Enduring Liberalism
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eral values. It is far from that at present. Nor should the abundant complaints about liberalism or about the United States as a liberal society from within the community movement be equated with a wholesale repudiation of liberalism. Indeed, perhaps the best way to read the community redirection in American political thought is as an effort to salvage liberalism by reinforcing its now somewhat tattered community side. In this way, perhaps, it underlines the continuing vitality of liberalism in the American political tradition.

Yet this description is not the full story either, for there is also something of a revolt against liberal values, and not just liberal practice, in the United States. And while no new consensus has emerged as a result, there are hints of a possible resolution, one in which community of some sort will have a central place. Whether the outcome will fit with an American public that shows little inclination to repudiate liberal values or support community in some form beyond the family and thin civil society groups remains to be seen.

There is some sense within the community movement that the auguries are increasingly favorable for change. Sadly, a good part of this perception builds from the spreading conviction that social decay has markedly worsened since the 1960s. While social scientists debate how broad and pervasive the decay is and what date or era should be used as a baseline to compare the present situation with the past, the widespread conviction that the decay is real as community erodes in the family, neighborhood, church, and nation is inescapable.

Thus the door opens wider for (revival of?) enhanced community in the United States, although in what form or forms is for now a mystery. For its public intellectual advocates, who are diverse but legion, the nation’s entrance through the door toward community cannot come too soon.
Chapter Seven

Environmentalism as a Point of Redirection

Community may be the mantra of much of contemporary political and social thought, but there is a good case for environmentalism as the most important new source of social and political ideas addressing the future of the United States—and the globe. Interest in and sympathy for environmentalism has increased dramatically throughout American culture in recent years, even among public intellectuals, where it has joined civil society and community as central concerns. At the same time, there has been a parallel growth in the recognition that a serious ecological perspective entails crafting a philosophy of environmentalism, including a metaphysics, an ontology, an ethics, and a political theory. Many public intellectuals are now fashioning green political theories in particular, and there will be more as political thinking in the United States becomes more ecologically conscious. Thus while the voices of participants in the environmentalist discourse may be less familiar today than those in the community or civil society discourses, time will likely alter this situation. In fact, it may happen soon if continuing environmental crises conspire to move more public intellectuals toward the concerns explored in contemporary ecological thought.¹

This chapter considers the movement toward environmentalism; the critiques of liberalism and liberal society that are so prevalent among green intellectuals; several of the more popular environmental ethics and their justifications in current environmental intellectual discourse; and green political and social thought, and the main images of the good ecological society that public intellectuals now articulate.
The Movement Toward Environmentalism

The shift toward interest in and support for environmentalism has come from many directions, and public support for environmentalism is now well established in the United States. Survey after survey indicates that few, if any, issues are more widely and enduringly popular with the American public. This sentiment, moreover, extends well beyond abstract and rather pious affirmations of concern for the environment. Majorities regularly declare their willingness to pay more taxes, change lifestyles, and accept considerable state interference to protect and promote the natural environment.

A few demographic points deserve notice. Some of the poor and some members of minority groups rank the environment lower on their value priority list than do other Americans. So do Protestant fundamentalists. The most "pro-environment" Americans are secular citizens specifically and white, middle-class people generally. These findings, however, are merely slight variations on a theme. Almost all U.S. citizens vigorously claim to support environmentalism.

Yet widespread green sentiments may mean less than they appear to. After all, the public continues to support liberal individualism in many ways, indeed in more ways than ever, and it definitely endorses capitalist and market economic values, as Richard Ellis and Fred Thompson have noted in their study of the larger public as distinguished from devoted greens in environmental groups. The latter favor a sharp redirection in values away from competitive individualism, economic growth, limited government, and progress defined in environmentally negative economic terms. These green values reveal a far more communal or even collective orientation (around the goal of environmentalism) and definitely conflict with strong liberal individualism and capitalism. Yet the American public does not endorse them. It wants both environmentalism and liberal values, and suspects it can somehow have both.

The rise of public intellectuals' interest in environmental thought in the last two decades is clear enough, although it is sad that those with an explicitly ecological perspective who have come to the fore are still outside the ranks of the fashionable in the profession of political theory. The first major voices relevant to green political and social thought burst forth in the 1960s and 1970s. These classics include, of course, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, although it was not
mainly a work directed toward political or social thought but one that was an enormous stimulus to broader environmental thought by others. Others, such as Barry Commoner’s book *The Closing Circle* and Jonathan Schell’s *Fate of the Earth*, along with a steady stream of books predicting disastrous population crises, were among the most dramatic in sounding the alarm about impending ecological catastrophe and encouraging related political and social theory.

Their survivalist message is often echoed today. In this tradition, decline is forecast as imminent and all but inevitable. Sometimes this reading of the future derives from a sincere analysis of the signs of future times, but at others it seems designed largely to frighten readers into moving toward a new and radically more ecological society.

The subject of what has been labeled ecopessimism is fascinating. The phenomenon is widespread in American intellectual life. It starts from the premise that global ecocatastrophes are so severe that existence as we know it in the United States and the West will soon end. Such notions have been heard often before. They are recognizable, in fact, as part of a long-existent subtext in Western thought that is consumed with the view that “the decline of the West” is at hand. Its contemporary exponents do not, however, recognize any such affinity. The issues they are concerned with are quite different. They pose the serious, even haunting, questions of whether we are prepared to face the seriousness of our environmental problems and whether we have the will to address them.

In the late 1960s Garrett Hardin offered what was perhaps the first contemporary example of serious environmental social analysis. His argument, which has proved influential, was that we are moving beyond the planet’s carrying capacity, forcing the human race into the “tragedy of the commons.” Hardin used this famous metaphor to attempt to show that the choices of self-regarding, rational individuals can lead to ecological disaster—and were doing so in our situation of increasing population. In the terms of Hardin’s example, the commons (the planet) is a shared grassland on which any herdsman can feed his cattle. In this setting, he argues, each individual’s interest is to obtain as much grass as possible, yet doing so guarantees disaster for the community as a whole. As the population of people and cattle expands, the commons will be destroyed by overgrazing.
Hardin concludes that the environmental problem is a human and ethical problem brought on by self-regarding people who often have too much freedom to pursue their (short-run) rational self-interest. It is not caused by some mysterious evil force or government or corporation. Nor are its origins technological. It is caused by too many people with too much freedom to act on their selfish interests. Free, rational people are destroying the environment.

The 1980s saw a burst of efforts by intellectuals to grapple with the environment. Some were sober expressions from social and natural scientists, such as Herman Daly and John Cobb's *For the Common Good*, which undertook to save the planet while also ensuring a viable economic life for human beings. Others argued the case for the rights of nature, while still others fashioned new ecological ethics, gaining insight from the essays of Aldo Leopold, one of the founders of environmentalism. Some called for radical ecocentrism, while others advanced ecological anarchism. Yet others, most prominently Julian Simon and Herman Kahn, ridiculed predictions of incipient environmental collapse and sought to undercut the various radical political and social changes advocated by green intellectuals.

The 1990s saw even more engagement with ecological dilemmas and the social and political thought that followed. The notion that an environmentalist redirection is urgently necessary has steadily spread. Evidence of the breadth of this movement includes not only the flood of books making the green case but also the arrival of skeptical works on what is now perceived—correctly—to be the formidable environmental movement toward change. For example, Wilfred Beckerman’s *Through Green-Colored Glasses*, published by the libertarian Cato Institute, challenges the highly statist assumptions of the green movement. Such books in turn regularly meet opposition, such as Paul and Anne Ehrlich’s *Betrayal of Science and Reason*.

Greg Easterbrook’s explicitly subtitled argument, “The Coming Age of Environmental Optimism” is an example of a gentler critical genre than Beckerman’s. But, like Beckerman, Easterbrook casts his eye on many green policy objectives and finds them grounded in a fear of change (suggesting environmentalism is a kind of conservatism), naïveté about the time change takes, and an almost willful dismissal of the ecological progress already made. He also notes many environmentalists’ considerable romanticism about the past, the primitive, and nature in general.
Public intellectuals sympathetic to environmentalism have been in far greater supply, of course. Some hope that the redirection toward environmentalism may provide the opportunity to cross increasingly rigid, even ossified, boundaries in American political thought and bring some unity in a very fractured intellectual world. At its most optimistic this aspiration can declare that "the ecology movement alone . . . has serious potential for crossing the identity trenches."\(^{19}\)

Bob Pepperman Taylor has been impressive in modeling this hope in his historical works on American political theory and environmentalism. His book *Our Limits Transgressed: Environmental Political Thought in America* interprets green thought—and its several traditions—over the course of U.S. history. Pepperman suggests that conventional analysis and boundaries will not really work with this body of thought. He describes a journey that had both more nuance and more coherence than is frequently present in earlier accounts.\(^ {20}\) His most recent study, *America's Bachelor Uncle: Thoreau and the American Polity*, continues his effort to discern the political side of American environmentalism and break free from conventional categories. For Taylor, the environmentalist hero Henry David Thoreau was much more politically oriented than others have realized. The portrait of Thoreau as radical individualist misses Thoreau's intense concern with civic responsibility and the public good. Implicit—and sometimes explicit—in Taylor's Thoreau is Taylor's own commitment to a mature and responsible political environmentalism that fits no neat category.\(^ {21}\)

An area that has seen much interesting intellectual green thought in the 1990s has been ecofeminism. Its beginning is earlier, but its recent burst into prominence merits notice here. Carolyn Merchant's *Death of Nature* (1980) was a pioneering work, but many other arguments have followed.\(^ {22}\) Books such as Joni Seager's *Earth Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms with the Environmental Crisis* are becoming more and more common.\(^ {23}\)

The 1990s also saw the full-scale emergence of religious intellectuals in the movement toward an ecological redirection.\(^ {24}\) Lynn White launched the effort in the late 1960s with his critique of aspects of Western religious traditions that, he charged, share much of the blame for our environmental difficulties. White complained that the West had often used the Bible and Christianity to justify
horrible exploitation of nature. Since then, of course, a host of Christian thinkers have insisted that Christianity does not support any such exploitation even as they have helped fashion an explicitly green Christianity. H. Paul Santmire has been among the most eloquent of the liberal Protestants. More and more evangelical Protestant voices have also become engaged, and the "evangelical entry into the environmental debate" is now a well-established fact.

Thus, there is now no shortage of interest among intellectuals in environmentalism as the basis for a serious redirection in American thought and culture. Many organizations are also working toward this same end, and these groups are now familiar as the practical embodiment of the considerable popular and intellectual support for an ecological political agenda. They include the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, Greenpeace, the Nature Conservancy, and many more, including dozens of wildlife, hunting and fishing, bicycling, hiking, and camping groups. Mostly well established, the organizations are integral to the story of American environmentalism, a movement that is now so much a part of our landscape that it is generating its own laudatory histories of itself.

Plenty of American religious groups also are involved in supporting an environmental redirection. They include the environmental arms of many organizations such as the National Council of Churches’ Eco-Justice group, the environmental organizations of mainline Protestant denominations, largely evangelical groups such as Au Sable, the Evangelical Environmental Network, the Christian Environmental Council, the Christian Environmental Association, and the Christian Society of the Green Cross.

Altogether the broad range of support behind an environmental redirection is unmistakable. This is not to say that there is a single animating vision of what such redirection should look like in specific social, economic, or political terms. Yet interest in ecological matters in the culture has now become intense enough that some observers ask whether it serves as a kind of faith for many adherents, as perhaps it must if it is to lead to any profound redirection in human life and thought.

Michael Barkun has explored one aspect of this possibility in a controversial analysis. He notes strands of apocalyptic thinking that are present in much of contemporary ecopolitical thought. The stan-
dard focus on overwhelming ecological crisis, the sometimes obsessive engagement with end times analysis, and the constant theme of human failure recall the category of sin in Western religious faiths—and perhaps this is not entirely an accident.\textsuperscript{30}

The Critique

Green intellectuals are often predictably relentless critics of liberalism in theory and practice in the United States today. In a sense, these blistering complaints from those who want to refocus on an ecological agenda are ironic. After all, many of the great voices of past liberal social and political thought on both sides of the Atlantic constitute a tradition that made “nature” a normative standard. This was as true of John Locke as of Thomas Jefferson, of Mary Wollstonecraft as of Ralph Waldo Emerson. These liberals relied on diverse definitions of nature and its ethical postulates; there is at least as much diversity among present-day ecological theorists.

Yet most contemporary green thinkers have little to say about those who called on nature before them. They are too busy noting how far today’s liberal social order has strayed from their ideal of an acceptable ecological ethic. In such a mission we would expect that classic liberal philosophers such as Locke or Wollstonecraft would rarely appear.\textsuperscript{31} The work of younger environmentalist scholars such as Joe Bowersox and John Meyer does, however, give some hope for the future. Such young scholars appreciate that present and past cannot be so easily severed, and they understand that it would be foolish not to learn from the past.\textsuperscript{32}

Several dimensions of modern-day liberalism draw the most intense dissent from environmentalist intellectuals, who especially reject what they believe is liberalism’s devotion to the human being and the individual above all else. They reject the idea that the human is at the center of the universe or of nature; instead, they endorse ecocentrism, which holds that all parts of nature are equal and interconnected with all other parts in a marvelous web. No part of nature, including the human being, has special rights or privileges, although each part has its own integrity and all must be honored as part of the whole. Thus, as John Rodman has argued, ecocentrism promises liberation
from human-centeredness and the pernicious idea that the rest of nature exists for humans to exploit as they see fit.\textsuperscript{33}

Objections to the liberal emphasis on the individual are also essential and common. No one has made a more thorough or passionate green attack on this side of liberalism than William Ophuls in his contemporary \textit{Requiem for Modern Politics: The Tragedy of the Enlightenment and the Challenge of the New Millennium}.\textsuperscript{34} For Ophuls, the urgent radical critique of liberalism must include a full-scale demystification of the liberal Enlightenment and its ideals of individualism in civilization. For him, what Western civilization has been about is "theft"—stealing from nature and from each other, often in the name of the false ideals of selfish individualism and unconstrained individual liberty.\textsuperscript{35}

For all its high-minded talk, the Enlightenment and its child liberalism, according to Ophuls, are best understood as the sanctioning of appalling "predatory development" for selfish economic gain. Moreover, he charges, the liberal Enlightenment outlook pursues the folly of trying to solve all problems by increasing production and overcoming scarcity. The result is as clear as it is tragic to Ophuls. Our present Hobbesian condition, in which selfish power and domination reign under the gods of Science, Reason, and Greed, has led to the rape of nature, impending scarcity, a breakdown of community, and the rise of a kind of friendly fascism—a democracy that is metamorphosing into a Hobbesian totalitarian state.\textsuperscript{36}

Green dissent regarding liberalism in the West today often singles out capitalism as a principal, often the principal, evil. Routinely connected to liberalism, capitalism's image is as an engine propelled by individual greed, relentlessly controlling and destroying nature—often in alliance with its dubious twin, technology. Wherever both are prominent, a shockingly desecrated natural world follows, one that cannot easily be rejuvenated.\textsuperscript{37}

While critical public intellectuals frequently identify liberalism, or selected "liberal" institutions, as central causes of our ecological travail, few make them the sole causes of environmental crisis. They could not be, after all, since Western liberalism is a relatively recent phenomenon, hardly a presence before the seventeenth century. This is why many green intellectuals also blame Christianity, a religion whose doctrines and practices they consistently single out for its alleged negative effects on nature.\textsuperscript{38}
The now nearly orthodox critique complains that Christian theology based in the Bible has been human-centered—declaring the human person special and the most important part of Creation, being made in God’s image. As a result, critics insist, Christianity has viewed the rest of nature as inferior and all too available for exploitation by humans at their discretion. The most frequently cited Bible passage, which is taken as deeply damning, is from the Book of Genesis: “Fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that are on the earth” (Gen. 1:28).39

Many Christian thinkers share this mood of dissatisfaction, especially with the record of Christian practice, which they tend to identify as the culprit rather than Christianity as a religion. But some complain also about theological misdirections (or perceived misdirections) toward nature by such influential Christian theologians as Saint Augustine or Saint Thomas Aquinas. They often proceed to offer what they consider to be a better Christian theology, one that is invariably respectful of all nature as God’s precious creation and that God calls human beings to love. Their prized exemplar of this Christian theology displayed in a life of witness is the story of Saint Francis of Assisi (1182–1226). Saint Francis’s famous love of the birds and all living things in nature is their Christianity in action.40

Alternate Ethical Foundations for an Environmental Redirection

There is little doubt that many in the community movement take community’s good as a given, especially in contrast to liberalism (or the side of liberalism they dislike). This reflexive attitude is equally present in modern environmentalist thought regarding its main assumptions. Yet the good news is that green intellectuals are increasingly engaging in serious reflection about alternative ethical outlooks and justifications for them. These reflections sometimes provide environmentalism with an unexpected philosophical side that is both welcome and stimulating.

There are, as Robyn Eckersley says, many ways to grapple with contemporary ecological thought and its tendencies, issues, divisions, and history. Eckersley concentrates on how the different
branches of green thought address the environment, working with the particular history of each. This proves fruitful, but to get the clearest sense of various environmentalist ethics and justifications, my focus is more strictly analytical. The goal is to present some sense of the major alternatives and the distinctions among them. Without this awareness, it is not possible to understand contemporary green thought. 41

Recourse to natural rights claims is one standard approach. In fact, contemporary green thought is suffused with rights talk and rights arguments—and with disputes over rights arguments. Intellectual proponents of a natural rights perspective make a wide range of claims, from suggesting a few domestic animals or large mammals have natural rights to maintaining that all of nature has rights. The case is made, for instance, that animals have a right to life or a right to equal consideration with humans and, in some arguments, a host of other rights as well.

This effort to extend rights to (or acknowledge the rights of) part or all of nature is a recognizably liberal project, predictable from some American intellectuals. But it is not self-evident, which is why there is plenty of argument about whether it makes sense to say there is such a thing as animal rights (or, for that matter, natural rights for anyone or anything). The debate is predictable in part because such rights talk flies in the face of postmodernism and postmodern intellectuals, who are hardly few in number in the United States. From a postmodern perspective, nature cannot provide a true foundation for ethics, and there are no true “rights” in nature. There are no such certain foundations or truths, and to believe there are is to delude oneself. Yet in this era of supposed postmodern skepticism, rights talk has never been more prevalent in environmental thought—and elsewhere. It is equally interesting to observe green thinkers lambasting liberal values or liberal culture while invoking the name of rights, a concept that has long been integral to both.

A crucial issue in the natural rights discourse is who has natural rights. Does a dog? Does a flea? Does an amoeba? And how should this be decided? For example, must an organism be beneficial to nature as a whole, including human nature, in order to have rights? That is, does a cancer cell have rights? Also in dispute is whether, and to what extent, an organism must be aware to have rights. Some argue that definite self-consciousness in an organism
is required. Others contend that some feeling is sufficient. Yet others propose that just a glimmer of consciousness will do. Adequate answers are far from clear.

Another recent effort to get humans to go “beyond prejudice” and accept the natural rights of other organisms maintains that what is required is the presence of “causation,” defined as the presence in an animal of purposefulness. As a standard, purposefulness is meant to be broad, and as a result it is not obvious what living thing lacks it. By this view, moreover, all purposes are equal, and so all living things have equal rights.42

There is also the matter of what rights an animal or other organism might possess besides the right to life. Often the answer is the right to some kind of liberty, but how liberty should be conceived and then defended in such a context is controversial and difficult to determine. And there is the significant question of how the limitless multitude of rights-bearing living things that would or do constitute nature can be held together in satisfactory equilibrium. Rights are often proclaimed in isolation, but nothing lives in isolation from other humans or the rest of nature. How would the putative right to life of the human fit with the same right for the wolf or the cancer cell?

Intellectual historian Roderick Nash is perhaps the most well-known exponent of a rights approach to environmental ethics. His primary work on the subject, Rights of Nature, is a fascinating history of environmental ethics but also an essay on behalf of a rights approach. Nash believes that all nature, not just the animal kingdom, has rights, but his defense of rights also proceeds from a pragmatic calculation that a rights argument for environmentalism is effective in the American context. At heart he is a pragmatist who likes a rights approach because he concludes it fits with our liberal, rights-oriented political tradition, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. For Nash, an extension of rights to nonhuman nature is just another logical step in the history of America’s affinity with rights. While this move might seem radical to some, Nash says it would be no more radical than other chapters in the story of the expansion of rights in American history. As he sees it, he is calling on people to acknowledge all nature’s rights to be free of human enslavement, just as almost 150 years ago Americans finally acknowledged African Americans’ rights and ended their enslavement.
A second important ethical framework among environmentalist intellectuals is the intrinsic value approach. This outlook attracts some of the more philosophical thinkers within environmentalism, who argue that nature's ethical value is intrinsic to nature and therefore derived from itself. They understand nature to be good in and of itself. Its value is not grounded in claims that it is God's creation or in some humans' assertions that it has rights.

Pioneering scientist and thinker Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) has become something of a hero to many who are attracted to this persuasion. Leopold's most influential work is *A Sand County Almanac*, which is now second only to Thoreau's *Walden* in the honored corpus of American nature literature. Although Leopold was a fairly prolific writer, he was not a philosopher and did not fashion an elaborate intrinsic environmental ethic. Leopold maintained that nature contained within itself its own natural and therefore proper values, especially integrity, stability, and beauty. Since these were intrinsic to nature, Leopold insisted they were appropriate for an ethic for all living things. He favored policies and institutions that served these values and opposed those that did not.

The intrinsic outlook can be a close cousin of the rights of nature perspective. Indeed, one might argue that those who talk of the rights of or in nature share a kind of intrinsic analysis. Both discern normative value in nature. The difference is often that rights thinkers discern rights in parts of nature that carry special normative weight. Intrinsic thinkers tend to valorize all nature.

The intrinsic approach is also sometimes confused with ecocentrism, which is now a standard perspective among green intellectuals and activists. Ecocentrism, in fact, is more a claim about what nature is like and what it includes than it is a justification for environmentalism or even an ethic of ecological concern. It understands nature as a complex, interwoven whole in which nothing and no one, including human beings, has special status. It also often defines nature broadly to encompass more than living things, including rocks, rivers, or entire ecosystems.

Since Leopold, many environmental theorists have argued within a self-conscious intrinsic framework. One who profoundly admires Leopold but continually refines and improves his own version of the intrinsic approach to nature is J. Baird Callicott, a professional philosopher. Skeptical of natural rights claims and resistant
to romantic conceptions of nature, Callicott believes that people do not really question nature’s intrinsic moral imperatives and that we should not do so. He is well aware that many analytic philosophers protest that the fact or “is” of nature must be separated from “ought” (that is, from the claim that nature somehow has intrinsic worth and thus ethical force). Callicott rejects this conventional philosophical distinction, in effect holding that it has no logic outside the arbitrary disciplinary rules of analytic philosophy. At other moments he leaves philosophical disputes over nature far behind and relates to nature in a decidedly mystical fashion—as he did when he discovered that the Mississippi River was intrinsically part of himself. In such images, the intrinsic approach reminds one of the intuitive ways of Thoreau. Thoreau was certainly a memorable mystic and something of an intrinsic ethicist, if not enough of a philosopher or political theorist for some public intellectuals in the environmentalist mode.

Callicott’s important environmental thought has evolved and includes several significant dimensions, but his affirmation of nature, its intrinsic worth, its beauty, and the interdependence of its parts has always included much respect for Native Americans, who, he argues, often related to nature in an ideal way. Callicott’s respect, however, is not uncritical. He understands that few Native Americans were self-conscious ecologists and that few tribes had flawless environmentalist records in practice.

Spiritually based environmental ethics and justifications are another common approach today. One sign is that even Tom Hayden, famous as a former New Left activist but not previously noted for his spiritual concerns, has joined in. Hayden’s manifesto, *The Lost Gospel of the Earth*, published by the Sierra Club, proclaims his desire for people to rediscover nature religions such as Native American faiths, as well as the sides of historical Christianity that celebrated nature as a possible framework for an ecological ethics.

One spiritually grounded ethics emphasizes “caring for creation: responsible stewardship of God’s handiwork,” as the title of a contemporary book defines the position. Many Jewish and Christian scholars defend the stewardship stance by drawing on relevant passages in the Book of Genesis that they read to hold that God commands humans to care for Creation, for example, “The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it” (Gen. 2:15).
While Christian scholars sometimes find a few verses in the New Testament to add to the picture, ones that suggest God will liberate all nature in the Second Coming, the main New Testament emphasis falls on its core event, the Incarnation. The usual claim is that the Incarnation of God as Jesus Christ is the most important imaginable indication of the Creator's overwhelming connection with and love of the natural world.

What stewardship of Creation by humans means, individual thinkers interpret differently. Some argue that stewardship requires active human direction and protection of nature. Others spurn this understanding and view stewardship as something all nature must somehow participate in. For them, nature is holistic, human beings are just one part of it, and each part has its own dignity and role. Romans 8:21 is often cited: "The world itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God."

Despite such differences, there is agreement that the Bible, whether inspired by God or God's literal word, justifies an environmental ethic of stewardship, however much it may have been ignored in Western and Christian history. In this spirit there is great confidence that the "Bible is not an enemy of the environmental cause, but its greatest asset."

Creation theology is a second example of a spiritually based ethic enlisted for ecological redirection. Some exponents align themselves with Christianity or Judaism, while many others do not, yet they share a vision of a universe in which the core is a divine, glorious, and continuing evolution, a universe in which nature is wonderfully creative. These intellectuals, often theologians, concentrate on ongoing creation in nature, including human beings. They are less interested in any original Creation. This is why they radiate confidence about the future of the divinely biocentric and evolving universe. Matthew Fox, a former Roman Catholic priest, and Thomas Berry, a well-known ecotheologian, among the leading voices of creation theology, suggest that the ethical implications of their perspective are radical. Profoundly communitarian, they see a holistic and evolving nature, which sharply clashes with the selfish and divided world men and women inhabit today.

Creation theology has had substantial intellectual impact and has generated predictable controversy within Christianity over
whether it can even be considered a legitimate form of Christianity. Isn't it really a distinct spirituality in which the special divinity of Jesus Christ disappears and the central, dynamic, first Creation of God is rendered unimportant? Some within Christianity charge that it is, and others outside of Christianity happily agree.\textsuperscript{59}

Yet creation theology is not nearly as controversial as another spiritually based standard for environmental ethics. This is ecofeminism, a perspective that has entered mainstream religious intellectual consciousness and has generated a lot of sparks.\textsuperscript{60} While not all ecofeminists are self-consciously spiritual, many are. Some, like the well-known Starhawk, are involved in the wiccan and other witch movements.\textsuperscript{61} There are as well a wide variety of goddess worshipers,\textsuperscript{62} adherents to nature religions, variously defined,\textsuperscript{63} and those within established religious traditions who are sympathetic to much (though rarely all) of the ecofeminist outlook; Roman Catholic Rosemary Radford Ruether is the most prominent of this last group.\textsuperscript{64}

The heart of the ecofeminist argument is that nature is the ground of proper authority either in itself or by the inevitable fact that we are beings of nature. As it is understood in ecofeminism, moreover, women are especially identified with nature because of their unique role in childbearing. There are the usual variations, but the common message affirms women and nature together and insists that both have been denied respect and often treated terribly throughout much of human history. There is also considerable agreement on the necessity of the liberation of both women and nature and on the value of a variety of means to enhance both objectives.\textsuperscript{65}

Most environmental ethics based in religion have much in common with secular environmental ethics. For example, most seek a radical ecological redirection of American ethics and life, basing this goal on a kind of foundationalism that derives from their shared perceptions of nature as a place of the greatest worth. Thus it is ironic that secular environmentalists (sometimes joined with religious compatriots) regularly criticize religion as a major impediment to environmentalism. The truth is, however, that many intellectual voices in the major U.S. religions are eagerly joining the cause, although some of their secular critics are blissfully unaware of the fact.

The pragmatic approach is another example of the many ethical perspectives in green thought today. There has long been a prag-
matic tradition in American environmental thought, just as there has been in other areas of political and social theory. Historically, the preservationist Gifford Pinchot represented this orientation. He shared pragmatism's desire to proceed in a practical, rational manner, taking account of what works in practice, and always avoiding absolutist claims. Like Pinchot, some environmentalist pragmatists today are human-centered; others are ecocentrists. Either way, their ethical outlook combines great respect for nature with a pragmatic conviction that assisting nature requires an ethic rooted in practice and experience, not abstract absolutes or statements of faith or romantic effusions.

These ethical perspectives and others are concerned with how to defend the struggle toward an ecological redirection. As we have seen, they are alike in much of their attitude toward nature and in many of their ethical attitudes, yet they often differ a good deal on the justifications they posit for their respective environmental ethics. If one steps back, though, it is their range of agreement that is more significant and justifies some self-confidence about the possibility of a transforming ecological ethic. There is little existential skepticism or postmodern uncertainty to be found in these ranks. The result reflects the growing energy making for environmental change, energy that manifests itself more and more in American intellectual life today, energy that could transform the beleaguered earth.

Images of the Good Society

American intellectuals concerned with a green redirection today go beyond matters of alternative ethics or value justification. The nation's intellectual life abounds in ecological visions of a good society, of social orders that respect, honor, and seek to embody nature. In fact, images of the good community have now become integral to environmental theorizing, and they increasingly take a significant place in contemporary American social and political thought.

One image, which is best described as an antiutopia, a dreaded possibility rather than a dearly sought ideal, is the authoritarian model. It is fiercely controversial and often denounced, but its consideration cannot be avoided. This view insists that environmental crises and the slow and halfhearted responses they generate cast
doubt on whether democracy has the capacity to make necessary changes fast and effectively enough. Its frankest proponents go further, doubting that Western democracy, including the United States, will be able to meet the task and wondering if some sort of Hobbesian authoritarian government may be necessary.

To avoid such an alternative, this view argues that what will be needed is not just a whirlwind of action to address ecological crises, but also a direct challenge to aspects of liberal democratic society. There will have to be a confrontation with Americans’ infatuation with individualism, their romance with property rights, their stubborn resistance to serious state action to confront ecological problems, and their continued willingness to cater to each other’s selfish, short-run interests.

For example, Robert Heilbroner in his widely read book, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* has questioned whether the First World is able to discipline itself sufficiently to save the environment. If it cannot, he predicts authoritarian resolutions will be inevitable—and perhaps appropriate. Heilbroner is anxious to avoid this possibility, and he wrote his book in part so that it might be escaped. He is a self-declared, left-leaning social democrat whose commitment to this ideal is very real. Yet his argument is that inequities between the West and the Third World and contemporary environmental problems together threaten the globe. Western democracy must address these problems on an international scale or face the fact that necessity will create authoritarian regimes that can.

In the back of the mind of more than a few green intellectuals there exists a fear that such worries may be justified. Those who cautiously approach the conclusion that if we are not careful we may have to turn to authoritarian resolutions are different, however, from others in the green movement for whom the only legitimate society must be one where “true” authority governs. Adherents to these views of course reject the sort of democracy practiced in Western governments. Such views are no strangers in American or European green thinking. In their most robust expressions, such as among some eco-Marxists, capitalism remains the core problem, and Marxist historical analysis constitutes the true authority, one that urges a powerful role for the state in meeting environmental demands. In less firmly Marxist versions of ecosocialism, more common in the U.S. green movement, there is greater emphasis on civil liberties and
a greater hostility toward state authority. Yet there is at the same time an assumption that protecting the environment will necessitate a great deal of state planning and control of the economy.  

A second and decidedly more alluring ecological image of the good life is eco-anarchism. For eco-anarchists, the best social order is one in which everything in nature, nonhuman as well as human, does as its nature dictates. In this sense it seeks a fully “natural” social order that would involve a free nature, living in community with itself and its parts. For some time Murray Bookchin has been the best-known voice for this ideal, which he calls the “ecology of freedom.”

This view assumes that for nature to realize liberation it will have to escape the intense pressures that human populations now put on it. In turn, eco-anarchists will have to “liberate” society from capitalism and from freedom conceptualized as the liberty to acquire private property, make private economic investments, or exercise wide consumer choice. Capitalism terribly damages nature through its encouragement of the values of wasteful production, competition, and pollution at the expense of nature. For eco-anarchists, moreover, liberal capitalist freedoms do not constitute real freedom at all. They involve the false freedom that is always entailed in manipulated consumer choices in a market or semimarket society.

There is rarely much attention to politics in eco-anarchist analyses. But that is not unusual in green thinking, where one eye typically is cast on present crises and the other on future ideals. Eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin, however, is an impressive exception to this too-frequent situation. He criticizes this tendency among some eco-anarchists as well as other green thinkers. For him, there will have to be a great deal of politics on “the pathways to a green future,” and it cannot be escaped by choosing national community or the market as the social ideal.

Eco-anarchists are interested in both quasi-Marxist analyses and classic nineteenth-century communitarian anarchist thought. Both approaches may be “dead” elsewhere in contemporary intellectual life, but they are far from dead among eco-anarchist intellectuals. This is why, while sometimes eco-anarchist perspectives are labeled “postliberal,” their spirit is actually closer to that of the late nineteenth century. The effort devoted to attacking capitalism and the market in the name of nature cannot help but remind some readers of Peter Kropotkin a century ago.
In this view, human domination of nature is not at all inevitable. Its origins lie in the hegemony of some humans over others, especially in economic relations. Indeed, eco-anarchists argue that transforming socioeconomic relationships is the gateway to transforming the relations of people with nature as well as with each other. For them, the resulting “social ecology” can be an ideal, egalitarian community, living in accord with nature. Left behind will be the corrupt hierarchies among people and between people and the rest of nature.73

This perspective on society, of course, has no confidence in government. Eco-anarchists are convinced that governments are all about the regular denial of precious natural liberty. They are equally certain that the proper ecological society will require only a modest bureaucracy. Since eco-anarchists expect to have the most participatory and communal society possible, one where all take part in common tasks, to them it makes no sense to depend on an unnecessary activist government. Community members will regulate themselves and have scant need to employ more than Marx’s “administration of things.”

Skeptics, of course, doubt whether such a vision is realistic. In particular they question whether a small, administrative government in an anticapitalist society will nourish the environment. Critics note that problems of management, coordination, and control necessarily will loom large in the enterprise of achieving a green society, as in any other social order, and they wonder how an eco-anarchist society can meet them. Even if that were possible, skeptics doubt the result would yield increased human freedom. They ask, How could a tight community built on shared values result in expanded freedom?

These are troubling questions, and eco-anarchists know it. They understand the doubts and rarely promise easy solutions. They especially recognize that the issue of liberation or freedom and what one means by it is important. Yet they insist that if one defines freedom as allowing people—and the rest of nature—the chance to control their life, their proposals are about liberation and liberty, and are the best means to expand them. They have few doubts that freedom from the rule of capitalism, consumerism, and the alienating big state/representative “democracy” that afflicts too many humans—and the rest of nature—would be liberation indeed.

There are variations among eco-anarchists, as with any group. Robyn Eckersley is especially impressed with the differences within
their environmentalist agendas. Thus, she notes, some eco-anarchists favor controlling the human population, while others want to move toward its gradual reduction, meanwhile putting more and more of the planet into wilderness areas out of the reach of humans for the entire ecosystem’s benefit. There are also plenty of variations among eco-anarchists when it comes to the proper means of change. Most characteristic is a spirit that is willing to break with conventional or even legal modes of behavior to stop alleged outrages against nature. Among eco-anarchists it is not unusual to encounter celebrations of classic monkey-wrenching as a means to help the ecological cause.

Another image of the good society, the participatory green society, is perhaps the most popular one among American green intellectuals arguing for an environmental redirection. This perspective is also a significant part of many green activists’ outlook. Indeed, this expression of the participatory ideal of democratic action originally articulated in the 1960s now permeates the green movement. The environmental slogan “Think Globally, Act Locally” reflects this disposition when it means that local action, taken by real people in highly participatory democratic settings, is a moral imperative that must be honored in practice. While eco-anarchism is also sympathetic to a localist and participatory order, proponents of the participatory ideal differ crucially in their attitude toward government and its positive possibilities for the green cause.

This approach, which is often summarized or lauded as a commitment by environmentalists to “true democracy,” has long been significant in European green thought. It has been slower to catch on in the United States, although it has had enthusiasts for decades. Now, however, it is gaining an important place here.

While the case for participatory activism assumes the results will positively affect the global environment, some accounts are far from transparent about why they will. To critics, this belief is naive and does not address the deep-seated structural problems that lie beneath particular environmental crises. Moreover, while in some cases, as with such an able theorist as Adolf Gundersen, there is a mature awareness of the conceivable conflicts between participatory democracy and the urgent ecological agenda, in others there is not. Where the awareness exists, the usual argument is that this problem is greater in theory than it will be in practice.
This is mostly because adherents to this approach have high trust in human beings, which is hardly a universal sentiment among environmentalist theorists. Participatory environmentalists express considerable assurance that people, when they are in a participatory and deliberative setting, will decide rightly. As a result, there is often no real tension among participatory environmentalists regarding their twin goals. For them, participatory democracy and a truly ecological society can go together. They can be a splendid exemplification of their ideal: humans and the rest of nature united as one community.  

In this connection Gundersen and others have been intrigued by the Native American experience. To be sure, Gundersen carefully distances himself from the uncritical environmentalist celebrants of everything and anything Native American. He knows it is pointless to pursue romantic, reactionary efforts to resuscitate the lost worlds of past Indian civilizations. Nor, he advises, should we think we can carve out a favorite part of those lost worlds and pretend it can be carried forward to today, no matter how different the present world may be. What Gundersen does consider worthwhile is exploring Native American experience as it took place in tribes' "embedded membranes," in Native Americans' actual lives, in their particular practices, their villages, and their culture. There we can perceive how Native Americans participated with nature and each other and, perhaps, learn from them.

Another image of the good society in green thought today is what I would call the "creation society." This image visualizes the good ecological society as one faithful to God's holy and beneficent will. What this invariably means is a society dwelling in accord with God's created natural universe, defined in the familiar ways: cherishing nature, creating an ecologically sustainable society, and fostering community within the human and all other species. Perhaps the most assertive steps toward achieving this image are taking place today in evangelical (not fundamentalist) Protestant Christian circles. Led by Calvin DeWitt and other committed Protestant evangelical greens, the progress toward this conception of the good society depends in part on the growing evangelical support that it is receiving. DeWitt characterizes this current effort as more than a movement. It is best understood "more as a revival. . . . People are finding new life in their faith as they encounter God in all his fullness."
Predictably, such efforts encounter roadblocks, divisions, and disputes. For example, the many parallels with the secular environmental movement lead some Christian critics to ask whether green Christian efforts distinguish themselves enough “from a secular environmental movement laden with humanistic and pantheistic views.” Others argue that the Bible of green Christians treats nature far too respectfully. It ignores the fact that the Bible holds that all nature, not just human beings, is corrupted, which is a claim most religious environmentalists firmly deny.

Another, final image (of many possible alternatives) of the good ecological society posits a holistic order as its ideal. As with some other images, public intellectuals and theorists drawn to this outlook hardly reject all the alternatives; indeed, they frequently incorporate part of them, just as other intellectuals make use of the holistic ideal in their conceptions of the good society. What distinguishes the holistic ideal is its stress on the theme of community among people and with nature. It is a communitarian vision, above all, one that concentrates on a holistic natural community as the special objective.

Two expressions that illustrate this outlook may be noted here. One is the considerable intellectual interest among greens in Native American culture as a splendid expression of a lived holistic ideal. This view is familiar enough in pop culture today, but the holistic image is also invoked often in the expanding arena of religious environmentalism. For example, process theologians lift up what they see as a sacred, holistic cosmos. In such a universe God is integral to the whole and not a remote transcendent figure.

Moreover, process theologies particularly accent development and evolution as part of holistic nature. To them, static perceptions of nature are misunderstandings of the dynamic and divine holism that nature so grandly embodies. Equally attracted to the holistic view are many ecofeminists. Pioneer Charlene Spretnak, along with a host of others, experiences the natural universe as a unity and resists visualizing it in what she views as an analytical, discrete, “male” fashion.

While already widespread in environmentalist writings, the holistic metaphor is spreading. Thus there is interest today in ecology conceived as a moral concept. Proponents of this idea stress the complex and interdependent dimensions of a moral environment,
note how society is affected by various moral relations, and observe that these relations are often more far-reaching than a less integrated and holistic analysis might predict. One example of this kind of environment-influenced analysis holds that there is a moral-environmental system in every social order and that in the United States today it is so damaged by media violence, family decline, and the like that it may be on the verge of collapse.87

Conclusion

There is little doubt that there is a growing momentum toward an ecological focus in contemporary American political and social theory. It has not yet attained the legitimacy among the most elite public intellectuals in the United States that considerations on liberalism and its failures, civil society, or community have, but it is making progress. Even this gap, moreover, may be more apparent than real. Intellectuals engaged with environmentalism, after all, certainly consider liberalism and its failures. They are also as much engaged with the idea of community as is contemporary political thinking in general. Indeed, one way to understand green political and social thought may be to interpret it as mostly a kind of community-oriented thinking. And it is fair to conclude that there is, in fact, more commitment to "community" in green thought than among many sometimes ambivalent communitarians in other discourses.

Of course, there are often differences between green intellectuals and those addressing more conventional understandings of community. The communities most attractive to environmental theorists are holistic biotic communities. They rarely are the same communities that attract many other community-oriented thinkers, which tend to be political communities ranging from national communities to participatory democratic ones. Nor is there much interest in local, decentralized communities in the ecological literature.

Support for community in green thought is inevitably, as well, part of the affirmation of all nature so prominent in this literature. Nature is the beloved ideal, and community is honored because it is intrinsic to nature. Community is not an independent good for a proper political or social theory or practice. It is not the end,
except as envisioned by some theorists of global civil society or ecoreligion.88

Ecological thought, however, has not formed a bridge to a third important, current direction in American political thought, toward a civil society analysis. Environmental theorists on the whole show little interest in—and, frequently, little respect for—intermediate institutions of any sort, from the family to cultural groups or to ethnic, racial, or religious organizations. The civil society often disappears before nature among green intellectuals, for whom ordinary days and ordinary institutions seem to hold little interest.

Despite the attacks on liberalism in green thought, a liberal vocabulary of politics retains a tenacious hold in these uncongenial waters. Those who want to argue that liberalism remains the dominant mode of American political intellectuals can find material to work with in contemporary environmental thought. There are a fair number of liberal moments: frequent rights language, celebrations of the goal of “liberation” in nature, insistence that each aspect of nature has its own individual integrity and, in its way, independence. Indeed, given the history of liberal thought and its frequent recourse to “nature” as a self-evident justification for values, it is no surprise that much of the basic conceptual languages of ecological thought and liberalism do not clash.

This picture may or may not fade as environmental thought develops and the green movement surges forward. It definitely runs counter to the desire of many intellectuals in the more radical and self-consciously theoretical environmental cause. But once again there is no choice but to conclude that while liberalism hardly rules all American intellectual thought, it is hardly gone either.

Still, contemporary green political and social theory proposes an important redirection. Its intellectual enthusiasts badly want a sharp break with liberal thought and practice in the United States, where a holistic and egalitarian community fully integrated with the rest of nature is not exactly foremost on the liberal agenda. Such green thought, however, has a long way to go in terms of intellectual acceptance and popular approval. It is hardly poised to become the basis for the emergence of a new consensus in American political and social thought.

The ecological strain of American thought today, taking into account its several dimensions, continues to serve as evidence that