise* 5 (December 1996), 23.

²³ Pickering, *The Earth Liberation Front*, 47.

²⁴ Rod Coronado, “Direct Actions Speak Louder Than Words,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?*, 179.

²⁵ Kuipers, *Operation Bite Back*, 231.

²⁶ Howie Wolke, “Grizzly Den: Thoughtful Radicalism,” *EF! Journal* 10, no. 2 (December 1989), 29.

²⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 115.

²⁸ Ted Kaczynski, “Hit ‘Em Where it Hurts,” *Green Anarchy* 8 (Spring 2002), 18.

Some green anarchists in the movement go even further, insisting that organized political resistance of any kind cedes too much authority to the system. These advocate a “feral revolution” against hierarchy and civilization in all its forms, one which will free the revolutionary agent from the chains of domestication while simultaneously bringing about the collapse of the system itself. As one writer for *Live Wild or Die* counsels, “By becoming a random, chaotic factor in the highly ordered and increasingly uniform world of civilization, we take the offensive... playfully creating spur of the moment, surreal guerrilla theatre that undermines the domestication process.”²⁹ Likewise, a green anarchist writer explains, “We can reconnect with our wild selves, we can break from the civilized order, we can release our feral fury, through violent conflict with those who create, maintain, and benefit from this omniscidal system and its apparatus of control.”³⁰

Gone is the carefully delimited scope of the previous forms of ecotage, and its circumscribed aims of short-term defense or long-term economic subversion. Gone, also, is any prohibition against physical violence. The feral revolution demands complete disregard for the legal, moral, and physical boundaries of claimed authority. Every shard of broken glass from corporate stores, every spray-painted wall, every smashed piece of technology, every punched TV reporter, every burnt bank, every barricade enacted in revolt, every penetrated fence, every destroyed piece of machinery, every charred SUV, every torched mansion, every wounded soldier, every knee-capped executive, every hung politician, every exanimated slavemaster, every castrated rapist, every beheaded king, every shanked prison guard, and every dead cop is the derivative of a rewilding act. Our rage against the death-machine has been pacified for too long, and it must be unleashed on those who attempt to run our lives, their institutions of domination, and their apparatus of control. It is through these acts of revolt and destruction that we can remember what it was like to live, to defend ourselves, and to act on those who wish to harm us.³¹

In short, in response to the inertia and gridlock of the political process and the ineffectiveness of nonviolent civil disobedience, many militant ecologists have concluded that their ecocentric principles demand the use any effective means necessary to defend wild nature, including sabotage and - in some cases - physical violence. Of course, there are disagreements as to the acceptable level of illegality or violence, depending upon the ultimate aims of the ecoteur; but it is nevertheless generally held to be a legitimate exercise of political power.

²⁹ A. Mary Praxter, “The Wild ones Fight Back,” 3.

³⁰ Gimli, “The Feral Fury Unleashed: Reconnecting with our Wild Selves Through Violent Conflict With Our Oppressors,” *Back to the Basics 3: Rewilding*, (April 14, 2004), 14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

13.2 Violence Never Solved Anything

This willingness to employ illegal, extreme, and occasionally violent tactics in defense of wild nature has been one of the most controversial aspects of militant ecology, with outside critics and even some within the movement questioning whether the recourse to illegality can ever be legitimate. Environmental ethicists and political theorists such as Eugene Hargrove, Steve Vanderheiden, Michael Martin, and Thomas Young have argued that ecotage is unwarranted when other legal and moral alternatives remain available. Given the democratic nature of the American political system, the burden of proof lies upon the ecoteur to prove conclusively that all legal avenues have been exhausted.³² Martin calls for further empirical studies to determine the relative efficacy of legal and illegal methods, while Hargrove points to the success of the German Greens to claim that viable avenues to political influence still remain open. In this critique, illegal and especially violent tactics can only be legitimate when all other legal remedies have been exhausted, which - critics allege - is plainly not the case with the environmental movement.

This critique, however, ignores a number of important facts about the American political system as well as the unique nature of the militant ecology movement. First, it fails to acknowledge that, for most militant ecologists, acts of ecotage and civil disobedience *are* a last resort, to protect threatened areas when legal means have failed.

As Julia "Butterfly" Hill explains,

Tree-sitting is a last resort. When you see someone in a tree trying to protect it, you know that every level of our society has failed. The consumers have failed, the companies have failed, and the government has failed. Friends of the forests have gone to the courts, activists have tried to make consumers aware, but with no results. Corporations have neglected their responsibility as landowners, while the government has refused to enforce its laws.

Everything has failed, so people go to the trees.³³

For activists unwilling to simply throw in the towel and admit defeat in the face of immanent destruction - which appears to be the real thrust of Hargrove and Martin's arguments - illegal and extreme tactics may be necessary. In addition, this line of critique forgets that militant ecologists do not accept the United States to be a democracy in anything but name, given the domination of the policymaking process

³² Eugene Hargrove, "Editor's Response," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (Spring 1983), 96; Eugene Hargrove, "From the Editor: Ecological Sabotage: Pranks or Terrorism?" *Environmental Ethics* 4 (Winter 1982), 291-292; Vanderheiden, "Eco-terrorism or Justified Resistance?" 425-47; Michael Martin, "Ecosabotage and Civil Disobedience," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (Winter 1990); Thomas Young, "The Morality of Ecosabotage," *Environmental Values* 10, no. 3 (August 2001), 385-93.

³³ Hill, *The Legacy of Luna*, 23.

by bureaucratic and corporate elites: “Our system is far from democratic - owing to the excessive power wielded by wealthy corporations to influence politicians through campaign donations and outright bribes, and through their advertising dollars in the media,” Foreman argues.³⁴ And even if the system *were* truly democratic, militant ecologists admit that they would still be in the minority, that most people remain too blinded by their anthropocentrism, pressing material needs, and artificial desires to put the good of the Earth first. To those who hold up the German Green Party as evidence that ecologically-based parties can be electorally successful, ecowarriors such as Foreman, Watson, and Manes reply that the Greens have only attained mainstream status by adopting an anthropocentric focus on social justice. As Watson writes of his experience with the Green Party of Canada, “I left the party when it started adopting left-wing, politically correct positions that went against the positions I deemed ecologically correct.”³⁵ In other words, the Greens have only attained any level of mainstream respectability by subordinating their ecological message to an emphasis on social justice, and thereby diluting their commitment to ecological integrity above all.

Thus, for those going against the current, with the power of the state and public opinion arrayed against them, small-scale acts of disobedience, sabotage, and even violence may be the only options left. Such actions outside the system, which Sidney Tarrow refers to as “contentious challenges,” are often the only recourse of social movements which lack stable resources such as money and state access.³⁶ Some might argue that this very lack of popular support implies that militant ecologists are on the wrong side of history, or at any rate destined to fail. However, the lack of popular acclaim is unlikely to serve as a compelling counter-argument to most activists. They believe themselves to be fighting in defense of the sacred, “on behalf of that which has no representation in government, no corporate sponsor, no voice in the world of men,”³⁷ and to buy time for the wild places on Earth. Though they place a premium on effective actions to that end, their morality requires them to persist even if the struggle seems hopeless. In response to those who would urge them to play by the rules or admit defeat, Foreman replies, “We are not talking about a football game or a high-school debate here; we are discussing the continuation of three and a half billion years of evolution.”³⁸ Given the hostility of most political elites, the inertia of the political process, the urgent and ongoing crisis of ecological destruction and wildlife extirpation, and the unlikelihood of any timely change in of public opinion, the question for the militant ecologist becomes: how much are they willing to lose playing by the rules of a game that has been rigged against them from the start?

³⁴ Foreman, *Confessions*, 122.

³⁵ Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 192. See also Foreman, *Confessions*, 219; and Manes, *Green Rage*, 133.

³⁶ Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power In Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Revised and Updated 3rd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10.

³⁷ Theresa Kintz, “Fanning the Flames of Resistance,” *EF! Journal* 19, no. 2 (January 31, 1999), 2.

³⁸ Foreman, *Confessions*, 123.

A more convincing and pragmatic argument against ecotage and violence is that they are not likely to achieve lasting results, and will in fact serve only to alienate potential supporters. If this critique is true, ecotage would therefore represent an abandonment of the core of militant ecology, which demands *effective* action in defense of the Earth. This argument is often deployed by total liberationists within the movement for whom the ultimate goal of radical activism is to raise awareness and galvanize social change. Judi Bari, who famously renounced tree-spiking in 1990, worried that it threatened the success of the broader campaign: “Those of us who are out on the front lines putting our bodies in front of the bulldozers and chainsaws can’t afford to be isolated and discredited by something as ineffective and incendiary as tree-spiking.”³⁹ EF! activist Karen Wood also argued for the superiority of nonviolent approaches to political change, insisting that nonviolence is the best tool for achieving lasting change in human behavior. It is human behavior that is destroying wilderness, polluting waterways, and driving species to extinction. It is human behavior that we must change in order to turn things around.

Forcing change - through a lawsuit, and act of ecotage, or... an act of violence - brings only temporary results in a world dominated by industrialism and its twin, consumerism.⁴⁰

Likewise, later in life EF! co-founder Mike Roselle reflected that nonviolence is the only reasonable approach in an asymmetrical conflict when one is up against “a larger, better financed, more politically powerful foe,” opining that the arsonist tactics of the ELF had “changed nothing, and the energy behind it could have been much better used building a broad-based and disciplined environmental movement.”^{41,42} This critique is likely to be more compelling to militant ecologists than those proffered by the aforementioned ethicists and political theorists, since it does not attack the practice of ecotage in terms of democratic legitimacy - to which activists are largely indifferent - but rather in terms of their own commitment to effective action. Direct action that strays too far outside the bounds of legality and social decency runs the risk of alienating supporters and drawing greater repression upon the environmental movement as a whole.

This critique is particularly applicable to the advocates of ultraviolence and revolutionary free-for-all, since - at this point in time, at least - such a strategy is unlikely to achieve any results beyond imprisonment and bad publicity. Industrial society is in no imminent danger of collapse, as Bron Taylor points out, and the energy infrastructure and repressive power of the state remain more than adequate to its needs: “It makes little sense to base strategy and tactics on such an unlikely possibility that communities of resistance will ever be able to mount a sustained campaign to bring down industrial

³⁹ Bari, *Timber Wars*, 274, 282.

⁴⁰ Karen Wood, “A Commitment to Nonviolent Change,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 5 (May 1, 1995), 2.

⁴¹ Roselle and Mahan, *Tree Spiker*, 205, 238.

⁴² Bron Taylor, “Resistance: Do the Ends Justify the Means?” in *Worldwatch Institute: State of the World 2013*, ed. Linda Stark (Washington DC: Island Press, 2013), 312.

civilization, even if that were a desirable objective..⁷⁶⁶ Indeed, the collapse of the American industrial state would likely be a very drawn-out affair, and not quite as egalitarian and peaceful in its outcome as green anarchists suppose. In any event, it seems clear that the advocates of total revolution generally have the downfall of civilization as their aim - whatever the cost - rather than the effective defense of wild nature, and thus abandon the core concern of militant ecology. However, it remains to be seen whether there might be instances in which other illegal activities, sabotage, and even violence might actually be effective in terms of the goals listed above: raising public awareness, supplying the “radical flank” of the environmental movement, performing holding actions to stave off imminent destruction, and putting offending enterprises out of business.

As far as raising awareness goes, it is undeniable that extreme acts of civil disobedience, sabotage, and arson have increased the profile of militant ecology, though whether for good or ill is a separate question. One activist writing in the *EF! Journal* claims that “where ecotage isn’t saving biological diversity directly, it is at least making biodiversity an issue. It can therefore be part of a larger campaign.”⁴³ Mike Roselle similarly argues that, regardless of its economic impact, ecotage helps provide publicity to public lands issues: “As with media coverage of the Vietnam War, the repetition of graphic images of violence and destruction helped to sway American public opinion against the logging of ancient forests.”⁴⁴ Sabotage itself may therefore generate discussion about biodiversity and wilderness loss and could for that reason possess a certain educational value. However, some caveats may be necessary. For one, radical acts that risk human life or cause gratuitous damage often lead the media and the public to focus on the tactics themselves, as well as their human victims, rather than the ecological issues at hand.⁴⁵ In the animal liberation world, for instance, some have argued that “open rescues” which liberate animals without causing damage tend to generate the most positive media coverage, whereas research lab raids and arson are of more questionable value.⁴⁶ In addition, as Paul Joosse points out, the strategy of leaderless resistance adopted by underground earth and animal liberation activists forces its actors to remain “unsympathetically faceless and nameless,” with their actions publicized by spokespersons rather than the activists themselves. Thus, while civil disobedience in which the activists publicly face danger and willingly put their freedom on the line possess a certain “body rhetoric” that generates admiration, the anonymous sabotage of the ecoteur does not.⁴⁷ Positive awareness is therefore most likely to be generated by such tactics as civil disobedience, the sabotage or vandalism of highly unpopular developments or businesses, and the liberation of research animals. These are tactics which, as Vanderheiden points out, appeal directly to the sense of justice and morality

⁴³ CM, “Monkeywrenching: An Appraisal,” in *Earth First! Reader*, 261.

⁴⁴ Mike Roselle, “Spike a Tree For Me,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 3 (February 2, 1995), 9.

⁴⁵ Bron Taylor, “Resistance,” 311.

⁴⁶ Best and Nocella, “Behind the Mask,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters*, 39-40.

⁴⁷ Joosse, “Elves, Environmentalism, and ‘Eco-Terror,’” 75-93.

of the larger community, and might therefore lead to political solutions.⁴⁸ However, in order to remain newsworthy such tactics must keep evolving, otherwise they risk becoming - like so many contemporary protests - yesterday's news.

What about the hope that such tactics can serve as holding actions, staving off imminent destruction until legal remedies are obtained? Acts of sabotage can bring certain operations to a halt, and in some cases might buy enough time for legal protection to be sought. Journalist Rik Scarce names the 1982 Gros Ventre Wilderness Area as one instance in which ecosabotage held off road construction long enough for a court order to be issued protecting the area.⁴⁹ As ELF spokesman Leslie James Pickering opines, "While diluted legal routes can take up to years to prove effective, something like constructing a treesit in an ancient forest threatened by clearcutting can stop the chainsaws instantly.. gaining the support that it takes to protect the forest forever."⁵⁰ Illegal direct actions therefore have the benefit of immediacy, working in conjunction with more long-term legal and political methods in order to defend threatened areas. As in every other case, however, it is important to ensure that such acts do not significantly damage public opinion. And there is also, of course, the question of if and when to throw in the towel. If no legal remedies are forthcoming, and if the collapse of industrial civilization does not seem to be on the horizon, should activists persist in defending areas slated for destruction or shift their attention elsewhere? Julia "Butterfly" Hill insisted on remaining atop a 1500 year old California redwood for 738 days, long after the local EF! activists wanted to abandon the site as hopeless; her efforts were ultimately rewarded after the tree and some surrounding area were granted protection.

On the subject of economic sabotage, the evidence is inconclusive. Regarding tree-spiking, Paul Watson claims that its great value as a tactic lies in the fact that "maximum economic damage can be inflicted for minimal expense."⁵¹ While this may be true in theory, there are other costs besides that of the hammer and nails to be taken into account: for instance, the value of one's freedom if captured (indeed, the value of one's life as well, given the increasingly violent responses to such acts documented by Helvarg and Switzer);⁵² the months or years of lost opportunities for further action; and, of course, the negative publicity should such tactics cause collateral damage. There is also the question of whether small-scale acts of sabotage really pose that much of an economic threat. Arguing against this assumption, Vanderheiden points to the ELF, which has caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damage but has not significantly affected the underlying profit structure of targeted businesses, except for

⁴⁸ Ibid., 436.

⁴⁹ Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 70.

⁵⁰ Leslie James Pickering, "Editorial," *Resistance: Journal of Grassroots Direct Action* 2 (Fall 1999), 3.

⁵¹ Paul Watson, "In Defense of Tree Spiking," *EF! Journal* 15, no. 3 (February 2, 1995), 10.

⁵² See Helvarg, *The War Against the Greens*; and Jacqueline Vaughan Switzer, *Green Backlash: The History and Politics of Environmental Opposition in the U.S.* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 1997).

marginally increasing insurance premiums. Moreover, he argues that nonviolent direct action and consumer boycotts are just as capable of galvanizing public opinion against offending industries, and do so without simultaneously inciting public outrage against the environmental movement as a whole.⁵³ His assessment, while valid in most respects, is perhaps too pessimistic about the potential for ecotage to create economic disincentives.

Though it is notoriously difficult to trace the causal relationship, there have been a few instances in which sabotage against vulnerable firms has resulted in considerable harm to the business in question. In addition to a few small-scale logging operations allegedly put out of commission by the efforts of early EF! activists, this seems to be the particular goal of underground activists in the ELF and ALF. In the most notorious case, ALF supporters of the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty campaign launched an all-out assault on the controversial animal research corporation Huntingdon Life Sciences through a campaign of secondary and tertiary targeting, which put not only the corporation itself but also its business partners, suppliers, and stockholders in the crosshairs, using tactics ranging from mass protests and sabotage to intimidation and physical violence. These tactics, while highly controversial, served to drive down profits and share prices and led over one hundred companies to sever their ties with HLS.⁵⁴ Thus, economic sabotage may well prove somewhat effective against either smaller outfits with high operating costs or immensely unpopular corporations that are unlikely to be granted “victim” status by the media and general public. However, for every logging company and fur farm put out of business, there are thousands more that will be merely inconvenienced - and as in every other case, violent tactics will always risk inciting a strong public backlash.

This leads to the final question: do extreme acts indeed generate the “radical flank” effect, making mainstream environmental groups appear more moderate by comparison and thereby gaining them greater bargaining power? Or do such tactics simply risk discrediting the environmental movement as a whole? Judi Bari once complained that the only effect of tree-spiking in Oregon was “pissing people off,” and an editorial in the more moderate animal rights magazine *Animal People* claimed that

The ALF and imitators are practically singlehandedly responsible for rationalizing the organized backlash against the animal rights movement, are the major reason why animal protection representatives still have virtually no place on institutional care and use committees; and have managed to equate the term ‘animal rights activist’ with ‘terrorist’ in the minds of many

⁵³ Vanderheiden, “Radical Environmentalism in an Age of Antiterrorism,” in *Environmentalism in the United States*, 2009.

⁵⁴ See *Eco-Terrorism, Specifically Examining the Earth Liberation Front and the Animal Liberation Front: Hearing Before the Committee on Environment and Public Works, U.S. Senate, 109th Cong. (2005)* (statement of John Lewis, Deputy Assistant Director of the FBI).

people in law enforcement and media, even those otherwise sympathetic to the cause of animals.⁵⁵

In response to such accusations, radical activists commonly respond that these moderate organizations are simply victims of their own success. “The blowback mainstream organizations might receive is not necessarily the result of ALF actions alone,” write Best and Nocella, “but also stems from the effectiveness of the animal advocacy movement in general and the will of the corporate state-complex to crush all dissent.”⁵⁶ Anarcho-primitivist John Zerzan similarly argues that those who condemn violent tactics like those of the Unabomber overlook “the simple fact that any real blows against the Megamachine will invite responses from our enemies. The specter of repression is most effectively banished by doing nothing.”⁵⁷ Though there is a hard logic to such a response, one must also doubt the ultimate value of prematurely radical tactics forced upon a recalcitrant public. In the end, the success of the radical flank effect depends upon a highly uncertain public perception of the organization and its activities. As Vanderheiden notes, “Where the public is able to recognize the difference, mainstream groups may become more attractive; where they cannot, ecotage risks a backlash against all greens.”⁵⁸ In a nation as politically polarized as the United States, a hostile public may be unable to distinguish between the litigation and lobbying of the Sierra Club and the fire-bombing of the ELF.

It therefore seems that illegal and extreme tactics *may* have a positive effect in certain situations. Vanderheiden summarizes a few of the necessary conditions:

- (1) some act is being undertaken which is contrary to both law and justice;
- (2) state officials charged with enforcing relevant laws are unwilling or unable to do so; (3) serious damage is immanent and, once complete, will be durable and irreversible; (4) legal means were attempted and proved unsuccessful; and (5) appeals to the sense of justice of the community have either already failed or would be frustrated by the unresponsive policy making or enforcement processes.⁵⁹

Kamieniecki, Coleman, and Vos add that such extreme acts might be able to cause a lengthy delay in development activities, giving mainstream groups time to achieve their aims through legal or political means.⁶⁰ If a reasonable number of the public

⁵⁵ Judi Bari, “Tree-Spiking: It Just Doesn’t Work,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 3 (February 2, 1995), 8; Harold D. Guither, *Animal Rights: History and Scope of a Radical Social Movement* (Edwardsville IN: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 161.

⁵⁶ Best and Nocella, “Behind the Mask,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?*, 41.

⁵⁷ Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness*, 154.

⁵⁸ Vanderheiden, “Radical Environmentalism in an Age of Antiterrorism,” in *Environmentalism in the United States*, 124.

⁵⁹ Vanderheiden, “Eco-terrorism or Justified Resistance?” 443.

⁶⁰ Sheldon Kamieniecki, S. Dulaine Coleman, and Robert O. Vos, “The Effectiveness of Radical Environmentalists,” in *Ecological Resistance Movements*, 325.

are supportive of certain acts of vigilantism, such as the Sea Shepherd campaigns or animal liberations, then the development of a “Robin Hood” persona may work in the interests of militant ecology.

In light of the foregoing, it appears that illegal acts of civil disobedience and sabotage may be effective under the following conditions: when they are employed to preserve things in danger of immanent and irreversible destruction in order to buy time for legal means to go into effect (old-growth forests, research animals); when economic sabotage might succeed at putting vulnerable businesses out of commission (small logging, ranching, mineral extraction outfits, or unpopular businesses whose investors and suppliers can be “convinced” to part ways); and when public sentiment stands a good chance of being on the activists’ side (animal rescues, opposing unsightly or destructive construction projects). Under such conditions, spiking trees in a clear cut, or sabotaging bulldozers being used to make illegal roads, may be strategically justified; but burning down an SUV dealership or luxury homes would not be, since they will simply be rebuilt and will impose minimal economic losses on the offending industry. Aggressively attacking the U.S. energy infrastructure would, at this point in time at least, also be off the table, since the massive inconvenience would certainly turn public opinion against the activists; but peacefully freeing animals from a research lab may be acceptable, since many people might sympathize with such an act. Violent acts in general, which physically target human beings, are also unlikely to achieve any positive results in the current political climate, whereas targeting faceless institutions and machinery would likely be less offensive to the public at large.

Despite its possible applications, however, ecotage and civil disobedience alone are poor substitutes for involvement in the political process. It is important to remember that, media coverage and government reports aside, the core of militant ecology is *not* a commitment to illegal, extreme, or violent tactics, but to effective actions in defense of wild nature. Despite their potential and limited uses, based on the foregoing it seems highly unlikely that these extreme tactics will at present achieve much more than bad publicity and increased government repression. By the same token, the criticisms of nonviolent civil disobedience offered by many activists also seem to ring true: demonstrations and protests rarely go much further than “raising awareness” and are unlikely to precipitate the necessary behavioral and policy changes in the needed timeframe; and militant ecologists are far too few in number for their arrests to serve much of a martyrdom value. Aside from a few victories in (temporarily) saving wilderness areas, liberating animals, and occasionally disrupting business as usual, many of the other strategic goals of the movement have not been achieved. Holding actions are self-evidently limited and short-term in scope; raising awareness is insufficient without effective political action to back it up; economic sabotage is unlikely to have an effect on any but the most vulnerable industries, and even then others will simply crop up like the heads of Hydra; extreme tactics are just as likely to move public opinion *against* the environmental movement as a whole as to generate a beneficial radical flank effect; and the total revolution approach advocated by green anarchists is, at this point in

time at least, unlikely to contribute to the effective defense of wild nature. Remaining wedded to obsolete or counter-productive tactics simply because they have been a part of the movement's culture through the decades obviously contradicts the commitment to the effective defense of ecological integrity above all.

Fortunately, these extreme tactics are not the only weapons in the militant ecology arsenal, nor even the most important. One significant but little-discussed aspect of militant ecology is the practice of "paper monkeywrenching" or "paperwrenching," which is simply the use of citizen lawsuits and appeals in defense of wild nature. It is, one activist writes, "The ultimate use of the tools of the devil against the devil, for these are the tools The System cannot fight without."⁶¹ Mike Roselle claims that "while it is a mistake to get bogged down by the system to the point where the original issue is lost, the courtroom *is* an important forum in which to defend the rights of the natural world," using such means as existing statutory protections, resource economics, appeals to religious freedom, and even species rights.⁶² Bron Taylor opines that these paper monkeywrenchers, "often self-taught, but increasingly sophisticated both legally and scientifically... have been among the most effective North American campaigners for biological diversity."⁶³ In addition to battling regulatory agencies and the courts, Karen Coulter argues that activists need to consider new tools, such as state constitutional amendments, township/city/county ordinances... long-term, corporate charter-revocation campaigns[,] and... a variety of grassroots-organizing tactics against contemporary mechanisms of corporate governance and globalization (e.g. against multilateral development banks, industry-sector advisory committees, etc.).⁶⁴

Another possibility is for activists, who are admittedly few in number, to work behind the scenes in more moderate conservation groups, bringing their talents and passion and ecocentric commitments to bear on a broader scale. One of the earliest aims of Earth First! was, in fact, not simply to become a movement in its own right but to "subvert" the mainstream wilderness conservation movement, carrying out "a friendly infiltration in an effort to strengthen and return an organization to its original principles - a revival, housecleaning, de-bureaucratization if you will."⁶⁵ This "friendly infiltration" would entail pressing other groups to take stronger stands, put forth more ambitious proposals, employ ecocentric rather than anthropocentric rhetoric, and avoid cozy relationships with politicians. Through these perfectly legal means, militant ecol-

⁶¹ Buck Young, "Abracadabra! Defending the Wild with Magic (and lots of ink)," *EF! Journal* 21, no. 1 (November 1, 2000), 48.

⁶² Mike Roselle, "Deep Ecology and the New Civil Rights Movement," *EF! Journal* 8, no. 5 (May 1, 1988), 9.

⁶³ Bron Taylor, "Earth First! and Global Narratives of Popular Ecological Resistance," in *Ecological Resistance Movements*, 14.

⁶⁴ Karen Coulter, "The Corporate Exploitation Paradigm Versus Anti-Imperialist Earth First!," *EF! Journal* 21, no. 1 (November 1, 2000), 78.

⁶⁵ Dave Foreman, "Earth First! and Subversion," *EF! Journal* 4, no. 2 (December 22, 1983), 3.

ogists might hope to advance the goals of wild nature and ecological integrity even more effectively than the extreme tactics for which they are known.

However, given that the core of militant ecology is effective defense of the natural world, by any means necessary, militant ecologists are not willing to commit themselves to a wholly legal path just yet. They often insist on the importance of “using whatever tools and tactics that are effective in saving natural diversity,”⁶⁶ arguing that “only the successful weaving of multiple strategies will lead to success”⁶⁷ and for that reason “all avenues of action must be utilized and recognized.”⁶⁸ Militant ecology therefore refuses to categorically disavow any tactic, since any and all means might be necessary in the defense of the wild Earth. As Foreman writes,

Delay, resist, subvert using all the tools available to us: file appeals and lawsuits, encourage legislation - not to reform the system but to thwart it. Demonstrate, engage in non-violent civil disobedience, monkeywrench. Defend. Deflect the thrashing mailed fist of the dying storm trooper of industrialism as represented by the corporate honcho, federal bureaucrat, and tobacco-chewing bubba. Our self-defense is damage control until the machine plows into that brick wall and industrial civilization self-destructs as it must.⁶⁹

In order to avoid devolving into a justification for all manner of adolescent vandalism and nihilistic violence, such a strategy requires considerable discretion and prudence. These characteristics, unfortunately, may not be particularly well-represented in the radical environmental subculture. “The combined efforts of education, non-violent protest, and militant resistance,” writes ELF activist Jeff Luers, “is the only method by which to raise public awareness and confront those responsible for ongoing injustices.”⁷⁰ The trick, of course, is getting the mixture right.

13.3 Movement or Vanguard?

In addition to disagreements over strategy and tactics, a related strategic debate among militant ecologists concerns the very nature of the movement itself: should activists continue to embrace their role as an ecological vanguard, or endeavor to build a broad and diverse mass movement for social change? Disagreements over this question constitute yet another dimension of the split between ecowarriors and total

⁶⁶ Dave Foreman/“Chim Blea,” “Cat Tracks: What Are We Fighting For?” *EF! Journal* 4, no. 2 (December 22, 1983), 17.

⁶⁷ Jeff Luers, “Weaving Multiple Strategies for Success,” in *This Country Must Change*, 52.

⁶⁸ Western Wildlife Unit of the Animal Liberation Front, *Memories of Freedom*, 67.

⁶⁹ Foreman, “Reinhabitation,” 22.

⁷⁰ Luers, “Weaving Multiple Strategies for Success,” in *This Country Must Change*, 52.

liberationists, stemming from their divergent beliefs concerning human nature and the prospects for social reform.

Due to their far more pessimistic appraisal of human nature, ecowarriors do not typically believe that voluntary social change alone will be sufficient to resolve the ecological crisis. Their statements on this subject tend towards the apocalyptic, revealing an almost gleeful anticipation for the downfall of modern civilization. As Foreman writes, "There is no way to take five billion people in the world today, with the worldview they have, and the economic and industrial imperatives they live under, and turn it into a sustainable Earth-harmonious culture... What is going to happen is that the system is going to collapse of its own corruption."⁷¹ This apocalyptic orientation derives, in part, from their conviction that wilderness and biodiversity loss are such pressing matters that "there is not enough time to peacefully transform industrial, overpopulated human civilization into something that can and will live at peace with the rest of nature."⁷² It also derives from their negative appraisal of human nature, sometimes going so far as to depict humankind as a cancer upon the Earth, and a belief that nothing less than industrial collapse and a massive decline in human population will be sufficient to safeguard the continued flourishing of life on Earth. "The planet will not be 'saved' by the people's new ecological consciousness," Jim Barnes writes, "But there will be rebellions, war, famine, and, oh yes, industrial collapse. One way or another, justly, fairly or not, humans will be far less numerous than at present. The rest of the biosphere, what's left of it, will take a quick breather. Natural selection forges on."⁷³ While ecowarriors also envision an ideal future primitive society that will arise from the ashes of the modern world, unlike total liberationists they do not believe that any sort of mass education, spiritual awakening, or revolutionary uprising will bring it about in the necessary time frame.

Regarding humankind as flawed and modern civilization as wholly corrupt and beyond saving, while also acknowledging the impossibility of a peaceful transition back to the hunter-gatherer world of the Pleistocene, ecowarriors see no point in devoting much energy to movement building or working for ambitious social reforms. They consequently tend to focus on preserving as much wilderness and wildlife as possible until civilization collapses of its own accord, or engaging in acts of sabotage that will hasten its fall. As Howie Wolke explains, "Thoughtful radicalism will save some biotic diversity in the short term, and allow more to be saved and restored for the longer run. Then, when the floundering beast finally, mercifully chokes in its own dung pile, there'll at least be *some* wilderness remaining as a seedbed for planet-wide recovery."⁷⁴

Needless to say, this perspective, which eschews most attempts at social reform not directly related to wilderness preservation, does not lend itself particularly well to

⁷¹ Quoted in Manes, *Green Rage*, 232.

⁷² Dave Foreman/"Chim Blea," "Cat Tracks: What Are We Fighting For?" 17.

⁷³ Jim Barnes, "Dieback: A Vision of Darkness," *EF! Journal* 17, no. 8 (September/October 1997), 3.

⁷⁴ Wolke, "Thoughtful Radicalism," 29.

movement-building. Though believing that EF! could profitably work together with other organizations, particularly Native American rights activists and anti-nuclear protestors, Foreman insisted that “we never envisioned Earth First! as being a huge mass movement” and that “for a group more committed to Gila Monsters and Mountain Lions than to people, there will not be a total alliance with other social movements.”⁷⁵ Total liberationist Judi Bari once criticized such inflexibility, asserting that the old guard wished to keep EF! “small, pure and radical” while she wanted it to become “big, impure and radical.”⁷⁶ Given their skepticism concerning mass movements, ecowarriors often posit the need for an ecocentric vanguard, an elite order of dedicated warriors to defend the sacred wilderness or even, in its later formulations, to push along the collapse of industrial civilization. This warrior ethos is captured in the EF! slogan, “No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth,” and reflects the fact that Earth First!’s founders originally envisioned it as a warrior society:

In addition to our absolute commitment to and love for this living planet, we are characterized by our willingness to defend Earth’s abundance and diversity of life, even if that defense requires sacrifices of comfort, freedom, safety, or ultimately, our lives. A warrior recognizes that her life is not the most important thing in her life. A warrior recognizes that there is a greater reality outside her life that must be defended. For us in Earth First!, that reality is Earth, the evolutionary process, the millions of other species with which we share this bright sphere in the void of space.. There may not be applause, there may not be honors and awards from human society. But there is no finer applause for the warrior of the Earth than the call of the loon at dusk or the sigh of wind in the pines.⁷⁷

This warrior ethos had spiritual dimensions as well. The act of monkeywrenching was conceived of as a chivalric spiritual exercise, requiring ecowarriors to “keep a pure heart and mind” and “remember that they are engaged in the most moral of all actions: protecting life, defending Earth.”⁷⁸

Ecowarriors also tend to be more overtly elitist in their outlook than total liberationists, unabashedly regarding themselves a natural aristocracy fighting to defend Earth against the masses mired in ignorance, indifference, and greed. As Reed Noss mused,

Maybe it’s time to recognize a ‘deep ecology elite,’ an ideological population of people who understand their kinship with the earth, their interdependence with other ecological entities, and their duty to fight for what they

⁷⁵ Foreman, *Confessions*, 20; Lee, *Earth First!*, 86.

⁷⁶ Lee, *Earth First!*, 128.

⁷⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 34-35.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

love and *are...* Remember, most people do not feel this way about the earth. Most people stupidly fear and reject any association with nature. Most people are “*Me First!*,” not “*Earth First!*”⁷⁹

For ecowarriors, in sum, the ecological vanguard is a spiritual aristocracy, comprised of those rare individuals who have rejected the anthropocentric ideologies of the modern world and taken the side of the mountains, the forests, and the Earth. Despite its anarchic trappings, the ecocentrism espoused by ecowarriors is in fact a highly elitist and aristocratic ethos, marked by a distrust of the vulgar majority and belief that spiritual connection to the wilderness is a mark of superiority.

The ultimate aim for most total liberationists, by contrast, is to radically *transform* society through education, political pressure, or even violent means if necessary. Among early Earth First! ecowarriors, the downfall of industrial civilization seemed immanent, and the only logical course of action was therefore to preserve as many tracts of wilderness and species of wildlife as possible before the whole juggernaut collapsed beneath its own weight. Total liberationists began to question this strategy, pointing out that even if such a collapse were immanent there is no guarantee that wilderness would survive the downfall. In addition, they insisted that humans are a part of the natural world, and for that reason a thoroughgoing ecocentrism must include human welfare among its chief concerns. As Judi Bari argued,

To define our movement as being concerned with “wilderness only,” as Earth First! did in the 1980s, is self defeating. You cannot seriously address the destruction of wilderness without addressing the society that is destroying it... The same power that manifests itself as resource extraction in the countryside manifests itself as racism, classism, and human exploitation in the city. The ecology movement must recognize that we are just one front in a long, proud, history of resistance.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Noss implies that, however important life experiences may be, there is one unavoidably genetic component to ecocentrism: intelligence. “It takes an ability to understand relationships, i.e., intelligence, to be a deep ecologist,” he writes (Reed Noss, “Deep Ecology, Elitism, and Reproduction,” *EF! Journal* 4, no. 5 (May 1, 1984), 16). This suggestion of a genetic basis for environmental concern has even driven some ecowarriors to promote parenthood among the ecological vanguard, despite their overpopulation concerns. Noss claims that the people who reproduce the most tend to have the worst environmental attitudes, while the intelligent and properly-educated children of environmentalists “can make a positive contribution to conservation, more than compensating for the resources [they] consume.” (Ibid., 16). Likewise, Paul Watson states that “ecologically intelligent men and women refraining from reproduction leaves the world in the hands of the ecological ignorant and the anthropocentrically arrogant” (Paul Watson, “The Laws of Ecology and Human Population Growth,” in *Life on the Brink*, 134). This argument does, of course, hinge upon the assumption that environmental concern is genetic, that the children of ecowarriors will invariably take up their parents’ banners in the fight for the Earth, and that conversion to an ecological viewpoint is otherwise impossible. In light of these questionable assumptions, many prominent ecowarriors who regard overpopulation as a chief ecological issue, such as Foreman, remained reluctant to endorse having children.

⁸⁰ Bari, “Revolutionary Ecology.”

Activists must acknowledge, as ELF spokesman Leslie James Pickering notes, that “as important as the protection of the Earth is, it is far from the only cause worthy of our attention and active involvement.”⁸¹ In addition to these pragmatic and humanitarian issues, the political and ecological landscape has changed since the early 1980s, with greater knowledge about climate change and increasing economic globalization forcing activists to reevaluate their priorities. As one EF! activist puts it, “Rather than acting piecemeal in defense of the last remaining wild places or spending time and energy on random symbolic actions, we should identify and assess strategic campaigns that are capable of blocking the expansion of globalized infrastructure.”⁸² In other words, militant ecologists can no longer afford to wait for the system to collapse beneath its own weight, or even to simply give it a push in the right direction; political and social changes must be implemented in order to bring oppression and ecological destruction to an end. Even in its green anarchist version, which is more pessimistic about the prospects for education, consciousness-raising, and “leftist reformism” to achieve the desired results, total liberationist ecology remains committed to the emancipation of *all* life and consequently more concerned with social issues such as racism, sexism, indigenous rights, and poverty, as well as the treatment of domestic animals.

A struggle as vast as that envisioned by total liberationists - against every form of oppression, racism, sexism, speciesism, homophobia, and a litany of other ills - cannot be won by a small and insular vanguard of ecodefenders. Total liberationists therefore insist that the radical environmental movement must overcome its overwhelmingly “white,” middle class, wilderness-focused origins and work to attract a much more diverse range of activists to the cause. These shifting priorities have also changed how activists perceive of their mission and their own roles in the struggle. Possessing a more optimistic view concerning the possibility of a mass change in human consciousness, as well as a desire to actually *change* society rather simply preserve the wilderness against its downfall, many total liberationists prioritize inclusivity, diversity, and coalition-building in their attempts to construct a mass movement capable of overthrowing modern civilization. They often express a belief that, in addition to direct actions against the oppressors, education and consciousness-raising are necessary components of the struggle. As one animal liberationist writes, “We must keep in mind that our long-term goal of total Animal Liberation will come about not through widespread intimidation but through general education and understanding.”⁸³

Due to their egalitarianism and social justice orientation, the very notion of a militant ecology elite (or an elite of any kind, for that matter) is anathema to total liberationists. They are therefore highly critical of the ecowarrior’s vanguardist and martial rhetoric, pointing to its violent, elitist, and sexist connotations as well as its potential to alienate allies. EF! activist Karen Pickett would later recall that the organization’s

⁸¹ Leslie James Pickering, “The Earth Liberation Front and Revolution,” in *This Country Must Change*, 170.

⁸² “Evolving EF! II,” 11.

⁸³ Matt Ball, “War or Revolution?” *No Compromise* 4 (October 1996), 10.

early public image consisted of “big, beer-swilling, out-of-the-Rockies and the deserts men in cowboy hats howling like wolves,” a macho image that grated upon the feminists in the organization.⁸⁴ Prominent activist Judi Bari likewise criticized the domination of Earth First! by “macho, beer-drinking eco-dudes,” as well as its marginalization of women in leadership positions and public roles. She once aptly summarized the organization’s public persona as “big man goes into big wilderness to save big trees.”⁸⁵ Bari also attributed the lack of an overt non-violence code in EF! to the fact that it “would contradict the he-man image that Earth First! was founded upon.”

Another activist similarly worried that the movement “seems primarily to value manly man radical action” by idealizing militant acts and downplaying other forms of action that require “compassion, working together and emotional sensitivity, traits usually associated with the feminine realm.”⁸⁶ Ecofeminist activist patrice jones has also expressed concern about the potential for disaffected young men to use the ALF as an excuse to vent their anger.⁸⁷ Thus, while ecowarriors envision themselves as an elite knighthood fighting in defense of the sacred natural order, total liberationists reject these chivalric trappings altogether as sexist, racist, and politically counterproductive. Instead, they perceive themselves as allies standing in solidarity with all the oppressed of the Earth, leading to a greater focus on human justice in order to build a broader movement.

In keeping with these concerns, with the growing dominance of the total liberationist outlook there has been a perceptible shift in Earth First! away from the “macho” and elitist rhetoric of ecodefense and towards the language of empathy and solidarity. A 2009 EF! gathering featured a debate over their longstanding motto, “No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth,” in which some of the newer organizers argued that the motto was out of date, since “animals and the Earth act on their own instincts. They attack. They don’t need defense; they need solidarity.”⁸⁸ As one activist explains it, such solidarity “is not an act of humiliating, top-down charity but an act of unity between allies fighting on different terrains toward the same objectives.”⁸⁹ Diversity and inclusivity have become the watchwords for the new movement, with activists eschewing the spiritual elitism of the ecowarriors and affirming “the need to create safe spaces for all beings who work for the Earth, Life, Freedom, and Justice, regardless of their backgrounds, orientations, persuasions and identities.”⁹⁰ These attitudes led the editorial collective of the *Earth First! Journal* to institute an “anti-oppression

⁸⁴ Karen Pickett, “What Would the Cowboys Have Done Without the Women?,” *EF! Journal* 21, no. 1 (November 1, 2000), 38.

⁸⁵ Bari, *Timber Wars*, 220.

⁸⁶ Dana, “Subvert the Gender Paradigm,” *EF! Journal* 15, no. 8 (September 23, 1995), 21.

⁸⁷ patrice jones, “Mothers with Monkeywrenches: Feminist Imperatives and the ALF,” in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?*, 149.

⁸⁸ Jezebell em Breamboat, “No Compromise Until Our Hearts Explode,” *EF! Journal* 29, no. 3 (March/April 2009), 2.

⁸⁹ Molly Jane, “Eco-Liberation,” 3, 32, 60.

⁹⁰ The Radikal Weatherman, “There Are No Safe Spaces on a Dead Planet,” 12-13.

policy” in 2007, which pointed out the ways in which hierarchy and privilege permeated the radical environmental activism.⁹¹ It also led to a greater backlash against the “painfully monochromatic and socioeconomically limited” complexion of the militant ecology movement, insisting that activists needed to understand the holistic connection between “Earth rights, the rights of animals, and the rights of women and all other marginalized people” in order to practice a consistent ecocentrism.⁹²

Alongside to this moral commitment to celebrate a greater diversity of viewpoints and issues, there was a pragmatic dimension to this strategy as well, reflecting strategic shifts in the broader environmental movement around the same time. In order to avoid losing influence in a changing, multicultural America (so the argument usually goes), environmentalists must reject their old-fashioned “white,” and “elitist” fetish for wilderness and wildlife and appeal to the material concerns of the poor and communities of color. Otherwise, the movement will never be anything more than a marginalized special interest group: as one EF! activist writes, “Simply because it is too often seen as a prerogative of the well-to-do, young white crowd, Earth and animal liberation are frequently dismissed by members of the powerful status quo.”⁹³ In short, the militant ecology movement must bring more people on board if it is to be politically viable. Total liberationists often claim that the most effective means of accomplishing this is to jettison the earlier fixation on wilderness and include more social justice issues among their concerns, since “as long as the definitions of radical environmentalism extend only to the unspoiled or ‘uncompromised’ landscape, its demographic will extend mostly to whites.”⁹⁴ As another EF! activist explains, “The greatest appeal we can make to getting people of color and of diversified backgrounds involved with EF! issues is to support their issues.”⁹⁵ Since all oppression is linked, it is not enough merely to form alliances with other movements for racial, gender, and economic justice when they happen to overlap with ecological concerns; militant ecologists must go further, actively lending their support even when they do not.

However, setting aside the question of whether or not peoples of color and the poor are, indeed, demonstrably less interested in wilderness preservation than wealthy whites, it is also necessary to consider whether diluting the movement’s core focus on wilderness and adopting more disparate social justice issues is really the best means of achieving the ecocentric goals of militant ecology. A greater focus on human welfare may bring more people on board, but perhaps for the wrong reasons, obscuring the sacrifices that might need to be made in the name of ecological integrity. What’s more, it is also necessary to factor in those supporters who will be *lost* by transforming a wilderness movement that was in principle “neither left nor right” into an avowedly

⁹¹ EF! Journal Editorial Collective, “Anti-Oppression Policy for the *Earth First! Journal*,” *EF! Journal* 27, no. 6 (September/October 2007), 13.

⁹² Jaynes, “Animal Defense and Earth Defense,” 20-1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 20-1.

⁹⁴ People of Color Caucus, “We See Color and it Fucking Matters,” 11, 24.

⁹⁵ Jimerfield, “Toward Cross Cultural Organizing,” 23.

leftwing movement for social justice. By abandoning its core focus it may have driven away those very activists who historically comprised an important segment of the American wilderness movement: the white upper and middle classes, hunters, anglers, and rural dwellers.⁹⁶

It is instructive, in this regard, to compare the different conceptions of “diversity” and “inclusivity” prized by ecowarriors and total liberationists. Despite later accusations of racism and elitism, the ecowarrior founders of Earth First! in fact intended the organization to be highly inclusive, welcoming any and all who shared their ecocentric outlook.⁹⁷ Later generations of total liberationists feared that this approach, in which the only criterion of membership was commitment to ecological integrity above all, actually served to *perpetuate* oppressive behaviors by allowing people with potentially unsavory political and cultural views into the movement. As one activist explains,

As idyllic as this [inclusiveness] sounds, without a culture of antioppression, i.e. a culture of actively working interpersonally on our oppressive behavior, the ghost of hierarchy still lingers strong - specifically “environmentalism trumps social justice,” creating a myopic focus on ecodefense. Perhaps the idea was to ignore identity politics and power dynamics, to focus on just getting shit done, but ignorance perpetuates an oppressive social environment. The name aptly sums it up: “Earth First!” implying: “Anything Else Second!”⁹⁸

Of course, this simply exchanged one ideological litmus test for another: while ecowarriors demand a concern for wild nature and the natural order above all, total liberationists demand a commitment to egalitarianism and social justice. This latter requirement might seem more likely to attract a larger number of people to the cause. However, some activists believe that the effective expulsion of any who do not subscribe to this rigid ideology has in fact made the movement weaker and far *less* inclusive than before. Speaking against this trend, Chris Irwin recently wrote in the *Earth First! Journal* that the “systematic driving away of rednecks from EF! circles” has created a culture of conformity in the movement: “To be an EF!er now (in some circles), you have to be white, middle-class, wear black, be angry all the time, shoplift, bathe irregularly, be in your 20s, have no sense of humor and, in general, walk so in lockstep with the new groupthink that you lack any real diversity or individuality.”⁹⁹ Rather than creating a broader movement more open to true diversity - of age, race, class, sexual orientation,

⁹⁶ Kevin DeLuca, “A Wilderness Environmentalism Manifesto: Contesting the Infinite SelfAbsorption of Humans,” in *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism*, 37.

⁹⁷ Foreman, *Confessions*, 20.

⁹⁸ Mercurius, “The Challenging Male Supremacy Debacle, EF! RRR 2012,” *EF! Journal* 33, no. 1 (2013), 20.

⁹⁹ Chris Irwin, “Where Have All the Rednecks Gone?” *EF! Journal* 28, no. 2 (January/February 2008), 21.

and profession - the triumph of the total liberationist outlook may have achieved just the opposite.

Certain aspects of the total liberationist approach to movement-building, of course, have an intuitive appeal. It seems reasonable to assume that a broader ecology movement, which includes issues of human justice alongside more traditional wilderness concerns, would be more likely to garner the support needed to attain its long-term goals. And there is nothing inherently self-defeating about *allying* with other groups such as the anti-pollution, animal rights, anti-war, or indigenous sovereignty movements, so long as the ecocentric mission of militant ecology remains paramount. The danger in the total liberationist approach is that, in trying to form alliances with movements for human welfare, it is likely that the more anthropocentric concerns of their allies will take precedence due to their greater humanitarian urgency and mainstream appeal. The issue is admittedly not a simple one, and the total liberationists have many good points in their favor; but the fact that they have dogmatically accepted the latter path indicates an abandonment of their commitment to wild nature above all, presaging their assimilation to the radical left.

14. The Future of Militant Ecology

The preceding chapters have examined the philosophical principles and political prescriptions informing militant ecology activism in the United States. The governing ethos of the movement is best understood as a particularly militant form of ecocentrism, the conviction that ecological integrity - which encompasses individual organisms, ecosystems, and the natural processes that give them being - is the highest good and must be defended by any means necessary. More specifically, the principles shared by most who identify as militant ecologists include 1) scientifically, an acknowledgement that human activity is currently threatening the integrity of the biological community and the survival of life on Earth; 2) metaphysically, a holistic understanding of reality as an interconnected, interdependent web; 3) a religious conception of life, the Earth, and/or natural processes as sacred or deserving of respect; 4) a recognition that humankind - or at least some portion of it - has outgrown its niche and arrogated itself to the role of lord and master over the biosphere; and 5) a political commitment to overcome the ecologically destructive modern world and bring human society back into accord with nature, by any means necessary. These ecocentric principles, which uphold the necessity of defending the integrity of wild nature by any means necessary, offer a powerful and logically consistent approach to ecological preservation. Likewise, its future primitive ideal, which translates this thoroughgoing ecocentrism into the realm of practical politics, also offers a uniquely counter-modern vision for a new society, including a justified suspicion of the representative liberal state and technological fixes to ecological problems; a qualified recommendation of decentralized communities, appropriate technologies, and small-scale economies; a strident commitment to wilderness preservation; and a recognition that, with such high stakes, any effective means must be used to achieve these ends.

Thus, while it is difficult to paint a definitive picture of a movement as diverse as militant ecology, at this point a few conclusions can be drawn. Against those who would argue that militant ecology is merely a special interest group, or reducible to a certain set of tactics, or an ecological wing of the radical left, this study has found that it actually advances a unique set of counter-modern philosophical and political principles. These distinguish militant ecology from other forms of green political thought, and indeed place it outside the traditional American political spectrum altogether, which is generally modernist, anthropocentric, and philosophically liberal in orientation. For this reason, the theory and practice of militant ecology offers a highly original and valuable perspective on contemporary environmental politics. While it is sometimes portrayed as a pseudoscientific New Age cult by its detractors, its underly-

ing philosophy represents a coherent synthesis of contemporary ecological science and philosophical holism, reconceptualized and reinterpreted for the present day. Unlike its ancient and modern forebears, it is uniquely political and uniquely concerned with environmental defense - because such defense was not necessary until recent times.

Despite the soundness of its underlying philosophical beliefs, however, the political program of militant ecology is not particularly well-developed. This has led some activists to embrace positions that actually contradict their ultimate commitment to *effective* action in defense of wild nature. These include a Luddite strain within the movement that eschews all forms of technology, as well as a violent and undisciplined approach to political activism among a vocal minority. The most significant of these inconsistencies is the reflexive attachment to anarchism common among activists, which fails to acknowledge the need for political authority in order to safeguard the natural world against those who would exploit it. Ironically, in light of accusations of “ecofascism,” it may be their very lack of “authoritarian” tendencies - their aversion to political power - that is the greatest deficiency in their political outlook.

14.1 Greener Than Thou?

However, as the previous chapters have continually reiterated, the militant ecology movement is not monolithic. Due to different understandings of ecocentrism among activists, there is actually a range of divergent political prescriptions within the movement concerning the precise form of anarchism they advocate, the relative priority of social justice and wilderness preservation, and the organization and nature of the movement itself. It is no wonder that militant ecology should strike some critics as utterly incoherent, or that its own advocates often disagree as to what is so *radical* about it. It should come as no surprise, then, that partisans of both camps often claim to represent the “true” militant ecology, accusing their ideological opponents of compromising the movement’s radical core of ecocentrism and effective action.

Total liberationists have accused ecowarriors of being myopic, misanthropic, fascist, and incapable of inspiring the mass movement necessary to effect a social revolution. From a pragmatic perspective, Judi Bari feared that the fixation on wilderness preservation was self-defeating, insisting that only an alliance between militant ecology and the social justice movement could bring about the lasting protection of wilderness or human welfare.¹ Several activists have expressed a similar unease with the ecowarriors in their midst, due to the latter’s anti-humanistic stance and indifference to left-wing social causes. In *Live Wild or Die*, a short-lived magazine founded around 1990 to counter the ecowarrior domination of the *Earth First! Journal*, Kelpie Willsin condemned the harsh views on immigration and world hunger expressed by various ecowarriors for “display[ing] the kind of reprehensible short sightedness that fascism

¹ Judi Bari, “Revolutionary Ecology” (1995).

is made of.”² Another activist pointed out, with some dismay, that the very name of Earth First! was devised by its ecowarrior founders as “a way of belittling causes that they did not see as part of an ecological agenda.” A report by the EF! “People of Color Caucus” likewise condemns the original conception of Earth First! as a wilderness protection group, contending that a *truly* ecological group would focus more on anti-racist organizing and urban issues.³

Overall, there seems to be a sense of embarrassment among the total liberationists that such reactionaries were ever a part of their movement at all - let alone its founders and most prominent early leaders. Activists of a more liberationist orientation have even gone so far as to question the sincerity and radical *bona fides* of their counterparts. Denouncing ecowarrior attitudes towards immigration and population growth, Kris Lynch intones that “anti-immigrant environmental and animal liberation activists must ask what it means to be radical,”⁴ while another activist complains that “calling yourself a radical does not mean anything if you’re not willing to acknowledge, call out and deal with the dynamics that privilege creates.”⁵ These imply, of course, that a *truly* radical perspective must eschew any association with the unsavory ideas of the political right. Many total liberationists have also accused ecowarriors of “entryism” into the inherently progressive environmentalist milieu, hijacking ecology “for racist, nationalistic, and fascist ends.”⁶ This suspicion stems from the fact that the ecowarrior outlook simply does not square with the total liberationist understanding of ecocentrism, which prioritizes egalitarianism and locates the root of the ecological crisis in domination and hierarchy. In this understanding, defending wild nature is not enough - a truly radical politics requires a revaluation of existing power structures and total liberation of *all* life on Earth, human and nonhuman.

For their part, ecowarriors have vehemently denied such charges. Writing in the *Earth First! Journal* in 2006, one activist speculates that critics on the left attacked the founders of EF! because they “resented a new worldview horning in, especially one claiming that humans might not be the center of the universe after all.”⁷ Indeed, as many historians have pointed out, the earliest ecologists and preservationists were typically not of the progressive left - which denounced environmentalism as a bourgeois concern that diverted attention away from the class struggle - but rather the antimodernist right. The appropriation of the environmental movement by the left is in fact a

² Kelpie Willsin, *Live Wild or Die* 2, 18.

³ People of Color Caucus, “We See Color and It Fucking Matters,” 11, 24.

⁴ Kris Lynch, “Two Responses to ‘The Bullshit That Must End,’” 10.

⁵ Trouble!, “Trannies are Taking Over!”, *EF! Journal* 27, no. 2 (January/February 2009), 28-9.

⁶ Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism*. Likewise, in his debate with Dave Foreman, a rather territorial Murray Bookchin accused Foreman and his ilk of borrowing “some of the specific programmatic proposals of the left libertarian tradition while ignoring or downplaying the underlying emancipatory, naturalistic, and humanistic logic of this tradition” - as if communitarianism and alternative technologies were the exclusive domain of the political left (Bookchin, *Defending the Earth*).

⁷ John Johnson, “Do We Know Where Our Deep Ecology Is?,” *EF! Journal* 26, no. 1 (March/April 2006), 43.

relatively recent phenomenon.⁸ To ecowarriors, with their more exclusive concern for wilderness and willingness to prioritize the ecological whole over human welfare, their left-leaning critics were the real entryists, whose humanitarian hand-wringing had compromised the movement's ecocentric core. Thus, Dave Foreman accused Earth First!'s total liberationist critics of orchestrating a "Redgreed Putsch" to supplant the true radicals, those ecowarriors who were "more spiritual, ecological, and not tied to the ossified approach of the Marxist Left."⁹ As opposed to the total liberationist interpretation of EF! history and demographics, Foreman insisted that "as originally brewed, Earth First! was not part of the left. We were not part of the animal rights, anarchist, peace, social justice, antinuclear, nonviolent, neopagan, native rights, or Green movements... Earth First! came directly out of the public lands conservation movement."¹⁰ As opposed to the total liberationist understanding of radicalism, which strives for total revolution and the emancipation of all beings, ecowarriors believe that true radicalism entails *upholding* the natural order in an unnatural world: Foreman claims, for instance, that "the idea of wilderness is, after all, the most radical in human thought," while Paul Watson asserts that "we are fighting to maintain the natural status quo. But attempting to conserve that status quo is a radical concept in an anti-nature society."¹¹

Just as total liberationists fear that their counterparts have perverted genuine ecocentrism by imbuing it with misanthropic and ecofascist attitudes, ecowarriors criticize total liberation for prioritizing human concerns over ecological integrity.¹²

Several EF! activists have expressed frustration with the growing dominance of progressive issues within the organization and their possibly detrimental effects on its core ecocentric ideology:

Sitting around and talking about our shit, writing anti-oppression policies and 'calling out' sexual offenders are not biocentric direct action, nor do they lead to it... if the new wave of EF! is all about something that is not

⁸ Roger Scruton, "Conservatism," in *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*, ed. Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a discussion of the antimodernist and aristocratic ethos of the early American preservationist movement, see Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy*; for a discussion of the association of ecology and nature mysticism with romanticism, conservatism, and fascism, see Daniel Gasman, *Haeckel's Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology*; Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); and Anna Bramwell, *The Fading of the Greens: The Decline of Environmental Politics in the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁹ Dave Foreman/"Chim Blea," "Cat Tracks: Why the Venom?" *EF! Journal* 8, no. 1 (November 1987), 19.

¹⁰ Foreman, *Confessions*, 216-7.

¹¹ Foreman, *Confessions*, 19; Essemli and Watson, *Interview*, 102.

¹² "Ecological concerns," George Sessions notes, "threaten to be eclipsed by the social justice movement, now posing as a broader 'environmental' movement under the banner of 'environmental justice'" (Sessions, "Postmodernism and Environmental Justice.").

biocentric direct action, then that's the same as saying that EF! has finally died.¹³

In short, while total liberationists charge ecowarriors with ignoring the emancipatory promise of militant ecology, ecowarriors in turn accuse total liberationists of compromising the movement by prioritizing human welfare over ecological integrity.

It is clear that the political prescriptions of both camps are open to serious critique, not only from outside but also with respect to their own ideals. Ecowarriors stand accused of misanthropy and indifference to social justice, thereby compromising both the ecocentric commitment to the health and wholeness of *all* beings as well as the wide-scale organizing and education necessary for an effective political movement. Total liberationists, on the other hand, have been charged with harboring a latent anthropocentrism that privileges humanitarian concerns over the good of the ecological whole, while its coalition-building strategy risks diluting its core membership and distracting from the defense of wild nature. Can one of these camps claim to represent the more "authentic," more consistent tendency in militant ecology?

In weighing the merits of each it is necessary to remember that the truly radical and unique core of militant ecology is not simply its extreme tactics, nor its anarchism, but rather its *militant ecocentrism*: its willingness to defend the integrity of wild nature by any means necessary. To this extent, the real threat to the radical core of militant ecology comes not from the occasionally misanthropic and elitist ecowarriors, but rather the total liberationists, whose chief concern - as the foregoing chapters have established - is not ultimately the defense of wild nature, but rather the struggle against oppression. Despite their claims to have overcome modernity, their interpretation of ecocentrism simply smuggles in a number of modernist assumptions about human rights, individualism, universalism, ethics, and social justice in an ecological guise.¹⁴ Thus, while ecowarriors may run the risk of wholly subsuming the welfare of the individual into the whole, denying the importance of diversity and difference, total liberationists run the opposite risk of abandoning holistic ecocentrism altogether, failing to note the potential conflict between the good of the ecological community and that of the individual. The danger of such win-win scenarios is that, while ostensibly taking the integrity of the whole into account, it will ultimately lead to a greater willingness to compromise on questions of ecological health in the name of human wel-

¹³ Ben Pachano, "Dear Shit Fer Brains," *EF! Journal* 27, no. 5 (July/August 2007), 5.

¹⁴ One might think this would be avoided by the green anarchists in the total liberation camp, with their explicit rejection of leftism and the Enlightenment. However, their opposition to leftism is somewhat disingenuous, since they invariably smuggle modern progressive notions of egalitarianism and nondomination into their depictions of archaic societies. They are perhaps better understood as critics of leftism from the left, rather than total critics of modernity. John Zerzan, for instance, asserts that life before domestication and agriculture was one of "leisure, intimacy with nature, sensual wisdom, sexual equality, and health... a state that did not know alienation and domination" (Quoted in Curran, *21st Century Dissent*, 102). However, this sounds more like an ecotopia from the 1960s than an accurate portrayal of prehistoric tribal societies, even by the standards of Paul Shepard or Marshall Sahlins.

fare - sacrificing the truly radical core of militant ecology and turning the movement into simply another appendage of the radical left. As Karen Pickett wrote in a recent *Earth First! Journal* article, “Biocentrism is what sets us apart - or at least, it used to. Have we evolved beyond our cheerleading for Aldo Leopold-style biocentrism and a concomitant focus on wilderness to a landscape where we are primarily fighting corporations on the globalization stage?”¹⁵ If such a complete transformation in priorities should come about, the movement (like other radical leftist movements before it) will likely collapse beneath the weight of its own internal contradictions and get lost in a maelstrom of identity politics and petty infighting, in the process losing what has made it so unique on the American scene.¹⁶ It also seems quite clear that, despite total liberationist charges that ecowarriors have “hijacked” the militant ecology movement for their own sinister, misanthropic ends, the truth is actually the opposite. It is the ideal of militant ecocentrism, with its uncompromising defense of wild nature, that has been co-opted, subverted, and defanged by total liberationists in order to advance their egalitarian agenda. The remainder of this chapter will consider how this came to pass, and what it means for the future of the movement.

14.2 The Triumph of Total Liberation

Regarding the future development of the militant ecology movement, it should now be apparent that the total liberationist tendency has been on the rise for at least two decades and is currently the predominant orientation among activists, or at least the most vocal segment. There are many possible explanations for this development. One is the fact that, ever since the 1970s, environmentalism in America has been primarily the domain of the political left, whose views on most social and political issues tend to be shared by activists in the total liberationist camp.¹⁷ This is hardly surprising, since the only currently viable alternative on the American political scene - the alliance of neoliberal economists, religious fundamentalists, and middle-American radicals that comprise the American right - has proven almost hysterically resistant to any suggestion that animals, landscapes, and ecosystems should be granted moral status. This association of militant ecology with the political left was strongly resisted by the early EF! ecowarriors: as Howie Wolke recalled,

¹⁵ Karen Pickett, “Gimme that Ol’ Time (Earth First!) Religion...” *EF! Journal* 26, no. 1 (March/April 2006), 48.

¹⁶ Ironically, the EF! total liberationists of the 1990s - who drove out the allegedly racist and sexist founders of the organization - now find themselves accused of transphobia, cultural appropriation, white privilege, latent misogyny, “cishnormativity,” and all-around oppression by many of the newer generation. The revolution does indeed devour its own children.

¹⁷ A transformation discussed by Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington: Island Press, 2005) and Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1995).

We founder types cultivated the beer-guzzling redneck image. This was partly because it was at least slightly true; also, it was to counter the tendency for social change and environmental groups to lose focus and drift into general left wing politics... the redneck thing was a spoof to mind-fuck environmental opponents who loved to typecast us greens as wimpy, ivory-tower, intellectual nerds.¹⁸

Foreman himself was an ex-Marine and former Goldwater supporter, and became uncomfortable when new activists began flooding the movement who “seem[ed] more adapted to a traditional social and economic justice worldview than to a radical ecological one.”¹⁹ Indeed, those most responsible for promoting the total liberationist perspective - Mike Roselle, Judi Bari, Darryl Cherney, Mike Jakubal, Craig Rosebraugh, and Leslie James Pickering - were not originally even affiliated with ecological or conservationist issues, but with traditionally leftist causes such as union organizing and anti-war protests.²⁰

This brings up another possible cause behind the triumph of total liberation: with the exception of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, militant ecology groups have embraced a highly democratic organizational style, lacking any clear command structure or means of disciplining members. From its inception, Earth First! was envisioned as a tribal organization bound together by symbols, songs, stories, and an ecocentric culture rather than any formal rules or requirements.²¹ Its founders rejected any semblance of hierarchy or authority, insisting that the group should have “no officers, no bylaws or constitution, no incorporation, no tax status” and operate as “a collection of women and men committed to the Earth.”²² The success of this organizational model depended upon the strength of a shared ideology which could ensure cohesion and cooperation. Early on, Foreman articulated what he believed to be the key features EF! philosophy - stressing its emphasis on ecological integrity, biocentrism, wilderness preservation, and population reduction above social justice concerns - and insisted that “if someone or some local group cannot accept these kinds of parameters, then they are probably in the wrong bunch and ought to join some other outfit or start their own.”²³ However, while ecocentrism did prove to be an enduring value among Earth First!ers, differences concerning its proper meaning soon created unbridgeable divides within the organization. And ironically, it was not those who disagreed with Foreman’s conception of ecocentrism that ended up leaving, but Foreman himself. No longer welcome in the organization they founded, many of these early ecowarriors departed and left the group even more solidly in the hands of total liberationists. As Wolke recalls, “With

¹⁸ Wolke, “A Founder’s Story.”

¹⁹ Foreman, *Defending the Earth*.

²⁰ Manes, *Green Rage*, 133.

²¹ Lee, *Earth First!*, 49.

²² Foreman, *Confessions*, 21.

²³ Foreman, “Around the Campfire,” *EF! Journal* 7, no. 6 (June 21, 1987), 2.

growth and publicity, our ability to steer the ship diminished. Unintentionally, we'd created a vehicle for the counter- culture."²⁴ It seems that a highly democratic and unstructured organization may be viable in situations of high cohesion and shared values - but as the movement grew and changed, so did its interpretations of ecocentrism, and consequently so did its priorities.

The role of leadership in the Earth and Animal Liberation Fronts is more difficult to assess, since these underground groups adopted a strategy of "leaderless resistance" which, as Paul Joosse describes it, "allows for and encourages individuals or small cells to engage in acts of political violence entirely independent of any hierarchy or leadership or network of support."²⁵ Leaderless resistance helps groups to avoid detection, infiltration, and prosecution, and allows for a high degree of ideological inclusivity. However, this lack of a firm ideology or organization made them prone to co-optation by self-appointed spokesmen, who were not directly involved in underground activism but saw the ELF and ALF as promising vehicle for their own revolutionary aspirations. Former ELF spokesmen Craig Rosebraugh admits that he was initially more interested in the antiwar movement, and "hadn't really thought animal rights, human rights, and environmental protection as being connected in any way."²⁶ Likewise, former spokesman Leslie James Pickering would go so far as to admit that "I was not especially what one would call an 'animal lover,' nor have I ever been,"²⁷ and that "I wasn't a tree hugger, I didn't really relate to that at all... it was the criminality of that struggle that attracted me the most."²⁸ Lacking a firm command structure and clear ideological leadership, the actions of the ELF and ALF had their meaning imposed from without, and in the hands of their spokespersons became simply one more front in the anti-capitalist revolution.

The group that has maintained the most consistently ecological focus over the years, eschewing diversions into humanitarian projects or identity politics, has also been the most hierarchical: the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. This is due in large part to the strong leadership of Captain Paul Watson, who remained implacably opposed to the tendency of ecological groups to drift into general left-wing politics and whom critics have described as "a dictator on his ship."²⁹ While the organization is governed by an executive board (which alone makes it far more hierarchical than any other militant ecology group), during campaigns at sea only the captain and campaign leader have full authority. As Watson explains,

Generally speaking, we never try to achieve unanimity or to conform to the majority opinion. That kind of independence of thought and action is

²⁴ Wolke, "A Founder's Story."

²⁵ Joosse, "Leaderless Resistance and Ideological Inclusion," 351.

²⁶ Craig Rosebraugh, *Burning Rage of a Dying Planet*, xv.

²⁷ Pickering, *Earth Liberation Front*, 230.

²⁸ Pickering, "People Ain't Feeling This Bullshit," in *Igniting a Revolution*, 304.

²⁹ Steven Best, "Watson, Paul (1950-) and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, 1721.

essentially anti-democratic, and we fully embrace that. It has what allowed the Sea Shepherd to remain loyal to the spirit of its origins and to prevent compromise from diluting its combative arm... To those who disagree with our methods and the battles we choose to fight, I have only one thing to say: "Support another organization because you are not going to change us."³⁰

Unlike the founders of Earth First!, Watson and the executive board have retained sufficient power within the organization to ensure the continued supremacy of their vision. As a result, despite numerous controversies over his methods, Watson remained the ecocentric heart of the SSCS until his resignation in 2013. In his absence it remains to be seen whether or not the organization will retain its firm commitment to ecological issues above all, but its more hierarchical organization probably makes it less prone to leftist entryism than less organized groups. Strong leadership is therefore not only more likely to ensure effective action and sound long-term strategy, but also may provide a bulwark against the creeping anthropocentrism that has eroded the ecocentric ethos of the movement's early years.

One final possible explanation for the triumph of total liberation is that, whatever its flaws, it offers a holistic and inspiring social vision to activists. Where ecowarriors have typically focused on preserving wilderness and wildlife in anticipation of the coming social apocalypse, total liberation looks toward an egalitarian future in which humanity and nature live in harmony and total freedom. For this reason, total liberationists often claim to be more "holistic" in their socio-political perspective than their ecowarrior counterparts.³¹ The dismissive and anti-social attitudes of some ecowarriors have certainly bolstered this impression.³²

However, the total liberationist camp does not have a monopoly on holistic sociopolitical approaches. Ecowarriors also acknowledge that social problems and ecological problems are inextricably entwined, and therefore do not wholly neglect the sociopolitical dimensions of their struggle. They simply differ from total liberationists with respect to their *priorities* and, consequently, the solutions they propose. As Foreman once said, "Ecology teaches us that all things are connected, and in this regard other matters become subsets of wilderness preservation."³³ The social positions of ecowar-

³⁰ Essemmlali and Watson, *Interview*, 102.

³¹ One activist depicts the movement's split as a struggle between the wilderness-fixated "Foremanistas" and activists "appreciating the role of cultural diversity and a holistic strategic approach at attacking root causes of wilderness destruction... and the inclusion of Anarchists, 'queers,' people of color, ozone depletion, global warming, environmental racism, nuclear issues, ocean issues, etc. into our fold of comrades and concerns" (Raven, "Revolutionary Assimilation," *EF! Journal* 15, no. 8 (September 23, 1995), 22).

³² Co-founder Howie Wolke once claimed that the purpose of EF! was to "fight for actions and programs that are necessary in order to preserve the health and diversity of our biosphere. We need not worry about how to restructure society in order to accommodate our proposals. We're not in the business of trying to save civilization" (quoted in Manes, *Green Rage*, 132).

³³ Foreman, "Whither Earth First!?" *EF! Journal* 8, no. 1 (November 1987), 20-21.

riors are therefore geared not ultimately towards human welfare or combatting oppression but, rather, the long-term preservation of wild nature. Nevertheless, it is clear that ecowarriors have often been so fixated on their anti-humanism and apocalyptic forebodings that they have failed to articulate a positive social vision. Total liberationists therefore deserve credit for one thing in particular: they brought this aspect of militant ecology into greater focus, affirming the inescapably social dimensions of their ecocentric program and highlighting its inspiring vision for the future.

14.3 Whither Militant Ecology?

It remains to consider the future of militant ecology. Though it may seem that the “golden age” of radical environmental activism has passed, that much of its broader political vision has been abandoned and many of its most dedicated activists imprisoned or driven away, it is nevertheless likely that this particularly militant breed of ecocentrism will persist as long as modern civilization continues to exist at odds with wild nature and the integrity of the biosphere.

Perhaps some militant ecology activists will elect to downplay their broader socio-political vision and adopt a more exclusive focus on wilderness preservation, endangered species, pollution, bioengineering, energy extraction, and other traditional environmentalist issues. Given that the vast majority of militant ecology activism has historically limited itself to such causes, this would not require much change in the way of strategy or tactics, and would still entail a far more radical approach to the defense of wild nature than any other political movement currently in existence. Several organizations have arisen over the years - many of them staffed by activists previously affiliated with the major militant ecology groups - which share the movement’s nocompromise approach while downplaying its broader socio-political vision: the Cascadia Forest Alliance, the Bay Area Coalition for Headwaters, the Rainforest Action Network, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, the Wildlands Project, and Friends of the Wolf, to name a few.³⁴ It is possible that this more circumscribed and less politically extreme activism, while remaining committed to aggressive direct action in defense of wild nature, might actually prove more effective in pursuit of its goals.

At the other extreme, some particularly radical activists may elect to pursue the paramilitary option, mobilizing a cadre of revolutionaries in order to bring down the industrial state. The most prominent ecological group in the United States to have adopted this strategy, though it is still in its formative stages, is Deep Green Resistance. Founded by Derrick Jensen, Aric McBay, and Lierre Keith, the immediate goal of this group is to engage in direct actions against the industrial infrastructure, provide aid to ongoing social and ecological justice struggles, defend the land from exploitation, build and mobilize resistance organizations, and create a sustainable subsistence base

³⁴ “Earth First!” *Activist Facts* (accessed May 11, 2016) <https://www.activistfacts.com/organizations/271-earth-first/>

for human societies.³⁵ Unlike most other militant ecology groups, DGR explicitly rejects anti-hierarchical and leaderless resistance organizational models, insisting that a clear command structure is necessary for any successful revolutionary movement against industrial capitalism. However, though admirable in its consistency, this approach seems unlikely to meet with any success in the current American political climate. Despite its vulnerabilities, the liberal capitalist state and industrial infrastructure are not yet fragile enough to be brought to their knees by a handful of radicals; and the backlash against, say, massive blackouts or disruptions in the food supply would rapidly ensure the loss of any public sympathy and swift state repression.

Another possible development would be for some activists, those who remain committed to the broader political implications of militant ecology, to attach themselves to one of the parties or movements already prominent on the American scene. Though connections have been forged between ecological issues and traditionalist, nationalist, and new right movements in Europe, such an alliance with the mainstream political right in the United States is practically unthinkable at present, given its hostility to environmental regulations and unwavering commitment to corporate capitalism and economic globalization. The political left is another matter. Indeed, the triumph of the total liberationist tendency, whose social concerns overlap with those of the radical left at many points, has already forged many connections between the two that are only likely to grow stronger in the future. Given the movement's trajectory over the last few decades, this may be the most likely of all the possible outcomes, at least for the major organizations. This left-wing militant ecology could continue to perform valuable work preserving wild areas and endangered species, combatting pollution and urban sprawl, and defending indigenous cultures. However, the truly radical socio-political core of the movement would be diminished, since - for reasons discussed throughout this study - the assimilation of militant ecology to the left will in all likelihood lead to the subordination of ecological integrity in favor of human welfare and social justice, preventing activists from taking the controversial stands necessary to defend the natural world. As Christopher Manes writes, those who understand militant ecology as simply another appendage of the left fail to see that "a truly ecological party would be revolutionary in its own, perhaps more profound way."

Ecological concerns demand an end to industrial growth and consumer values on which a modern state relies. The concerns of the new left for a more just and humane society may involve the same demands on a general level, but at a specific level the new left has the constituency of the poor and powerless, whose very real present needs sometimes demand policies incompatible with ending industrial growth.³⁶

Rather than merely rehashing the political program of the radical left, the future primitive society will have its own unique set of political prescriptions grounded upon ecocentric principles.

³⁵ McBay, Keith, and Jensen, *Deep Green Resistance*, 442-3.

³⁶ Manes, *Green Rage*, 132.

One final possibility is that, as the most prominent militant ecology organizations drift away from their roots and become single-issue environmentalist groups or ecological appendages of the left, this will alienate some of their most thoroughly ecocentric supporters. Perhaps these die-hard activists - ecowarriors who have been driven from the movement since the 1980s, wilderness enthusiasts, indigenous traditionalists, religiously-motivated defenders of the sacred, old-fashioned patriots and lovers of the land - will coalesce around a new kind of organization, one that is more consistent than any previous group in its commitment to defend wild nature by any means necessary. A consistent militant ecology would retain the movement's historical commitment to effective tactics, anti-anthropocentrism, holistic metaphysics, and wilderness preservation, while jettisoning its counter-productive attachment to anarchism and simplistic views on technology and economics. It would retain the ecowarrior's vow to uphold the natural order even when this conflicts with immediate human welfare; but it would adopt a more thoroughly holistic socio-political outlook and reject the blanket misanthropy often expressed by that faction. Like the total liberationists, it would acknowledge the interplay of social and ecological problems as well as the importance of political alliances, but reject their hostility to political authority, unrealistic approach to overpopulation, and tendency to sacrifice ecological integrity to egalitarian ideology. A consistent militant ecology would take the defense of ecological integrity as its chief priority, and would promote whatever social and political policies were conducive to that end. The defense of large tracts of wilderness and wildlife would be of paramount importance, in addition to the restoration of degraded landscapes and proper management of protected areas. Given the threat to wild nature posed by an increasing human population, a commitment to lowering birthrates worldwide would also be a necessary component of their program; this includes support for international family planning aid and might extend to the stringent population reduction measures and immigration restrictions currently denounced by the political left. However, for pragmatic and ethical reasons, a consistent militant ecology would couple its population policies with an emphasis on reducing consumption in developed countries, rejecting the artificial needs and materialism cultivated by global capitalism. While justifiably suspicious of unsustainable hard technologies and energy sources, a consistent militant ecology would support alternative forms of green technology, given their possible uses for limiting human impacts upon the biosphere. Finally, a consistent militant ecology would defend and preserve traditional cultures that are threatened by the homogeneous consumer societies of the modern age. In addition to their intrinsic value as manifestations of genuine human diversity, these cultures are one of the last bastions of communitarian and religious values and therefore can serve an important role in defending the Earth and human dignity against the onslaught of dehumanizing technologies and a globalized corporate capitalism.

Of course, given that the ethos of militant ecology is confined to only a small minority of environmentalists - especially if it is followed to its logical conclusion and not simply regarded as a form of single-issue politics or a variant of left-wing activism

- such a group is unlikely to achieve success on its own. One possible direction for the future, then, is that individuals of thoroughly ecocentric commitments, rather than confining themselves to one of the existing militant ecology groups, might attempt to influence the direction of other sympathetic organizations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, carrying out this kind of “friendly infiltration” was one of the original aims of Earth First!³⁷ In addition to the obvious wilderness preservation, anti-pollution, and animal welfare groups that might be open to such influence, one might include movements for indigenous solidarity, urban renewal, historical preservation, anti-war activism, population stabilization, renewable energy, and “buying local,” as well as religious organizations and youth groups. They could push these groups to adopt a more ecocentric perspective and thereby create a broader coalition for ecological and cultural preservation.

Over the years, various environmental leaders have called for an disciplined order of individuals - Aldo Leopold’s men and women “who cannot live without wild things,” Bob Marshall’s “spirited people who will fight for the freedom of the wilderness,” Ed Abbey’s “monkeywrench gang,” and Foreman’s “warrior society”³⁸ - to take up the Earth’s banner and lead humanity back towards a more authentic and harmonious relationship with the natural world. As Christopher Manes writes, “For all its controversies and shortcomings, perhaps radical environmentalism is the spearhead of that warrior society, and perhaps it will be able to put the rage of the times, that warrior spirit, to use in the best context - the defense of the integrity of life on this planet.”³⁹ The groups discussed throughout this study have served as this vanguard in the late twentieth century, but they are only one historical manifestation of a perennial human desire for wholeness and authenticity, a perception of a sacred order in the cosmos that is worthy of reverence and defense. It may be true, as the more pessimistic among them believe, that this civilization is destined to collapse beneath its own weight. But if any hope remains in social change, in a politics that can preserve human dignity and the flourishing of the wild Earth, it is likely to be found in some version of the future primitive society. Even if none of these possibilities come to pass, even if the groups currently upholding the militant ecology flame pass away or evolve into handmaidens of the political left, militant ecology will survive in the writings and actions of its most heroic adherents, its countermodern ethos of ecocentrism and commitment to defend the Earth by any means necessary serving as an inspiration to future generations of activists.

³⁷ Foreman, “Earth First! and Subversion,” 3.

³⁸ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, xvii; Marshall, “The Problem of the Wilderness,” 141-8; Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.

³⁹ Manes, *Green Rage*, 248.

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A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Notre Dame in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
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