DOGMAS and DREAMS
A READER IN MODERN POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES
Edited by Nancy S. Love
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CAROLYN MERCHANT

Radical Ecology:
The Search for a Livable World


Introduction: What Is Radical Ecology?

Radical ecology emerges from a sense of crisis in the industrialized world. It acts on a new perception that the domination of nature entails the domination of human beings along lines of race, class, and gender. Radical ecology confronts the illusion that people are free to exploit nature and to move in society at the expense of others, with a new consciousness of our responsibilities to the rest of nature and to other humans. It seeks a new ethic of the nurture of nature and the nurture of people. It empowers people to make changes in the world consistent with a new social vision and a new ethic.

To become clear about our own goals for change, we need to reflect on the ways in which we have absorbed the norms and roles of the larger society in which we live. How can we replace feelings of individual helplessness with feelings of power to make changes consistent with a new social vision and a deeper, more articulate environmental ethic? ...

Radical Ecology

Ecology as a science emerged in the late nineteenth century in Europe and America, although its roots may be found in many other places, times, and cultures. The science of ecology looks at nonhuman nature, studying the numerous, complex interactions among its abiotic components (air, water, soils, atmos, and molecules) and its biotic components (plants, fungi). Human ecology adds the interactions between these, enormously increasing the complexities. Human ecology is successful when it studies clearly defined places: e.g., the people of Papua New Guinea, the Shoshone Indians, or the Tukano Indians of the Amazonian rainforests. Within this dimension, environmental history emerges as the study of the processes of change in specific regions, and environmental historians—the ecological history of hydraulic society in California, changing patterns in America, and so on.

Social ecology takes another step. It analyzes the institutions that people use in relationship to nature—such as axes, guns, and bulldozers—transferring them into “natural resources.” Systems of economic production, gathering, and fishing, subsistence agriculture, and industrial production provide norms and techniques that shape how and when to eat children. Laws and political systems reproduce the social order. Ideas and ideologies, religion, art, and science, offer frameworks of consensus and making ethical decisions.

Radical ecology is the cutting edge of social ecological systems toward new patterns of production and consumption that will improve the quality of human life. It challenges those aspects of the political system that prevent the fulfillment of basic human needs. It offers new models of social and economic systems that will support social movements for removing the cause of environmental problems and altering the patterns of production and consumption and raising the quality of life for people of every nation.

How can radical ecology help bring about the social changes needed to address environmental problems ... result from contradictions in each other's continuance) in today's society. The tension between the economic forces of production and the second from tensions between reproduction and production is the particular form of production in modern society—capitalist and state socialist—creates accumulating inequality, soil, and biota (including human beings) and this inequality is reproduced itself over time.

The first contradiction arises from the assault on nature. Examples include the destruction of the environment (such as the oil spills and air pollution from the predicted nuclear winter from nuclear war); ...
MERCHANT

Ecology:
a Livable World

radical ecology?

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emissions of carbon dioxide; acid rain from industrial emissions of sulphur dioxide; ozone depletion from industrial uses of chlorofluorocarbons; the pollution of oceans and soils from the dumping of industrial wastes; and industrial extractions from forests and oceans for commodity production. These assaults of production on global ecology are circulated by means of the biogeochemical cycles and thermodynamic energy exchanges though soils, plants, animals, and bacteria (see figure 1.1 [p. 610], center circle). Their effects are experienced differently in the First, Second, and Third Worlds and by people of different races, classes, and sexes.

The second contradiction arises from the assaults of production on biological and social reproduction. The biological (intergenerational) reproduction of both human and nonhuman species is threatened by radiation from nuclear accidents (such as the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island in the United States and the 1986 accident at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union) and by toxic chemicals from industrial wastes. The reproduction of human life on a daily (intragenerational) basis in Third World countries is endangered as local food, water, and fuel supplies are depleted by the conversion of lands to cash crops and in the First World as harmful chemicals in foods, drinking water, and indoor air invade the home. The reproduction of society as a whole is imperiled by government policies that support continued industrial pollution and depletion and by industry policies that support continued sex and race discrimination (see figure 1.1, middle circle). A country's form of social reproduction and its form of economic reproduction constitute its political economy. Thus the United States, China, Brazil, Kenya, and Malaysia all have particular political economies.

The global ecological crisis of the late twentieth century, I argue, is a result of these deepening contradictions generated by the dynamics between production and ecology and by those between reproduction and production. But problems of pollution, depletion, and population expansion have specific roots in each country's internal history, its place in the global order, and the current trajectory of its internal development. Each environmental problem therefore needs to be examined in the context of its own specific history as well as its linkages to global political economies.

As these two contradictions become more visible, they also undermine the efficacy of western culture's legitimating worldview, pushing philosophers, scientists, and spiritualists to re think human relationships with the nonhuman world (see figure 1.1, outer circle). The mechanistic worldview created during the seventeenth century scientific revolution constructs the world as a vast machine made up of interchangeable atomic parts manipulable from the outside, just as the parts of industrial machines can be replaced or repaired by human operators. This mechanistic worldview, which arose simultaneously with and in support of early capitalism, replaced the Renaissance worldview of nature as a living organism with a nurturing earth at its center. It entailed an ethic of the control and domination of nature and supplanted the organic world's I-thou ethic of reciprocity between humans and nature. Domination legitimates the use of nature as commodification and capitalism.

Deep ecologists... call for a total transformation that will replace the mechanistic framework of dual framework of interconnectedness and reciprocity. We need to infuse religions with new ecological ideas vering nature. Social ecologists... see a total tron as the best approach. Most of these theories which all parts of the ecosystem, including huma ecologically-modified homocentric ethic that valri ecology.

Radical environmental movements draw on th orists, but intervene directly to resolve the contr production and between production and reproduc... advocate the formation of green parties that we reproduction and a variety of direct actions that production on reproduction by saving other spec and cleaning up the environment. Ecofeminists... about issues that affect women's own bodies in the toxic substances and nuclear radiation) and wom tion (such as altering workplace/homeplace patter able development movement... searches for new that would reverse the assaults of production on e preserving soils, waters, air, and biota.

Although radical ecology pushes for change an not a monolithic movement. It has many schools groups. Its branches are often at odds in goals and specific actions. These produce conflicts an larger movement resulting in a variety of approach problems. My own view is one of guarded opti movements that intervene at the points of greatest reverse ecological damage and fulfill people's basic tion need to be subordinated to the reproduction of human needs and the preservation of local eco ethic of partnership between humans and nonhuman worldview advocated by deep and spiritual eco transformation, it can nevertheless foster and sup social directions taken. Perhaps over the next five revolution will take place so that by the middle of will have new forms of production, reproduction sustain both people and the natural environment. fulfill much of the vision and hope of radical eco
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 and race discrimination (see figure
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ethic of reciprocity between humans and nature. Mechanism and its ethic of
domination legitimates the use of nature as commodity, a central tenant of in-
dustrial capitalism.

Deep ecologists . . . call for a total transformation in science and worldview
that will replace the mechanistic framework of domination with a ecological
framework of interconnectedness and reciprocity. Spiritual ecologists . . . see
the need to infuse religions with new ecological ideas and revive older ways of
vering nature. Social ecologists . . . see a total transformation of political econ-
y as the best approach. Most of these theories entail an eco-centric ethic in
which all parts of the ecosystem, including humans, are of equal value, or an
ecologically-modified homocentric ethic that values both social justice and so-
ical ecology.

Radical environmental movements draw on the ideas and ethics of the
orists, but intervene directly to resolve the contradictions between ecology and
production and between production and reproduction. Green political activists
advocate the formation of green parties that would recast social and political
production and a variety of direct actions that would reverse the assaults of
production on reproduction by saving other species, preserving human health,
and cleaning up the environment. Ecofeminists . . . are particularly concerned
about issues that affect women’s own bodies in biological reproduction (such as
toxic substances and nuclear radiation) and women’s roles in social repro-
uction (such as altering workplace/homeplace patterns and norms). The sustain-
able development movement . . . searches for new approaches to resource use
that would reverse the assaults of production on ecology, thereby renewing and
preserving soils, waters, air, and biota.

Although radical ecology pushes for change and social transformation, it is
not a monolithic movement. It has many schools of thought and many action
roups. Its branches are often at odds in goals and values, as well as techniques
and specific actions. These produce conflicts and heated debates within the
larger movement resulting in a variety of approaches to resolving environmental
blems. My own view is one of guarded optimism, placing hope in social
ovements that intervene at the points of greatest ecological and social stress to
verse ecological damage and fulfill people’s basic needs. The goals of produc-
tion need to be subordinated to the reproduction of life through the fulfillment
of human needs and the preservation of local ecologies and be informed by an
thic of partnership between humans and nonhuman nature. Although the new
worldview advocated by deep and spiritual ecologists may not lead the social
transformation, it can nevertheless foster and support the new economic and
al directions taken. Perhaps over the next five decades a global ecological
volution will take place so that by the middle of the twenty-first century we
will have new forms of production, reproduction, and consciousness that will
 sustain both people and the natural environment. Such a transformation would
fulfill much of the vision and hope of radical ecology.

(Continued on p. 611)
Ecology, production, reproduction, and consciousness interact over time to bring about ecological transformations. The innermost sphere represents the ecological core within the local habitat, the site of interactions between ecology and human production. Plants (producers), animals (consumers), bacteria and fungi (decomposers), and minerals exchange energy among themselves and with human producers in accordance with the laws of thermodynamics and the biogeochemical cycles. Introductions and withdrawals of organisms and resources from outside the local habitat can alter its ecology. Human production (the extractions, processing, and exchange of resources and commodities) is oriented toward immediate use as food, clothing, shelter, and energy for subsistence or toward profit in mercantile trade and industrial capitalism. With increasing industrialization, the subsistence-oriented sector declines and the market-oriented sector expands (as indicated by the clockwise arrow).

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The middle sphere represents human and nonhuman generational reproduction of species and intragenerational ecological interactions directly in the case of nonhumans by production in the case of humans. In subsistence (as indicated by the arrows), science, philosophy, and art, helping to maintain and to influence change. Through arts, ethics, morals, taboos, and games, they are translated into actions and behaviors affected by the environment, production, and reproduction.

The "semipermeable" membranes between the spheres and interactions among them. Ecological revolutions are bifurcations between production and ecology and between human reproduction and nature and forms of human consciousness.

(Continued from p. 669)

Many people will disagree with the goals of radical environmentalism, yet it is the radical standpoint from which to view and analyze mainstream environmentalism. It sharpens our understanding of the underlying Western civilization and its values. It is a second and third world economic and environmental alliance that formulates answers to the dilemmas of self in society versus society.

The visibility of radical environmental movements and environmental goals are more acceptable. Radical activism about issues enmeshed in bureaucratic structures and processes is an example. It may fail to bring about radical changes, but it can still be effective in changing attitudes, promoting social change.
The middle sphere represents human and nonhuman reproduction. The intergenerational reproduction of species and intragenerational survival rates influence ecological interactions directly in the case of nonhuman individuals or as mediated by production in the case of humans. In subsistence (or use-value) societies, production is oriented toward the reproduction of daily life in the household through the production of food, clothing, shelter, and energy (as indicated by the two-way arrow). For humans, the reproduction of society also includes socialization (in the family, church, and community) and the establishment of laws and governance that maintain order in the tribe, town, state, or nation.

Human consciousness, symbolized by the outermost sphere, includes representations of nature reflected (as indicated by the arrows) in myth, cosmology, religion, philosophy, science, language, and art, helping to maintain a given society over time and to influence change. Through ethics, morals, taboos, rituals, festivals, the dance, and games, they are translated into actions and behaviors that both affect and are affected by the environment, production, and reproduction (as indicated by the arrows).

The “semi-permeable” membranes between the spheres symbolize possible interactions among them. Ecological revolutions are brought about through interactions between production and ecology and between production and reproduction. These changes in turn stimulate and can be stimulated by new representations of nature and forms of human consciousness.

(Continued from p. 609)

Many people will disagree with the goals of radical ecology. Perhaps most will decline to participate in its various actions. Yet radical ecology offers a critical standpoint from which to view and analyze mainstream society and mainstream environmentalism. It sharpens our understanding of the assumptions underlying Western civilization and its values. It broadens our perspective on Second and Third World economic and environmental problems. It helps us to formulate answers to the dilemmas of self in society, society in self, and self versus society.

The visibility of radical environmental movements may make mainstream environmental goals more acceptable. Radical actions often raise public consciousness about issues enmeshed in bureaucratic technicalities. Changes triggered by radical actions may then come about through normal political processes. Although it may fail to bring about revolutionary transformation, radicalism can still be effective in changing attitudes, raising consciousness, and promoting social change.
Conclusion: The Radical Ecology Movement

What has the radical ecology movement accomplished? A broad range of answers to this question is possible. Radical ecology has not brought about a worldwide socialist order. Nor is such a scenario likely in the immediate future. Its achievements are far more modest. As a theoretical critique of the mainstream environmental movement, it exposes social and scientific assumptions underlying environmentalists' analyses. As a movement, it raises public consciousness concerning the dangers to human health and to nonhuman nature of maintaining the status quo. In so doing, it pushes mainstream society toward greater equality and social justice. It offers an alternative vision of the world in which race, class, sex, and age barriers have been eliminated and basic human needs have been fulfilled.

What analyses and concrete results have radical theorists and activists contributed to the environmental movement?

Contributions of Radical Theorists

- Reality is a totality of internally related parts. The relationships are fundamental and continually shape the totality as contradictions and conflicts arise and are resolved.
- Social reality has structural (ecological and economic) and superstructural (law, politics, science, and religion) features. Continual change is generated out of the contradictions and interactions among the parts and levels.
- Science is not a process of discovering ultimate truths of nature, but a social construction that changes over time. The assumptions accepted by its practitioners are value-laden and reflect their places in both history and society, as well as the research priorities and funding sources of those in power.
- Ecology is likewise a socially constructed science whose basic assumptions and conclusions change in accordance with social priorities and socially accepted metaphors.
- What counts as a natural resource is historically contingent and is dependent on a particular cultural and economic system in a given place and time.
- Surplus and scarcity are produced by economic interactions with nonhuman nature. Scarcity is both real in that some resources are nonrenewable over human lifespans and created in that economic producers control the technologies of extraction and the distribution of commodities.
- Human reproduction is not determined by indiscriminate sexual passions, but is governed by cultural norms and practices.
- Gender is created not only by biology, but by social practices.

Contributions of Radical Activists

- The dangers of radioactive, toxic, and hazardous wastes to human health and reproduction have been exposed by citizen activists and regulations concern-
Ecology Movement

accomplished? A broad range of anti-ecology has not brought about a nirvana likely in the immediate future. A theoretical critique of the maines social and scientific assumptions a movement, it raises public con-health and to nonhuman nature of pushes mainstream society toward an alternative vision of the world in which been eliminated and basic human rights have been restored.

radical theorists and activists con-

The Radical Theorists

parts. The relationships are funda-

damental and economic and superstructural. Continual change is generated among the parts and levels of the system. Thus, the dynamics of nature, but a social context, are shaped by its practices in both history and society, as sources of those in power.

radical ecology, whose basic assumptions and social priorities and socially accepted institutions are contingent and are dependent on a given place and time. Ecological interactions with nonhuman nature, resources are nonrenewable, are not renewable, and human producers control the technologies.

indiscriminate sexual passions, but by social practices.

The Practical Activists

arduous wastes to human health and safety and regulations concern-
ing disposal have been tightened.

- The siting of incinerators and landfills in poor and minority communities and Third World countries has been exposed as racist.
- The rapid clearcutting of tropical rainforests and northern hemisphere old growth forests by corporations on both public and private lands and the associated decimation of rare and endangered species have been brought to public awareness, and cutting in some areas has been curtailed.
- The slaughter of whales, dolphins, salmon, and other ocean species has been sharply criticized and in some cases curtailed or temporarily reduced.
- The dangers of pesticides and herbicides on foods and in water supplies and the availability of alternative systems of agriculture have been made visible.
- The viability of green parties as a source of political power has been recognized.
- The self-determination and power of indigenous peoples throughout the world to the right to control their own natural resources has become important.
- Direct, nonviolent action has become an acceptable and highly visible means of political protest.
- Alternative, nonpatriarchal forms of spirituality and alternative pathways within mainstream religions that view people as caretakers and/or equal parts of nature rather than dominators are being adopted by more and more people.
- The need for ecological education and individual commitment to alternative lifestyles that reduce conspicuous consumption and recycle resources is making headway.

While radical ecology has achieved specific gains and visibility, it nonetheless has its own limitations and internal contradictions. Radical ecology lacks coherence as a theory and as a movement. Theoricians are deeply divided as to whether they are ethical, economic, social, and scientific assumptions. Some deep ecologists wish to focus on redefining the meaning of self, others on redefining science and cosmology, still others on the connections between spirituality and deep ecology. Social ecologists and deep ecologists are at odds as to whether the priority lies with challenging and redefining the dominant worldview as the mode for initiating transformation or whether the preeminent strategy lies in the pursuit of social justice, with each camp accusing the other of lack of sophistication. Some social ecologists disdain spiritual ecology as politically naive and as diverting energy away from social change, while many spiritual ecologists defend spiritualism as a way of focusing social actions. Ethically the camps are also in disagreement, with many deep ecologists and spiritual ecologists holding some form of ecocentric ethic, while social ecologists generally pursue a homocentric approach informed by ecological principles. Although the theoretical debates among proponents of radical ecology in general are often vituperative,
they are equally incisive and healthy as a forum for clarification of assumptions
and principles.

Similarly, green movements are divided along both theoretical and strategic
lines. Green politics is fraught with disagreements between those who hold
depth ecological and/or spiritual ecological assumptions and those who identify
with social ecology and hold an ethic of social justice as the primary objective.
Equally significant are the divisions between Greens who wish to pursue a prac-
tical real-world strategy of working with other political parties to achieve eco-
logical goals and Greens who refuse to compromise fundamental movement
principles and prefer to work outside the established political system. Eco-

defeminists are often critical of deep ecologists for their failure to recognize both
biological and socially constructed differences, and divided among themselves
as to basic strategies for change, with some pressing for spiritual, others for 

social approaches, and still others seeking to combine ritual with action. Similarly
the sustainability movement is divided among those who primarily follow sci-

cific/ecoological principles in advocating policy and those who incorporate
or subordinate scientific strategies to social justice strategies.

Radical environmental movements also differ in different parts of the
world. In the First World, much energy is directed toward mitigating the effects
of toxic pollutants (e.g., chlorofluorocarbons, petroleum spills, PCBs, pes
ticides, and nuclear and hazardous wastes), preserving endangered species, saving
wilderness, and promoting recycling. In the Second World, priorities are fo-
cused on controlling industrial threats to human health, particularly the effects
of urban air and water pollution as well as nuclear contamination resulting
from the Chernobyl accident. In the Third World a primary emphasis is on ob-
taining sufficient food, clean water, and adequate clothing for basic subsistence,
developing appropriate technologies for cooking, heating, and farming, coun-
tering the effects of pesticide poisoning on human health, and preserving the
lands of indigenous peoples.

Yet just as the environmental and human health problems facing the three
worlds are interdependent, so radical movements are linked. When toxic sub-
stances and pharmaceuticals are banned in the First World, they are often dumped in Third World countries. Radical movements expose and protest
against such practices. When rainforests are cut in Third World countries, de-
stroying indigenous habitats, First World environmental groups organize con-
sumer boycotts of timbers and hamburgers. When Second World activists orga-
nize environmental protests, they receive support and assistance from First
World activists. International environmental conferences produce international
networks of groups helping other groups.

Within the First, Second, and Third World radical ecology movements,
tory and practice are linked, each informing and inseparable from the other.
Divisions among proponents open new avenues for both synthesis and criti-
cism. The movement as a whole is both dynamic and timely. New ideas and
new strategies for change are continually evolving; new people with energy and enthusiasm.

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Radical ecological movements attempt to re-

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ting both humans and nature. The sustainability

contradiction between ecology and production,

able production technologies, restoring ecosystems
dev development programs.

Despite the accomplishments and vision of

most of the world's power is presently concentrated in
political institutions that bring about environmen-

that split rich from poor, whites from people of color, humans from nature remain. Radical ecology itself is a
political, economic, and scientific world order. To

actions challenge the hegemony of the dominant con-
problems promise to be among the most critical of

century, environmentalists will play increasingly in-

action. Radical ecology and its movements will con-
environmentalism and will remain on the cutting

cutting the search for...
new strategies for change are continually evolving; the door is always open to new people with energy and enthusiasm.

I ... [use] the concepts of ecology, production, reproduction, and consciousness in understanding both the ecological crisis and ways of overcoming it. I have analyzed the crisis [as] a result of two contradictions, the first between production and ecology, the second between production and reproduction. As these contradictions deepen, they push the world into greater ecological stress. The crisis could be relieved over the next several decades, however, through a global ecological revolution brought about by changes in production, reproduction, and consciousness that lead to ecological sustainability. Thus deep ecologists call for a transformation in consciousness from a mechanistic to an ecological worldview which transforms knowing, being, ethics, psychology, religion, and science, while spiritual ecologists focus on religion and ritual as ways of revering nature. Social ecologists call for a transformation in political economy based on new ecologically sustainable modes of productions and new democratic modes of political reproduction.

Radical ecological movements attempt to resolve the contradictions that lead to the crisis through action. Green politics address the contradiction between production and reproduction, pressing for ways of reproducing human and nonhuman life that are compatible with ecosystem health and social justice. Ecofeminists press for gender equality and the subordination of production to the reproduction of life such that children will be born into societies that can provide adequate employment and security and have an ethic of nurturing both humans and nature. The sustainability movement focuses on the contradiction between ecology and production, devising ecologically-sustainable production technologies, restoring ecosystems, and promoting socially-just development programs.

Despite the accomplishments and vision of radical ecologists, however, most of the world’s power is presently concentrated in economic systems and political institutions that bring about environmental deterioration. The trends that split rich from poor, whites from people of color, men from women, and humans from nature remain. Radical ecology itself stands outside the dominant political, economic, and scientific world order. Together its various strands and actions challenge the hegemony of the dominant order. Because environmental problems promise to be among the most critical issues facing the twenty-first century, environmentalists will play increasingly important roles in their resolution. Radical ecology and its movements will continue to challenge mainstream environmentalism and will remain on the cutting edge of social transformation, contributing thought and action to the search for a livable world.