

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

Explaining Environmentalism

In Search of a New Social Movement

Philip W. Sutton



EXPLAINING ENVIRONMENTALISM

For Patricia

Explaining Environmentalism

In search of a new social movement

PHILIP W. SUTTON

University of Leeds

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2000 by Ashgate Publishing

Reissued 2019 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© Philip W. Sutton 2000

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

A Library of Congress record exists under LC control number:

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-71840-1 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-315-19583-4 (ebk)

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>x</i>
1 Environmentalism and Radical Ecology	1
Introduction: The Basic Divide	1
Environmentalism	2
Radical Ecology	4
Post-Industrialism and the New Social Movements	8
Notes	12
2 Theories of Old and New Social Movements	13
Introduction	13
Definitions of 'Social Movement'	14
Approaches to New Social Movements	18
Distinctiveness of the New Social Movements	19
Social Movements in Programmed Societies: Alain Touraine	27
Social Movements as Signs: Alberto Melucci	33
Revising New Social Movement Theory	37
Notes	40
3 The Rise of Environmentalism and Radical Ecology	43
Contemporary Environmentalism and Radical Ecology	43
Contemporaneous Explanations	43
Historical Explanatory Frameworks	51
Cyclical Approaches and Political Opportunities	51
Critical Remarks	55
Karl Werner Brand: A Cyclical Phenomenon?	56
Klaus Eder: The Emergence of a Submerged Counter-Culture	61
Ulrich Beck: Reflexive Modernization and the Risk Society	69
Back to Society: The End of Nature	72
Conclusion	76
Notes	78

4	The Origins of Organised Environmentalism	83
	Introduction	83
	A Background of Changing Sensibilities	85
	Origins of the Organised Environmental Movement	89
	Organisational Forms and Campaigning Styles	100
	'Green' Ideas in Socialist and Anarchist Thought	107
	Conclusion	112
	Notes	113
5	Twentieth Century Environmentalism	117
	The Organisation of Twentieth Century Concern for Nature	117
	Creation of a Mass Movement	120
	Globalising the Environmental Movement	124
	Precursors of Contemporary Ecocentrism	128
	Ecocentrism: The Deep Ecological Ideological Bond	137
	Ecocentrism in the Green Party	145
	The Green Party	148
	Development or Disjuncture?	156
	Notes	158
6	Industrialisation and Nature Politics	163
	Introduction	163
	Industrialisation in Historical Perspective	164
	Structural Bases of Environmentalism and Radical Ecology	168
	Institutional Dimensions of Modernity	171
	The Creation of an Industrial Society in Britain	176
	Conclusion	186
	Notes	187
7	Towards a Socio-Historical Explanation of British Environmentalism	189
	Environmentalism and Radical Ecology: A Conceptual Distinction	189
	Phase Models and Social Process	194
	The Reformism/Radicalism Axis	199
	The Problem Identification/Practical Implementation Spiral	200
	State Involvement: Established/Outsider Relations	201
	The Long-Term Development of Environmentalism	202

Conclusion	210
Notes	211
<i>Bibliography</i>	215
<i>Index</i>	237

List of Figures

Figure 7.1	Environmentalism	190
Figure 7.2	Radical ecology	191
Figure 7.3	The expansion of nature conservation: open spaces to National Parks	207
Figure 7.4	Man/environment relationship	211
Figure 7.5	Social construction of nature	212

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Shallow versus deep ecological perspectives	7
Table 4.1	Dates of formation of selected nineteenth century environmental organisations	90
Table 4.2	Examples of the extent of early memberships	98
Table 5.1	Twentieth century environmental organisations	119
Table 5.2	Summary of Green Party performance in British General Election 1992	151
Table 5.3	Green Party performance in national elections 1974-92	152
Table 6.1	Urban population in England and Wales 1841-81	181
Table 7.1	Phases in the long-term development of British environmentalism	203

Acknowledgements

This book is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation and has benefited enormously from several disparate sources. I would like to thank my thoughtful colleagues and friends, particularly Stephen Vertigans and Steve Clarke for taking the time to read the entire manuscript at moments more crucial for the project than perhaps they realise, and for their constructive (and destructive!) comments which forced me to re-think some of the arguments. Ian Varcoe and Richard Kilminster were continuous sources of support, encouragement and sociological good sense over a number of years, and I have been fortunate to be able to discuss important theoretical issues with Chris Drinkwater and Conrad Russell. Paul Bagguley and Steven Yearley provided thoughtful and insightful critical comments on the thesis and I have tried to pay them heed.

Participation in Cultural Studies Workshops at the University of Leeds brought me into contact with different departments and specialisms and helped to convince me of the need for a sober sociological assessment of recent social change. I must also take this opportunity to express personal thanks to Judith Graves and Lynn Towell for their infectious enthusiasm during the book's pre-history, and for which I am ever grateful.

Thanks to all the Editorial staff at Ashgate for their efficient work on bringing the book to completion which has undoubtedly improved the final version, and special thanks to Rosalind Ebdon for her keen-eyed checking of the whole manuscript. The anonymous reviewer at Ashgate also provided positive comments and very helpful suggestions for improving Chapter Three, and deserves to be mentioned. You know who you are! As usual, all the book's failings are mine alone, though I cannot claim the credit for all of its virtues.

Finally, special thanks must go to Kevin and all of those who shared in the practical seminar on perseverance and self-belief in Barcelona on the evening of May 26th 1999, where we learned so much, and heartfelt thanks to Pat, without who this book simply would not have been possible.

1 Environmentalism and Radical Ecology

Introduction: The Basic Divide

In the literature on varieties of environmental or Green thought, a basic distinction exists between 'reformist' and 'radical' approaches to the defence of the natural world from human interference. Unfortunately there is no consensus on the use of terms in this literature, so that whilst some writers use 'environmentalism' to describe a managerial reformist approach to the conservation of nature, others use the same term to refer to radical ecology or 'Green' politics which rejects reformism, arguing for major transformations in the Western way of life.

The basic dichotomy goes back to Arne Naess's (1973) use of the distinction between 'shallow' and 'deep' ecology as philosophical approaches to society/nature relations, but since then a range of other terms have entered the discourse. Andrew Dobson (1990), uses 'green' (reformist) and 'Green' (capital G) (radical), Eckersley (1992) defines 'ecologism' (radical) in contrast to several other forms such as 'conservationism' (reformist), while Jonathon Porritt makes a distinction between 'light' (reformist) and 'dark' (radical) Greens (1984). What all the above writers are attempting to do is to show that the earlier ideas and practices of nature conservation, preservationism, and arguments for public access to natural areas only produced strictly limited analyses of the human/nature relationship, and do not call for urgent action and social change, whilst the newer Green, ecological perspective goes beyond these, to demonstrate that solving contemporary environmental problems will require a radical restructuring of the ways of life currently enjoyed in modern societies. It is this political message which seems to set 'ecologism' apart from 'environmentalism.'

Throughout this study I will characterise the basic distinction between reformist and radical approaches as that between 'environmentalism' and 'radical ecology' respectively, though for grammatical purposes I will sometimes refer to the latter as 'Green'. Part of my argument is that the two approaches are distinct enough to justify the separation, but also because the

2 *Explaining Environmentalism*

historical development of reform environmentalism and radical ecology are substantially divergent. What Dobson calls 'ecologism' and Eckersley calls 'ecocentrism' *do*, I believe, ask questions of existing political ideologies and worldviews respectively, but these questions are not wholly new ones. The kinds of questions asked by radical ecology, and many of the answers offered have a familiar ring, but what seems to have changed is the context in which these questions are raised. First though, we must establish the terms of the discussion.

Environmentalism

The term 'environmentalism' is often used in Green circles, to describe an earlier form of nature concern which is now superseded by a deeper, 'ecocentric' analysis of the relationship between human societies and the natural world. As I use the term in this study, environmentalism refers to those approaches to society/nature relations which emphasise the benefits to human beings of natural objects, and to attempts to rectify problems of environmental damage and pollution through technological means. For environmentalists, interest in and contact with the natural world are seen as part of an enlightened view of human well-being. Humans can benefit in several ways from this interest. Nature study offers pleasures of aesthetic or scientific kinds, leisure pursuits can help humans to lead healthier lives, society can benefit from the preservation of endangered species as this maintains genetic diversity and can be useful in developing new medical treatments (an argument often advanced in support of protecting tropical rainforests), and so on. This perspective is human-welfarist in so far as its main arguments rest on the value of nature conservation *for* society and where no benefit can be gained for human society, then environmentalist arguments against scientific and industrial development fail, particularly if that development brings other benefits such as employment opportunities, housing and increased convenience.

Environmentalism is also used here to cover all those organisations which are rooted in an environmentalist perspective. For example, the National Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (R.S.P.B.) and the Woodland Trust argue in favour of keeping some areas of nature free from industrial and urban development and have used a number of strategies to achieve this goal, from public education and recruiting supporters to buying

tracts of land which they manage and maintain themselves. In their own terms these efforts have had some successes, but for Greens these efforts do not go far enough, as they fail to address the root causes of ecological damage and hence do not call for significant social changes.

Reform environmentalist approaches are sometimes accused of adopting a managerial stance towards the natural world, and one which is ultimately self-defeating. Almost all conservation, preservation and amenity organisations fall into this category, as they tend to argue for and are involved in managing nature reserves, areas of outstanding natural beauty, public access areas and buildings of historical value and interest.¹ Environmental organisations do these things largely for human-centred reasons. For example, one aspect of the work of the R.S.P.B., is that it owns nature reserves which it manages ostensibly for the benefit of birdlife, but also for its own members who have access to these reserves for observation. In this way, environmentalism argues for nature preservation and conservation as part of the creation and maintenance of a high quality of life for humans.

Radical ecologists might argue that this strategy may indeed protect some wildlife in the short term, but the establishment of green 'oases' does nothing to prevent the large-scale destruction of nature by commercial and industrial practices all over the planet, which will make localised environmentalist efforts largely irrelevant. Further, some eco-radicals argue that the very idea of human beings being able to 'manage' naturally occurring ecosystems in their own interests is a clear indication of modern human hubris and Western 'Enlightenment' thinking, itself one of the root causes of global environmental damage revealed by the recent evidence on global ecological damage. In this sense, the destructive modern attitudes towards the natural world are reproduced within reformist organisations, whose very existence then tends to militate against the development of a more 'ecocentric' perspective. As Evernden (1985: 10) notes, enlightened self-interest is not an adequate basis for nature politics because '... environmentalists have ensured their own failure whenever self-interest can be perceived as lying elsewhere'. An example of this would be a more short-term materialistic adherence to the benefits of economic growth as being more conducive to 'self-interest'. In this way, radical ecology has come to define itself not only in opposition to further industrial modernisation, but also in opposition to more established forms of managerial environmentalism.

4 *Explaining Environmentalism*

Further than this though, the analysis of modern societies offered by radical ecology is claimed to go much 'deeper' than that of environmentalism, to penetrate to the causes of ecological damage, and thus it is said to contain, 'all the truths of the shallower view, plus some additional ones as well' (Goodin 1992: 43), and hence to go beyond 'mere' environmentalism. It is argued that the emergence of a radical ecological perspective could lead to the radicalisation of reformist environmental organisations and the creation of a mass movement pursuing the transformation of the destructive society/nature relationship currently embodied in modern culture. It is worth remembering though, that the real reforms achieved by the early environmental groups have come to be largely taken for granted by those which followed, and in this sense the descriptive chronological contrast between 'reformists' and 'radicals', though useful in some respects, tends also to act as a barrier to seeing this contrast against the backdrop of the longer-term development of British environmentalism. This long-term development is a major theme running throughout this study.

Radical Ecology

Trying adequately to characterise the radical ecological perspective is notoriously difficult, due to the variety of approaches which fall within this general 'worldview'. In attempting to differentiate radical ecology from environmentalism I do not want to be drawn into a protracted discussion about this internal variety.² Here I am attempting to provide a guide to the fundamental differences of approach of the two perspectives and their respective solutions to environmental problems in order to show why some researchers have come to see the contemporary ecological movement as 'new.'

As a working definition I use the term 'radical ecology' to refer to those approaches which attempt to move away from a human-centred concern for nature protection towards an ecocentric perspective which emphasises the interrelatedness of living things (including humans) in ecosystems. By ecocentric I mean 'a mode of thought which regards humans as subject to ecological and systems laws' (Pepper 1996: 329). More than this though, ecocentrics argue that non-human nature is worthy of protection and defence in its own right, without recourse to arguments about the necessity for this protection to be related to human survival and well-being. As Goodin (1992:

8) has observed, '... it is clear that nature is now taken to have an independent role in the creation of value. The value of nature is no longer regarded as wholly reducible to its value to God or to humanity. And it is this insight that drives, most powerfully, the current wave of environmental concern'. In this sense, radical ecology wants to shift the burden of proof on to those who would interfere with natural systems and intervene in areas of 'wild' nature in the name of development, to demonstrate why it is justifiable to destroy valuable ecosystems and disrupt natural processes. In the absence of such justifications, radical ecologists argue that the natural world should be maintained intact.

In opposition to environmentalism, radical ecology approaches generally argue that ecological problems cannot be solved within the present socio-economic, political framework, which usually means more technological fixes such as recycling plants, catalytic converters and so on. Whilst these may provide short-term solutions, they also require industrial production themselves and therefore can only add to long-term global ecological problems caused by industrial development, as well as propagating the notion that no radical social change is required. In addition, radical ecology approaches, despite using the findings of scientific research to substantiate their calls for urgent action, are critical of the contribution of classical scientific thinking to an anthropocentric worldview which legitimises ecological damage in the interests of progress and development. There are many statements of faith which could be used to illustrate their point here. For example, Marx's thesis (cited in Bottomore and Rubel 1990: 68) that '... mankind always sets itself only such problems as it can solve; since, on closer examination, it will always be found that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation'. One of the more recent statements in this vein is the following from P.B. and J.S. Medawar (1972: 15):

We believe that technological remedies can be found for evils of technological origin and are prepared to marvel at people who think otherwise. One had hoped that a journey to the far side of the moon had convinced everyone that any accomplishment which is not at odds with the laws of physics is within human capability.³

This represents a clear 'technocentric' orientation (O'Riordan 1981) against which many radical ecologists are reacting. Instead they propose a return to

simpler lifestyles, usually in decentralised communities, lower levels of consumption in the Western nation-states and the reorganisation of highly industrialised societies and cultures in favour of ecologically benign (or 'soft') technologies and anti-materialist attitudes which advocate 'treading softly on the Earth'. So, although managerial environmentalist measures may receive some support from radical ecologists, they will tend to be perceived by the latter as not going far enough in their analysis of the *causes* of ecological degradation, and therefore to understate the size of the problem hence avoiding any discussion of necessary social changes. 'If it [Green politics] stops at mere reforms in conservation and pollution control, then it will merely be operating as a leaky safety valve for the existing systems of exploitative politics' (Ecology Party 1983: 34).

Radical ecology therefore sees itself as going beyond the rather narrow confines of the environmentalist approach and moving nature politics in the direction of a thoroughgoing critique of modernity itself, particularly in so far as this is based on criticisms of the rationalistic Enlightenment 'project' and 'classical' methods of scientific inquiry. Many radical ecologists trace the origins of the contemporary 'ecological crisis' back to the advent of dualistic modes of thinking and a mechanistic worldview introduced via the sixteenth and seventeenth century scientific revolution.⁴ Fritjof Capra (1983: 38) summarises why this is so.

The medieval outlook changed radically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The notion of an organic, living, and spiritual universe was replaced by that of the world as a machine, and the world-machine became the dominant metaphor of the modern era. This development was brought about by revolutionary changes in physics and astronomy, culminating in the achievements of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton.

By locating one of the sources of destructive modern attitudes to nature in the scientific 'worldview', radical ecologists differ from environmentalists who will typically draw on expert scientific research to support their arguments for nature preservation. It should be noted though that radical ecologists are much more impressed by recent developments in theoretical physics, particularly the emergence of 'chaos theory' and quantum (sub-atomic) physics which appear to be more amenable to an 'ecological' reading of their implications (as in, Prigogine and Stengers 1985). Capra (1975: 71) argues for example that, 'Quantum theory thus reveals a basic oneness of the universe ...' which supports the radical ecological focus on interrelatedness.⁵

Table 1.1 Shallow versus deep ecological perspectives

Shallow Ecology	Deep Ecology
Natural diversity is a valuable resource for us.	Natural diversity has its own (intrinsic) value.
It is nonsense to talk about as value except as value for mankind.	Equating value with value for humans reveals a racial prejudice.
Plant species should be saved because of their value as genetic reserves for human agriculture and medicine.	Plant species should be saved because of their intrinsic value.
Pollution should be decreased if it threatens economic growth.	Decrease of pollution has priority over economic growth.
Developing nations' population growth threatens ecological equilibrium.	World population at the present level threatens ecosystems but the population and behaviour of industrial states more than any others. Human population is today excessive.
"Resource" means resource for humans.	"Resource" means resource for living beings.
People will not tolerate a broad decrease in their standard of living.	People should not tolerate a broad decrease in the quality of life but in the standard of living of over-developed nations.
Nature is cruel and necessarily so.	Man is cruel but not necessarily so.

(Source: Naess cited in Devall 1990: 33)

In this way the links which Toulmin (1982) finds between the 'new' physics and postmodernism can be extended to radical ecology, as part of the postmodernist undermining of the certainties and metanarratives of modernity (Lyotard 1984). Generally, I will be arguing against this kind of interpretation, which seems to ignore modernity's 'dualistic' character (Eder 1993 and Chapter 3 this volume).

By way of a summary, Arne Naess's characterisation in Table 1.1 above, gives a good indication of the key difference of emphasis between environmentalism and radical ecology, though it should be borne in mind that the terms of the divide have been set from the radical side. Nevertheless, despite the polemical intent here, Naess manages to capture the broad differences of emphasis of the two approaches and gives us a feel for the solutions they offer. However, I will argue *pace* Naess, that (shallow) environmentalism is not a restricted form of deep ecology, rather the two are different perspectives, and as Goodin (1992) has argued, which one is 'correct' is a matter of political intent and genuine debate. More than this, I will be attempting to show that the histories of the environmental movement and radical ecological ideas in Britain are significantly interrelated.

Post-Industrialism and the New Social Movements

Post-industrial society theories are now an established part of sociological discourse, having been propounded in several forms since Daniel Bell's initial statement of the thesis in the USA in 1963. The most influential interpretation in Europe has probably been Alain Touraine's work (1971, 1981, 1983) which puts a stronger emphasis on the displacement of industrial class conflict than Bell, and the subsequent struggle of new social actors to step into the place vacated by the labour movement. I will have more to say about Touraine than Bell as it is the former's attempt to locate which new movement has the potential to fill the void which brings us into contact with the self-conceptions of Green activists and writers.

However much their respective analyses differ in emphasising one aspect of post-industrial theory over others, there is a quite remarkable degree of agreement amongst post-industrial theorists on the key features of the new society (Kumar 1986: 193). An initial characterisation of these would include:

1. The long-term decline of manufacturing industry and with it the proportion of the workforce directly involved in the processes of manufacturing material goods. A corollary of this is that the service sector of the economy expands, leading to a rise in the numbers of service sector workers, in particular a shift away from blue-collar work and towards white-collar work takes place.
2. A certain kind of technological change gathers pace, based on information technologies which not only creates powerful new groups of information professionals but also results in a thorough - going 'informationalising' of manufacturing processes, resulting in a speeding up of the removal of industrial workers from the manufacturing sector.
3. The emergence of groups of information professionals begins to change the dominant sources of social power and although there is disagreement over just how powerful these information professionals are or will become, both Bell and Touraine argue that the development is significant. Bell reads a major importance into the emergence of these groups from his perception of a shift in modern society's 'axial principle' towards the production of theoretical knowledge rather than manufactured goods (though he later repudiated the idea of a 'knowledge elite' in Bell 1980).

Touraine (1971) sees the emergence of a new 'class' conflict between a growing 'technocracy' and a variety of social groups opposed to different aspects of the post-industrialising process, or in his own terms, in opposition to the 'programming' of more and more aspects of social life. In order to be an effective opposition though, Touraine argues that these diverse groups must coalesce into one genuine social movement. The task for sociologists is to explore which of the fledgling movements has the potential to develop in this way. In recent times, the environmental and Green movements have been seen as the most likely to be able to unite the various strands of opposition (Eder 1993).

These aspects of contemporary social change provide the necessary structural context for the development of new social concerns and protest which feed into the emergence of new social movements such as environmentalism, animal rights, women's movements, disability rights, anti-

nuclear and peace movements and various urban movements. It is here that post-industrial theories meet those which define new social movements as a special category of social movements more generally. New social movements are said to be different from previously existing 'old' social movements in a number of ways including: organisational form, issues of concern, participants involved and value orientation. The generalising of these common features to all new social movements I find difficult to accept on empirical and historical grounds and will be concerned not only to argue against the grain of new social movement theories, but also to produce a more discriminating and historically realistic description and explanation of the development of environmental and Green movements. At this stage it may help to outline a few of the key questions and problems which are raised in relation to the linking of post-industrialism, new social movement theory and the history of the environmental movement, to set the scene, as it were, for what follows.

Ecological writers and many sociologists have identified contemporary nature politics as 'anti-industrial' in tenor, often explicitly so. In the USA, Theodore Roszak (1981: 33) identifies the 'convergence of all urban-industrial economies' as the main problem, because all such societies are 'devoted to maximum productivity and the unbridled assertion of human dominance'. Whilst one of the classic statements of the British Greens' anti-industrial position comes from Jonathon Porritt (1984: 43-4):

The politics of the Industrial Age, left, right, and centre, is like a three lane-motorway, with different vehicles in different lanes, but *all* heading in the same direction. Greens feel it is the very direction that is wrong, rather than the choice of any one lane in preference to the others. It is our perception that the motorway of industrialism inevitably leads to the abyss - hence our decision to get off it, and seek an entirely different direction.

The use (and waste) of the Earth's resources in the production of consumer goods; the degradation of natural environments, rapidly increasing extinction of species, creation of global problems such as ozone depletion and global warming, pollution, technological disasters such as oil 'spills' at sea and the Chernobyl nuclear explosion, and many other 'dysfunctions' are all seen by Greens as products of industrialisation and its destructive mind-set. The latter leads to an unrealistic technological optimism and faith in modern industrial societies to solve the problems it sets itself. Greens have

no such faith and are, in Cotgrove and Duff's (1982) terms, 'catastrophists' not 'cornucopians' seeing natural limits to human development.

One question we can ask at this point is why, if Green movements are opposed to industrialisation, have they only emerged in the final quarter of the twentieth century? Why did Green politics not find a fundamental place within the oppositional forces in industrial capitalist societies much earlier? In Britain, the origins of the modern Industrial Revolution can be traced back to 1750-1830, the period of 'industrial take-off', and industrialisation has continued apace ever since. With hindsight, perhaps we should be surprised at the lack of resistance to industrial development during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The apparent dismissal, or lack of interest in this problem is evident from several contemporary Green texts which seemed all too willing to accept the idea that they were contributing to the development of a radically new social movement. For example, the 1983 U.K. Ecology Party (1983: 4) Manifesto claimed that 'Green politics is the single most significant international movement since the birth of socialism at the end of the 19th century'. The Ecology Party had adopted the 'Blueprint for Survival' (1972), a document drawn up by the editors of the British environmental journal *The Ecologist*, as its manifesto. The latter claimed that '... our Blueprint for survival heralds the formation of the movement for survival and, it is hoped, the dawn of a new age in which Man will learn to live with the rest of nature rather than against it' (Goldsmith et al 1972: 10).

To compound the problem, it appears that at the precise moment when sociology begins to produce and embrace post-industrial and postmodern theories which describe a historical transition *beyond* industrialism and modernity, a radical social movement emerges which professes an implacable opposition to continuing industrialisation. How do these two 'fit' together and how can we make sense of the apparent incongruity?

One further problem needs to be mentioned. Organisations whose aims have included the conservation of nature, protection of wild animals, defence of natural beauty and access rights for the public to the countryside have been in existence in Britain long before the 1970s. This fact is often acknowledged but often dismissed on the basis that a few middle class 'societies' constitute a social movement. Others ignore early conservationist groups as irrelevant to the understanding of contemporary nature politics which seems to have radical political aspirations in contrast to the localised and reformist nature of earlier conservationist efforts. At the heart of this study is the contention that we cannot understand the character and

12 Explaining Environmentalism

prospects of contemporary environmental and Green movements without locating them in their proper historical context. This means taking seriously the earlier forms of nature conservation as well as the longer-term development of the environmental movement *and* its constituent organisations which are often neglected in contemporary discussions.⁶

Notes

- 1 Conwentz's (1909) term, 'natural monuments', gives some sense of the connections that early environmentalists found between preserving both 'natural' and 'human-made' objects.
- 2 See Eckersley 1992 for a reliable engagement with these varied positions.
- 3 It is somewhat ironic that space travel, rather than lending support to a technocentric orientation to ecological problems, helped to drive home the radical ecological message of how beautiful and fragile life on Earth is. As one former astronaut of the former German Democratic Republic put it, 'Before I flew I was already aware of how small and vulnerable our planet is; but only when I saw it from space, in all its ineffable beauty and fragility, did I realize that humankind's most urgent task is to cherish and preserve it for future generations' (Jahn quoted in Kelley 1988; plate 141).
- 4 See for example Fritjof Capra's *The Turning Point* (1983), Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1982) and Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1988) for good examples of this argument. All three find links between the rise of Western science and the oppression of women, thus leading the way into an ecofeminism based on inverting modernity's negative symbolic evaluations of both nature and women.
- 5 Such a reading seems inexorably to lead in the direction of new age idealism with all the problems this brings. Zukav (1980: 117) argues that 'Since particle - like behaviour and wave-like behaviour are the only properties that we ascribe to light and since these properties now are recognised to belong not to light itself but to our interaction with light, then it appears that light has no properties independent of us'. This is clearly not consistent with ecological realism which stresses the intrinsic properties and value of natural objects, rather, it is strikingly reminiscent of some forms of extreme social constructionism (as in Tester 1991).
- 6 The reading of contemporary Green ideas as 'new' leads to some curious positions. For instance, in a largely excellent account, O'Riordan (1981: 239) notes that in advocating a return to the land as a solution to the evils of civilization, 'Kropotkin was a hundred years ahead of his time'. However, the recourse to nature as a healing salve expressed by Kropotkin (and others) in the late nineteenth century, has been a recurring feature in oppositional politics since at least the early nineteenth century. In this sense, Kropotkin was very much 'of his time'.

2 Theories of Old and New Social Movements

Introduction

A sociological perspective on contemporary social movement activity, which emphasises the novel or historically 'new' aspects of these movements, has been widespread amongst researchers in this field since the 1970s. Since a wave of contemporary environmental and Green organisations and protest actions appears to have emerged around this time, 'new social movement' (NSM) theory would seem to have been, at least partly, developed to try to account for this wave of nature politics. 'Ecological' movements have been described as typical 'new' social movements, and as I am extremely sceptical of many of the claims of NSM theories, a reconstruction of the historical development of nature politics, taking in 'Green' ideas, actions and organisation building provides a good test case for the utility or otherwise of this perspective. Chapter Four begins this reconstruction.

In this chapter I outline the main themes of NSM theories, but I particularly want to highlight two underlying issues. Firstly, differences notwithstanding, NSM theories seem to be drawn inexorably towards a reliance on large-scale theories of social-structural change, primarily though not exclusively, some version of the post-industrial society thesis, as a way of structurally anchoring, and hence providing a framework within which the rise of NSMs can be explained. In British sociology the ideas of 'New Times' (Hall and Jacques 1989) associated with the (now defunct) journal *Marxism Today*, theories of post-fordism (Murray 1989), and Lash and Urry's thesis of the disorganisation of British capitalism (1988, 1985), make some similar claims to post-industrial theories (Bagguley 1992: 26-7), though there are differences of emphasis among the various analyses. I shall discuss post-industrial theories here, and will only refer to the more recent British research when it adds something extra to the main claims of the older theories. I consider the apparent connection between NSM theory and post-industrialism to be problematic in several respects, and will explain why.

14 *Explaining Environmentalism*

Secondly, I return to an issue already raised, namely the continuity of social movements across time. I consider that the relative neglect of this dimension in NSM theory has detrimental consequences for this theory's ability to cope with the historical evidence on environmentalism. The critique of NSM theory leads into a re-evaluation of structural post-industrial theories, and Part Three makes some progress towards a more realistic and long-term approach to understanding the development of environmental movements in Britain.

Definitions of 'Social Movement'

Though definitions of the concept 'social movement' abound in the literature, and each gives special emphasis to some aspect or other, there is fairly broad agreement on what it is that differentiates social movements from other forms of collective action such as political interest groups and political parties. A representative attempt at a definition is the following from Alan Scott (1990: 6):

A social movement is a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests and, for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity. Social movements are distinguished from other collective actors, such as political parties and pressure groups, in that they have mass mobilization, or the threat of mobilization, as their prime source of social sanction, and hence of power. They are further distinguished from other collectivities, such as voluntary associations or clubs, in being chiefly concerned to defend or change society, or the relative position of the group in society.

There are I think, four important points in this definition:

1. Social movements are 'collective actors'. That is, there is a unity to their activity.
2. They have, or aim to create, a 'common identity'. This alerts us to the ways in which people can come to take their involvement in a social movement as a fundamental part of their own self - identity which they share with others in the movement.