

# **The State and Environmental Political Thought**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the condition of Doctor of Philosophy.  
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September, 2007

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# Abstract

Anarchist ideas have dominated green political thought since the appearance of the environmental movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. It is unsurprising, then, that green theorists have taken a stance towards the state which may be described as ambivalent at best. The last 15 years, however, have witnessed a shift on the part of green political theorists in the direction of a more accommodating stance towards the state. This shift in orientation has led to the question of the state becoming a contested issue within environmental political thought, with greens drawing upon a variety of existing theories of the state. Despite this, certain concepts and theories – in particular ecological modernisation and deliberative democratisation – have come to the fore as focal points, or sites of contestation, in discussions over this question. This thesis, however, takes a step back from the current trend of green thinking towards the state. Rather than narrowing the focus of analysis to a particular strand of state theorising, or promoting a particular blueprint of *the* green state, its main contribution to green political theory resides in it being the first work to provide a wider-ranging critical analysis of the environmental dimensions of *various* theories of the state which may be delineated within political theory. This is not to say that the thesis does not connect with, and contribute to, contemporary debates. On the contrary, its more expansive focus enables it to embed its commentaries on contemporary green positions towards the state within broader analyses of the theoretical heritage from which they herald. It is an exercise in normative political theory that contributes novel and critical insights into the environmental aspects of each *individual* perspective on the state, whilst also providing a fuller picture of the many of ways in which green thought and state theorising intersect.

# Table of Contents

*List of Tables and Figures* 6

*Acknowledgements* 7

**Introduction** 9

## **1. Marxism, the State and Environment I:**

**The Instrumentalist Approach** 16

1.1 Marx and the Capitalist State 18

1.2 Miliband and the Instrumentalist Approach 22

1.2.1 The Capitalist Class 23

1.2.2 Capturing the State 32

1.3 Globalisation, Class and the State 39

1.4 The Ecological Marxist Critique of Capitalism 46

1.5 Structural Functionalism and the Limits of Instrumentalism 54

1.6 Conclusions 59

## **2. Marxism, the State and Environment II:**

**Economic Crisis and the Contradictions of the Welfare State** 62

2.1 Economic Crises 65

2.1.1 The Falling Rate of Profit and Crises of Underproduction 65

2.1.2 Capitalism's Second Contradiction 67

2.2 Crises of the State: The Systems Analytic Approach 71

2.2.1 A Systems Analytic Definition of the State 73

2.2.2 Contradictions of the Welfare State 76

2.2.3 The Fiscal Crisis of the State 78

2.2.4 Rationality and Legitimation Crises 79

2.2.5 Motivation Crises 81

2.3 The State and Nature: Further Contradictions? 83

2.4 Ecological Modernisation and State Imperatives 90

2.5 The Organisational Realist Approach 100

2.6 Conclusions 108



### **3. Anarchism and the Environment I:**

<b>Anarchism and the Cult of the Natural</b>	<b>111</b>
3.1 Defining Anarchism	112
3.2 Types of Anarchism	118
3.3 Anarchism and the Cult of the Natural	122
3.4 Kropotkin's Darwinian Justification of the Stateless Society	127
3.5 Bookchin's Evolutionary Ethics	135
3.6 Conclusions	140

### **4. Anarchism and the Environment II:**

<b>Stateless Visions of the Sustainable Society</b>	<b>142</b>
4.1 Spatial Concerns and the State	144
4.2 Bioregionalism	148
4.2.1 Deep Ecology	150
4.2.2 Connecting Deep Ecology and Bioregionalism	154
4.2.3 Defining the Bioregion	160
4.2.4 Bioregionalism, Autarky and Relativism	166
4.3 Social Ecology, the State and Domination	173
4.3.1 Libertarian Municipalism	178
4.4 Syndicalism	183
4.4.1 New Social Movements, Class and the Environment	184
4.4.2 A Background to Syndicalism	194
4.4.3 Green Syndicalism	202
4.5 Response to the Statist Critique of Ecoanarchism	210
4.6 Anarchism and Political Strategy	217
4.7 Conclusions	220

### **5. Green Democratisation and the State 222**

5.1 The State and Liberal Democracy	225
5.1.1 The Green Critique of Liberal Democracy	231
5.2 Deliberative Democracy	235
5.2.1 Deliberative Democracy and the Environment	237
5.2.2 Expunging Deliberative Democracy's 'Heroic Assumptions'	244

5.2.3 Must Greens Be Democrats?	247
5.3 Institutionalising Deliberation	253
5.3.1 Deliberative Opinion Polls	253
5.3.2 Citizens' Juries	257
5.3.3 E-Participation	260
5.3.4 Deliberation and Environmental Policy-Making	264
5.4 Discursive Democracy	269
5.5 Conclusions	275
<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	<b>278</b>
<i>Bibliography</i>	284

# Tables and Figures

## Tables:

Table 1.1: Percentage of corporate directors who are members of at least one exclusive social club, by inner-circle location.	27
Table 1.2: Beneficial ownership of US company shares (1900-1978).	28
Table 2.1: Crisis origin and form	77
Table 2.2: A typology of environmental-economic risks.	97
Table 5.1: The 1999 Australian referendum: deliberative opinion poll results.	255
Table 5.2: Political attentiveness, 1999 referendum.	256

## Figures:

Figure 3.1: Types of anarchism	119
Figure 4.1: The syndicalist model of institutional organisation	201

# Acknowledgements

Thanks first and foremost must go to my supervisor, David Judge. David is one of the few people I know whose breadth of knowledge is as impressive as its depth, and his editing skills are second to none, despite his intransigence over the question of split-infinitives. I also wish to express gratitude towards my colleagues in the Department of Government at the University of Strathclyde: all have helped dull the pain of being chained to a PC for hours on end. Ross Campbell and Gordon Heggie merit a special mention here for embroiling me in endless discussions over the political thought of Homer Simpson, and for assisting me in the cultivation of a potentially health-threatening caffeine addiction. Who needs sleep anyway? I am also grateful to Kerri Woods and Alastair Stark, who commented extensively upon several chapters, and to Jim Smith and Frank Montgomery at Glasgow Caledonian University, who were a constant source of invaluable advice on all aspects academic life. I am looking forward to working with the latter pair on a full-time basis. Daryl Glaser, my original supervisor, also deserves credit for providing excellent direction in my first year of study. Daryl, somewhat suspiciously, ran off to South Africa almost immediately after reading a first draft of my first chapter. He claims he was offered a promotion; I remain unconvinced. And Fiona Macintyre and Denise Meiklejohn did a sterling job fixing the numerous computers, printers and photocopiers my ignorance of technology has threatened to destroy over the past four years. Without them I would be a Luddite by default.

Outside of the wacky world of academia, my family and friends have been as understanding as ever. I now intend to re-engage with the social world, just as soon as I've finished this conference paper, article, teaching, marking etc. – honest. My parents, as ever, have supported me every step of the way, despite being faced with the sorts of problems that make the difficulties associated with writing a PhD thesis pale into absolute insignificance. This thesis is dedicated to them.

And finally, my partner, Julie Bardin, has been a rock throughout. I only hope that I can be as calming an influence on her when she is submitting her own thesis in two years time. *Merci de l'appui.*

Sections of chapter 4 appear in: Davidson, S. (2007) 'The Troubled Marriage of Deep Ecology and Bioregionalism', *Environmental Values*, vol. 16(3): 313-322.



## Introduction

It would be somewhat misleading to suggest, as some have (Paterson *et al.* 2006: 135), that the importance of the state has been understated, or that the state has not received serious attention, in green political theory. Attention has been paid, but it has tended to be unremittingly critical. Anarchist ideas have dominated green thought since the appearance of the modern environmental movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. This influence has ensured, as Barry (1999: 77) explains, that: ‘While “soviets plus electrification” equalled socialism for Lenin, it seems that, for many green theorists, activists and commentators, stateless, self-governing communities plus solar power equal the “sustainable society”’. The state’s importance has rarely been denied; however, this importance has tended to derive from the state being viewed as the cause or facilitator of environmental degradation and thereby as an institutional ensemble which precludes the achievement of ecological sustainability.

What the last 15 years in particular *has* witnessed is a shift in orientation towards the state on the part of green political theorists. Paterson *et al.* (2006: 135) note that: ‘In green theory there has been a loss of innocence marked by a step back from an anarchist rejection of the state’. Expanding on this, Saward (1998: 345) similarly comments that: ‘It seems clear that green political theorists now largely accept that the liberal representative state as we are familiar with it cannot, and probably should not, be transcended’. References to ‘green states’ (Dryzek 2003 *et al.*; Paterson *et al.* 2006; Eckersley 2004; Christoff 2005), ‘eco-states’ (de Geus 1996; Meadowcroft 2005) and ‘ecological states’ (Barry and Eckersley 2005a) – terms which would once have been considered oxymoronic by greens – are now commonplace within environmental literature. Rather than asking the question, ‘How do we bypass or undermine the state?’ green theorists are now increasingly asking the question, ‘What sort of state ought the green movement seek to create and engage with[?]’ (Barry and Eckersley 2005b: 255).

There are various reasons why this shift in orientation has taken place. Some cite the need to move beyond the 'worthless utopianism' (Saward 1998) associated with anarchism. Eckersley (2005: 159) emphasises that: 'we can expect states to persist as major sites and channels of social and political power for at least the foreseeable future'. Indeed, the state has acquired a variety of new environmental functions and responsibilities in the latter half of the twentieth century. One of the implications to be drawn from such observations is that greens should formulate a political theory capable of informing those policymakers and state managers who are dealing with the immediate practical realities of environmental issues, and who have the resources to deal with such issues. Eckersley (2004: 11) also notes that the anti-state localism of much of radical environmentalism 'sit[s] considerably at odds with the day-to-day campaign demands of environmental activists, organizations, and green parties for "more and better" state regulation of economic and social practices in order to secure the protection of the environment'. The move to a more accommodating stance towards the state may also be seen, then, as part of an effort to bring environmental theory back in line with its associated social movement.

Whatever the reason for this shift in orientation, it has led to the question of the state becoming something of a contested issue within environmental political theory, with greens theorists drawing upon a variety of existing theories of the state. Certain concepts and theories have, however, come to the fore as focal points, or sites of contestation, in discussions over how to answer the above question posed by Barry and Eckersley. The ideas of ecological modernisation theory, in its various guises, have permeated the economic thinking of those promoting the 'greening' of the state (see, *inter alia*, de Geus 1996; Eckersley 2004; Christoff 2005; Meadowcroft 2005). Deliberative democracy, on the other hand is increasingly being seen as articulating the participatory ideals most appropriate for a green state (see, *inter alia*, Gunderson, 1995; Saward 1998; Barry 1999; Smith 2003; Eckersley 2004; Baber and Bartlett 2005). This thesis, however, takes a step back from the current trend of green thinking towards the state. Rather than narrowing the focus of analysis to a particular strand of state theorising, or promoting a particular blueprint of *the* green state, its main contribution to green political theory resides in being the first work to provide a



wider-ranging critical analysis of the environmental dimensions of *various* theories of the state which may be delineated within political theory. This is not to say, however, that the thesis does not connect with, and contribute to, contemporary debates. On the contrary, its more expansive focus enables it to embed its commentaries on contemporary green positions towards the state within broader analyses of the theoretical heritage from which they herald. It is an exercise in normative political theory that contributes novel and critical insights into the environmental aspects of each *individual* perspective on the state, whilst also providing a fuller picture of the many of ways in which green thought and state theorising intersect.

Two strands of state theorising – Marxism and anarchism – provide the central focus for four of the five chapters in the thesis. There are two reasons why these bodies of thought receive particular attention: first, they provide insights which are especially relevant to understanding the role that the state may or may not play in a sustainable society, and in the transition to such a society; and second, they provide ideal contexts within which to introduce and examine wider debates and theories of the state. Marxist theories of the state provide insights into the manner and extent to which the state, *situated within a capitalist society*, may be incapable of pursuing sustainable policies, whether this is due to the *subjective* influence of the capitalist class, or *objective* constraints such as the growth imperative. The subjectivist approach of Marxist-instrumentalism represents the ideal context within which to examine the extent to which the particular balance of social forces in civil society impacts upon the state and its position regarding environmental issues, while a commentary on state imperatives provides the context within which to critically assess ecological modernisation theory. The various strands of anarchism, on the other hand, are explored in detail in order that an assessment may be made regarding the merit of the recent shift away from such ideas, and also so that the criticisms which have been made by greens against the state *in general* may be considered. A focus on anarchism also allows for an exploration of the extent to which empirical studies of nature may inform social organisation, as this form of argumentation is most prevalent in anarchist circles.

As is inevitably the case with any piece of work whose central focus is the state, the thesis is multidisciplinary. It deals, variously, with issues of political economy, policy-making, environmental ethics and ontology, social movement theory and geopolitics. There is also extensive attention paid to the potential for 'greening' the state through its democratisation. As Eckersley (2004: 1) notes, 'a normative theory of the state would need to provide an account of the basis of state legitimacy by developing the regulative ideas that confer authority on, and provide the basis of acceptance of, decisions made in the name of the state'. In this context, the insights provided by Marxism and anarchism are used to assess, first, liberal democracy, and second, attempts to infuse the liberal state with the ideals of deliberative democracy.

Ultimately the thesis produces findings which challenge the current trend of green thinking on the state. More specifically, it challenges the idea that the *state-in-capitalist-economy* is capable of pursuing policies commensurate with ecological sustainability, and also casts doubt on the likelihood that proposals for democratising the state in a deliberative direction will fulfil the green potential identified in more abstract discussions over deliberation as a form of communication. It points towards the need for a revival of green political theory's critical edge – its once oppositional stance towards capitalist structures and the reformist proposals which legitimise them – and argues that an ecosocialist platform infused with libertarian ideas represents the greatest hope for a sustainable society.

The thesis is split into six chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on Marxist theories of the state. They are concerned with theories of the *state-in-capitalist-society*. The first of these examines comments made by Marx regarding the state, and the nascent theories which may be gleaned from such remarks, before going on to focus on the instrumentalist approach in particular. The chapter explores questions regarding class formation and looks at the means identified by instrumentalists through which the capitalist class is said to dominate the state. In doing so it examines the extent to which this class has used its power, and its ability to colonise the state, in order to shape the content of environmental policies.



In addition to being relevant as a theory of the state itself, the instrumentalist approach represents an ideal starting point for the thesis, as it provides a context within which to discuss the environmental credentials of capitalism; the impact of globalisation on the state and class formation; and questions of structure and agency. The chapter concludes by using the Miliband-Poulantzas debate as a lens through which to explore the limitations of subjectivist approaches to the state.

With chapter 2 the focus shifts from subjectivist theories to those which emphasise the importance of objective factors in constraining the actions of the state. A discussion of the manner in which environmental issues may be factored into traditional Marxist analyses of economic, or 'first order', crises, acts as a platform from which to examine the ways in which these crises are displaced onto the state. Drawing on the work of Offe, Habermas and O'Connor in particular, an account is provided of the contradictory nature of the functions fulfilled by the state, and the manner in which these contradictions manifest themselves in state, or 'second order', crises. Working the environment thread into the analytical weave, an exploration is undertaken into the manner in which the state has increasingly become accountable for the protection of the environment as part of its responsibility for the reproduction of the conditions of production. Following this, the chapter explores the various ways in which this responsibility places further contradictory pressures upon the state. Of particular interest is the manner in which the state's accumulation, or growth, imperative may militate against its ability to implement sustainable policies. It is within this context that ecological modernisation (EM) theory is discussed. Its relevance here revolves around its claims to have 'uncoupled' economic growth from environmental degradation. If this were the case, the state's accumulation imperative would no longer represent a barrier to the pursuit of sustainable policies. Finally, the state-centred approach of organisational realism is critically examined, the premises of which have been used by Alan Carter (1993; 1998; 2004) to explain an 'environmentally hazardous dynamic' within which states are trapped.



In chapters 3 and 4, the focus shifts to anarchism. It also shifts, therefore, from critiques of the state-in-capitalist-society to critiques of the state form in general. And whereas the direction of analysis in this thesis tends to flow from theories of the state to their environmental implications, with chapter 3 this is, to an extent, reversed. The focus is primarily on assessing the extent to which ‘lessons’ may be derived from nature for social and political organisation. In particular, this chapter examines the ‘naturalistic’ arguments which often underpin the libertarian optimism of anarchists, and their rejection of the state. For anarchists employing this mode of justification, studies of nature are deemed to reveal natural laws or tendencies which substantiate their normative vision. The state, on the other hand, is viewed as ‘unnatural’ or ‘artificial’ on the basis that it runs counter to, and subverts, these natural laws. Examining the naturalistic mode of justification contributes to an understanding of the affinity between anarchists and environmentalists by uncovering several areas of convergence between anarchistic and green thinking, particularly regarding their ‘monistic’ conceptualisation of the universe.

Naturalistic arguments, however, far from exhaust anarchism’s reserve of ecology-related criticisms of the state. Chapter 4 examines several non-naturalistic arguments forwarded by anarchists for viewing the state as anti-ecological, as part of a wider critical analysis of various stateless visions of the ecological society. Three models of ecoanarchism are singled out for particular attention: bioregionalism, social ecology and green syndicalism. The core components of a general, statist critique of ecoanarchism are gleaned from the various criticisms which may be levelled at these particular variants. The final sections of chapter 4, however, mount a qualified defence of ecoanarchism against this critique.

Finally, chapter 5 looks at the ways in which the social choice mechanism employed by the state may impact upon the achievement of green goals and values. It critically assesses the environmental credentials of liberal democracy before going on to examine proposals for the democratisation of existing state forms. As noted above, deliberative democracy is increasingly dominating the thinking of statist greens with regards the political system. For this reason, particular attention is given to

examining the reasons why green theorists have been attracted to the deliberative model. This assessment is split into a more abstract discussion of the green potential of deliberation as a form of communication orientated towards generalisable arguments and public interests, and an examination of the various proposals for the institutionalisation of deliberation. After examining barriers to the incorporation of deliberative mechanisms into representative systems, the focus shifts to John Dryzek's 'discursive', 'macro' conception of deliberative democracy.

A concluding section then draws together the findings of each chapter and outlines the implications they have for the future direction of green thinking on the state. It challenges both the notion that statist have secured a decisive victory over anarchism, and the increasing acceptance of capitalism and the liberal capitalist state on the part of green political theorists and large sections of the environmental movement. Comment is also made on the appeal of an ecosocialism informed by libertarian ideals.



# Chapter 1: Marxism, the State and the Environment I:

## The Instrumentalist Approach

*The political dominance of the economic elite, coupled with its class interests, places substantial constraints on society's ability to confront and deal with potentially devastating environmental problems. (Gonzalez 2001: 123)*

The Marxist-instrumentalist view of the state rarely gets a mention, if at all, in the recent spate of green commentaries on the state. Green political theorists, where they have sought to explicate the environmental implications of Marxist or neo-Marxist theories of the state, have almost exclusively concentrated on those variants of Marxism which emphasise structure over agency (see, for example, Eckersley 2004: 54-64; Hay 1994, 1996). This is not to say that instrumentalist *ideas* have never been connected with environmental issues. A number of studies have commented on the corporate community's ability to dominate environmental policy-making (see, *inter alia*, Crenson 1974; Cahn 1995; Ehlich and Ehlich 1996; Rowell 1996; Austin 2002; Davis 2002; Beder 2002; Gonzalez 2001, 2005). However, these studies are rarely embedded within a broader discussion about instrumentalism in its more comprehensive form, as a *theory of the state*.

This is perhaps due to the indirect nature of the relevance of instrumentalist ideas to environmental debates. As the quote which introduces this chapter indicates, the ability of a class to dominate the state only translates into a 'constraint on society's ability to confront and deal with potentially devastating environmental problems' when the specific 'class interests' of the elite in question are deemed to be at fundamental odds with green aims and values. Demonstrating this to be the case involves either an ecological critique of capitalism – the economic system which the capitalist class seeks to use the state to maintain – or a critique of the particular vision of environmentalism advocated by such a class. However, these critical

debates – debates which imbue instrumentalism with an environmental relevance, and in which the environment is at the *fore* of the discussion – are peripheral to the core claims of instrumentalism as a theory of the state.

There are, nonetheless, good reasons why the instrumentalist approach is the first comprehensive theory of the state to be examined in this thesis. The indirect nature of instrumentalism's environmental relevance does not detract from the implications its hypotheses would have, if they are deemed accurate, for green strategies for social change, and more generally for the state's potential to act 'as a facilitator of progressive environmental change rather than environmental destruction' (Barry and Eckersley 2005a: x). Hence, although sections of the proceeding account of instrumentalism are inevitably short of environmental content, their broader implications legitimise their inclusion here. Moreover, instrumentalism represents an ideal starting point, as it provides a state-centred context within which to introduce and examine several debates of wider relevance to the thesis. In particular, it acts as a platform from which to examine the ecological credentials (or lack thereof) of capitalism; the forms of environmentalism advocated by the capitalist class; questions of structure versus agency; and the impact of globalisation on the state. And by allowing an early stance to be taken on such issues, instrumentalism enables several theoretical markers to be put down which set the context for many of the debates pursued in later chapters.

Due to the wealth of relevant research conducted in the US and UK, the account of instrumentalism outlined here focuses on these two countries. There is evidence, however, that the trends it identifies are present in other western states (see Stokman *et al.* 1985). The account starts with an examination of the concept of the capitalist class – a concept central to the instrumentalist case – and details how it has developed over time. It then outlines the various mechanisms which instrumentalists believe serve to integrate the capitalist class, and the manner in which such mechanisms are deemed to assist in the forging of a coherent capitalist class position on the environment. The chapter then moves on to examine the means through which the capitalist class is said to 'capture' or 'instrumentalise' the state. It looks at the



ability of this class to 'colonise' the state and, more specifically, its capacity to colonise those positions within the state that are central to the formulation of environmental policy.

Following this, the impact of globalisation is factored into the account. A section is devoted to looking at the transnationalisation of the capitalist class and its integrative mechanisms. An account is then given of the rise of transnational *environmental* policy networks and the effect this has had in facilitating the convergence of business around a particular conceptualisation of sustainable development. And finally, within the context of globalisation, a section examines and refutes the claims of hyperglobalists regarding the 'retreat' or 'end' of the state.

As noted above, the key environmental implication of the capitalist class's capacity to instrumentalise the state lies in the environmental credentials of the particular mode of production it seeks to use the state to maintain – capitalism. This being the case, a substantial section is also devoted to outlining the ecological Marxist critique of capitalism. And finally, the last section of the chapter examines Nicos Poulantzas' critique of instrumentalism, and Miliband in particular, and questions whether a lack of structural considerations fatally wounds the instrumental case. It is argued here that Poulantzas himself goes too far in sacrificing agency on the alter of structural determinism. However, this does not rescue instrumentalism from the fact that structuralism limits the claims it can make, that objective structural forces limit the agency of state elites. This sets the argument for the next chapter which aims to examine these forces and the limits they place on the ability of the state to pursue environmental policies within a capitalist society. However, before any of this, a section dealing with the views of Marx towards the state is necessary as an introduction to the next two chapters.

### ***1.1 Marx and the Capitalist State***

It is an oft observed fact that Marx never forwarded a comprehensive analysis of the state. Through letters to Ferdinand Lassalle (Feb 22, 1858), Engels (Apr 2, 1858) and



Joseph Wedermeyer (Feb 2, 1859) we know that such a task was planned as part of an ambitious programme of work to be undertaken throughout the late 1850s and 1860s, but of this only Volume I of *Capital* was ever completed (Miliband 1977: 1-2). Instead, as Jessop (1990: 25) points out, 'his work on the state comprises a fragmented and unsystematic series of philosophical reflections, contemporary history, journalism and incidental remarks'. However, Marx's fleeting remarks on the subject provide the raw materials from which various nascent theories of the state can be gleaned. It is therefore useful to examine Marx's comments on the state in the early sections of this chapter, as his ideas form much of the battleground upon which contemporary Marxists are still engaged.

One approach to the state evident in Marx's work can be extricated from the deterministic sociology espoused in passages of *The German Ideology* (1845-46), *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) and the 'preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). Here the state, and indeed the entire juridico-political 'superstructure' of society, is viewed as surface reflections, often distorted, of the economic 'base' (See Marx [1859] 1992: 425-426). For example, property and contract law are viewed as legal expressions of relations of production; political struggles *within* the state are viewed as obscured reflections of real class struggle; whilst class struggle *outside* the state reflect the contradictions inherent between relations and forces of production (Jessop 1982: 9; 1990: 26). At its most extreme, this position is guilty of the worst form of economism, implying as it does that the state is a pure epiphenomenon of the economic base and therefore incapable of any degree of autonomy. As Jessop notes, such a view 'implies that there is a perfect correspondence between juridico-political relations and economic relations or, at best, some sort of lead or lag between them' (Jessop 1990: 27).

In Volume 3 of *Capital* (1893) Marx introduces a more overtly functionalist language, stressing the coordinating role played by the state in organising the division of labour. Irrespective of whether the ruling class controls the state, it is nevertheless structurally designed to ensure the optimal conditions for capital

accumulation. Such comments anticipate the view that the state functions as a *factor of social cohesion*. Evidence of this position can be found in *The German Ideology*, where Marx and Engels point out that the existence of the state *predates* the development of class antagonism, as it emerges out of the need for an institution capable of managing the common affairs of the members of the gentile society (Jessop 1982: 17). Within the 'classic' Marxist texts, Engels gives this position the most attention in *The Origins of the Family, Property and the State* ([1884] 1942); however, it is with the work of Nicos Poulantzas (1968; 1978) that it is given its most comprehensive exposition.

An approach which is more prevalent within Marx's writings, however, is to view the state as an instrument of class rule. In its voluntarist form this is taken to mean that the state serves the interests of the ruling class as a direct result of it being under the control of that class. Marx and Engels's ([1848] 1985: 82) claim that 'the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' is most commonly cited as evidence of their subscription to this view.

A purely instrumental approach tends to view the state as being *class-neutral*, implying that it can be utilised effectively by any social class capable of gaining control of it. It therefore also denies the state any significant autonomy, although this time economic determinism is swapped for class determinism. Where the wishes of short-sighted individual capitalists or fractions of capital are a threat to the long-term interests of capital in general the state may intervene against the former and in favour of the latter. However, this autonomy is only autonomy *within* the scope of the long-term interest of the ruling class.

The instrumental approach found favour particularly within the Marxist-Leninist literature. Lenin himself referred to the state as 'the instrument for the exploitation of wage-labour by capital' and commented that state personnel are bound to the ruling class by 'a thousand threads' (Lenin [1917] 1971:17). However, Lenin at times moves beyond a pure form of instrumentalism when emphasising that state



intervention and forms of political representation have an effect on class struggle itself. For Lenin, the modern democratic republic represents the ideal shell for capitalism. Such structural observations led him to reject the neutrality of the state and instead stress the need to replace it with a direct form of democracy (see Held, 1989). For Lenin the state was an instrument which in its current form could only be wielded by the capitalist class.

A more subtle but less developed approach to the state can be found in Marx's historical writings on French contemporary politics, *Class Struggles in France* (1850) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). In these works Marx introduces the idea that the state is capable of achieving relative autonomy from any *specific* class in situations where there is a balance of class forces. In such circumstances the state can act as the arbiter of class conflict. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx examines Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's rise to power and the attendant centralisation of power with the executive. Crucially, Marx emphasises that this development saw power wrenched away from both civil society *and* the bourgeoisie's political representatives. In situations such as this the state may become a 'parasitic body', imbued with a degree of autonomy sufficient enough to allow it to pursue its own private interests. However, again putting the 'relative' in relative autonomy, Marx stresses that the capitalist state is always constrained by its dependence upon the economy for the material resources upon which it survives. It must therefore generate policies consistent with the continued reproduction of capital accumulation and therefore the general objectives of the bourgeoisie.

Neo-institutionalists (see in particular Skocpol 1985; and Block 1987) have made various claims to the effect that Marx never dealt with the various institutional modes through which power is exercised and therefore the extent to which the state as an independent variable influences political, social and economic phenomena. However, a more careful reading of Marx's more historical works reveals him to have been keenly aware that the difference between holding *nominal* and *real* power within the state depends upon the particular balance of forces between its various branches. In order for a particular class to gain decisive control over the state it must control those

institutional branches of the state within which real power is vested (for an overview of this debate see Codato and Perssinotto 2002).

As noted above, various theoretical schools have developed from Marx's remarks on the state. This chapter and the next chart these strands of thought and question what relevance they have for green political theory. This chapter concentrates on the instrumentalist view of the state.

### ***1.2 Miliband and the Instrumentalist Approach***

Interest in the instrumental approach to the state was revived by Ralph Miliband in the late sixties and early seventies (Miliband 1969; 1970; 1973). For Miliband (1977: 66) 'In the politics of Marxism, there is no institution which is nearly as important as the state'. As emphasised in the introduction to his *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969), Miliband's original polemical concern was with the pluralist view of the state which was gaining orthodoxy at the time. Probably the most important theorist in this movement is Robert Dahl (1957; 1961), whose empirical investigations led him to view the competition between diverse interests as a source of democratic equilibrium that ensures power is disaggregated and non-cumulative. Miliband on the other hand, although using a similar methodology, involving power structure research, positional analysis and social analysis, used it to generate specifically Marxist results. In what is probably as concise a summary of the instrumentalist position as achievable, Miliband (1969: 23) states that 'the "ruling class" of capitalist society is that class which owns and controls the means of production and which is able, by virtue of the economic power thus conferred upon it, to use the state as its instrument for the domination of society'. By breaking this quote down we can identify three areas of research central to the instrumentalist case. First, instrumentalists must prove the existence of a relatively unified capitalist class which owns and controls the means of production; second, they must identify the mechanisms which enable this class to control the state; and third, they must explain the manner and extent to which state



policies serve the interests of the capitalist class. The following sections examine these areas in order to assess instrumentalist claims.

### ***1.2.1 The Capitalist Class***

Reports of the demise of class in advanced capitalist societies have become increasingly prevalent over the last 35 years or so, and there are reasons why one may be forgiven for viewing such claims as at least plausible. The last few decades witnessed the contraction and fragmentation of the industrial working class and the attendant decimation of the traditional labour movement; the marked and mutually antagonistic division between the dominant and subordinate classes has been blurred by the growth of the middle-classes; and capitalist class dominance has been challenged by the rise of a professional managerial stratum. Within the context of the instrumentalist view of the state, this last claim is most pertinent. Without a coherent capitalist class to talk of, the instrumentalist view of the state would disintegrate. It is unsurprising then that, for instrumentalists, rumours concerning the death of the capitalist class have been greatly exaggerated.

This, of course, is not to say that the capitalist class has remained unchanged throughout the development of capitalism. In Britain the rise of industrial capitalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century removed the centrality of land to economic production and thus shifted the base from which the capitalist class derived its economic power. Small industrial companies took the strain until their dominance was itself extinguished by the trend towards the monopolisation of both industry and finance. Barrow reports that in the US the vast bulk of capitalist economic activity is now concentrated in the fifty largest financial institutions, and the five hundred largest non-financial corporations (Barrow 2002: 14). Similarly, in the UK just 140 companies were responsible for half of the economy's manufacturing output in 1970, whereas in 1914 it took 2000 companies to produce the same amount; and in 1976 a mere 87 companies accounted for over half of British exports (Coates 1989: 22). These trends



are also replicated at the global level, with the *Fortune 500*, the worlds 500 largest corporations, responsible for 42% of global GNP in 1990 (Rowell 1996: 74).

It is not without good reason, then, that Miliband, and indeed the vast majority of those operating within the instrumentalist paradigm, view the corporation as the point of departure when attempting to define the capitalist class. As Miliband explains in the above quote, in Marxist terms, the capitalist class is comprised of those who own and control the major productive resources in society. Given that corporations clearly qualify as the major productive forces in society, it is reasonable for Miliband to define the ruling class as those who own and control such companies. As Barrow explains, the capitalist class is 'an overlapping economic network of authority based on institutional position (i.e., management) and property relations (i.e., ownership) (Barrow 2002: 15).

Barrow's quote would seem to sum up the concept of the capitalist class nicely. However, there have been important transformations in the structure of the business enterprise which have thrown up legitimate questions regarding the continued conceptual validity of the capitalist class. The replacement of small-scale with massive-scale business enterprises – a symptom of the movement towards monopoly capitalism – necessitated a change in the traditional structures of ownership. As Scott explains, 'as the enterprise grows in size it requires more capital than can be provided by one individual or family, and the legal forms of ownership become fetters on its further growth' (Scott 1997: 24). The requirement of massive capital investment rendered individual or family ownership unviable. No longer could the development and expansion of the enterprise be wholly dependent upon the personal wealth of such a limited group. The solution to this problem was the corporation, or joint stock enterprise, which by opening up investment opportunities to anyone willing and able, enabled companies to draw from a wider net of disposable wealth. Those who invest in the wealth of the company by purchasing a 'share' of its total capital are entitled to a dividend income in proportion to the level of their investment. However, whereas with the individually owned capitalist enterprise the entrepreneurial capitalist is the legal owner of all aspects of the business assets,

'shareholders' no longer have effective possession of the means of production. Rather, the corporation itself attains a legal existence and ownership of the business's assets.

Along with the legal separation of share ownership from the *effective ownership* of the means of production, there was an attendant break in the direct link between ownership and *effective control* due to major transformations in the share ownership demographic. Share holdings are increasingly dispersed amongst large numbers of investors with relatively small shares per head. With this dispersal it becomes logistically impossible for shareholders to play a hands-on role in the day-to-day running of the company. This job is undertaken by a board of directors and managers, the composition of which is decided by the majority vote of shareholders. For Berle and Means ([1932] 1947) and Bell (1961), such developments constituted a 'managerial revolution' in which owners had relinquished their position as the dominant class to this non-propertyied managerial stratum. This came about because the dispersal of shareholdings also makes it difficult to mobilise the majority of shares into an organised and coordinated block capable of exercising any effective control over these directors. As Scott (1997: 31) explains, 'the mass of shareholders can no longer be regarded as 'capitalist' in the strict sense, as they have merely a beneficial, and very small, interest in the affairs of the companies of which they are the nominal owners'. Managers in such situations are able to break from the control of shareholders and plough their own furrow so to speak.

To recap, then, the managerialist argument states that the diffusion of share holdings has undermined the validity of ownership of the means of production as an indicator of class position, and has effectively decoupled ownership from corporate control, which now resides in the hands of a propertyless managerial stratum. There are a number of responses instrumentalists make to these claims. Although the decline of individual and family ownership has been exaggerated somewhat (Bottomore 1989; Scott 1997), it is clear that such forms of ownership are no longer the norm in a capitalist economy. However, Bottomore (1989: 5) notes that 'studies of modern corporations have shown that although there is diffusion of share ownership a few



large shareholders are normally able to exert effective control'. Baran and Sweezy (1966: 35) supplement this with the observation that managers themselves are often among the largest shareholders (Mills 1956 also arrives at this conclusion).

These observations may be buttressed by a further set of arguments which stress the more indirect ways in which the propertied class converts its personal wealth into corporate control. John Scott (1997: 311) emphasises the ability of the capitalist class to monopolise the benefits of the education system:

Personal wealth allows the purchase of education; and it is education and the social connections that it brings that are the key to a business career for executive and financial capitalists. The connection between property and privilege allows the connection between capital and class to be sustained, despite the extended separation that exists between the mechanisms responsible for them. (Scott 1997: 311)

In the UK between 1939 and 1970 the proportion of directors sitting on the boards of the large clearing banks who had a public school education rose from 68.2% to 79.9%, with 60.4% of these directors being drawn from an Oxbridge background in 1970 (Scott 1997: 293). A similar correlation can be drawn in the US with regards to the Ivy League universities, which are highly exclusive and act as a gateway to a corporate career (Soares 2007).

By ensuring their children enter the top educational establishments, the capitalist class are ensuring that they mix in the appropriate social circles and establish the contacts necessary for a future in business. Private social clubs also fulfil this function and allow for the passing on of class values, beliefs and traditions. Their class-based exclusivity is secured by expensive initiation fees and annual dues, along with rigorous screening processes involving interviews with membership committees and often requiring nominations and letters of recommendation from existing members. Domhoff (2006: 59) reports that a case study of the highly exclusive Bohemian Club, located 75 miles North of San Francisco, found that, of a list of

1,144 Californian corporations, 24% had at least one director who was a guest at its 1991 annual two-week retreat. The figure for the top 100 corporations outside of California was 42% (see also Domhoff 1975). Kono *et al.* (1998) find that in the US the recruitment of non-executive directors is similarly mediated by club membership, a finding also reached by Useem (1984, see Table 1.1).

*Table 1.1 Percentage of corporate directors who are members of at least one exclusive social club, by inner-circle location.*

Number of large- company directorships	British Clubs		American clubs
	A est.	B est.	
One	24.6%	8.9%	10.9%
Two	41.4%	26.5%	31.5%
Three or more	37.4%	31.8%	46.9%

*Source:* Useem (1984: 65).

For the managerialist argument to undermine the instrumentalist position would require the corporate elite to draw its membership from a diverse class background. This would demonstrate that with the surrender of *ownership* individual entrepreneurs and wealthy families have simultaneously surrendered *control* of the means of production. What the above arguments demonstrate for instrumentalists, however, is that the capitalist class retains its control over the means of production, even if this is now mediated by the use of social mechanisms such as the education system.

There is a common distinction made within Marxist literature between a *class-in-itself* and a *class-for-itself*. The former is deemed to be a group whose members share a similar *objective* position in relation to the process of production. The latter, in addition to this, are conscious of the shared interests that arise from this similarity of objective position: they have a shared *subjectivity* or class-consciousness. It is vital to the instrumentalist case that the capitalist class may be viewed as a *class-for-itself* – a class with a consciousness of its shared interests. If this were not the case then the



coherence of arguments pertaining to capitalist class (singular) domination of the state would be under threat. It is also vital that it is able to *act* as a class. It must be able to formulate and act upon policy positions and strategies which are articulations of class-wide interests. This section outlines several factors which instrumentalists believe facilitate this process.

The first factor which some instrumentalists highlight as engendering corporate integration harks back to the shared educational and social background of these elite actors. As Matthew Bond (2007: 60-61) notes, a social capital approach explains how shared social background acts to ‘facilitate trust and allow [corporate actors] to take coordinated action that benefits each firm, which they would not be able to take if the directors came from different social backgrounds’. Integration is further facilitated by the structure of corporate networks. Financial institutions have increasingly become major shareholders in other companies. Table 1.2 shows how such companies have increased their share of the overall US corporate stock from 6.7% in 1900 to 34.7% in 1978; by 1990 this had risen to 53.3% (Scott 1997: 66). Similar trends are in evidence in the UK where in 1979 58% of listed ordinary shares were owned by financial institutions (Coates 1989: 26).

**Table 1.2 Beneficial ownership of US company shares (1900-1978)**

Type of holder	% of corporate stock held by each category			
	1900	1939	1974	1978
Bank-managed trusts	4.3	12.9	11.1	8.9
Pension funds	-	0.2	9.9	13.6
Investment companies	-	1.2	5.4	3.5
Life insurance companies	0.5	0.6	3.5	3.4
Other financials	1.9	2.1	3.3	5.3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>34.7</b>

*Source:* Scott (1997: 67)

This allows such institutions to have a direct influence on groups of corporations. However, this is not the only manner in which they facilitate corporate integration.

Financial institutions also derive power from their ability to control the flow of finance capital, without which production companies cannot survive. Indeed, for Mintz and Schwarz (1985) and Glasberg (1992), the ability of financial institutions to influence other corporations through the loans system secures them a hegemonic position within domestic economies. They represent the focal point of a corporate structure capable of generating a 'commonality of interest' (Mintz 1989: 215): the major regional banks organise capital allocation at the regional level, according to where their interests are located, while, as Mintz (1989: 218) notes, 'local orientations are transcended by the function of the major insurance companies which link the regions into a coherent whole'.

Another important factor believed by instrumentalists to generate corporate cohesion is the 'interlocking directorate', which exists whenever a stable network of overlapping directors are identified among a group of corporations. These interlocks are channels of communication, allowing multiple directors to transmit information from one board to another. Where there is a capital relation between the companies, as is the case between financial institutions and non-financial corporations, they may also constitute relations of power, acting as 'a means through which one enterprise is able to dominate the affairs of another' (Scott 1997: 7). This goes some way to explaining why when there is evidence of a stable interlocking directorate, and therefore a grouping of corporate enterprises, one or more dominant financial institutions will normally be central to this group.

Useem (1984) ascribes special significance to these multiple directors, a group which he calls the 'inner circle'. As he explains:

Central members of the inner circle are both top officers of large firms and directors of several other large corporations operating in diverse environments. Though defined by their corporate positions, the members of the inner circle constitute a distinct, semi-autonomous network, one that transcends company, regional, sectoral, and other politically divisive fault lines within the corporate community. (Useem 1984: 3)



The fact that this group of multiple directors transcends various possible cleavages within the capitalist class enables it to act as what Mintz (1989: 213) terms 'an effective organising element within the elite'. Such a group is able to mediate between financial and non-financial corporations, between competing intra-regional non-financial corporations and between owners and directors where the two are combined in the manner identified above by Baran and Sweezy (1966). It is their ability to think beyond the narrow interests of the individual corporation that enables them to lend cohesion to the actions of the corporate elite.

Perhaps the most important mechanism for integrating the corporate elite, though, is the corporate policy-planning network. These networks are composed of think tanks, foundations and policy-discussion groups, which are, in large part, funded by corporate interests, and whose directors and trustees are, to a large degree, drawn from the corporate elite. As Domhoff (1978: 61) explains 'it is within the policy process that the various sectors of the business community transcend their interest-group consciousness and develop an overall class consciousness'.

Policy-discussion groups are the foci of these networks and the key means through which the corporate elite are able to forge policy stances on national issues – stances that are more likely to reflect the interests of the elite as a whole rather than the narrow interests of particular corporations. As Domhoff (2006: 80) explains, policy-discussion organisations:

are non-partisan groups that bring together corporate executives, lawyers, academic experts, university administrators, government officials, and media specialists to talk about such general problems as foreign aid, trade, taxes, and environmental policies. Using discussion groups of varying sizes, these organisations provide informal and off-the-record meeting grounds in which differences of opinion on various issues can be aired and the arguments of specialists can be heard.

Think-tanks, on the other hand, are where ‘The deepest and most critical thinking within the policy-making network takes place’ (Domhoff 2006: 87). They are non-profit organisations which employ academics amenable to the corporate agenda in order to generate the policy ideas which will be further scrutinised in policy discussion groups. Think-tanks are normally involved in identifying and re-packaging existing research rather than undertaking original research themselves. As Desai (1994) puts it, referring to the Institute of Economic Affairs’ description of itself, they are ‘second-hand dealers in ideas’. Their integrative capacity stems from the fact that, by receiving funding from multiple donors, they are in a sense forced to produce findings which are in the interests of the corporate community in general rather than those of a particular company. As Andrew Austin (2002: 79) comments, ‘They produce knowledge designed to raise and align the political consciousness of the capitalist class’. In the US think-tanks are particularly important to the process of generating policy consensus due to the fact that in the US political parties do not play as active a role in policy development as in other industrial countries and generally lack ideological coherence (Beder 2002: 83).

Prominent examples of think-tanks which have worked to forge a coherent corporate position on environmental issues include the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute and the George C. Marshall Institute. To take one of these as an example: the Cato Institute is a libertarian think-tank which, according to its web-site, is committed to the ‘traditional American principles’ of limited government, individual liberty and free markets ([www.cato.org](http://www.cato.org)). It has produced a variety of anti-environmentalist literature which, for example, questions the reality of global warming (Michaels 1992), presents the International Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) projections on global warming as a ‘fix’ (Michaels and Balling, Jr. 2000), argues the *benefits* of global warming (Moore 1998), attacks the use of state regulation in ensuring environmental protection (DeLong 2002) and defends the use of free markets in solving environmental problems (Segerfeldt 2005; Goklany 2007). The Cato Institute is funded by a number of major corporations, including Amoco, ARCO and Dow Chemical (Hammond 1997).



### ***1.2.2 Capturing the State***

The above discussion outlines the manner in which, for instrumentalists, similarities in social background, the structure of the corporate network, interlocking directorates and the corporate policy-planning network serve to integrate the capitalist elite. It is now vital to outline the means by which this class is able to control the state. Two broad strategies are outlined in this section: colonisation and lobbying.

The most direct means by which the capitalist class secures its control *over* the state is through its colonisation *of* the state. For Miliband, the state is explicitly capitalist in its class composition. A substantial body of evidence has been generated which lends credence to this view (see, *inter alia*, Mills 1956; Burch 1980, 1981; Domhoff 2006). Overlaps between the corporate elite and the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the state are especially pronounced in the US. Miliband (1969: 53) notes that of the total number of US cabinet members between 1889 and 1949, more than 60% were businessmen of some form. An update of these figures confirms the continuation of capitalist class influence. The current president, George W. Bush comes from a family with intimate connections with the oil industry and was founder and CEO of the Bush Exploration Oil and Gas Company between 1975 and 1986, while vice president Dick Cheney was CEO of the oil services company Halliburton from 1995-2000. Of the 20 remaining cabinet ranking officials, 60% have served major corporations or financial institutions at board level. The legislative branch of the state's governmental apparatus is also heavily colonised by the capitalist class. As Robert Reich (2001), former labour secretary in the Clinton administration, stated in *The New York Times*: 'There is no longer any countervailing power in Washington. Business is in complete control of the machinery of government. The House, the Senate and the White House are all run by business-friendly Republicans who are deeply indebted to American business for their electoral victories'. Donations to the electoral campaigns of individual candidates and political parties are a vitally important component of the capitalist class's strategy for ensuring that these 'right people' get into political office. Julian Borger (2001), writing in *The*

*Guardian*, notes that for the 2000 US election the Bush campaign received, *inter alia*, \$25.6 million from bank and credit-card firms, \$25.4 million from Oil and Gas companies, \$17.8 million from pharmaceutical firms, \$4.2 million from airlines, \$3.2 million from timber companies and \$2.6 million from the mining sector.

Similar patterns of colonisation can be discerned in the UK. In 1994 135 Conservative MPs held 287 directorships and 146 consultancies between them, with 29 Labour MPs holding 60 directorships and 43 consultancies (Rowell, 1996: 78). Moreover, the peerage process has acted as a route for corporate leaders to access parliament's second chamber; indeed, at the time of writing, the current Labour executive has recently been subject to a police investigation over claims that it swelled its coffers by swapping cash-for-honours. It must be emphasised, however, that the peerage system is set to change as a result of the proposed reforms to the House of Lords (see Kelso 2006). The process can also work in reverse, though: MPs deemed to be loyal to corporate interests are often rewarded with directorships when they step down from the legislative assembly. As Rowell (1996: 79) comments, 'the revolving door just keeps on spinning in a synergistic relationship that both parties profit from'.

Shifting the focus to the environment, there is plenty of evidence that corporate elites have been able to colonise positions of particular relevance to the formulation and direction of environmental policy. George A. Gonzalez (2001) notes the appointment of Gifford Pinchot and Stephen Mather – two prominent members of the corporate elite and active members of corporate policy-planning networks – to director positions within the US Forest service and the National Park Service at the time of their inception. In a detailed study of these agencies Gonzalez demonstrates that: 'As a result of Pinchot's and Mather's appointments, ideas developed within their respective networks were incorporated into the public policies of both the forest and park services' (Gonzalez 2001: 18). In a more contemporary vein, Bush senior's appointment of William Reilly as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), although applauded by 'official' mainstream environmentalists, was not free of corporate influence. Reilly's environmental stripes were earned through his



involvement with the Conservation Foundation and its offshoot, Clean Sites Inc – an organisation considered by more grassroots environment groups to be little more than a ‘willing cover for corporate interests ... helping corporations minimise their liability for waste-site cleanups’ (Tokar 1997: 22). He was also director of both the Environmental Defence Fund and the Conservative Fund, organisations which are exponents of what Mark Dowie (1995) terms ‘third wave environmentalism’, a central tenet of which is the notion that ‘all non-fraudulent businesses and industries deserve to exist, even if their technologies or products are irreversibly degrading to the environment (Dowie 1995: 108). Similarly, George W. Bush’s appointment of Gale A. Norton as Secretary of the Interior, a position she held from 2001-2006, further demonstrates the instrumental linkage which exists between corporate elites and influential positions within the state. As Austin (2002: 72) notes, ‘Pairing Norton with the cabinet level post directly concerned with conservation and protection of the natural environment was a bold and potentially divisive move by the new president’ – bold and divisive because of her connections with the corporate elite. Norton was senior council at Brownstein, Hyatt, Farber and Strickland, a firm noted for representing the key petroleum interests. She also received funding from corporations such as Amoco, ARCO and the CMA during her period as research fellow at the Political Economy Research Centre; however, it is her position as founder and former chair of the Council of Republicans for Environmental Advocacy (CREA) which most solidly demonstrates her corporate connections. The CREA is funded by mining, chemical and chlorine industries such as the Chemical Manufacturers Association and the National Coal Council, and whose steering group is comprised of various prominent lobbyists for these industries (Austin 2002). In the UK, on the other hand, Gordon Brown has recently appointed Digby Jones as life peer and minister in the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform – the department responsible for energy policy (Monbiot 2007). Jones was director-general of the Confederation of Business and Industry from 2001-2006 which, during this tenure, called for road taxes to be abolished and for the climate change levy to be frozen.

A look at the composition of pressure groups also reveals the extent of the overlap between economic and political elites. For example, The National Wilderness Institute – a US pressure group founded by the Hardwood Manufacturers Association – has had several prominent political figures sit on its General Council, including members of the Senate, such as Steven D. Symms and Larry Craig (both R-Idaho); and members of Congress, including Charles H. Taylor (R-North Carolina), Richard Pombo (R-California) and Dan Young (R-Arkansas) (Austin 2002).

Critics of the instrumentalist approach have claimed that its proponents, in outlining such a close relationship between the capitalist class and the political elite, are culpable of suggesting that the state is incapable of acting contrary to the interests of the capitalist class. If this were the case, they would therefore be unable to explain instances where other classes have made significant impacts on the policy agenda. However, as Barrow (1993: 26) points out, such a criticism confuses the theory of instrumentalism with its empirical findings, and ignores the fact that viewing the class character of state actors as vitally important *presupposes* the analytical separation of class and state. This opens up the possibility that if non-capitalist parties were able to seize control of the state they would be able to direct its power towards realising their own goals. This form of critique also over-exaggerates the empirical claims made by proponents of the instrumentalist approach. It is important to note the distinction Miliband makes between governing and ruling. Governing entails the day-to-day decision making and running of the state, whereas to rule is to have *ultimate control*. Miliband emphasises that the state is composed of five institutional clusters, or elements: the governmental apparatus, the administrative apparatus, the coercive apparatus, the judicial apparatus and sub central governments (Miliband 1969: 49-53). What is required to gain ultimate control of any state depends upon its own *particular* institutional form. In a state where the executive is particularly weak, for example, governmental power is uncoupled from state power and needs to be supplemented with control over other elements. Thus, socialist control over the executive has not necessarily enabled them to control the state as a whole, with the flip side of this being that the capitalist class has generally not ‘assumed the major share of government’ (Miliband 1969: 55), yet has maintained



ultimate control of the state. As Barrow points out, it is better to think of state control as being 'the degree to which members of the capitalist class control the state apparatus through *interlocking positions* in the governmental, administrative, coercive, and other apparatuses' (Barrow 2002: 17, emphasis added).

Due to the fact that the capitalist class's colonisation of the state is imperfect, it is vital that it operates within the political system to influence state managers. Lobbying is central to this task; indeed, it is often the case that corporate actors expend a greater amount of capital on lobbying activities than on campaign finance. Domhoff (2006: 174) reports that the top 20 defence contractors in the US spent \$400 million on lobbying between 1997 and 2003, compared with only \$46 million on campaign contributions during the same period. The institutions of the policy-planning network play an important role here, beyond their integrative function, by seeking to influence government and the policy agenda. Policy-discussion groups, 'Through such avenues as books, journals, policy statements press releases and speakers ... influence the climate of opinion in both Washington and the country at large' (Domhoff 2006: 90). Beder (2002: 75) similarly notes that think-tanks:

insinuate themselves into the networks of people who are influential in particular areas of policy by publishing books, briefing papers, journals and media releases for policy-makers, journalists and people able to sway those policy-makers. They liaise with bureaucrats, consultants, interest groups, lobbyists and others, and seek to provide advice directly to the government officials in policy networks and to government agencies and committees, through consultancies or through giving testimony at hearings.

For example, the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Centre for Policy Studies, which was founded by Keith Joseph, were particularly influential in shaping the economic policy of the Thatcher government in the UK.

With regards to environmental issues, the manner in which the corporate community in the US was able to mould the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act stands out as an example of its ability to 'instrumentalise' the state through lobbying and colonisation. Over 100 businesses organised themselves into the Clean Air Working Group (CAWG), which 'served as a mechanism for business to resolve disputes among themselves and to present the consensus proposals to the administration and congress' (Gonzalez 2001: 102). The substantial resources of its members were then utilised to lobby Congress – activities which were greatly assisted by the positioning of business sympathisers to vital roles within the policy-making process. For example, President Bush's 'tribunal', which was responsible for the formulation of the clean air legislation, was composed of James D. Watkins, Energy Secretary and director of power companies, Southern California Edison and Philadelphia Electric; Richard G. Darman, director of the Office of Management and Budget and director of the power company, AES Corporation; and the aforementioned William Reilly, head of the EPA (Gonzalez 2001: 103). The House Energy and Commerce Committee, on the other hand, which was responsible for formulating those provisions of the act relating to automobile and fuel emissions, was chaired by John Dingell (D-Michigan), a known ally of the automobile industry. The Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) shows Dignall's top three contributors to be from this industry, contributing over £100,000 between them (CRP nd.).

The opposition to the CAWG came in the form of another umbrella organisation, the National Clean Air Coalition (NCAC), which included environmental groups, church groups, civic groups, public health groups and labour unions. The clean air 'issue network' was therefore not solely composed of business interests, but also public interest groups. As Gonzalez (2001: 103) notes, 'Consequently, if the pluralist or state autonomy/issue network models represent an accurate depiction of the policymaking process, the final legislative result should represent a meaningful compromise between the view of these competing organizations'. This, however, was not the case: 'the national regulatory regime established under the 1990 Clean Air Act reflected strongly the policy preferences of those segments of the corporate community affected by the new regulatory regime'. For example, with regards



automobile emissions, rather than demanding increases in the use of alternative fuels or of gasoline additives – solutions which threaten the oil industry’s lucrative gasoline market – the Clean Air Act focuses on lowering automobile emissions through the introduction and development of technologies such as catalytic converters. This solution is sub-optimal from the point of view of lowering overall emissions, as it takes some time for new models to replace older, more polluting ones. Similarly, with regards industrial pollution, rather than employing direct taxation, the Clean Air Act supports a permit trading system, which is ineffectual and, in Gonzalez’s (2001: 111) words, ‘conforms to the corporate view of a regulatory regime’ (see Tokar 1997: 37-41; and Sarkar 1999: 140-147 for a critique of such methods). Moreover, in addition to being able to significantly influence the style of regulation advocated, business was able to puncture the legislation with ‘forty pages of exceptions, extensions, and other loopholes’ (Domhoff 2006: 175). And lobbying activities did not cease with the passing of the bill. The Environmental Working Group (EWG 1997) reported that, between 1995 and 1997, ‘major companies that will have to control pollution under newly approved Clean Air Act regulations contributed \$12.2 million to members of the U.S. House of Representatives’; and that ‘Campaign gifts from polluting companies were nearly three times greater to House sponsors of a bill to delay pollution controls compared to House members who do not cosponsor’. Lobbying attention was also directed at the EPA as business sought to impede effective regulation. As a result, by 1998 the EPA had managed to issue standards on less than ten hazardous chemicals (Domhoff 2006: 175).

This provides us with a comprehensive account of the core components of the instrumentalist argument. Thus far, however, the discussion has focused on national bourgeoisies, and has discussed their actions solely in terms of the impact they have on the nation-states within whose sovereign boundaries they reside. The following section, on the other hand, examines the effect globalisation has had on the form and accuracy of such arguments. It looks at the impact globalisation has had on the process of class formation and on what some have argued is the appearance of a transnational capitalist class (TCC). This provides a context within which to examine

the form of environmentalism propagated by such a class. And finally, the impact globalisation has had on the sovereignty of the state is explored in order that the continuing relevance of the state as a subject of analysis may be assessed.

### ***1.3 Globalisation, Class and the State***

Any Marxist theory of class starts from an analysis of the economy. As Marx ([1847] 2006) explained: '[The] social relations between the producers, and the conditions under which they exchange their activities and share in the total act of production, will naturally vary according to the character of the means of production'. In recent times, this model of class formation has been employed to examine the effects of globalisation on the make-up of the capitalist class. In a world of national economies all aspects of the circuit of capital were contained within national borders. However, in a rapidly globalising world, production practices, the placement of resulting commodities and the profits generated, are to an increasing degree globally dispersed. For Robinson, 'the globalization of production and the extensive and intensive enlargement of capitalism in recent decades constitute the material basis for the process of transnational class formation' (Robinson 2004: 54).

This transnational capitalist class (TCC), as we would expect, is deemed to comprise the owners of transnational capital, and in particular transnational corporations (TNCs) and private financial institutions. Sklair (1997: 521) notes that members of this class tend to have 'outward-orientated global rather than inward-orientated national perspectives on a variety of issues', as befits a class whose interests lie in global over national accumulation. The mechanisms of class integration highlighted above are claimed by supporters of the transnational-capitalist-class-thesis to have been replicated at the international level. Transnationally interlocking directorships are increasingly prevalent, facilitating communication between owners and managers of TNCs, and thereby creating 'mutual trust, the potential [for one company to] monitor or even to exercise control over another company, and a common identity that shapes the members' behaviour more than their national identities' (Nollert



2005: 294). Staples (2006: 315) notes that the percentage of companies with at least one non-national board member rose from 36.2% in 1993 to 75% in 2005. Robinson (2004: 57-62, 64-67) supplements these findings with evidence demonstrating increases in cross-border mergers and acquisitions and strategic alliances. Carroll and Carson (2003), on the other hand, focus on the role played by international corporate-policy networks – in particular the International Chamber of Commerce, the Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral Commission and The World Economic Forum. Borrowing Useem's (1984) terminology, they report that a relatively small 'inner circle' of corporate directors 'knit the corporate-policy network together by participating in transnational interlocking and/or multiple policy groups. This inner circle creates the interlocks that make the network a transnational formation' (Carroll and Carson 2003: 52). In a passage worth quoting in full, they stress the importance such networks have for elite integration:

Although the practice of interlocking corporate directorates already links most of the world's leading corporations into a single network, corporate policy interlocks make a dramatic contribution to global corporate-elite integration. This additional layer of social structure, within which leading corporate capitalists step beyond their immediate economic interests to take up matters of global concern, pulls the directorates of the world's major corporations much closer together, and collaterally integrates the lifeworld of the global corporate elite. (Carroll and Carson 2003: 52)

Transnational policy networks organised around specifically environmental issues proliferated in the 1980s. The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) founded its own Commission on Environment, and held a World Conference of Environmental Management in 1984 which attracted 500 leaders of business. In 1990 the ICC adopted the Business Charter for Sustainable Development and formed the Global Environmental Management Initiative to aid with its implementation. The most influential green business network to result from ICC activity is the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD); however, Sklair (2001: 204) is correct to point out that it is still one amongst many which have sprung up since the

late 1980s. In particular, the Global Climate Coalition (GCC), formed in 1989 and representing almost a quarter of a million separate firms, has proved itself an influential actor as business's voice on global warming. Rowell (1996) perceived there to be around 40 transnational business policy networks dealing with environmental issues in the mid-1990s.

There is evidence that these transnational environmental policy networks have had the integrative effect predicted by instrumentalist theory. Rutherford (2003: 149) observes that: 'Since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, business messages about the environment have reached a level of unprecedented sophistication and organisational commitment ... advocates of business greening "live" in a collective ideology'. As the names of some of policy networks mentioned above suggest, business's response to the environment has largely converged around the concept of sustainable development. The most widely used definition of this concept is that provided in the 1987 UN-sponsored World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report, *Our Common Future*, commonly referred to as the Brundtland report. Here sustainable development is defined as: 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED 1987: 43). However, the WCED definition was kept deliberately vague so as to facilitate as widespread a subscription to the concept as possible, to the extent that Pearce *et al.* (1989: 173-185) were able to disentangle 40 different interpretations of the WCED definition (see also Jacobs 1999). As a result, to say that business subscribes to the concept of sustainable development reveals little; what is more important is how business interprets the concept.

As Sklair (2001: 206) explains, the corporate community quickly sought to secure 'ownership, redefinition, and effective monopoly [over] the public appropriation of sustainable development', recognising it to be an opportunity to move beyond the negative, anti-growth and therefore explicitly anti-capitalist forms of environmentalism which had previously dominated environmental discourse. Stephan Schmidheiny, honorary chairman of the WBCSD and chief advisor for business and industry to the secretary general of the 1992 United Nations Conference



on Environment and Development (UNCED), interprets the concept to entail: 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the welfare of future generations. This concept recognises that *economic growth and environmental protection are inextricably linked*' (Schmidheiny 1992: 4, emphasis added). As Mebratu (1998: 505) explains, the WBCSD definition of sustainable development asserts that economic growth is essential 'for sustaining growing populations, and eventually stabilizing population'. The traditional tension between economic growth and environmental sustainability – the central concern of the limits to growth thesis – is downplayed or reinterpreted as limits to pollution and disposal rather than limits to supply and consumption. For business, these latter issues are to be resolved by technological developments and increased energy and resource efficiency; and given the technological capacity and resources available to business sector, this provides the basis for their claim to be the ones who should provide leadership in the quest for sustainable development (Schmidheiny 1992). Sklair (2001: 207) also notes that business uses its particular conceptualisation of sustainable development, 'to deflect attention from the idea of a singular crisis and to build up the credibility of the idea that what we face is a series of manageable environmental problems. Sustainable development, then, can be achieved piecemeal by meeting all these separate problems as they arise'.

Rutherford (2003) derives further insights into business's interpretation of sustainable development, and indeed its approach to the environment in general, from analyses of the discourse employed by business at the 2002 United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) (see also Rutherford 2006). The message of business at the Johannesburg summit was coordinated by Business Action for Sustainable Development (BASD), a subsidiary of the WBCSD which was created specifically for the event and therefore disbanded after its conclusion. In 2001, membership of BASD comprised of 161 corporations, and its delegation to the summit consisted of 71 corporations and 38 CEO's (Rutherford 2003: 146). It therefore constitutes a substantial transnational corporate policy network. Rutherford identifies six main 'reference points' which underpin the discourse employed by business leaders at the summit:

- 1) markets must be 'free and equitable';
- 2) effective sustainable development requires the application of international regulatory frameworks as co-ordination mechanisms;
- 3) eco(nomic)-efficiency should characterise all production processes;
- 4) voluntary forms of corporate social responsibility should be extended to the environment;
- 5) channels of communication must take place between business and environmental stakeholders;
- 6) partnerships are the only means of realising a market driven and judiciously regulated business environment relationship (Rutherford 2003: 146-147).

In sum, business interprets the concept of sustainable development in a manner which renders it compatible with established neo-liberal discourse. The boundaries of the concept are moulded around the boundaries of acceptable interference considered from the perspective of the requirements of capital accumulation.

A second question of relevance to arise out of a discussion of globalisation concerns its implications for the nation-state. Various commentators (see, *inter alia*, Reich 1991; Strange 1996; Ohmae 1996; Gray 1998; Greider 1997) claim that globalising pressures have led to the retreat or even 'end of the state' (Ohmae 1996). According to such obituaries, in the movement towards a 'borderless world' (Ohmae 1996) the nation-state is forced to cede increasing economic, political and cultural control to the global market, TNCs and supranational bodies. However, globalisation theorists – and particularly 'hyperglobalists' – tend to underestimate the role played by the state in the process of globalisation, and to overstate the extent to which changes in the current, globalised, phase of capital accumulation undermine state sovereignty and thereby downgrade its importance as an institutional actor worthy of further analysis. Barrow (2005: 129, 125) convincingly argues that, on the contrary, 'The function of the nation-state has not been diminished as a result of globalization'; the state remains 'the guarantor of the political and material conditions necessary for global capital accumulation', in that it still plays the vital role of managing the



contradictory pressures of the process of global capital accumulation and that of national legitimation (one of the main subjects of the next chapter). Barrow agrees with Cox (1987) that we are witnessing the *internationalisation* of the state rather than its retreat. Glassman (1999: 673, emphasis in original) defines this as '*a process in which the state apparatus becomes increasingly orientated towards facilitating capital accumulation for the most internationalized investors, regardless of their nationality*'. Whereas in previous phases of capital accumulation the state acted in defence of domestic welfare in the face of external disturbances, this orientation has shifted, with the state becoming more of a transmission belt from the global to the national economy. Moreover, for Barrow (2005: 145), rather than being powerless in the face of globalising pressures, states have acted as the *principal agents* of globalisation, 'by exercising their enormous power to realign the state apparatuses with transnational capital, to reconstitute property and contract law, and to implement and enforce the provisions of international trade and investment agreements'. Indeed, the very structural readjustment policies often interpreted by globalisation theorists as evidence of the retreat of the state – such as those concerned with deregulation and the privatisation of state assets – actually require for their implementation states strong enough to push them through in the face of significant domestic opposition (see Weiss 1997: 20-26). Moreover, the 'rollback' of the state is not a uniform phenomenon. Even in states where there has been a marked commitment to paring down the public sector, there has tended to be an expansion of the state's environmental portfolio as a result of the failure of markets to adequately protect the environment (Meadowcroft 2005; ch. 3). As Christoff (2005: 50) explains:

Even if the state were capable of retreating from or even shedding its historically accrued responsibilities for certain allocative and productive functions – those relating to social reproduction – the intensification of global environmental crisis means the state is increasingly being pressed to perform a green welfare function by organizing and funding remediation, infrastructure provision, research and implementation, and regulating environmental degradation in the environmental domain.

The important point is that, as Hay (2006: 77) notes, although ‘the internationalization of capital has rendered (more) porous the boundaries of formerly closed national economies ... it has not lessened the significance of national differences or indeed national *states* in the regulation of capitalist accumulation’. Indeed, the setting up of a transnational or global state would seem to be contrary to the long-term interests of transnational capital: ‘it is the political fragmentation of the globalized economy that makes the threat of capital flight and disinvestment operative. The structural power of transnational capital can be effective only in a world where capital has the ability to move from one state to another in search of competitive advantages’ (Barrow 2005: 136). Robinson’s (2001) claim that a transnational state (TNS) is emerging from global institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO is therefore both counter-intuitive and inaccurate. It is counter-intuitive, as such a move is against the interests of transnational capital; it is inaccurate because these institutions simply do not have the monopoly on legitimate violence that is the ‘constitutive essence of stateness’ (Barrow 2005: 137). As Fred Block (2001: 220) explains:

A true TNS would need to have an effective monopoly on legitimate violence. This requires two rather difficult steps – the first is that nations like the United States would place their troops permanently under the command of some transnational entity. Second, soldiers from the United States, Europe and Japan would have to be willing to lose their lives to impose neoliberal policies on recalcitrant populations in different parts of the world. Neither of these steps seems imminent.

Narrowing the focus back on to the subject of this particular chapter, Matthias Finger (2005: 296 emphasis added) is correct in observing that: ‘TNCs ... have an interest in a strong state, *provided that they can influence its behaviour*’. In other words, there are significant incentives for the capitalist class to ‘instrumentalise’ the state, despite the changes brought about as a result of globalisation.



#### ***1.4 The Ecological Marxist Critique of Capitalism***

As evidenced in the manner that the capitalist class constructs its response to environmental issues, its interests lie in maintaining the current economic structure. To put it another way: its interests lie in securing those relations of production which enable the extraction of surplus value from workers, and thereby capital accumulation. To be even more specific: its interests lie in protecting the private ownership of, and control over, the means of production, and the retention of private control over investment decisions and capital allocation (Barrow 1993: 40). The implications of the capitalist class's ability to instrumentalise the state – beyond those concerning the state's lack of democratic authenticity – depend, therefore, on the normative judgements made over capitalism as an economic system. For Marxists, the capitalist class's instrumentalisation of the state is a concern primarily because this class uses the state to maintain an exploitative and alienating mode of production. Similarly, the reason why Gonzalez (2001: 123), in the quote which introduced this chapter, believes that 'the political dominance of the economic elite ... places substantial constraints on society's ability to confront and deal with potentially devastating environmental problems', lies in the fact that the interests of this class lie in maintaining a mode of production which is antithetical to green goals and values. It is worthwhile examining the observations ecological Marxists in particular have made on this point.

One of the basic tasks for any successful economy is to ensure that society's overall labour capacity is allocated in need-satisfying production of differing types. This is done through the management of the division of labour. In pre-capitalist peasant-family production, the division of labour was consciously planned and regulated *prior* to production. However, such an approach is antithetical to the logic of a capitalist commodity economy, with privately owned, independent enterprises dominating production. Instead, any given expenditure of labour is socially validated as being part of the *socially necessary labour-time* of society, as being *need-satisfying* production, by the end product realising an exchange-value on the market.

The market therefore regulates the division of labour *postproduction* (Burkett 1999: 57).

This socially necessary labour time – what Marx calls abstract labour – plays a homogenising role in that it abstracts from the qualitative differences between specific labouring activities. All productive activities can be calculated quantitatively according to the average labour time necessary for their completion. Socially necessary labour time is the source of *value* in *general*, and although such value can only find expression in the *particular* exchange-values attached to specific products, underlying any particular exchange-value is value as socially necessary labour time.

Just as socially necessary labour time abstracts from qualitative differences in the realm of productive activity, so too does it play a homogenising role in the realm of exchange. Every commodity must inevitably have a *use-value*, defined as the real-world material form in which a commodity's need satisfying quality is manifested. In their form as use-values, commodities face each other in a state of *qualitative* non-equivalence in that there is no standard measurement by which they can be compared. However, when represented as an exchange-value, as an expression of abstract labour expenditure, their existence as qualitatively differentiated use-values is abstracted from, allowing them to confront each other as *quantitative* equivalents. This abstraction eventually takes the form of money, which acts as 'the form of appearance of the value of commodities – that is, as the material in which the magnitude of their value is expressed' (Marx [1867] 1976: 184). Money is the physical representation of value and completes the abstraction from use-value.

With the commodification of labour – the creator of value in production – the generation of surplus value and profit through exploitation becomes a possibility. This sets off a change in the character of production. In pre-capitalist societies the main motivation driving production was the creation of necessary use-values. This is not to say that exchange did not take place, it clearly did; rather, it is to emphasise that exchange itself remained tied to the goal of use value attainment. Marx expressed this pre-capitalist exchange process in the formula C-M-C (C representing



commodity and M representing money). A commodity is exchanged for money in order that another use value can be obtained. In capitalist production however, the circuit of capital is exchange orientated rather than use orientated, following the formula M-C-M. 'The capitalist's 'person, or rather his pocket, is the point from which the money starts, and to which it returns' (Marx [1867] 1976: 254). The primary motivation behind production and exchange is therefore the attainment of money. However, as Marx points out, such a process 'would be absurd and empty if the intention were, by using this roundabout route, to exchange two equal sums of money' (Marx [1867] 1976: 248). Rather, the capitalist throws their money into circulation for the purpose of generating surplus value or profit: 'value here is the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus value from itself' (Marx [1867] 1976: 255).

As Paul Burkett (1999: 58) points out, for such a system to become the dominant, generalised form of production, there must be a social separation of workers from the conditions of production, of which nature is included. Such a separation ensures that no individual can obtain that which is necessary for his or her subsistence independent of interaction with the commodity market. It also ensures that, for those who do not own the means of production, wage-labour becomes the only means of obtaining the money necessary to be able to undertake this interaction successfully.

This account of the change in the character of production with the advent of capitalism and its 'value-form' of representing wealth helps shed light on the logic driving some of capitalism's inherently anti-ecological characteristics. In particular, two aspects of capitalism combine to ensure its ecologically destructive nature. First, there is the fact that the quantitative logic driving the specifically capitalist value-form of representing wealth abstracts from, neglects and therefore stands in *potential* contradiction with, the qualitative, material basis of wealth. As Burkett puts it:

Money as a representative of value abstracts from the qualitative variegation of nature, from environmental distinctions and relationships –

from ecological diversities – insofar as these are not manifested in the *quantity* of social labour time required to appropriate and productively utilise natural conditions (Burkett 1999:84).

Despite this abstraction, though, value must be objectified in some form of material use-value. Although a commodity's qualitative, 'natural', material-form is not accounted for in the value-form, it is still the case that this is obviously an essential element of any commodity; without it, it would have no material existence. However, capitalism is forced by its central abstraction to assume the commensurability of the qualitative and material basis of commodity production – its natural aspect – and the quantitative logic of capitalist accumulation governing the production process. Nature as an essential condition and instrument of production is therefore expected to adhere to the dictates of its own abstract quantitative representation.

An important example of the possible contradiction between a commodity's value-form and its material basis is that, as Deleage (1994: 38) notes, 'from its start capitalism has treated nature as unlimited'. Money as the general equivalent of value can expand infinitely; it recognises no limits to growth. However, its material basis consists of a world of finite natural resources. Before going on to identify in more detail other ecologically destructive forms this overarching contradiction can take, however, it is essential to explore the second aspect of capitalism which ensures its anti-ecological nature. Whereas the value-form's abstraction from the material base of the commodity provides the *potential* for contradiction, it is the inherently growth orientated and expansive nature of capitalism which ensures that this potential is realised. To take the previous example, the mere fact that the value-form fails to take into account natural limits, when taken on its own, does not mean that the economy will inevitably go on to breach these limits. Rather, the inevitability of this breach is provided by the growth dynamic central to the logic of capitalist accumulation – a logic which nature is expected to adhere to, and is itself a by-product of the value-form. As Marx ([1867] 1976: 252) explains, in pre-capitalist production: 'The repetition or renewal of the act of selling in order to buy finds its measure and its goal (as does the accumulation process) in a final purpose which lies outside it,



namely consumption, the satisfaction of definite needs'. However, with capitalism 'in buying in order to sell ... the end and the beginning are the same, money or exchange-value and this very fact makes the movement an endless one' (Marx [1867] 1976: 252). The lack of use-value orientation therefore deprives capitalism of an inherent end-point, as the point of rest is the next point of departure; it is inherently expansive. Use-value is only a secondary consideration, never entering into the value equation other than as the depository of value, the material form which value must be objectified in. Where exchange value predominates over use-value, therefore, we see production for production's sake; that is, production undertaken for the very reason that the act itself expands the value invested in it.

It must be stressed, though, that such a cycle is not necessarily motivated by the greed of the individual capitalist. The competitive streak endemic in the system ensures that growth is an economic necessity. Enterprises are forced by the 'accumulate or die' climate into taking a short-sighted approach in which the increase not only of profits, but the *rate* of profits, takes precedence over everything else. This necessitates the increased objectification of labour in use-values and therefore accelerates the depletion of the natural resources which form the material base of these commodities.

On top of this, capitalist production does not restrict itself to appropriating already existing use-values and meeting already existing needs. Capitalism also broadens the appropriation of nature by developing new ways of transforming nature into commodities. The need to innovate and invent new products, diversify old ones and thereby create new needs is driven by the need to realise surplus value in vendible use-values and counter the trend of falling profits and overproduction in saturated industries (Pepper 1993: 92). As ever, the natural resource base is expected to meet the production requirements these new needs create.

Another of the main potential contradictions between the value-form and its material base in nature stems from the value-form's abstraction from space and time. Such notions do not exist in this quantitative 'pure economics'; however, once again,

capitalism is required to deal with the commodity's material existence and, in this context, what Elmar Altvater calls: 'the material temporality of socio-ecological processes' (Altvater 1994: 76). Ecological processes, whether they are reproducing the raw materials for labour to work upon, acting as direct instruments of production, are subject to the laws of nature rather than the laws of capitalist accumulation. However, again, this does not stop capitalism from attempting to impose the latter on the former.

The shortening of the time taken to complete the circuit of capital is essential to increasing the rate of accumulation. Capitalism therefore attempts to remove any impediments to this circuit, be they natural, cultural or social (Altvater 1994: 77). Increasing productivity – meaning that a greater amount of raw materials is consumed in production by a smaller amount of labour time – lowers the value of the product, giving the producer market advantage over those with lower productivity levels. Rising productivity and the subsequent lowering of prices leads to an increase in consumption and thus deepens the appropriation of nature by accelerating material throughput. However, this is not the only manner in which an increase in productivity may speed up environmental degradation. The main means by which productivity is increased is through the development of the forces of production. Increasing proportions of enterprises' earned profits are ploughed into fixed capital in the form of technology and machinery. As enterprises strive to out-compete each other, the revolutionising of the forces of production increases in its occurrence, meaning fixed capital has an increasingly short life span. It is also the case that with each technological revolution the proportion of fixed capital to labour increases. The result of this clamour for technological advantage, then, is that an increasing amount of natural resources are expended with each development, with these developments taking place at an ever increasing rate. The overall material throughput and impact on nature created by the development of the productive forces is therefore exponential.

When attempting to shorten the circuit of capital, capitalism also alters physical space in order to compress production time. Naturally heterogeneous spaces,



landscapes and regions are homogenised as capital seeks to remodel nature according to its own rationality. This reworking of nature in capital's image is a demonstration of capitalism's tendency toward reductive simplification. As Burkett (1999: 86) points out, although money is infinitely divisible, nature, due to its inherently holistic and interconnected composition, is not. When a part of nature is represented in its monetary form, in isolation, its relationship to the system(s) it inhabits, and the part it plays in such a system, is not represented. For example, a tree can be represented in a monetised value form, as the labour time necessary for its felling and transportation; however, this fails to take into account the tree's importance within an interconnected ecosystem. With this reductive, atomistic form of valuation, ecosystems themselves become no more than the sum of their parts.

Such a simplistic view leads the value form to neglect the full systemic impact of any encroachment on nature. Only the isolated part of nature required for the specific production process in question is considered when it is divided and disconnected from its surroundings. It is this process of simplification which also leads to the replacement of interconnected systems with stockpiles of particular raw materials – ecological monocultures in other words. O'Connor (1998: 238) refers to the 'even-age industrial plantations' of pine and fir in the US as 'forestry's equivalent to the urban tower block'. Moreover, beyond the mere spatial reconfiguration of nature, capitalist firms have also made direct attempts to speed up the laws of nature, the most extreme example of this being genetic modification (GM).

One last point to mention with regards to the value-form is that, as Deleague puts it, 'economic analysis ends precisely where the flows of money stops... the goods and services produced by human activity only appear in the economic system insofar as they exist in the form of commodities, and they drop out of sight as soon as they lose this quality' (Deleague 1994: 38). The result of this is that any effect of production or consumption which does not impact upon the labour time necessary for production itself is not accounted for – it is treated as an externality.

The above account demonstrates how the inability of the material world to emulate the theoretical perfection of its abstract value-form causes it to become a hindrance to capital accumulation, and how efforts to overcome this through the attempted enthrallment of nature to the laws of capital accumulation make capitalism an inherently anti-ecological economic system. Finance capital – the most recent incarnation of capital accumulation – demonstrates the system's need to abstract from, and even bypass, the qualitative material world. Here the same capital bounces from company to company and from economy to economy in a matter of hours, minutes and seconds rather than days, weeks and months, as it is invested and reinvested in a multitude of different economic ventures. Accumulation is the outcome of a multi-trillion dollar game of musical chairs, where speculation, computer projection, and chance determine success or failure. Share value maximisation replaces profit as the primary goal. Of course, the value of any company will eventually fall if profits are not attained at some point, but until this undetermined time its value will fluctuate according to expectation rather than actual performance. Accumulation is therefore, to a certain degree, decoupled from production and profit. Capitalism here gets as close as possible to achieving the ideal circuit of M-M; it most represents its ideal theoretical form, overcoming time and space. As Kovel (2002: 65) comments, the world of finance capitalism is one in which 'the very materiality of existence can seem an inconvenient afterthought' (Kovel 2002: 65).

Of course, as evidenced in the discussion over the sustainable development, the forms of environmentalism propagated by the capitalist elite challenge the negative-sum conceptualisation of the environment-economy relationship that lies at the heart of this critique of capitalism. And there has been a discernable shift in green thought towards an acceptance of such theories. The question of whether this shift is theoretically sound is examined through a critical analysis of ecological modernisation theory in the following chapter, which moves the focus from subjectivist approaches to the state, to those emphasising the importance of the objective, structural factors which constrain state actions. However, to shift the focus from subjectivist to structuralist theories without commenting on the conflicting



nature of their methodological underpinnings would be to ignore one of the most fundamental areas of conflict within state theory. Accordingly, the next chapter examines questions of structure versus agency through the lens of the infamous Miliband-Poulantzas debate, and in doing so sets the scene for the following chapter.

### ***1.5 Structural Functionalism and the Limits of Instrumentalism***

The first thing to note about Nicos Poulantzas' analysis of Miliband's work is that he makes an explicit point of praising Miliband's efforts at 'ideological critique'. Poulantzas does not question Miliband's success in revealing the internal inconsistencies of the pluralist canon by generating empirical results which contradict its theoretical claims. However, while such pursuits have undoubted political value, in the sense that they demystify the claims of bourgeois social science, the contrasting of empirical facts with theoretical concepts *alone* is insufficient if the aim is to develop a specifically Marxist theory of the state. Poulantzas' problem with Miliband, then, stems from the fact that Miliband critiques pluralism whilst remaining wedded to its methodology, concepts and categories of thought. He operates from *within* the adversarial problematic and therefore never moves from theory testing to theory construction. For Poulantzas, on the other hand, a *Marxist* theory of the state must generate its own concepts and methodology – its own problematic. The danger with not taking this crucial next step, and with calling the outcomes of an ideological critique a separate *theory* of the state, is that one risks being 'unconsciously and surreptitiously contaminated by the very epistemological principles of the adversary' (Poulantzas 1969: 69), something Poulantzas finds evidence of in Miliband's writing.

It is for this reason that Poulantzas concerns himself with epistemology and concept generation, and the task of extricating the theory of the state implicit within Marx's own writings, rather than with the type of empirical fact-finding which consumed most of Miliband's attention. It is important to note here that Poulantzas subscribes to Althusser's view that Marx's work should not be understood as a coherent whole.

Rather, it is only with the *German Ideology* that we see Marx break epistemologically with his Hegelian past and develop a specifically Marxist 'historical materialism'. Poulantzas therefore rejects the *Communist Manifesto* as being an inappropriate text from which to develop a Marxist theory of the state. This only serves to widen the methodological chasm between himself and Miliband, who took the *Communist Manifesto* as the point of departure when constructing his theory of the state.

Poulantzas believed that his authentically Marxist theory of the state highlights those areas where Miliband has been led astray by bourgeois methodology. He uses an Althusserian model of society as a springboard from which to examine the more specific role of the state. According to this model, society is comprised of three structural levels: the economic, the political and the ideological. Each mode of production is marked by a distinctive array of functional interrelations between these levels, which serve to maintain and reproduce the structure as a whole. A stable *capitalist* society, therefore, is one in which all levels function as an integrated system to maintain the specifically *capitalist* relations of production.

Capitalism is a notoriously contradictory and unstable system, however, and as such is in constant danger of spiralling into various forms of crisis. It is within this context of crisis that Poulantzas locates the functional role of the state. According to Poulantzas, the state functions to preserve the system by serving as '*the factor of cohesion of a social formation and the factor of reproduction of the conditions of production*' (Poulantzas 1969: 73, emphasis in original). However, whereas orthodox Marxist tracts define the political in relation to the economic base, Poulantzas, again following Althusser, instead defines the function of the state in relation to the requirements of the structure as a whole. The state intervenes at each structural level with policies or institutional reforms geared towards mitigating the inherent contradictions within the capitalist system and therefore reproducing or re-establishing systemic stability. To take just a few examples, the state assists in the reproduction of labour power and the productivity of labour, sets down the rules which organise market exchange through the judicial subsystem, engages in



ideological activities through its control over the education system and maintains political order by setting the boundaries for legitimate political engagement.

The state therefore benefits the capitalist class to the extent that it reproduces those conditions conducive to the realisation of surplus value. Poulantzas, however, derives the capitalist nature of the state from its objective *structural* function rather than from the class position of the human *agents* who control it, as Miliband does; it is inherent within its form rather than being the contingent outcome of class struggle:

The direct participation of members of the capitalist class in the state apparatus and in the government, even where it exists, is not the important side of the matter. The relation between the bourgeois class and the state is an *objective relation*. This means that if the function of the state in a determinate social form and the *interests* of the dominant class coincide, it is by reason of the system itself: the direct participation of members of the ruling class in the state apparatus is not the *cause* but the *effect*, and moreover a chance and contingent one, of this objective coincidence. (Poulantzas 1969: 73)

For Poulantzas then, dominance of the capitalist class is determined objectively by the structure of the social formation. This is not to downplay the importance of class struggle – Poulantzas views this as the means by which structure is either reproduced or transformed. Poulantzas is instead attacking the view that such a struggle takes place independently of state interference. As Jessop notes, for Poulantzas ‘the political influence of class and class fractions depends in part on the institutional structure of the state and the effects of state power’ (Jessop 1990: 30); ‘the structure defines a particular conjunction, which is essentially a field of objectively possible outcomes of class struggle’ (Clarke 1991: 17). However, even within the boundaries of these possible outcomes, the state interferes in a manner which ensures the domination of capitalist class, as this provides the optimal conditions for its own reproduction. For Poulantzas, the state, through the execution of its political and ideological functions, acts to ‘organise and unify the dominant power bloc by

permanently disorganising – dividing the dominated classes’ (Poulantzas 1978: 140). He also emphasises, in opposition to Miliband, that the capitalist class is unable to achieve the unity necessary for it to present its interests in a collective manner. The state, then, not only diffuses threats from the working class through a process of divide and conquer, but also protects the system, and thereby the collective interests of the capitalist class, by filtering out demands forwarded by individual fractions of capital, which, although rational in the short-term, may actually serve to undermine the long-term stability of the system as a whole. Such functions require that the state possess a degree of autonomy from both the dominant class and the economic base in general. As Poulantzas points out, ‘while the bourgeoisie continue to derive many benefits from such a state, it is by no means always contented with it’ (Poulantzas 1978: 12).

At base the Miliband-Poulantzas debate is a structure vs. agency debate. Poulantzas chides Miliband for concentrating on subjective agency at the expense of an analysis of objective structures, for reducing social classes to interpersonal relations and, therefore, for failing to perceive them, and the state, ‘as *objective structures*, and relations as an *objective system of regular connections*, a structure and a system whose agents, ‘men’, are in the words of Marx, ‘bearers of it’ (Poulantzas 1969: 70-71). This leads Miliband, mistakenly in Poulantzas’ reckoning, to explain the actions of the state with reference to the motivations of individual actors, and to present the state as being class-neutral. As Jessop (1985: 68) notes, the state ‘is able to present itself as a neutral, non-class state through the exclusion of any open class bias’; however, in reality it protects and enhances the capitalist system. The logical outcome of these points is that it would be sheer folly to think of state elites as agents capable of using political power toward non-capitalist objectives (Barrow 1993: 58).

This critique has some merit, as there is a definite lack of structural analysis in purely instrumental accounts of the state. As Clarke points out, Miliband’s ‘voluntarist theory, sees the only limits to state power in the organisation, will and determination of the contending classes’ (Clarke 1991: 19). Any theory of the capitalist state should



take into account the constraints placed upon the state by the fact that it is situated and dependent upon a capitalist economy.

However, whilst having some purchase, Poulantzas' critique fails to wound the instrumentalist case to the extent he wishes. It is one thing to say that instrumentalism provides no account of the structural limits to class driven state action; however, it is another thing to say that instrumentalism is worthless. Indeed, it is Poulantzas' attempt to rid Marxism of instrumentalism that leads him to construct an overly radical form of structuralism as the polar opposite of an agency-centred approach. The problem is that if agency is as irrelevant as Poulantzas seems to indicate, at least when it comes to influencing the state, we would expect the capitalist class to be largely indifferent with regards to who controls it. It should be able to sit back and enjoy the bounty that structural necessity brings it. However, as we have seen, this is clearly not the case, so unless capitalists enjoy spending millions of pounds pushing open doors, agency must be having some effect even if its influence is severely restricted. As Miliband himself points out, Poulantzas is:

rather one-sided and goes much too far in dismissing the nature of the state elite as of altogether no account. For what his *exclusive* stress on 'objective relations' suggests is that what the state does is in every particular and at all times *wholly* determined by these 'objective relations': in other words, that the structural constraints of the system are so absolutely compelling as to turn those who run the state into the merest functionaries and executants of policies imposed upon them by the system. (Miliband 1970: 57)

That everything seems to be explained as a function of the system renders Poulantzas' theory tautological. It is also, as Lukes (1974: 54) stresses, based on a false dichotomy between structural determinism and methodological individualism. A more fruitful approach would be to 'examine the complex interrelations between the two and allow for the obvious fact that individuals act together and upon one another within groups and organisations, and that the explanation of their behaviour

is unlikely to be reducible merely to their individual motivations' (Lukes 1974: 54). Barrow (1993: 62) points out that 'softer' forms of structuralism have attempted to incorporate agency within their model by stressing that in fulfilling its function, and mitigating the contradictions inherent within the capitalist system, state elites must *know* what is required by business to continue the process of capital accumulation. Therefore, 'political processes such as lobbying, candidate contributions, propaganda campaigns, and consulting are necessary "transmission-belts" between capital and the state ... the subsidiary mechanisms emphasised by instrumentalists turn out to be required for the effective functioning of the major mechanisms pointed out by structuralists' (Barrow 1993: 62, 63) In a sense then, the capitalist class acts as an early warning system, sending signals to state elites which are essential to the avoidance of rubbing up against structural limits. However, although this is a useful merging of instrumentalism and structuralism, it still defines the actions of the capitalist class as a function of the system. In order to provide a true merging of the two we need to accept that there is manoeuvrability within structural limitations, and that within these limits there is a battle within which the capitalist class will attempt to secure the *optimal* conditions for capital accumulation. This is essential in providing us with an explanation of differences between capitalist states, something that Poulantzas struggles to do.

## ***1.6 Conclusions***

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the instrumentalist perspective has, by-and-large, been overlooked by contemporary green theorists of the state. One of the findings of this chapter, however, is that this indifference is not wholly justified. Whilst it is the case that the relevance of instrumentalism to environmental issues is of an indirect nature, the implications its arguments have for the capacity of the state-in-capitalist-society to pursue environmentally sustainable policies are nonetheless considerable. Dominated by the capitalist class, the state – according to instrumentalist thinking – is used by this class to propagate an economic system – capitalism – which serves own its interests. As the ecological Marxist critique of



capitalism demonstrates, however, the ecological credentials of this system are highly questionable. Instrumentalist ideas are also relevant at the more micro level of environmental policy-making. Even where a proposed piece of environmental legislation is compatible with a capitalist economy; if it is perceived as threatening the optimal conditions for capital accumulation the capitalist class tends nonetheless to employ its financial resources, and consequent ability to influence the state, in order to subvert such legislation. This tendency was made evident in the case of the US Clean Air Act, where proposals for altering consumption patterns and production practices, and for introducing environmental taxation, were rejected in favour of end-of-pipe technologies and market-based solutions.

This chapter, then, has sought to rectify the mistaken indifference displayed by green theorists towards instrumentalism, by outlining and analysing its central tenets and by drawing out its environmental implications. It first examined the coherence of the concept of a capitalist class, and the mechanisms instrumentalists highlight as generating class cohesion, before outlining the means through which this class is deemed to control the state. At each stage of the discussion examples drawn from the sphere of environmental policy-making were used to illustrate instrumentalist claims. Moreover, in addition to being relevant as a theory of the state itself, the preceding discussion of instrumentalism also acted as a platform from which to examine several debates of wider relevance to the thesis. The section devoted to analysing the implications of globalisation for the state demonstrated the continuing relevance of the state as a principle agent of globalisation, and as the key actor in the management of the contradictory pressures of global capital accumulation and national legitimation. In doing so it provides justification for the state-centred focus of the thesis as a whole. Similarly, the section outlining the ecological Marxist critique of capitalism poses several questions to which any theory of sustainable capitalism must respond. It therefore sets the context for the debate over Ecological Modernisation (EM) theory which is contained in the following chapter. And finally, the instrumentalist debate acted as an ideal springboard to introduce questions of structure versus agency – questions which reappear in various guises throughout the thesis.

The final sections of this chapter sought to defend the instrumentalist position against the more deterministic sections of the structuralist camp, and in particular Poulantzas. It has been suggested that the mechanisms of control identified by instrumentalists can be incorporated within a weaker form of structuralism if they are considered as transmission-belts between capital and the state. There must also be flexibility *within* structural limits if any sense of agency is to be rescued within the Marxist paradigm. However, whilst as a conclusion this may rescue instrumentalism from complete destruction, it is still the case that there is *something* influencing the state besides the subjective consciousness of the capitalist class – that there are objective forces which act as limits to the agency of state elites. It is to these objective forces that we turn to in the next chapter, which provides a deeper analysis of the limitations placed on the state as a result of it being situated within and dependent upon a capitalist economy. This is vital if we are to judge whether the state is class-neutral and whether it can be used for ecological ends.



## **Chapter 2: Marxism, the State and the Environment II: Economic Crisis and the Contradictions of the Welfare State**

*The expectation that the ability to reconcile emerging contradictions through adaptive measures is limited, and that contradictions will finally result in a crisis of the capitalist mode of production, is not based on any utopian hopes, but on the consideration that there is no actor or agency within the capitalist mode of production that is sufficiently unaffected by those contradictions that are to be reconciled to be able to act in such a way as to counteract them. (Offe 1984: 133)*

One of the main conclusions of the previous chapter was that although Poulantzas, perhaps as a result of his battle to rid Marxism of the subjectivism he found so unappealing in Miliband's instrumentalist theory of the state, ended up overemphasising the structural and the objective to the point where the explanatory purchase of agency is diminished, his critique nevertheless alerts us to the fact that there is *something* influencing the state besides the consciousness of the capitalist class. This conclusion forms the starting point of the current chapter, which examines the objective factors which constrain the activities of the capitalist state. The general method employed is to review established Marxist literature before working the environmental thread into the analytical weave.

As is often the case with Marxist literature, the economy acts as a springboard from which to examine society as a whole. This chapter therefore begins with a review of the more traditional Marxist accounts of the contradictions inherent within the capitalist *economic* system and the crises that these contradictions give rise to. In particular, the tendency for the rate of profit to fall and for capitalism to generate demand shortages are examined on account of their being the two most prevalent crisis-inducing economic trends discussed in Marx's own work. An attempt is then made to incorporate environmental factors into the debate. Whereas chapter one

analysed capitalism's environmental abandon in terms of whether its internal logic would inevitably result in *ecological* crisis, the current chapter examines whether its anti-ecological bent may first manifest itself in *economic* crisis. In other words, the question being asked is whether environmental degradation can plausibly be considered as a trigger of economic crisis. The main thesis examined in this section is James O'Connor's proposed second, ecological contradiction of capitalism. The main argument forwarded is that, although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with O'Connor's account of an ecologically triggered economic crisis, his separation of the ecological contradiction from other contradictions inherent within capitalism is 1) analytically problematic, and 2) may create a strategically inexpedient artificial divide between labour and ecological struggles in the political sphere. The first point is exposed through a demonstration of the interrelatedness of the second contradiction with other contradictions within the capitalist mode of production, including the crisis of underproduction and the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. The second point is brought to light through a discussion of the effectiveness, to the detriment of the environmental movement, of capital's attempts to drive a wedge between labour and such a movement. The conclusion of this section is that it is better to think of these different contradictions as particular manifestations of the more fundamental contradiction identified by Marx between production for profit and production for human need. This completes the section dealing with what Offe terms first order crises and provides the foundation for an examination of the systems analytic approach to the state and second order crises, or crises of the welfare state. Of particular interest is how first order, economic crises are displaced from the economic realm onto the other subsystems – especially the state, or political subsystem – which systems analysts identify as operating within capitalist society.

Following the same pattern as the previous sections, a review is first undertaken of established literature in the area. This includes an account of the various contradictions inherent within the welfare state, the limitations these put upon state action and the forms of crises which are inevitably generated as a result of these factors, as identified by Offe, O'Connor and Habermas amongst others. In particular, fiscal crises, rationality crises, legitimation crises and motivation crises are



examined. This provides a conceptual framework into which the environmental thread can be incorporated. Following the methodology of systems analysis, this section starts with an examination of the functions the state is required to fulfil with regards to environmental protection. An attempt is then made to determine whether these functions generate any additional contradictions within the welfare state. And finally, there is an exploration of how these contradictions may manifest themselves as state crises.

After fully explicating the environmental dimensions of the systems analytic conception of the state, the focus moves to challenges to this account. Ecological modernisation (EM) questions the zero-sum account of environment-economy relations which forms the basis of the argument that the state is unable to adequately deal with environmental problems due to its growth imperative. According to its proponents, economic growth can be 'decoupled' from environmental degradation. Indeed, environmental protection should be thought of as an opportunity for growth rather than an impediment. There are, however, serious deficiencies with EM theory, and due to these problems it is unable to avoid the conclusion that a movement for true environmental sustainability is inevitably on a collision course with the capitalism and the state's accumulation imperative.

The second challenge to the systems analytic approach generates conclusions which are more radical than those of EM. These originate from the society-centred approach of organisational realism, which Alan Carter (1993; 1998; 2004) uses to produce stronger condemnations of the state than are forwarded by those coming from a systems analytic background. The state is criticised for being the direct cause of environmental problems rather than merely for being impotent in the face of problems which are foisted upon it as a result of the contradictions of the capitalist economy. However, again, there are several problems with the organisational realist approach and the conclusions which Carter draws from it.

## ***2.1 Economic Crises***

Before going on to examine the various ways in which the crisis-ridden nature of economic subsystem destabilises the state and the wider social system in operation within capitalist society, it is essential to provide first some account of the manner in which this system is crisis-ridden. After examining the tendency for the rate of profit to fall and the problem of underconsumption – these being the most prevalent crisis-inducing tendencies discussed in Marx's work – this section goes on to consider whether environmental issues may act as a trigger of *economic* crises.

### ***2.1.1 The Falling Rate of Profit and Crises of Underconsumption***

The tendency for the rate of profit to fall results from increases in what Marx termed the 'organic composition of capital'. This is comprised of the ratio of constant capital (the value of goods consumed in the process of production) to variable capital (wages). As mentioned in chapter 1, in order to ensure the competitiveness of their *products*, capitalist firms need to be competitive with regards to their levels of *productivity*. The main means through which productivity increases are achieved is the innovation and implementation of technological developments which increase the ratio of constant to variable capital. As Marx ([1894] 1981: 318) explains, such developments are implemented in order that:

the same quantity of labour-power that is made available by a variable capital of a given value ... sets in motion, works up, and productively consumes, within the same period, an ever-growing mass of means of labour, machinery and fixed capital of all kinds, and raw and ancillary materials – in other words, the same number of workers operate with a constant capital of ever growing scale.

Productivity enhancements gained through increases in the ratio of constant to variable capital therefore cheapen the costs of production. This gives the innovating firm a competitive advantage over those operating with higher costs of production,



an advantage which can take the form of lower commodity prices on the market or higher profits where market prices remain constant. These advantages are short-lived, however; a competitive economic environment inevitably forces rival firms to follow suit or go to the wall – to innovate or die. This being the case, the new, cheaper cost of production enjoyed by the innovating firm quickly reasserts itself as the *average* cost of production, albeit a new, lower average, with the new commodity price reasserting itself as a new, lower, *average* price. This process is then repeated ad infinitum, with further innovations further increasing the ratio of constant to variable capital. The important point to note here is that, as a result of labour being the source of value, increases in the ratio of constant to variable capital lead to a cheapening of commodities. As Marx ([1894] 1981: 319) explains:

With the progressive decline in the variable capital in relation to the constant capital, this tendency leads to a rising organic composition of the total capital, and the direct result of this is that the rate of surplus value, with the level of exploitation of labour remaining the same or even rising, is expressed in a steadily failing general rate of profit.

As Petith (2005) explains in great detail, Marx was never able to demonstrate that the rate of profit *must* fall; various forces counter this movement, including the cheapening of constant capital, foreign trade etc. As a result, the hypothesis must be expressed as a tendency rather than a law. However, it is nonetheless a tendency which can manifest itself in economic crisis. The costs of regenerating the forces of production tend to rise as the ratio of constant to variable capital increases. Firms are therefore required to re-invest increasing proportions of their profits each time they are compelled to revolutionise their forces of production in order to stay competitive, with the time between these revolutions also tending to shorten. As a result, many firms go out of business, creating a tendency towards monopoly.

The tendency for the rate of profit to fall can also manifest itself in *crises of underproduction*, especially where capitalists respond to falling rates of profits by increasing the rate of exploitation. Crises of underproduction, or what O'Connor

(1998) terms the ‘first contradiction of capitalism’, stem from a contradiction between the production and circulation of capital. As we have seen, capitalist production does not limit itself to the production of use-values, but also the production of *surplus* value, by extracting not only socially necessary labour, but also *surplus* labour from the working class. The problem is that the exploitation of labour in the production of surplus value generates difficulties in realising exchange value on the market. This is because exploitation limits the working class’s consumption capacity and therefore its demand relative to the total value created in production. As O’Connor comments, ‘any given amount of surplus value produced (or any given rate of exploitation) will have the effect of creating a particular shortfall of commodity demand at market prices’ (O’Connor, 1998: 162). The increasing discrepancy between the expansion of capital and the relative stagnation of workers’ demand generates a bottleneck at the point where the surplus value objectified in any given product should be translated into profit. The greater the rate of exploitation, the lower the ability of the working class to consume, the more extensive this bottleneck becomes. At best this results in recession, at worst, general crisis, deflation of capital values and depression.

### ***2.1.2 Capitalism’s Second Contradiction***

O’Connor (1998: 164-167) goes on to develop what he sees as a second contradiction of capitalism. The point of contradiction this time is between the relations and forces of production, and the conditions of production. As demonstrated in chapter 1, capitalism tends to erode non-human nature and therefore the conditions of production,<sup>1</sup> especially when it defends or restores profits by externalising costs onto them; as Lebowitz (1996: 226) puts it, capital ‘appropriates the natural conditions of production without regard for the requirements of reproduction’. Capitalism is thus pushing us towards ecological crisis. However, O’Connor believes that before limits to growth make themselves felt as absolute shortages of raw materials, clean air, productive land etc. – that is, *ecological* crises – they first manifest themselves as

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<sup>1</sup> Labour-power and urban infrastructure are the other two main conditions of production.



*economic* crises. This is because capitalism's degradation of nature raises the costs of reproducing the conditions of production. This creates a supply-side bottleneck, a crisis of *under-production* or liquidity crisis, in which the flexibility and profitability of capital are threatened.

O'Connor's conception of a second contradiction within capitalism has come under criticism. Such criticisms, however, have tended to concentrate on the analytical separation of the two contradictions rather than the plausibility of the claim that environmental degradation can possibly lead to liquidity crises. This separation of the 'traditional' and 'ecological' accounts of economic crisis seems to imply that traditional Marxist accounts identify capitalism's fundamental contradiction with accumulation and profitability crises. As Burkett (1998) and to a lesser extent Lebowitz (1996) stress, this is not the case. Accumulation crises are but one manifestation of a more fundamental contradiction inherent within capitalism identified by Marx, between the needs of capital and the needs of human beings. This fundamental contradiction has many guises; as Burkett points out, 'the conflict between production for profit and production for human needs, the alienation of the conditions of production vis-à-vis the producers and their communities, and the tension between social production and private appropriation, are all equivalent expressions of capitalism's fundamental contradiction in Marx's view' (Burkett 1998: 178). For example, the crisis of underproduction is a manifestation of the contradiction between social production and private appropriation, and is a process which is itself dependent upon the separation of producers from the conditions of production. Similarly, the ecological, liquidity crisis identified by O'Connor can be seen as a manifestation of the contradiction between production for profit and production for human needs, a process again dependent upon the alienation of producers from the conditions of production. As Lebowitz concludes, 'in the one case, there is the tendency to produce without regard for natural conditions [the ecological account]; in the other, to produce without regard to social conditions [the traditional account]. Rather than two contradictions, there is indeed only one – that between the needs of capital and the needs of human beings' (Lebowitz 1996: 228).

Pointing out the error of this distinction would be unnecessarily pedantic were it not to serve some analytical purpose. The main problem with artificially separating these two crisis tendencies into two separate contradictions is that it precludes any analysis of the complex interplay between the different ways in which capitalism's fundamental contradiction reveals itself and, therefore, the ways in which the two crisis tendencies interact. In one instance O'Connor (1991: 107) goes as far as declaring that 'first contradiction of capitalism...has nothing to do with the conditions of production, whether these are interpreted economically or in socio-political terms'. This is suspect, as the exploitative relations of production which generate demand-side crises are based upon the separation of producers from the conditions of production. The two contradictions can also be connected in a circumlocutory manner vis-à-vis the increasing ratio of constant to variable capital. The increased productivity that this brings results in both a greater degradation of the conditions of production in the form of increased material throughput in production *and* an increased likelihood of demand crises as a result of the falling rate of profit. It is also quite plausible that in attempting to avoid one form of crisis capital instigates the other. In order to offset the rising costs of production which arise as a result of the destruction of the conditions of production, capital may increase levels of exploitation, thereby increasing the likelihood of a demand crisis. Alternatively, economic crises may force the state to jettison environmental protection, as profitability is increased where the costs of preventing ecological damage are avoided. As Altvater (1993: 222) explains, 'The unloading onto society of environmental costs that would otherwise increase the outlay of constant or variable capital has a counteracting effect upon "the tendency of the falling rate of profit"'. Martin Jänicke (1996: 73) verifies this through a survey of the relationship of GNP to environmental regulation, concluding that: 'in a situation where a country is highly developed but in economic crisis, there arises a general negative effect on the conduct of policy (as demonstrated by the recessions of the early 1970s, 1980s and 1990s)'. Economic crises may force the state to jettison environmental protection, thereby further degrading the conditions of production and increasing the likelihood of a liquidity crisis. One aspect of this, as Burkett (1998: 195) notes, is that the degradation of the conditions of production can, in the short-term, ease the tendency



towards underconsumption by generating new markets and demand for 'green' industries dealing with such negative externalities. As Hans Enzensberger (1996: 27) stresses, the 'industrial protection of the environment emerges as a new growth area, the costs of which can either be offloaded on to prices, or are directly made as a social charge through the budget in the form of subsidies, tax concessions, and direct measures by the public authorities, while the profits accrue to the monopolies'. Of course, this only temporarily staves off crises of underproduction, as these new industries merely form the basis for new means of exploitation, with the tendency towards underconsumption continuing but on a larger scale.

Burkett is correct, then, to note that O'Connor's artificial separation of the two contradictions detracts from the ability of his conceptual schema to represent the complex interplay between the different ways which capitalism's fundamental contradiction reveals itself. The problems created by O'Connor's separation are not only analytical, however, but also have implications for political strategy. O'Connor notes that in traditional Marxist exegeses the agency of social revolution is the working class. This class emerges in opposition to the exploitative nature of capitalist relations of production, and through a growing consciousness of the contradiction between these relations and the forces of production takes as its immediate aim the transcendence of this contradiction through the revolution of these relations. On the other hand, O'Connor's ecological Marxism identifies new social movements as the agents of social transformation. These movements arise in opposition to the degradation of the conditions of production, their consciousness arising from the contradiction between these conditions of production and the capitalist mode of production.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with identifying two revolutionary agents as corresponding to two qualitatively different manifestations of the contradiction between the needs of capital and the needs of human beings. The problem is that because: 1) O'Connor fails to connect the two contradictions he identifies to this more fundamental contradiction; and 2) because he emphasises the analytical distinction between the two manifestations of this fundamental contradiction; he is in

danger of artificially dividing labour and ecological struggles. This is particularly careless of O'Connor given that driving a wedge between labour and the environmental movement has been the favoured strategy of capital since the modern environmental movement emerged in 1970s. Capitalist firms have successfully employed a 'divide and conquer' strategy against labour and the environmental movement, blaming ecology groups for various forms of exploitation experienced by labour from poor wages to redundancy, the argument being that such groups cause increases in the costs of production as a result of their attempt to protect nature as a condition of production. To avoid contributing to this ideologically driven cleavage it is important to recognise crises as particular manifestations of the more fundamental contradiction of capitalism identified by Marx. This enables a recognition of the diverse forms of political struggle which erupt around qualitatively different crises, *and* a recognition that that these movements are united by a wider struggle against the more fundamental contradiction inherent within capitalism.

## ***2.2 Crises of the State: The Systems Analytic Approach***

The above account details the crisis-ridden nature of the capitalist economy, and explicates the part the environment potentially can play in this process. However, limiting any examination of crisis to the economic realm gives the impression that this sphere stands apart from the rest of society, that it is allowed to follow its own internal logic free from impediment and that the contradictions inherent within the capitalist social form manifest themselves only within this realm, as *economic* crises. Such a view may have limited validity if restricted in application to early phases of capitalist development; however, when referring to advanced or late capitalism, it is untenable due to vast increases in state-regulation post-world-war II and the impact this has had on the nature of crisis.

Understanding this new stage of capitalist development, marked by the existence of the welfare state, requires a rejection of the more dogmatic economism which has plagued Marxist sociology and which, at times, seeps into Marxist conceptions of



crisis. Neo-Marxists such as Claus Offe, Jürgen Habermas and James O'Connor have sought to avoid such problems by developing a systems analytic approach according to which advanced capitalist society is conceptualised as a *system*, a functional whole, comprised of three *interrelated* subsystems: the economic system, the political system and the socialisation system. The *economic* subsystem is defined by the commodity production and exchange relationships of the capitalist economy; the *political* or *administrative* subsystem consists largely of state institutions and policies; and the system of *socialisation* includes the family, education institutions, culture and religion.

The important point is that by conceptualising these subsystems as *interconnected* the implication is that the autonomy of each sphere, including the economic, is relative, and is disturbed by the actions of, and events within, the other subsystems. The methodology of systems analysis therefore immediately discounts any attempt to analyse economic crisis solely according to the logic of capital, as the influence of the economic system's flanking subsystems, and, as we shall see, the state in particular, interferes with this logic and fundamentally alters the trajectory of economic crisis tendencies. Moreover, beyond this, the systems analytic approach not only seeks to comprehend more fully the effect of flanking subsystems upon capitalism's economic crises tendencies, but also to challenge the Marxist tendency to identify crisis with *economic* crisis in the first place. This is not to say that the economic subsystem is not *dominant* within capitalist society; indeed, it is precisely the dominance of such a crisis-ridden subsystem that destabilises the system as a whole. It *is* to say, however, that economic crises are often displaced onto the other subsystems, manifesting themselves in qualitatively different forms, for example as fiscal crises of the state (political) or motivation crises (socialisation). The methodological implication of all of this, as Offe points out, is that:

Economic crisis theories are inadequate for the analysis of crisis-prone processes because they only examine "first order crises" – in other words, crises that can be described as a cumulative self-obstruction of the process of surplus value creation by means of the effects triggered by this

process... On the other hand... “second order crises” are connected with the utilization of regulatory principles external to both capital and the market. In the current phase of capitalist development, second order crises are more relevant than those of the first order, although they are, of course, produced by the latter. (Offe 1984: 51)

The systems analytic approach avoids identifying crisis with economic crisis by concentrating ‘on the *relationship* between the three fundamental organisation principles of society as a whole’ (Offe 1984: 83). Crisis is defined, therefore, in relation to the system as a whole rather than one particular subsystem – as a failing of the relationship between the three subsystems – as a system’s crisis. Habermas makes this explicit when commenting that ‘according to [the] systems approach, crises arise when the structure of a social *system* allows fewer possibilities for problem solving than are necessary for the continued existence of the *system*’ (Habermas 1976: 2, emphasis added).

There are obvious parallels to be drawn between the systems analytic approach and the functionalism of the likes of Poulantzas; however, whereas Poulantzas concentrates on explicating the mechanisms through which the state executes its role as a factor of social cohesion, systems analysts go one step further by seeking ‘to theoretically comprehend the *limits* of the “policy-making capacity” of the capitalist state’ to ‘systematically anticipate and analyse the deficiencies and *limitations* of the stabilizing activity of the state (Offe 1984: 35; 36, emphasis added). As indicated by the quote which introduced this chapter, for Offe, O’Connor and Habermas, the state is incapable of avoiding crisis due to the contradictory functions it is required to fulfil. Before explicating these contradictions, however, it is necessary to define the state according to its functional roles.

### ***2.2.1 A Systems Analytic Definition of the State***

Offe defines the state in relation to the ‘flanking’ subsystems identified above. The first notable characteristic of the capitalist state is that it ‘has no authority *to order*



*production* or *to control* it. Production/accumulation takes place in *enterprises* that are said to be free in the sense of “*exempt from state control*” (Offe 1975: 126). In capitalist societies, political authority, or the state, is separated and *excluded* from economic decision-making; it is unable, therefore, to command the initiation or cessation of private production, and instead must rely upon merely offering incentives to those who do have this power, namely the owners or managers of the means of production.

Despite being excluded from direct economic decision-making, it is nevertheless the case that ‘the state does not only have the authority, but the *mandate* to create and sustain *conditions* of accumulation’ (Offe 1975: 126). There are various reasons why this has come to be the case. Offe stresses, in opposition to Miliband and the instrumentalists, that capital is incapable of articulating a common and unified class interest. The state is required, therefore, to act as an ideal collective capitalist – to articulate and enforce the general interests of business and capital against the narrow and short-term interests of individual capitals or fractions of capital (Offe 1984: 49). There is then the problem, first identified by Polanyi, surrounding the fact that labour-power, as an essential condition of production, is not a commodity in any real sense (See Polanyi [1944] 2001: ch, 6). It is a ‘fictive commodity’, in that, as a result of it being inseparable from the labourer, it cannot be produced capitalistically, that is by the expenditure of labour or in accordance with market forces. The result is that market forces alone are unable to ensure that the requisite amount of labour-power is available to capital in the right form and at the right place and time. Indeed, rather than fulfilling this function, the labour-market generates class conflict, increasing the gap between the needs of capital and the supply of labour-power. The state is required, therefore, to step in and regulate and sustain the labour-market, and produce a *normative* structure within which it is legitimate to treat labour-power *as if* it were a commodity. It plays a *maintenance* function, as the process of capital accumulation ‘cannot perpetuate itself in the absence of this external being... there are threats and possible disturbances to the process of accumulation that require some state-organized protection of the process’ (Offe 1975: 127). In sum, as Jessop (1990: 185) stresses, ‘the role of the state is not to promote the narrow, economic

interests of particular capitals but to secure the social conditions in which market forces can operate to maximise capital accumulation in the long-term’.

This relationship is not unidirectional, though. The state is not immune from disturbances in the economic subsystem and is not free to dictate the shape of this subsystem in whatever manner it sees fit. To assume this would leave us without an explanation of why the state defends capital accumulation, and why it allows itself to be excluded from the economic realm. Rather, ‘[The state’s] power relations, its very decision-making power *depends* (like every other social relationship in capitalist society) upon the presence and continuity of the accumulation process. In the absence of accumulation, everything, and especially the power of the state, tends to disintegrate’ (Offe 1975: 126).

The relationship between the economic and political subsystems is therefore one of reciprocal dependency. However, this relationship itself does not exist in a vacuum, as the welfare state’s ability to fulfil its maintenance function is itself dependent upon its perceived *legitimacy*. The state needs to appear as a neutral entity geared towards pursuing the general interests of society as a whole. Only when it is considered as such, and secures the requisite level of mass loyalty, will it be able to pursue its more specific function as a *capitalist* state; in other words, as Offe (1975: 127) puts it, ‘the *existence* of a capitalist state presupposes the systematic *denial* of its nature as a *capitalist* state’.

The state’s unenviable task, then, is to counter the contradictions inherent within the capitalist mode of production without violating the exclusion, maintenance, dependency and legitimation principles. For systems analysts, this is impossible on account of the state’s functions being contradictory, pulling it in different directions, and ensuring that it is unable to fulfil one function unless it is at the expense of violating another.



### 2.2.2 Contradictions of the Welfare State

The most obvious contradiction of the welfare state resides in the tension between the maintenance and exclusion principles. As mentioned, the unsuitability of capital and the market as regulatory agents means that the economic subsystem, when left to its own devices, is unable to resolve its own contradictions and therefore stave off threats to continued capital accumulation. The state is required, therefore, to perform a maintenance function. However, in order to realise this function the state must violate the exclusion principle. This is increasingly so: the falling rate of profit requires the state to socialise more and more of the conditions of production in order to ensure the continued profitability of the monopoly sector. The problem is that the violation of this principle generates what Offe terms *problems of demarcation*. As he explains, 'the interventions necessary for the material reproduction of capitalist society are, at the same time, the kind which stimulate interpretations of needs which negate the capitalist form of social reproduction as such' (Offe, 1984: 55). In other words, by violating the exclusion principle in order to protect the economic subsystem from its own internal contradictions, the state *itself* undermines the *dominance* of this subsystem and thereby threatens to negate the economy's specifically capitalist character. The fear is that through overregulation 'the administrative form of control over material resources could become politicized to such an extent that it would no longer be subservient to, but subversive of the commodity form' (Offe 1984: 142).

Such problems of demarcation are further complicated by the need to maintain legitimacy. If state intervention overtly favours the interests of capital, it violates the legitimacy principle and erodes its own mass support. For this reason it must disguise its capitalist bent. This concealment will only have a limited effect, though. The state must therefore produce policies which compensate for the costs of private production and economic growth borne by the subordinate classes. However, this again requires the state to violate the exclusion principle. The tension this time resides in the state's need to offset the loss of legitimacy incurred as a result of the social costs of private production, whilst not impinging upon the primacy of this form of production. Of

course, the state could plausibly attempt to transcend the exclusion principle by reconstituting the economic subsystem, say by instigating progressive taxation policies or extensive nationalisation, but this would likely trigger a retaliatory response from capital in the form of investment strikes. Given the state's dependence upon the economic sphere, such a response would render 'the therapy more harmful than the illness it was designed to cure' (Offe 1984: 50).

There is also a contradiction to be found in the fact that the legitimacy of the state is bound-up with the health of the economic system. The ability of the state to pursue policies geared towards increasing its legitimacy is *dependent* upon the revenues it gleans from the economy in the form of taxes. However, the health of the economy itself is based upon exploitation and the externalisation of the costs of production. In other words, the state depends for its ability to combat the social costs of production upon the very system which generates these costs. On the other hand, an unhealthy economic environment only makes things worse for the state. The lower the rate of employment, the higher the demand for income support from the state, but the lower the rate of profit, the less able the state is to generate revenue through taxation. The state is therefore at its least capable when it is most required.

**Table 2.1 Crisis Origin and Form**

Point of origin (sub-systems)	System crisis	Identity crisis
Economic	Economic/Fiscal crisis	-
Political	Rationality crisis	Legitimation crisis
Socio-Cultural	-	Motivation

Adapted from Held (1982: 183).

This account demonstrates some of the contradictions inherent within the welfare state. However, it leaves things at a fairly abstract level. For this reason it is essential to examine how these abstract forces and contradictions manifest themselves in specific crises. The proceeding sections examine the fiscal crisis of the state,



rationality and legitimation crises, and motivation crises. Table 2.1 sets out these crises and the subsystems within which they manifest themselves.

### ***2.2.3 The Fiscal Crisis of the State***

Like Offe, O'Connor perceives the state to be fulfilling two, often mutually contradictory, functions. First it must provide and maintain conditions conducive to capital accumulation, and second, it must create or preserve the *legitimacy* of the social order.

For O'Connor, state expenditure takes two broad forms: *social capital* and *social expenses*. Social capital expenditures are those geared towards securing the conditions necessary for profitable private accumulation. There are two kinds of social capital expenditure: *social investment* and *social consumption* (constant capital and variable capital expenditures according to orthodox Marxist terminology). Social investment expenditures attempt to increase productivity, whilst social consumption expenditures aim to lower the reproduction costs of labour. Social expenses, on the other hand, are those expenditures which are required to maintain legitimacy and social harmony (O'Connor 1973: 80). As a result they are not even indirectly productive from the perspective of capital.

O'Connor's first argument is that 'state spending is increasingly the basis for the growth of the monopoly sector of the economy and total production' (O'Connor 1973: 80). This is because 'the socialisation of the costs of constant and variable capital increases over time and increasingly is needed for profitable accumulation' (O'Connor 1973: 81). In other words, the growth of the monopoly sector requires the state to increase its social capital expenditures if it is to remain profitable. However, increases in the supply of social capital and the growth of the monopoly sector also generate an increased demand for the state expenditure on the social expenses of production. That is, state actions which ensure the necessary conditions for capital accumulation simultaneously undermine its legitimacy in the eyes of those classes

which suffer the costs of economic growth. As a result the state must meet increasing political pressure for expenditures on the likes of social security, housing, health care, education etc. if it is to offset this loss of legitimacy and the potential threats it brings.

O'Connor's second argument is that 'the accumulation of social capital and social expenses is a contradictory process which creates tendencies toward economic social and political crises' (O'Connor 1973: 82). This happens because although the state's socialisation of production costs leads to increases in the social surplus which appear to underwrite the expansion of social expenses, this potentially closed circuit is undermined by the fact that such surpluses continue to be appropriated *privately*. In the monopoly sector, the power of capital and large-scale unions enable them to soak up surpluses in the form of profits and wages. In pursuing such goals they resist the state appropriation of surpluses to finance social expenses. As a result, productivity gains resulting from social capital expenses are prevented from being passed down to competitive sectors of the economy and non-unionised workers where wages and prices are largely market-determined. For this reason, these sectors will resist increased taxation on the basis that they fail to appropriate its benefits. The result of all this is that 'the socialisation of costs and the private appropriation of profits creates a fiscal crisis or "structural gap" between state expenditures and state revenues' (O'Connor 1973: 82).

#### ***2.2.4 Rationality and Legitimation Crises***

O'Connor's final argument pertains to the existence of a *rationality crisis*. For him, the fiscal crisis is exacerbated by the fact that most demands for social expenses or social capital expenditures are processed by the *political* system rather than coordinated by the market, with decisions determined by the outcome of *political* struggle. The first point to note here is that, in the context of social capital expenditures, the state is forced to act in a partially blind manner as it is not party to the marginal cost curves necessary for it to calculate optimal expenditure. This can



lead either to wasteful expenditure, as the state responds to conflicting and often mutually contradictory demands from fractions of capital and competing sectors, or to the state underestimating the social capital expenditures required for the continued profitability of industry.

Second, in juggling between its accumulation and legitimacy functions the state is forced to choose between two conflicting forms of rationality. It is an adherence to democratic procedures in the construction and validation of any state policy which confers legitimacy on that policy in the eyes of the citizenry. However, legitimacy cannot be based purely on procedural fairness. As David Estlund comments, in choosing between two preference options the flipping of a coin is the epitome of procedural fairness, as each option has an equal chance of selection (Estlund 1997: 176). The reasons behind our finding this method of decision-making to be intuitively unacceptable inevitably appeal to standards beyond procedural fairness. That is, the legitimacy of any set of procedures is based on the assumption that an adherence to them will lead, in the long term, to policy outcomes which are functionally effective, or *epistemically* correct. The important point is that legitimacy does not solely inhere in the short-term adherence to procedural correctness, but also in the long-term success of policies. This leaves the state with two, potentially contradictory, sources of rationality from which to choose from: the adherence to procedurally correctness, or functional effectiveness. As Barrow (1993: 108) notes, when these two rationalities conflict, the state 'must chose between maintaining short-term formal legal legitimacy, and long-term functional effectiveness'. For Offe and Habermas, these two rationalities are becoming increasingly incongruous, deepening the rationality crisis within the state. O'Connor concludes, in brief: 'the accumulation of social capital and social expenses is a highly irrational process from the standpoint of administrative coherence, fiscal stability and rationality, and potentially profitable private capital accumulation' (O'Connor 1973: 83).

At this point it is useful to draw out the distinction between rationality crises and legitimation crises. As we have seen, a rationality crisis is a political crisis in the sense that it results from 'the displacement of the contradictory steering imperatives

from market commerce into the administrative system'; it therefore 'takes the place of economic crisis' (Habermas 1976: 47). However, it is also an *output crisis*, as it represents the failure of state policies to deal with the received imperatives of the economic subsystem. It is the expression *within* the state of 'the contradiction between socialised production for non-generalizable interests and steering imperatives' (Habermas 1976: 46).

Legitimation crises also arise in the political system; however, unlike rationality crises, they are *input crises*: they are instances where the state fails to secure the requisite input of mass loyalty. For Habermas, the state's increasing encroachment on areas traditionally belonging to the private sphere gradually demystifies the unplanned, 'nature-like', 'invisible hand' of capitalism. These areas become politicised, thus increasing the demands upon the state. If the state finds itself unable to meet these demands whilst simultaneously avoiding economic crisis 'it lags behind programmatic demands *that it has placed on itself*. The penalty for this failure is withdrawal of legitimation' (Habermas 1976: 69).

The legitimation crisis has as its source the contradiction between class interests. If we remember, Offe stressed that in order to fulfil its capitalist function the state must, paradoxically, conceal its capitalist nature by presenting itself as being class-neutral. However, its increasing encroachment upon areas of social life once deemed private renders problematic the maintenance of this chameleon-like existence. Production becomes more transparently social, making the contradiction inherent within social production for private appropriation, and the potential transcendence of this contradiction, more apparent (O'Connor 1998: 163-64).

### ***2.2.5 Motivation Crises***

Habermas also highlights the increasing prevalence within advanced capitalist societies of what he terms *motivation crises*. These are generally discussed in relation



to legitimation crises, but Habermas's account of the relationship between the two is obscure at best, and for this reason it is best to examine them in isolation.<sup>2</sup>

Motivation crises are crises generated within the socio-cultural or socialisation subsystem, and again stem from the encroachment of the state into private realms. Simply put, a motivation crisis exists where the outputs of the socialisation system are altered in a way that renders them incompatible with the requirements of the economic or political sub-systems. For Habermas, the process of rationalisation has progressively eroded the traditional methods of producing motivational patterns conducive to the requirements of capitalism, such as religion and the family. On top of this, the central aspects of bourgeois ideology are also losing purchase. The necessity of state intervention in securing a fairer distribution of resources erodes faith in the market and the values of competition and endless achievement seeking. Additionally, the increasing need for the state to socialise the costs of production undermines the ideals of possessive individualism, that is, the belief that private individuals acting in competitive isolation is the only way of realising collective goals (Held 1982: 126). Finally, the need for state redistribution policies effectively uncouples income from labour-market participation, creating cultural identities, such as students, pensioners, the long-term incapacitated and unemployed, which are detached from economic productiveness: 'the cultural deficit can be observed sociologically in individuals that are increasingly motivated by the non-workplace-centred, nonproductivist normative values of a "post-materialist" culture' (Barrow 1993: 110).

The above account of the ideas of O'Connor, Offe and Habermas provides a brief overview of the contradictions of the welfare state identified by those operating broadly within the systems analytic paradigm. The aim of this chapter is to examine how the environment may be factored into this account. In doing this, the proceeding sections aim to: 1) examine what functions, if any, the state is required to fulfil with regards to environmental issues; 2) determine whether these functions generate any

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<sup>2</sup> For an exposition of the difficulties with Habermas's account (or lack of) of the relationship between legitimation and motivation crises, see Held (1982).

further contradictions within the welfare state; and 3) to examine what forms of crises, if any, these contradictions may generate.

### ***2.3 The State and Nature: Further Contradictions of the Welfare State?***

Before examining the role the state may play in relation to the environment, it is useful first to situate the environment within the broader production process. Marx ([1867] 1976: 284) viewed nature as a *condition of production* in the sense of being: 1) the material basis of any product; and 2) an instrument of production. Similar to his discussion of labour-power, Polanyi stresses that nature is a condition of production which is not produced capitalistically; that is, it is not a product of labour or produced in accordance with the law of value. Parts of nature or natural forces are therefore not commodities in any real sense. However, capitalism creates the pretence that parts of nature *are* produced in this manner by representing them as exchange values and subjecting them to market forces. In doing so it transforms them into fictitious commodities (O'Connor 1998: 144). Again, as noted within the context of labour-power, the fact that conditions of production are not produced capitalistically is problematic from the standpoint of capital, as there is no guarantee that such conditions will be reproduced in a manner conducive to the requirements of production and capital accumulation. This is equally true of nature. As O'Connor comments, 'there is no law of value at work making land, soil, water, and other natural elements available to capital in the requisite quantities and qualities and at the right place and time' (O'Connor 1998: 147). Indeed, as was argued in chapter 1, it is precisely this gap between the requirements of capital, as stipulated by the abstract, quantitative logic of the value form, and the productive capabilities of nature – the qualitative material basis of production – which is the source of capitalism's inherently anti-ecological character. By assuming the commensurability of the two, capitalism ends up degrading nature and thereby generating the economic crises of underproduction identified by O'Connor.



In brief then, the fact that nature as a condition of production is not produced capitalistically means that leaving it to be regulated by the market will likely lead to economic crisis. Were the state to allow this to happen it would be failing in its maintenance role, jeopardising its own legitimacy and indeed the legitimacy of the wider social form, and undermining its fiscal capabilities. For this reason, it is once again required to play the role of guardian to the conditions of production. Just as it is compelled to mediate between capital and labour, it must also mediate between capital and nature in order to regulate the production, distribution and access to the conditions of production. There is also a legitimation aspect to the state's response to the failure of markets and voluntary action to protect the environment. As Meadowcroft (2005: 7) explains: 'the propensity of economic agents to impose negative externalities on other actors, the over exploitation of (potentially renewable) common pool resources, and the concern that grave harm might be done to environments necessary to human welfare justify an increasingly active environmental management function'. Thus, as has been shown to be the case with other contradictions inhering in the economic subsystem, 'contradictions arising from the ecologically unsustainable articulation of a (domestic) capital economy with its environment are displaced to the political realm' (Hay 1996: 426). In taking on this responsibility the state is faced with a variety of contradictory demands. In particular, it must attempt to override the short-term concerns of fractions of capital or individual capitalists, whose concern is with immediate profitability, in order to protect the *collective* interests of capital as a whole by securing the conditions for continued capital accumulation in the longer term. The contradictory demands made of the state do not end there, though, as O'Connor explains:

Policy may benefit ... capital fractions at the expense of individual capitals. Some industries may be aided at the expense of others, or at the expense of the environment. Certain regions may be favoured to the detriment of other regions. The state may undo with one hand what it does with the other. (O'Connor 1998:150)

As O'Connor concludes (1998: 150), 'the regulation of the conditions of production is a highly contradictory process. State policy has complex unintended consequences'.

This demonstrates how the protection of nature as a condition of production becomes the responsibility of the state via its maintenance function. This, however, far from exhausts the state's functional remit. As noted, the state must also concern itself with maintaining its own legitimacy, and indeed the legitimacy of the wider social form.

There are two main ways in which environmental issues may translate into legitimisation crises for the state. First, the degradation of the environment threatens state legitimacy in an indirect sense via the type of economic, liquidity crisis identified by O'Connor. Rising costs of production resulting from the degradation of the conditions of production threaten profitability and may result, therefore, in recession and unemployment, which in turn undermine the state's fiscal capabilities. Again, the state is rendered impotent at exactly the time it is required to provide the most assistance, this resulting in a legitimacy deficit.

Environmental degradation may also generate legitimisation crises in a more obvious and direct sense. Not all groups or individuals in society perceive nature primarily as a condition of production – that is, in terms of its relation to the process of capital accumulation. As Graham Smith (2003) stresses, there are a plurality of foundations upon which people base their valuations of nature, be they ethical, aesthetic, health related, spiritual or otherwise, which are unrelated to economic matters. And groups motivated by such values are more likely to object to environmental degradation *irrespective* of the impact this may have upon capital accumulation. A potential gap opens up, therefore, between the outcomes of an economic rationality and the outcomes of the various non-economic rationalities employed by groups within civil society. Indeed, the post-materialism thesis suggests that this will increasingly become the case as more groups are unshackled from the burden of basic survival (this issue will be examined in greater detail in chapter 4).



Of course, where the outcomes of economic and non-economic rationalities coincide the state is able to fulfil its maintenance and legitimation roles simultaneously. Such a scenario exists where a piece of environmental legislation or state expenditure aimed at protecting or restoring an aspect of nature meets the needs of both capital – in the sense that it has a limited or indeed positive impact on prospects for capital accumulation – and the wider interests expressed within civil society – for example, where such an action protects or rejuvenates an aspect of nature in a way which connects with public concerns. An example of this would be the banning of CFCs. This had a negligible impact upon capital accumulation and allayed concerns raised by environmental groups over the destruction of the ozone layer (Hay 1994). Where economic and non-economic rationalities coincide, social capital expenditures are also expenditures on the social expenses of production.

For ecological Marxists, however, such convergences are unlikely to be the norm, as the outcomes of an economic rationality diverge in various ways from those produced according to non-economic rationalities. Productive pursuits often degrade the environment without threatening their own continuation via destruction of the conditions of production, at least in the short to medium term. As a result, its propagators will tend to oppose regulatory activities which threaten their productivity and economic growth more generally. However, public opinion, not being confined within the boundaries of an economic rationality, is more likely to demand regulatory action for extra-economic reasons, say ethical or health based. In such situations the state again finds itself between a rock and a hard place: if it fails to act it risks losing legitimacy as a direct result of its failure to protect the environment; however, if it does act, and foists unprofitable regulation upon capital, it is in danger of increasing the costs of production and suffering a legitimation crisis indirectly via liquidity crisis. Ecological modernisation theory rejects the negative-sum presentation of environment-economy relations which underpins this analysis, and more about this will be said about this below; for the moment, however, it is worth drawing out fully the implications of the Marxist-based analyses.

Beyond the more obvious disparities between economic and non-economic rationalities, in which the state fails to protect the environment from destructive production processes, there are more subtle divergences which may occur even when the state *does* protect the environment, but does so in a manner which considers only the requirements of capital. For example, if the state responds to the deforestation of an area of natural beauty with regulation which leads to monocropping, it becomes obvious that the environment is being protected only because such action is in the interests of capital. As mentioned earlier, Offe stresses that if the state's capitalist character becomes too transparent it risks losing legitimacy as a supposedly class-neutral institution.

Environmental issues, therefore, create further contradictions and tensions within the welfare state. As Hay (1996: 426) notes, the state:

must juggle the often conflicting short-term imperatives of capitalist accumulation and the generally longer-term considerations of environmental sustainability... [It] must seek to maintain the optimal conditions conducive to the optimal accumulation of capital, while seeking to minimize environmental degradation and despoliation in the attempt to maintain societal consent.

Such tensions are amplified by the fact that nature as a condition of production has increasingly become *politicised*. Environmental movements generate deficits of political legitimacy to which the state must respond, thus ensuring that the development of the conditions of production will be determined not only by the outcome of conflicts between fractions of capital and *within* the state, but also by conflicts between movements within civil society on the one hand and the state and capital on the other. In other words, how the state regulates the conditions of production will be determined by political and ideological factors as well as economic ones.



As Hay (1996: 427) notes, when faced with decisions regarding the environment, the state has a range of potential political options from which to choose. These can be placed on a hypothetical scale regarding the extent of state intervention. At the extreme interventionist end of the scale is the option of revolutionising the economic system in order to remove the environmentally destructive growth imperative. This sort of action would smash through what Offe identified as the problem of demarcation, as the state in this instance would not merely be subversive of the commodity form, but actively seeking to eliminate it – it would be explicitly anti-capitalist. Such action would require not only the political will of state actors, but widespread public support, both of which are missing in advanced capitalist societies. As such, for any government within the liberal-democratic state to attempt to instigate such wholesale changes would be political suicide. It is also the case that there would also have to be clear transition strategies and a coherent blueprint of the post-capitalist sustainable society. Whether these exist is a matter of debate.

The polar opposite of this strategy is the *laissez-faire* option – do nothing. Although this initially appears to be a more realistic option given its resonance with neo-liberal rhetoric, Hay also finds this stance untenable on the basis that a government which is completely ambivalent towards the environment will be swiftly replaced by one that at least acknowledges the issue, even if it pays it little more than lip-service.

The actual options available to the capitalist state, then, are far more limited, as they are constrained by the state's reliance upon an economy based on capital accumulation, and its need to maintain societal legitimacy. The crucial point for Hay (1996: 427), however, is that governments responding to threats to their legitimacy will do so at a *tactical* level, dealing with societal *perceptions* rather than the actual contradictions which generate these threats. Seward (1998: 349) similarly notes that the state's stance towards new ideas which potentially challenge its capacity to pursue economic growth will be one of symbolic receptiveness at best. For Hay (1996: 427), the 'structural form and operational logic of liberal-democratic representation' contributes to the likelihood of such a response, as it 'encourages governments to restrict their responses to legitimation deficits to the minimum they

perceive necessary for the short-term restoration of legitimacy'. O'Connor (1998: 151) similarly notes that, 'The political system has an independent effect on the state's capacity to protect or restore conditions of production'. A significant aspect of this effect is temporal: the time-horizon of contemporary democratic procedures tends to be 3-5 years, whereas ecological problems span millennia. In a sense then, liberal-democratic procedures engender an administrative rationality which is even more short-term in its outlook than that of industry. The state is likely to respond to perceptions of environmental crisis with a combination of 'symptom amelioration, symbolic politics, token gesturism, the 'greening' of legitimating ideology and responsibility displacement' (Hay 1996: 427). Liberal democracy's lack of ecological credentials will be examined in greater detail in chapter 5, which focuses on prospects for the 'green democratisation' of the state. For the moment, the point to emphasise is that the state, when coupled with the shell of liberal democracy, is unlikely to take actions which are sufficiently radical to resolve the basic contradictions which plague it, or which are likely to have any significant impact in avoiding ecological crisis.

This concludes the explication of the systems analytic approach, its account of the objective factors which constrain the activities of the capitalist state and the implications this may have for environmental issues. The following two sections turn to alternative accounts of state imperatives. The first examines ecological modernisation (EM) theory, which challenges the pessimism of the systems analytic approach by reconceptualising the environment-economy relationship as a positive-sum game. If environmental protection is compatible, indeed beneficial, to economic growth, the state's accumulation imperative no longer precludes it from pursuing sustainable policies. The second examines the state-centred approach of organisational realism. It focuses on identifying characteristics, *intrinsic* to the state, which may be viewed as anti-ecological. Such an approach tends to produce stronger condemnations of the state than are forwarded by systems analysts, in the sense that the state is viewed more directly as a cause of ecological problems, rather than as an entity which is merely incapable of solving them. For Alan Carter (1993; 1998 2004), the need to maintain control over its territories in an international environment



of competing states compels the state actively to select and maintain economic relations which are growth orientated and support environmentally damaging technologies.

#### ***2.4 Ecological Modernisation and State Imperatives***

Eckersley (2004) criticises the analyses of O'Connor and Hay for being overly deterministic in their formulation of state/economy relations, and indeed the systems analytic approach in general for being unable 'to *predict* change or explain historical agency and the social meanings attached to such agency' (Eckersley 2004: 61). Following Stuart Rosewarne (1997), she charges O'Connor with forcing 'the different logics of the economic (objective, functional) and the political (inter-subjective, contingent) into the one frame in a way that undercuts his long-standing effort to include social agency in social formations' (Eckersley 2004: 61). For Eckersley, by talking about state imperatives '*as if* they were beyond the control of social agents', and by theorising at a high level of abstraction, those heralding from a systems analytic background tend to 'obscure those things that are likely to shed light on social transformation, short of system collapse' (Eckersley 2004: 62). Eckersley, on the other hand, seeks to shift the focus by approaching the question of state functions from a critical constructivist perspective. For Eckersley (2004: 62), 'there is nothing objective or deterministic about the development of the productive forces precisely because the meaning of these developments are unavoidably evaluative, historically contingent, and filtered through different social frames and social standpoints'. The same may be said about social institutions: their purposes, meanings and functions are discursively constructed. These social interpretations in turn influence changes in material practices by providing the context in which they take place.

The important point, for Eckersley, is that if the functions of the state are discursively constructed, they may be discursively contested. Political and discursive struggles over how the functions of the state are ideationally rendered are therefore

important in shaping their further development. Social agency and critical discourse can transform social structures – the recognition of which, Eckersley (2004: 64) believes, enables critical constructivists to question the resignation of Hay and O'Connor to a view of the state as being significantly constrained by economic forces.

This is not to say that Eckersley completely dismisses the conclusions of functional theories of the state. She acknowledges that such theories have 'highlighted the ways in which the outer boundaries of successful policies – green or otherwise – appear to be set by the economy' (2004: 64). Rather, her departure from such theories concerns the extent to which she conceives of such boundaries as “spongy” and contestable' (Eckersley 2004: 63). However, this merely raises the question as to the extent to which Eckersley seeks to contest the *functions* of the state, or simply the *manner* in which these functions are fulfilled. To be more specific, Eckersley is unclear about whether she envisages the state being somehow unleashed from the shackles of the accumulation imperative, or whether it is simply to be redesigned in a way which enables it to encourage an environmentally benign form of accumulation:

On the one hand, the green state would still be dependent on the wealth produced by private capital accumulation to fund, via taxation, its programs and in this sense would still be a capitalist state. On the other, securing private capital accumulation would no longer be the defining feature or primary *raison d'être* of the state. The state would be more reflexive and market activity would be disciplined, and in some cases curtailed, by social and ecological norms. (Eckersley 2004: 83).

As Paterson *et al.* (2006: 153) note, the extent to which the two claims made here are compatible is questionable. If the state is dependent upon the wealth produced by private capital accumulation, then its ability to promote legislation which curbs this process is limited. Much would seem to rest upon the accuracy of the claims of ecological modernisation (EM) theory, which, as Eckersley (2004: 69-70) recognises, has 'become the most politically and economically credible way of



talking about environmental policy since the 1980s' (see also Hajer 1995: ch. 3). EM theory rejects radical environmentalism's call for an overhaul of the market system, instead recasting the environment/economy relationship as a positive-sum game in which economic growth is 'decoupled' from environmental degradation. As David Toke (2001: 281) points out, 'Probably the most fundamental point [of EM theory] is that environmental protection policies involve both gains for ecological wellbeing and for the economy'. To the extent that this is true, the state's accumulation imperative need no longer be viewed as an impediment to the pursuit of sustainable policies. This in turn would, as Eckersley suggests, relegate the systems analytic approach to highlighting the manner in which the 'outer boundaries' of successful state policies are set by the economy.

There are, however, different varieties of EM. The most commonly used distinction is between its 'weak' and 'strong' forms (Christoff 2000). The 'weak' version, which Hajer (1995: 251) refers to as 'techno-corporatist' EM, seeks to make rudimentary changes through technological fixes, policy learning and institutional adjustments. It 'recognises the structural character of the environmental problematique but none the less assumes that existing political, economic and social institutions can internalise care for the environment' (Hajer 1995: 31). Ecological concerns are viewed as opportunities for economic growth; the need for alternative technologies and green products is a market opportunity, while altering production methods generates cost savings, resulting from efficiency increased and reductions in wastage. In short, the 'greening' of business is good for everyone: business, economy, government, consumer and environment alike, sentiments which are echoed in a recent UK Treasury report on the economics of climate change:

The transition to a low-emissions global economy will open many new opportunities across a wide range of industries and services. Markets for low carbon energy products are likely to be worth at least \$500bn per year by 2050, and perhaps much more. Individual companies and countries should position themselves to take advantage of these opportunities ... Climate change policy can help to root out existing

inefficiencies. At the company level, implementing climate policies can draw attention to money-saving opportunities. (Stern 2006: 269)

The ecologically modernising state, according to this model, could be described as environmentally neocorporatist (Barry 1999: 115). The role of this 'proactive, agenda-setting, and interventionist' state, would be to encourage interest groups, trade unions, business and the environmental movement to accept the agenda of ecological modernisation, and to discipline the market through the use of green taxes where voluntary action is not forthcoming.

As the above quote from the Stern Report indicates, weak EM has been appropriated, at least discursively, by a variety of states and business leaders (see Weale 1992; Hajer 1995; Mol and Sonnenfeld 2000; Hunold and Dryzek 2002; Dryzek *et al.* 2003). This is unsurprising given its growth-orientated, reformist outlook. Hajer (1995: 32) notes that EM is a discursive strategy which allows governments to accommodate the environmentalist critique of the 1970s, politically, while meshing with the deregulatory trends which typify the 1980s. Indeed, he goes as far as questioning whether this 'weak' form of EM may be little more than 'a rhetorical ploy that tries to reconcile the irreconcilable (environment and development) only to take the wind out of the sails of "real" environmentalists' (Hajer 1995: 34). Weak EM has rightly been criticised for being toothless and unable to offer more than 'a short-term reprieve to the tensions between accumulation and legitimation facing the state' (Eckersley 2004: 71).<sup>3</sup>

'Strong' versions of EM still recognise the need for technological change and the use of market tools; however, these are no longer viewed as *sufficient* for addressing ecological problems. Whereas weak EM seeks to instigate rudimentary changes in *existing* political, economic and social institutions, strong EM is willing to go beyond piecemeal changes and confront structural impediments to the achievement of sustainability. As Hunold and Dryzek (2002: 29) stress, 'Ecological modernization in a stronger form would involve fundamental transformation of the political economy'.

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<sup>3</sup> For a defence of weak EM see Mol (1996).



It is more committed to a deliberative approach to policy making than its corporatist counterpart. Indeed, its divergence from weak EM is such that Humphrey (2007: 82), in the context of a discussion over the compatibility of democratic procedures with ecological imperatives, comments that: 'Once ... ecological modernisation comes in a form this "strong" it becomes difficult to see what distinguishes it from the kind of environmental demands that it was feared nobody would ever vote for'. For the purposes of this chapter, we may modify this observation: it becomes difficult to distinguish strong EM from the type of environmentalism which business leaders and state managers would reject out of hand. It is also the case that the term encompasses such a protean group of theories that it is in danger of becoming tautological. John Barry's (1999: ch. 5) radicalised version of EM, which he calls 'collective ecological management', bears little resemblance to its weaker counterparts, and comments such as: 'what both ecological modernization and collective ecological management share is a concern with the political regulation of human interaction with the environment' (Barry 1999: 120) do not help much in forging a meaningful connection. Both theories engage in an immanent critique and transformation of existing institutional structures; however, its call for the decentralisation and deliberative democratisation, the embedding of markets through Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) and commons regimes, and its questioning of consumption-driven economics, makes such a linkage tenuous. A better way of identifying what unifies the EM camp is to examine what differentiates strong forms of EM from Baker's (2006) ideal model of sustainable development (IM). For Pepper (1999: 29), whereas IM 'is fundamentally incompatible with and often overtly antipathetic to capitalist dynamics' collective ecological management 'accepts global marketisation "as a fact", seeking to restrain it through intervention'.

Dryzek enriches the distinction between weak and strong EM by outlining the nature of their 'attachment' to state imperatives. According to Dryzek, techno-corporatist EM seeks to achieve environmental conservation by attaching itself solely to the state's accumulation imperative and derives its weakness from this:

The risk of cooption is high because only modest goals can be linked to the economic imperative in the absence of a credible movement threat to destabilise existing political and economic institutions. Weak ecological modernisation, linked to only the economic imperative, never challenges the legitimacy of the state's complicity in practices that generate environmental risks. (Dryzek *et al.* 2003: 168)

A stronger form of EM, as the above quote suggests, needs to appeal to the state's legitimation imperative, which Dryzek believes can be done via Beck's (1992; 1999) notion of 'risk society'. For Beck, the 'second modernity' we currently inhabit is one in which, more than any previous period, the consequences of our actions have no limit in terms of territory and temporality. This age of increased risk, however, is also an age of uncertain knowledge – of what Beck (1999: 6) terms 'manufactured uncertainty'. The authority of scientific and technocratic knowledge is undermined by their inability to accurately predict the impact of certain technologies or production processes. This, according to Beck, has led politics to be increasingly organised around the production, distribution and amelioration of risk, rather than the distribution of resources: 'The driving force in the class society can be summarized in the phrase: *I am hungry!* The collective disposition of the risk society, on the other hand, is expressed in the statement: *I am afraid!*' (Beck 1992: 44). There is an obvious connection to environmentalism here – nuclear power, genetic modification, the use of toxic chemicals, encroachments into fragile ecosystems – all carry with them significant risks. The apprehension generated by such risks has led to the mobilisation of social forces – what Beck terms 'sub-political activities' – which question technological progress and scientific rationality, and which confront corporations and the state from within civil society. This may lead in turn to a crisis in the state's legitimation of the political economy: 'Those on the receiving end of risks are so numerous, and so capable of political mobilization, that they threaten the stability of the political-economic order, and so legitimation becomes an issue' (Dryzek 2000: 98).



Dryzek *et al.* (2002: 668) stress that, 'The conceptual continuum of ecological modernization maps on to a continuum of strategies practiced by environmental movements, with the weak version corresponding to moderate action, the strong version to more radical discursive politics'. The type of sub-politics identified by Beck is seen as vital to a strong version of EM, which requires a 'critical green public sphere raising fundamental questions, and prompting more discursive and democratic negotiation of the transition to an ecological modernity' (Hunold and Dryzek 2002: 29). Such a sphere is vital in assisting the connection of the environmental movement to the state's legitimation imperative. Where such a sphere is not present, the likelihood of cooption increases. Dryzek *et al.* (2003) find that active oppositional spheres flourish best, somewhat paradoxically, in states which take a passively exclusive approach to interest representation. In such states interests beyond those of labour and capital are excluded; however, this exclusion is passive, as the state does not seek to undermine the conditions under which they are likely to form (see Dryzek *et al.* 2003: ch. 2). For example, Germany's passively exclusive 'legal corporatism' meant that new social movements were forced to remain movement groups and as such maintained a more radical, anti-statist outlook. From civil society they were able to exert significant pressure on the state and trigger a risk-related crisis of the political economy which led to the implementation of stronger forms of EM, including anti-pollution programmes and the gradual phasing out of nuclear power (Hunold and Dryzek 2002: 31). This passive exclusion softened in the late 1980s with the entry of environmental movements into the state; however, they were incorporated as 'reflexively aware former activists' rather than as 'professionals schooled in moderate bureaucratic organizations', and as such 'remain conscious of the degree to which their successes rely on continued mobilization in civil society' (Hunold and Dryzek 2002: 33). This stemmed the depletion of the civil sphere and opened up the possibility for dual insider/outsider strategies: 'Along with the decentralized sub-politics that accompanies risk issues, Germany features a stronger form of ecological modernization than other states. The implication is that an interesting range of strategies with, against, and aside from the state is now available' (Hunold and Dryzek 2002: 35).

There are, however, serious concerns regarding the limitations and contradictions of EM. The ‘decoupling thesis’, which is central to EM’s claim to have overcome the tendency for capitalism to degrade its own conditions of production, contains several flaws. First, there is a tendency for EM to focus on the potential for the greening of production processes and products through technological advances, and to downplay the importance of consumption rates. This is a manifestation of its central concern with rendering economic growth compatible with environmental sustainability: to challenge consumption rates would be to challenge economic growth. However, the problem is that the environmental gains in production and products which advocates of EM point to are likely to be dwarfed by growing consumption. For example, Pepper (1999: 17) notes that CO<sup>2</sup> emissions were 4.32 metric tons in 1972 compared with 5.83 in 1990, despite the introduction of environmental technologies such as catalytic converters during this period, the impact of which were offset by a massive growth in car sales.

*Table 2.2: A Typology of Environmental-Economic Risks*

		<i>Potential Damage to Natural Environment.</i>		
		<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
<i>Economic Costs of Crisis Resolution</i>	<b>High</b>	Global Warming. Deforestation	Mass Species Extinction	Destruction of Rural Landscape
	<b>Medium</b>	Nuclear Disaster	Air/Ocean Pollution	River Pollution
	<b>Low</b>	Ozone Depletion	-	Footpath Erosion

*Adapted from Hay (1994: 94)*

Second, the economic benefits of business greening are in many cases overstated. As Neil Carter (2007: 236) points out, often the transition to sustainable production



processes requires a major initial outlay in anticipation of longer-term benefits; however, 'Firms may be reluctant or unable to make such a commitment, especially if it threatens short-term competitive advantage'. As a result, Pepper (2005: 15) reports that many firms opt for the quicker profits offered by end-of-pipe technologies. Toke (2001: 284) attempts to counter this challenge by highlighting the example of the successful switch away from the use of CFCs. However, this seems to be little more than cherry-picking on Toke's part. In Hay's (1994: 94) cost-consequence calculus of environmental risks (see Table 2.2), combating ozone depletion through the eradication of CFCs is an example of a high risk environmental problem with a low economic cost of resolution. Problems such as combating global warming and deforestation, on the other hand, are not as amenable to profitable solutions. Indeed, as Jänicke (2004: 201) acknowledges, there are environmental problems for which the available technological solutions are simply not cost-effective. For example, Australia's abundance of fossil fuels provides its economy with relatively low energy prices. The environmentally damaging forms of energy production which utilise these resources therefore underpin the country's economic prosperity. In such cases, EM is unattractive to both industry and state alike.

Third, many of the environmental improvements which are seen as examples of the plausibility of the decoupling thesis have been achieved, not through any overall reduction in environmentally damaging production practices, but through the displacement of these practices to developing countries (York and Rosa 2003). As Carter (2007: 231) wryly suggests, 'Perhaps ecological modernisation requires a large periphery of poor countries to act as a waste tip for the polluting activities of a rich core of nations?' Dobson (2000: 211) similarly notes that the achievement of declining energy consumption per unit of GNP in some developed countries has been largely based on a faster economic growth of the service sector. This is obviously not something that can be replicated across the globe unless we are going to stop consuming industrial products altogether. There are therefore serious questions regarding the extent to which EM is a generalisable developmental theory or one which is limited in its applicability to already developed countries. Blowers (1997: 845) claims EM to be 'a theory based entirely on Western industrial experience'.

Fourth, there are social and ethical issues which do not stimulate a response via the profit motive, and are thereby not dealt with by EM, at least in its weak form. As Dobson (2000: 209) observes, EM fails to provide firms with reasons to consider the needs of future generations; such reasons must therefore be parachuted in from outside of the theory. Similarly, Toke (2001: 290) is forced to admit that EM 'does not, and, in its present guise at least, cannot serve as a comprehensive social theory of development on account of its failure to deal with issues of social justice'. Dealing with such issues would mean going against the rollback of social democracy and capitalism's tendency to concentrate wealth (Fotopoulos 1997: ch. 2).

Pepper's (1999: 16; also 2005) summing up of EM would appear to be accurate:

EM's premises and assumptions – in both “weak” and “strong” readings – are fundamentally flawed. They are “utopian”, in the sense of ignoring capitalism's economic dynamics; failing to appreciate that attempts to mitigate its adverse social and environmental impacts do not amount to a matter of correcting “flaws” in an otherwise satisfactory mode of production. Rather, they try to reverse or deflect tendencies which are *inherent*: which *must* occur if the system is to work “satisfactorily” on its own terms, and which, history has shown, cannot be readily “reformed”.

The claims made by EM theorists tend either to overstate how far technological reforms can take us towards sustainability, or to understate the extent to which more radical demands are incompatible with a growth-orientated, capitalist economy. As such, EM theory fails to avoid the conclusion that any movement for sustainability is on a collision course with the growth-dynamic inherent to the capitalist economy, and therefore the state's accumulation imperative.



## 2.5 The Organisational Realist Approach

To borrow Theda Skocpol's (1979; 1985) terminology, the systems analytic approach to the state is *society-centred*, as indeed are Marxist approaches to the state in general. This type of approach, as Gianfranco Poggi (1990: 97) observes, 'accounts for the state's existence by referring primarily to social processes which are not themselves of a political nature, and which political developments such as state-making are seen to complement, assist and secure'. For Skocpol (1979: 31), this leads Marxists to treat states 'as if they [are] mere analytic aspects of abstractly conceived modes of production' or as 'political aspects of concrete class relations and struggles'. States are forms of 'instrumental or objective domination' (Skocpol 1979: 27), their actions being determined by the *subjective* influence of the capitalist class or their *objective* relation to the social system as a whole, and in particular the economic and socialisation subsystems which flank them. Marxists therefore conclude that state policy, even where *relative* autonomy is granted, is incapable of deviating from the *long-term* interests of the capitalist class.

Organisational realists (Skocpol 1979; 1985; Block 1987) see this as a fundamental error of Marxism:

The fatal shortcoming of Marxist theorising (so far) about the role of the state is that nowhere is the *possibility* admitted that the state organizations and elites might under certain circumstances act *against* the long-run economic interests of a dominant class, or act to create a new mode of production. (Skocpol 1973: 18)

For Skocpol, 'Marxist debate on the state stops short at the problem of the autonomy of the state' (Skocpol 1979: 28). Organisational realists, on the other hand, seek to rectify this situation by, as the title of Skocpol's (1985) essay suggests, bringing the state back in – by reinstalling it as a real historical subject.

According to the alternative *state-centred* approach outlined by Skocpol, the state should be recognised as an 'organization for-itself', which has 'a structure with a logic and *interests of its own* not necessarily equivalent to, or fused with the interests of the dominant class in society or the full set of members groups in the polity' (Skocpol 1979: 27). State managers are self-interested actors concerned with enhancing institutional power, and as such states themselves should be considered as self-interested organisational actors, as 'sets of institutions specifically concerned with accumulating and exercising political power' (Poggi 1990: 98). States should be recognised as at least '*potentially autonomous* not only over against dominant classes but also vis-à-vis entire class structures or modes of production' (Skocpol 1979: 27, emphasis added), and therefore, in certain situations, able to 'formulate and pursue goals that are not simply reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes, or society (Skocpol 1985: 9).

Skocpol (1985: 7) operates from a distinctly Weberian definition of the state, according to which its main functions are to exercise 'control over territories and the people within them'. There are two aspects to this: first, the state must maintain domestic order; and second, the state must compete to secure its survival and political-military advantage in an international environment of competing states. It does so through two types of organisation, administrative and coercive, which for Skocpol are 'the basis of state power' (1979: 29) and represent the core components of any state (1985: 7). However, the functioning of these organisations is dependent upon the state being able to appropriate resources from society and the economy, most notably in the form of taxes.

Skocpol uses the above definition of the state and its functions as a basis from which to derive an abstract understanding of what interests the state *may* pursue. Crucially though, she must demonstrate that the state has interests which diverge from those of the dominant class, as this is obviously essential if there is to be any possibility of state autonomy. First and foremost, Skocpol notes that 'state organizations necessarily compete to some extent with the dominant class(es) in appropriating resources from the economy and society'. She then goes on to outline a variety of



reasons why it may be expected that the use to which the state puts these resources will be at variance from the interests of the dominant classes. For example, maintaining domestic order may necessitate *distinctive* state-initiated reforms, especially in times of crisis where concessions are most likely to be made to the subordinate classes 'at the expense of the interests of the dominant class, but not contrary to the state's own interests in controlling the population and collecting taxes and military recruits' (Skocpol 1979: 30). Similarly, 'The linkage of states into transnational structures... may encourage leading state officials to pursue transformative strategies even in the face of indifference or resistance from politically weighty social forces' (Skocpol 1985: 9); indeed, 'international military pressures and opportunities can prompt state rulers to attempt policies which conflict with, and even in *extreme* cases contradict, the fundamental interests of a dominant class (Skocpol 1979: 31).

The *first implication* of organisation realism, then, is that the state is at least potentially autonomous from the dominant class(es). However, Skocpol is cautious when it comes to detailing the extent to which this is the case: state autonomy 'is not a fixed structural feature of any governmental system' (Skocpol 1985: 14). Indeed, she goes as far as claiming that Marxists are correct in their observation that 'states usually do function to preserve existing economic and class structures' (Skocpol 1979: 30). However, whereas Marxists view this as an inevitable result of the state's structural position vis-à-vis the capitalist economy, and/or its domination by the capitalist class, Skocpol (1979: 30) stresses that it is *the state itself* that chooses this path, because it 'is normally the smoothest way to enforce order'. The *second implication* of the organisational realist position, therefore – and the one which, as will be demonstrated, has the greatest relevance for greens and especially eco-anarchists – is that it is in the state's interest to maintain the capitalist economy. As Poggi (1990: 97) suggests, there is a 'convergence of interests' between capitalists and state actors, and between the requirements of the capitalist economy and the requirements of the state.

Crucially, though, Skocpol maintains that this convergence is of a contingent nature. In *exceptional* circumstances – particularly when the state is faced by some form of crisis – it is capable of contradicting the interests of the capitalist class. However, a crisis situation is not enough in-itself to guarantee that the state will exercise its autonomy; state actors must themselves be willing to undertake this action. Skocpol goes on to claim that the exercising of state autonomy is dependent upon the existence of ‘organizationally coherent collectives of state officials, especially collectives of career officials relatively insulated from ties to currently dominant socioeconomic interests’ (1985: 9). This being the case, ‘the extent to which [states] are actually autonomous, and to what effect, *varies from case to case*’ and ‘can only be analyzed and explained in terms specific to particular types of sociopolitical systems and to particular sets of historical circumstances’ (Skocpol 1979: 30, emphasis added). Marxist theorists, on the other hand, ‘have too often sought to generalize – often in extremely abstract ways – about features or functions shared by *all* states within a mode of production, a phase of capitalist accumulation, or a position in the world capitalist system’.

The first implication of organisational realism – that the state is at least potentially autonomous from the capitalist class and economy – may be a source of optimism for greens, in the sense that economic, legitimation or environmental crises may force the state to abandon its support for an environmentally damaging form of economy. However, the second implication – that it is in the state’s interest to maintain the capitalist economic system – may temper this optimism, as it can be interpreted as a demonstration of the state’s intrinsically anti-ecological nature.

Alan Carter is one commentator who explicitly draws out the ecological implications of the organisational realist approach, or what he terms a state primacy model (see Carter 1993a: 43-45; 1998: ch. 4; 2004: 313-319). Carter questions both pluralist and Marxist theories of the state on the basis that ‘Neither theory takes sufficiently seriously the possibility that all humans belong to the same species, and that state actors are also pursuing their own rational self-interest’ (Carter 1993a: 43). For Carter (1993a: 44), as with the organisational realists, the state chooses to stabilise



capitalist economic relations because it is in the interests of state actors to do so; *'such a role is self-chosen by the state'*. However, whereas Skocpol (1979: 30) rather sketchily alludes to this being because supporting the capitalist economy 'is normally the smoothest way to enforce order', Carter (1993a: 44, emphasis added) is more explicit in claiming that the reason capitalists are 'allowed to retain economic control' is because they 'are well suited to organizing the accumulation process that the state depends upon':

For Carter, there is reason to believe that the state must necessarily stabilise capitalist economic relations. However, he is at pains to stress that: 'Although this has the appearance of the state being an instrument of a class, the state would, on this account, remain an autonomous agent' (Carter 1993a: 45). The state could choose to usher in a new set of economic relations; the reason it chooses not to, however, is that such a move would not be in its own organisational self-interest.

Of course, this sounds similar to the type of claims made by structural functionalists and systems analysts. As noted, Offe (1975: 126) observes that, due to its structural position, '[the state's] power relations, its very decision-making power *depends* (like every other social relationship in capitalist society) upon the presence and continuity of the accumulation process. In the absence of accumulation, everything, and especially the power of the state, tends to disintegrate'. If the state were to attempt to alter this situation by altering the structure of economic relations in any significant way, capital's likely response would be investment strikes or capital flight, thereby rendering 'the therapy more harmful than the illness it was designed to cure' (Offe 1984: 50). The important point, however, is that, for Offe (1984: 159), 'the space of possible decision is determined by societal forces'. It is not the case, therefore, that Marxist theory as a whole fails to take 'sufficiently seriously the possibility that ... state actors are also pursuing their own rational self-interest', as Carter (1993a: 43) claims. It is simply that, for Offe, the interests of state actors are determined by societal forces to such an extent that their agency is rendered theoretically insignificant. Carter (1993a: 42), on the other hand, views state actors as having more clout: 'The bourgeoisie will only be strong as a class and only able to use their

economic power to constrain the state *while the state lets them*'. According to him, the capitalist class may initiate investment strikes or transfer capital abroad *only if the state allows this to happen*.

This being the case, Carter must have some other reason why the state is dependent upon the capitalist economy. As with Skocpol, he focuses on the fact that the modern state finds itself 'located within an international structure of competing states' (Carter 1993a: 44). The state must therefore develop its coercive forces in order to compete militarily; but it is only able to do so 'if the productive forces were developed sufficiently to provide the surplus that the development of the coercive forces requires' (Carter 1993a: 44). This being the case, 'states have an interest in introducing and then stabilising those economic relations which are capable simultaneously of generating the maximum wealth the state can then tax and of developing the most sophisticated technologies' (Carter 2004: 311).

The environmental implications of this state-dependence upon growth-orientated economic relations are clear: states 'are driven to stabilise economic relations which promote, indeed compel, environmentally destructive behaviour' (Carter 2004: 317); they are 'trapped within an *environmentally hazardous dynamic*' (Carter 2004: 316). It is worth quoting in full Carter's description of this dynamic:

Centralised, pseudo-representative, quasi-democratic political structures choose for stabilisation highly competitive, inegalitarian economic relations, which develop non-convivial, environmentally damaging technologies. Such technologies are the precondition for, and produce the wealth required by, the maintenance and further development of nationalistic and militaristic coercive forces. And it is these coercive forces which both empower the state and ultimately stabilise the economic relations selected. (Carter 2004: 316)



The way out of this dynamic, for Carter, is through 'radical disobedience' aimed at undermining each of the factors of this dynamic – capitalist economic relations, the state and oppressive technologies.

There are, however, several problems with the state-centred approaches identified here. First, as Codato and Perissinotto (2002: 66) note, despite the 'historicising' theoretical discourse that Skocpol forwards; and despite her criticisms of the overly abstract nature of Marxist theories of the state; her own conception of the state itself ends up being 'excessively formalist'. A weak/strong state scale is employed by organisational realists to measure the degree to which the *potential* autonomy inherent in states *in general* is realised in any *particular* historical examples. Weak states are less able to act against the interests of a dominant class: 'the apparatus of state power is more decentralized, fragmented, and tied down by nonexpert patronage linkages to dominant social interests which restrict its range of actions' (Barrow 1993: 132). Strong states, on the other hand are able to act against the will of the dominant class; they are characterised by a centralised administration: 'state sovereignty has been institutionalized in detriment of other non-state organisations' (Codato and Perissinotto 2002: 67). However, for Codato and Perissinotto (2002: 67), because this vision of state autonomy:

ignores the existing correspondence between particular political structures and particular types of relations of production ... [it] is not able to structurally differentiate different states, that is, to perceive that strong or weak states, in spite of this quantitative similarity, can be structurally distinct to the extent that they correspond to different social relations. The institutionalist approach would lead us to identify the French society of the absolutist monarchy as a society with a high degree of *stateness*, and to say the same regarding French society of the postrevolutionary period.

Takis Fotopoulos (2005), taking aim at Carter's state primacy model this time, notes that such an approach rests on the mistaken assumption that state managers operate

independently of the political elite. He uses the inquiries which followed the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 as just one example which demonstrates this not to be the case: 'The various official reports, which were commissioned by the Blair government and carried out by supposedly "independent" state actors, simply whitewashed the criminal choices of the British political elite on the Iraq war, as, I suppose, Carter himself would admit'. He also stresses that, according to the rational choice theory that Carter himself uses, the interests of state actors are in maintaining their position and maximising their own income. However, such aims are not necessarily achieved by maximising state surpluses, which is evidenced in the fact that 'East European regimes and most of the state machines today ... are seen to be far from functioning with the objective of maximising their country's economic surplus, on which, ultimately, depends the size of the state surplus' (Fotopoulos 2005). Peter Bratsis (2002: 251-252) goes further in criticising Skocpol's substitution of the state-as-subject for state managers. Skocpol assumes that the state exists as a calculating actor on the basis that whoever occupies an institutional position within the state acquires the same 'bureaucratic rationality'. However, the process by which the subjectivity which unifies state managers is generated is left unexplained. Skocpol (1985) at times alludes to state officials sharing a sense of ideological purpose, but again, she provides no account of the process through which this is generated. Bratsis (2002: 252) concludes that:

Such neo-Weberian theories talk about institutions acting "as if" these institutions were thinking calculating agents even though the Weberian assumptions they share place the methodological emphasis on individuals qua state managers and not institutions as such. In this way, neo-Weberian theories of the state-as-subject are guilty of presupposing and reifying the state.

Carter's main problem, however, is that his attempts to demonstrate the potential autonomy of the state lead him to underestimate the constraints placed upon state managers. For example, Carter's claim that the bourgeoisie would only be able to harm the state through capital withdrawal as long as the state allows them to is overly



simplistic. In order to remove the bourgeoisie's capacity to respond in this manner the state would have to restrict the movement of capital and even strip some companies or actors of their assets. However, this would generate market instability and lead to investment strikes. How is the state supposed to force investment? It would seem that the only way for the state to avoid the effects of such actions would be through nationalisation and a radical restructuring of the economy. It would also have to deal with the likely unfavourable response of business-owned media outlets. Again, the only option available may be to increase state control in this area. However, without the requisite political will such authoritarian solutions will simply trigger a legitimisation crisis through the withdrawal of mass support.

## ***2.6 Conclusions***

This chapter has outlined the various ways in which environmental issues may be incorporated into discussions of 'first order' economic crises and crises of the welfare state. With regards to 'first order' crises, it is argued that, while there is nothing intrinsically inaccurate about O'Connor's claim that an ecological contradiction within capitalism may trigger economic crisis, the presentation of this contradiction as separate from crises of overproduction is analytically problematic and politically inexpedient. As regards what Offe terms 'second-order crises', the state finds itself burdened with contradictory roles. In addition to the contradictions of the state identified in standard Marxist and neo-Marxist literature, its role as guardian of the conditions of production, and therefore nature, generates further tensions. In particular, the state's dependency upon capital accumulation renders it largely impotent in the face of environmental destruction. This potentially generates legitimisation deficits, which the state is forced to respond to with symbolic, tokenistic gestures, aimed at the short-term restoration of legitimacy. The specifically liberal form of democracy assists such a response, as shall be explained in greater detail in chapter 5.

There are valid criticisms which may be levelled at the systems analytic approach, though. One of the main problems is that its concepts are difficult to operationalise and measure empirically. How does one measure a legitimation or motivation input? As Barrow (1993: 115) notes, 'short of a complete system implosion, it is virtually impossible to know definitively whether social problems are genuinely systemic contradictions or merely difficult policy dilemmas'. Both Habermas and Offe at times seem to agree that this is an insurmountable problem. This does not completely dissolve the importance of the systems-analytic approach as a heuristic device, but it certainly limits its precision.

It is also the case that systems analysts have tended to underestimate the extent to which the welfare state can juggle the contradictory demands placed upon it. First, the state has shown itself to be far more able to convert social expenses into productive social capital expenditures. Second, systems analysts have tended to overestimate the extent to which the legitimacy of the state is linked to its resource distribution. The neo-liberal rollback of the state in the early 1980s demonstrated that the withdrawal of social welfare services need not necessarily generate legitimation problems. As Barrow comments, 'systems analysts failed to anticipate or to understand the degree to which normative participation is attached to political myths, national symbols, and rituals of participation which in principle are unrelated to fiscal consideration'. Such comments resonate with the likely state responses to environmental problems identified by Hay. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that the further tensions placed upon the state by environmental issues will necessarily lead to its implosion. There is no doubting that the environmental issue heaps extra strain on the state, but whether this leads to a state crisis is contingent upon various factors, including balance of power between capital and environmental groups and the extent to which the state is protected by the social choice mechanism from which it derives its democratic legitimacy – i.e. the specifically liberal form of democracy. The task of generating the requisite political will to force the state, via its legitimation imperative, to restructure the economy in a manner which unleashes it from the straight jacket of its accumulation imperative remains a monumental one.



The final two sections looked at challenges to Marxist-informed functional views of the state. EM paints an unconvincing picture of the environment-economy relationship as a positive-sum, win-win situation. Carter, on the other hand, seeks to shift the blame from the economy to the state by viewing capitalism as an economy which is actively selected and supported by the state on the basis that it provides the high levels of productivity required for the state to defend itself in an international environment of competing states. However, Carter's state-primacy theory is also found wanting on several accounts. In particular, it underestimates the extent to which the state is subject to legitimation and therefore cannot simply pick and choose whatever economic system suits its needs. The next two chapters, however, go on to look at other arguments which originate from an anarchist background, and which purport to demonstrate the inherently anti-ecological nature of the state.

In sum, then, this chapter has offered a qualified defence of the systems analytic approach to the state. Valid criticisms may be levelled against this approach; however, these criticisms serve to highlight its limitations rather than invalidate it as a whole. As demonstrated in the final two sections, systems analysis provides a conceptual framework which is superior to, and capable of highlighting deficiencies in, rival theories of the state.

## **Chapter 3: Anarchism, the State and Environment I:**

### **Anarchism and the Cult of the Natural**

*The first of all of Gaea's daughters was Themis, to whom she entrusted the laws of nature, and it is in the diligent study of those laws that we can best guide ourselves in reconstructing human societies. (Sale 2000: 108)*

As Sylvan (1993) observes, 'anarchism has vanished from the mainstream academic scene'. Indeed, it is debateable whether it was ever part of the mainstream academic scene. Despite this, there are two reasons why an in-depth examination of anarchism is of particular relevance given the subject of this thesis. First, there is anarchism's unique status as the only ideology to call for the abolition of the state; and second, anarchism has had the greatest influence on the early development of green political thought – an influence which has ensured that anarchist ideas still permeate green thinking, imbuing it with a particularly anti-state orientation. Indeed, Goodin (1992: 152) goes as far as claiming 'greens are basically libertarians-cum-anarchists'.

The first part of this chapter provides a definition of anarchism. This is no simple matter; anarchism is a particularly protean ideology, to the extent that even sympathetic commentators such as David Miller (1984: 3) have questioned whether it qualifies as a coherent ideology at all. The argument forwarded here, though, is that *all* ideologies encompass diverse, indeed oppositional, variants within their broader definitional structure. This being the case, the task is to outline the definitional structure of anarchism in particular. This is done by piecing together the few points of consensus to be found within the anarchist camp. An abstract, broad-brush approach such as this minimises the danger of arbitrarily excluding particular variants through the conscious or unconscious application of subjective value judgements regarding what constitutes an 'authentic' anarchist theory. However, this is not to say that the definition of anarchism must be kept at this level of abstraction;



precision is gained by delineating the different variants in evidence *within* the broader definitive structure rather than by narrowing the terms of definition.

The second part of the chapter delves deeper into what underpins anarchism's libertarianism, and in doing so uncovers areas of convergence between anarchist and green philosophy regarding the manner in which they conceptualise the structure of the universe and natural law in particular. The main focus is upon the naturalistic form of argumentation employed by anarchists, according to which empirical studies of nature are deemed to reveal natural laws or tendencies which in some way justify their normative claims regarding social and political organisation. For anarchists, the stateless society is 'natural' in the sense of being in concord with the laws of nature, whereas the state is 'unnatural' or 'artificial' as it runs counter to these laws. A critical examination of the theories of Peter Kropotkin and Murray Bookchin in particular form the basis for a critique of the naturalistic method of justification.

### ***3.1 Defining Anarchism***

In the popular consciousness, the archetypal anarchist takes the form, not of a Tolstoy, a Thoreau or a Gandhi, but of a nihilistic, black-masked, bomb-wielding rebel-without-a-cause, hell-bent on bringing about lawlessness and disorder. As anarchist historian George Woodcock (2004: 11) laments, 'anarchism, in popular parlance, is malign chaos'. Amongst the cognoscenti, on the other hand, the perception of anarchism as a naïve, romantic ideology, unable to extricate itself from its pre-industrial, agrarian roots is more prevalent. To say there is but a grain of truth to both these archetypes is to overstate their accuracy. As Richard Sylvan (1993: 219) points out, 'much of what is popularly and journalistically associated with anarchism consists of optional extras which are neither necessary nor even typical features of it'. Very few anarchists are terrorists, while those wishing to regress to some pre-industrial, agrarian past are in a distinct minority.

Where such misrepresentations are consciously propagated one would expect them to originate from the right of the political spectrum, anarchism typically coming from the left. However, in reality they are as much products of fraternal feuding as they are concoctions of political opponents. Many of the caricatures painted of anarchists either originate with, or were at least fuelled by, the attempts of Marxists to blacken their name. Ever since Marx's own slanderous attacks on Bakunin led to the latter being dismissed from the First International in 1871, anarchists have repeatedly found themselves on the wrong end of communist mudslinging. Subject to a lasting, and decidedly indiscriminate propaganda campaign, they have been accused variously of backwards primitivism, bourgeois apologetics, fascism, terrorism and naive utopianism. Lenin referred to anarchism as an 'infantile disorder', as 'bourgeois individualism in reverse', while Marx, who was no stranger to the art of invective, nevertheless managed to save some of his more vituperative remarks for anarchists, referring to Bakunin as the rogue elephant and as *asinus asinorum* (the ass of asses). On a more theoretical level, Marx and Engels fashioned the following erroneous definition: 'anarchy means universal, pan destruction; the revolution, a series of assassinations, first individual and then *en masse*; the sole rule of action, the Jesuit morality intensified; the revolutionary type, the brigand' (quoted in Marshall 1993: 631). Such demagogical falsehoods, as Ulrike Heider (1994: 7) observes, only served to 'confirm the distorted bourgeois images of anarchism'.

This, however, is only half of the story. Anarchism itself, as Peter Marshall (1993) explains, is a broad river, and as such resists precise definition. Its tributaries include communists and free-market capitalists, communitarians and individualists, pacifists and advocates of violent revolution. It has no movement-defining theorist, no Marx nor Communist Manifesto, and history has yet to provide us with an example of an actually existing anarchist society. Indeed, the river metaphor may be overly benign, implying as it does some common ground of agreement on direction or goals. A less partisan description may see anarchism as protean to an extent that precludes it from consideration as a distinct, coherent ideology.



This may be taking things too far, though. It may be that anarchism cannot be defined with reference to one theorist, work or historical example, but this is the case with any ideology. Socialism, conservatism, liberalism: these ideologies represent broad traditions of political thought which encompass conflicting variants. Moreover, attempts to claim 'authenticity' for one particular variant of an ideology are susceptible to shifts, conscious or otherwise, from disinterested description to normative evaluation, with the value judgements of the commentator, themselves dependent upon ideological persuasion, becoming the criterion of judgement. To guard against this, when faced with diversity, the commentator concerned with accurate description is better served by a broadening of the terms of definition – by a shift in the search for the essence of an ideology to a higher level of abstraction. In other words, as David Morland (1997a: 20) notes with specific reference to anarchism, 'vicissitudes of theory and practice... do not necessarily preclude the imposition of some wider definitive structure within which one could place a variety of thinkers and label them anarchist'. Of course, at some point a line must be drawn and categorisation must take place, and for this reason it is probably impossible to give a completely non-ideological definition of an ideology; however, a wider definitional structure may minimise contamination. Then, once a broad definition of anarchism has been forwarded, further precision may be achieved by delineating the different forms which anarchism takes – by illuminating the dimensions along which diversity is found.

A popular starting point for those attempts to define anarchism is the etymology of the term itself. Anarchy derives from the Greek *anarchos*, meaning 'without chief' or 'without ruler'. This being the case, it is unsurprising that anarchism is normally defined in terms of what it aims to negate. Etymology only gets us so far, though, as the precise meaning of the above translation is itself open to interpretation. Even the most cursory glance at the anarchist literature reveals its proponents to be opposed variously to leadership, domination, centralisation, government, authority, hierarchy, coercion and exploitation. If the negation of these concepts was uniform there would be no problem; however, there is wide variation within the literature as to which oppositional stance should be emphasised or granted definitional privilege. Bookchin

(2004) finds anarchism's anti-hierarchy stance to be its defining feature, whereas Malatesta ([1891] 1995) stresses its opposition to domination and exploitation. Moreover, the fact that not every anarchist opposes every one of these concepts represents an even greater definitional problem. Morland (1997a: 14-15) stresses that Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Peter Kropotkin were driven by a realistic conception of human nature to accept that coercion and authority will at times be required, even in an anarchist society. Such problems lead John Clark (1978: 6) to argue that 'any definition which reduces anarchism to a single dimension... must be judged seriously inadequate'.

It is at this point that we need to broaden the terms of definition – to broaden the brush strokes by shifting the analysis from lower-level concepts to broader meta-characteristics. Here, two associated principles may be regarded as sites of consensus amongst anarchists, and as essential and defining components of the ideology. The first of these is the belief that each person be allowed the freedom to foster and express her or his individuality. As George Crowder (1991) explains, for anarchists freedom is 'an inviolable value since it is definitive of true humanity'. Similarly, Rudolf Rucker ([1938] 1989: 33) claims that 'freedom is the very essence of life, the impelling force in all intellectual and social development, the creator of every new outlook for the future of mankind'. There are disparities within the anarchist canon concerning how freedom should be conceptualised, depending whether liberty is defined in communitarian or individualistic terms; however, freedom is nonetheless the aim. Indeed, this very libertarianism contributes to its resistance to precise definition. As Woodcock (2004: 18) notes:

To describe the essential theory of anarchism is rather like trying to grapple with Proteus, for the very nature of the libertarian attitude – its rejection of dogma, its deliberate avoidance of systematic theory, and, above all, its stress on extreme freedom of choice and on the primacy of the individual judgement – creates immediately the possibility of a variety of viewpoints inconceivable in a closely dogmatic system.



Nevertheless, somewhat paradoxically, it is this libertarianism which also provides the basis for its second defining feature, its opposition to the state. For anarchists, the only legitimate form of society is that which is based on the active voluntary cooperation of free individuals. Only this type of society is compatible with their libertarianism. However, they view the state as not only unnecessary but inimical to the type of freedom they view as inviolable. For anarchists, the state is a constellation of institutions characterised by domination, coercion and stultifying hierarchy; its scale is dehumanising, with power over vast territorial areas concentrated, centralised and monopolised by a ruling minority. It is an expensive drain upon regional resources, serves to protect wealth, property and privilege, entrench inequality and destroy local communities. As such, Sylvan (1993: 8) defines the state as 'the paradigmatic anarchist form', placing it in definitional opposition to *anarchism*.

Probably the most impassioned anarchistic assault on the state comes from Proudhon ([1851] 1989: 294):

To be GOVERNED is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so... To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorised, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under the pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolised, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonoured. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality.

What stands out in this quote is that Proudhon directs his attack at government rather than state. This is a common occurrence in anarchist thought. Alan Carter (1993b: 141) takes anarchy to mean ‘without government’; Kropotkin ([1910] 2005c: 284), in his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on anarchism, defines it as ‘a principle or theory of life and conduct in which society is conceived without government’; and George Woodcock (2004: 12) similarly states that ‘anarchism is the doctrine which contends that government is the source of our social troubles’. This would not be problematic were anarchists to reject *any* form of government; however, as Clark (1978: 8) notes, ‘while there runs through all anarchist writings an unmitigated contempt for the state, the anarchist position on government is far from unequivocal hostility’. Anarchists seem to attack government through a conflation with the state: they attack government with the state in mind. This conflation probably stems from the fact that it is impossible to have a state without government. However, where it falls down is that it *is* possible to have government without the state, and certain forms of government have been found acceptable by various anarchists. For example, as Morland (1997a: 16) notes, both Proudhon and Bakunin believed in the need for governmental structures as a mechanism for resolving disputes; indeed, Bakunin was not adverse to the idea of having a fully legislative and judicial structure. Kropotkin ([1914] 2006: ch. 5), despite his earlier quote, praised the governmental institutions of medieval cities; and more recently, Sylvan has claimed that ‘an anarchistic system may well have a small, smooth-running public administration’ (Sylvan 1993: 216). The crux of the problem seems to be, as Morland (1997a: 15) notes, that ‘the state is defined as a matter of degrees rather than kind’. This makes identifying the point at which government becomes state-government inherently problematic. Where some commentators see state, others will see government.

Morland (1997a: 16, 17) tries to ‘alleviate the problematical nature of elaborating a definition of the ideology’ by defining anarchism as an *anti*-state ideology rather than a *non*-state ideology – as ‘an exploration of the possibilities in the development of anti-state social and political structures’. The reason Morland employs a broader, more encompassing definition, is his perception that some anarchists are amenable to



maintaining some aspects of the state form. This is fine as it goes; however, the term anti-state still implies some common definition of the state itself. What needs to be added to Morland's account is a recognition that questions over whether anarchism is anti-state or non-state, anti-government or pro-government, are double-edged in the sense that their answer will depend not only on an examination of the organisational structures advocated, but also on an overarching and ongoing discussion of how these terms are defined.

What has been said thus far, however, fails to shed any light on what anarchism wishes to replace the state with. We have noted that anarchism is philosophically *for* liberty, but politically we have only ventured to say that anarchism is *against* the state. As Clark (1978: 5) notes, this is somewhat typical of anarchist commentaries, as few theorists attempt to define anarchism in terms of its positive proposals. Again, this is likely to be down to the diversity of proposals forwarded by anarchists. Despite this, however, anarchism's libertarianism again points us in the direction of a couple of broad proposals common to the anarchist vision. First, as noted, anarchists emphasise the need for voluntary methods of association and organisation; only agreements made in such a way are compatible with the type of freedom that anarchists see as inviolable. And second, for the same reason, they advocate decentralisation, this type of structure being most amenable to self-government.

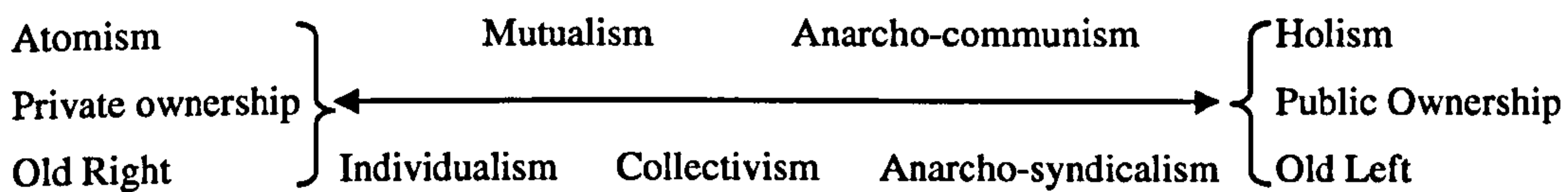
A definition of anarchism, then, may look something like this: it is a libertarian, anti-state ideology which aims to construct a decentralised society based upon the principle of voluntary association. This is a broad definition, because only a definition of this type avoids arbitrarily excluding particular variants. However, now that a broad definitional structure is in place, more detail can be added to the picture by delineating the different forms through which anarchism manifests itself.

### ***3.2 Types of Anarchism***

One of the most popular methods of classifying different strands of anarchism is to locate them on a dimension graded according to the degree of institutionalised

collectivity advocated, the polar extremes being atomism and holism. This dimension is intimately connected with the public-private ownership scale and therefore the old right-left classification (see Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1: Types of Anarchism**



*Adapted from Pepper (1993), Sylvan (1993) and Woodcock (2004)*

The *individualistic* strand of anarchism originates with Max Stirner, author of *The Ego and its Own* ([1907] 1982), a work critiqued in detail by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* ([1846] 1972). For Stirner, humans are essentially egoistical by nature. This is not simply the way things are, but the way things should be. Only those individuals who recognise their own interests to be the only reality and rule of conduct overcome the alienation and fragmentation of the self. As such, any authority other than that of the individual self is deemed illegitimate. This includes not only the state, but also society itself, to the extent that it attempts to force the individual to take into account interests other than her or his own.

The idea that humans will act in a cooperative manner out of some natural propensity for benevolence and solidarity is inconceivable for Stirner. Like Hobbes before him, Stirner ([1907] 1982: 260) is inclined to view humanity's natural condition as a 'war of all against all'. However, whereas Hobbes uses his vision of human nature and the state of nature to justify an all-powerful state, Stirner reaches specifically anarchist conclusions. Society will be replaced by a spontaneous 'union of egoists', based on contractual agreements aimed at avoiding conflict, and therefore undertaken for the sole reason that it is in the *individual's* enlightened interest to do so.



On the economic dimension, individualism tends to be paired with capitalism. Pro-capitalists find their way to anarchism through a radicalisation of the type of free market ideology pioneered by the likes of Ludwig von Mises and Milton Freedman. Anarcho-capitalists, of whom the intellectual leader of the U. S. Libertarian Party, Murray Rothbard, is the most renowned, wish to abolish the state through a privatisation of the public sector. However, of the plethora of free market supporters, only a select few may be termed anarchist, as most, including Robert Nozick, stress the need for a state, however small.

It is worth drawing out the differences between liberals and anarchists here. Both schools may be characterised as displaying scepticism towards the state; however, for liberals the state may be legitimised by constitutionalism and representative democracy; for anarchists, it may not. On this question, liberals side with Rousseau rather than the anarchists, their aim being legitimisation rather than abolition.

The *mutualism* of Proudhon seeks to maintain private property and market mechanisms; however, whereas under capitalism workers are forced to sell their labour for less than its worth, Proudhon attempts to design an economy which ensures a just distribution of property by basing it on the principle of the mutual exchange of equivalents. People's banks would issue workers with mutual credits according to time spent in the labour process, while goods sold on the market would be priced according to the average labour time required to produce them. Workers would be free to enter into what he called mutualist associations, which were bound by social contract rather than government legislation.

Bakunin moves things further along the scale towards holism by favouring the principle of *collectivism* over mutualism. Adapting the anarchist approach to an increasingly industrialised society led Bakunin to recognise the collective basis of labour and therefore of wealth. As such, wealth should be owned collectively by voluntary organisations or local communes, rather than on an individual basis as envisaged by Proudhon. The distribution of this wealth, however, is to be based upon work done rather than need; workers are only guaranteed the right to appropriate the

product of their labour or its equivalent. It is this distributive method that *anarcho-communists* question. As Kropotkin ([1892] 1982: 162-3) notes, 'Collectivists, begin by proclaiming a revolutionary principle – the abolition of private property – and then they deny it, no sooner than proclaimed, by upholding an organisation of production and consumption which originated in private property'. In place of this anarcho-communism aims, as the slogan popularised by Marx proclaims, to shift the guiding ideal of distribution 'from each according to his means, to each according to his needs'.

Lastly, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *anarcho-syndicalism*, sometimes termed revolutionary syndicalism, appeared in reaction to the reformist, parliamentary socialism typified by Eduard Bernstein. It is a body of thought which emerges as much from the socialist movement as that of the genuinely anarchist. Syndicalists reject the view that the state is capable of acting as a vehicle for working class emancipation, and that socialism may be reached via gradual parliamentary reform. Rather than engaging in conventional party politics, syndicalists call for working class autonomy from state institutions of any kind. The trade union is the institution through which working class struggles are coordinated, the overall aim being the overthrow of the capitalist regime through general strike. However, for syndicalists, the trade union is not merely a tool of revolutionary change; as stated in the *Confederation Generale du Travail*'s 1906 Charter of Amiens 'The trade union, which today is a defensive institution, will be, in the future, the basis of production, distribution, and the re-organisation of society' (CGT 1906). This separates syndicalists from anarcho-communists, who see the local commune as the organising unit within society.

Although this is the most common way in which varieties of anarchism can be placed, it is by no means the only one. Sylvan (1993: 232-233) includes three additional dimensions: mechanisms of *group decision* range from the fully participatory through to the fully dictatorial; *procedures-of-change* from violent to pacific and from constitutional to non-constitutional; and *change initiators* may hail from the bottom, or 'the people', for example workers' syndicates or new social



movements; or from higher up, for example political parties or big business. There are also important variations in how anarchists conceptualise the state. Many anarchist's view the state as emerging with economic inequality, as an institutional means of protecting specific class and property relations. This group is therefore in general agreement with the Marxist-instrumentalist view of the state. Others, most notably Alan Carter (see chapter 2), agree that the state protects capitalism and the capitalist class, but emphasise that it chooses to do so because this is in its own interests.

We now have a base-line definition of anarchism, and from this have been able to explore briefly how the basic ideals which make up this definition are manifested in the different schools of anarchist thought. However, although the previous sections highlighted anarchism's subscription to a radical form of libertarianism, and explored some of the implications of this, we have still to examine the philosophical basis of this belief. Upon what do anarchists base their optimism in freedom? Upon what do they base their belief that a stateless society will not lead to a Hobbesian 'war of all against all'? In other words, how do anarchists go about normatively justifying the stateless society? It is these questions that the subsequent section addresses. In doing so it uncovers areas of convergence between the philosophical underpinnings of anarchism and green political thought.

### ***3.3 Anarchism and the 'Cult of the Natural'***

The answer to the above questions lies in what Woodcock (2004: 25) terms anarchism's 'cult of the natural'.<sup>4</sup> In short, as the quote which introduced this chapter indicates, anarchism is often claimed by its proponents to be the 'natural' society, on the basis that it adheres to certain lessons which may be derived from the natural

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<sup>4</sup> From here on, the focus will be on social forms of anarchism rather than the individualist strand typified by Stirner. Stirner's theories, although deserving of the term anarchism, are not typical of the general thrust of anarchist thinking, and individualist anarchism in general has had little impact upon green thinking, which is unsurprising given its association with an unfettered capitalism.

world. The flip side of this argument is that the state runs counter to these lessons, and as such is unnatural or artificial.

Attaching the term 'natural' to a particular subject is a time-honoured means of conferring normative value upon it, while appealing to the 'unnaturalness' of something is a common strategy for undermining its legitimacy. The term, however, has found itself coupled with disparate and opposing ideals. Part of the reason for this, as Marshall (1989: 127) notes, is that it can be 'appealed to as if it has its own invincible weight ... it is given the force of logic so that like  $2 + 2 = 4$  it only has to be asserted to be self-evidently true'. This easily obtained propaganda value has encouraged arbitrariness in application, particularly in popular discourse. As Pepper comments, 'if what *I* do and like is natural, it is just, or must be accepted even if it is not liked. Conversely, if I do not like things *you* like – such as homosexuality or egalitarianism – I can dismiss their worth by branding them as 'unnatural'' (Pepper 1993: 8).

Of course, not all 'naturalistic' arguments are this baseless. Most of the time some attempt is made to justify rather than simply assert the usage of the term natural by appealing to observations made of the natural world. However, this brings us to the second reason why the term has found itself coupled with varying ideals. As Tim Hayward (1995: 198) observes, 'nature teaches notoriously equivocal lessons'. Douglas Alexander (1990: 167) reminds us that 'throughout the history of western civilisation, thinkers have purported to see in nature confirmation of the inevitability and "naturalness" of slavery, patriarchy, hierarchy, and war, as well as their converse: social justice, mutual aid, and human equality'.

This chapter focuses on two of the more sophisticated examples of the naturalistic argument to spring from anarchist circles: that of Peter Kropotkin and Murray Bookchin. Both of these thinkers use empirical studies of nature to highlight the existence of laws, processes or tendencies which justify their normative claims, and thereby undermine the legitimacy of the state. However, before going on to discuss their particular theories it is worthwhile illuminating the common manner of



conceptualising the universe upon which naturalistic arguments are based. This not only provides a theoretical context within which to situate Kropotkin's and Bookchin's work, but also brings to light several areas of convergence between anarchistic and ecological thinking.

A fundamental assumption of anarchism is that there are natural laws governing the universe which generate natural order and harmony. It is this assumption which underpins their belief in freedom. Nature, for anarchists, thrives best when left to follow its own course. The same is the case with humans: if left to follow their own natural inclinations they would spontaneously form orderly and harmonious social relations. Indeed, it is upon these natural inclinations that anarchists base their optimism regarding spontaneous revolutionary capability of the masses:

The anarchist social revolution ... arises spontaneously in the hearts of the people, destroying all that hinders the generous upsurge of the life of the people in order thereafter to create new forms of free social life which will arise from the very depths of the soul of the people. (Bakunin, quoted in Guérin 1970: 34-35)

For anarchists, both nature and human nature are imbued with what Proudhon termed 'immanent justice'. Rather than the abolition of the state and man-made law being an open invitation to chaos and disorder, anarchists believe that 'people will voluntarily cooperate in sufficient numbers to facilitate public goods (and thereby preclude the necessity for the state)' (Hartley 1995: 154). Indeed, beyond being merely unnecessary, anarchists believe the state's existence subverts the universe's naturally harmonious condition. As Marshall (1993: 14) comments, for anarchists, 'it is interfering, dominating rulers who upset the natural harmony and balance of things. It is only when they try to work against the grain, to block the natural flow of energy, that trouble emerges within society'. We need, therefore, to get back to a more natural way of living, to following natural law rather than human law. As George Crowder (1991: 31) observes, for anarchists, 'to reject the laws of men and follow

the law of nature is to abandon the realm of interest and conflict for that of truth and concord as reflected in the structure of the universe itself'.

The quest to articulate the true content of natural law has spanned almost the entire history of political philosophy. Since its earliest expression in Taoist philosophy and the Stoic distinction between *jus natural* and *jus gentium*, it has been constantly revised and reformulated, from Cicero to the Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages, to the social contract theorists, and more recently the creators of the doctrine of natural right. Investigations into natural law, therefore, have thrown up varied conclusions depending on how the 'structure of the universe', and humanity's place within it, is conceptualised.

Throughout the eighteenth century – anarchism's crucial formative period – the dominant strands of thought were the romanticism of Rousseau and the scientism of the Enlightenment. Rousseau bucked the enlightenment trend by rejecting reason in favour of the heart or sensibility – by preferring personal introspection to empirical science in the search for natural law. In the infamous 'The Confession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar', an interlude in the fourth book of *Emile*, Rousseau ([1762] 1991: 229) celebrates the fact that his main character deduces the rules of his moral conduct, not 'from the principles of a high philosophy', but from 'the depths of [the] heart, written by Nature in effaceable characters'. However, a fact generally overlooked by those wishing to charge anarchism with naïve romanticism is that anarchism, on the question of natural law at least, aligns itself with the mainstream of the enlightenment rather than with Rousseau. Anarchists conceptualise the universe in secular terms, as a purely sensible realm governed by universal laws which are to be accessed through the application of the methods of empirical science. Natural law, especially with Kropotkin, comes to be equated with ecological law. This being the case, anarchism is the first contemporary political ideology to *politicise* ecology: it derives normative implications for the *social* realm from empirical investigations into the ecological laws inscribed in the *natural* realm. It is nature itself, then, which provides the ammunition with which anarchists seek to puncture the legitimacy of the state.



The validity of this naturalistic form of argumentation rests upon anarchism's subscription, albeit in a modified form, to a manner of conceptualising the universe which originated in the middle-ages. Here the universe is envisaged as 'great chain of being', which is 'composed of an infinite number of continuous links ranging in hierarchical order from the lowest form of being to the highest form – the Absolute Being or God' (Marshall 1993: 15). The laws governing this chain emanate from God. As Crowder (1991: 31) explains, natural law, according to this view, 'is that part of God's law accessible to human reason' through a priori reasoning, intuition or revelation.

It is perhaps surprising that anarchism is informed by such a view of the universe, given its historical association with justifications of hierarchy and spiritualism. In its original formulation, some individuals were considered to be higher up the chain of being, and therefore better able to access God's laws, such as the Pope. However, Anarchists are drawn to its *monism*: viewing the universe as a single chain of being is necessary if all phenomena in the chain are to be understood as subject to the same underlying laws and processes. If this were not the case – if the social and natural world were viewed as being governed by separate laws – anarchism would be unjustified in deriving normative implications for the social realm from the natural world. In any case, the picture of the great chain of being painted by anarchists is very different from that which predominated in the middle-ages. As noted above, it is secularised – God's law being replaced with ecological law as the source of natural law; and whereas the middle age version was static, the anarchist version is temporalised, imbued with the evolutionary view of nature which was gaining popularity at the time.

As Pepper (1993: 165) notes, the monism of the 'great chain of being' is something which modern ecological thinkers have also found appealing. It is therefore an important site of convergence between anarchist and ecological thought. As noted, a monistic conceptualisation of the nature-society relationship runs counter to the notion that both these realms are distinct, separate entities. It therefore undermines

the notion that social laws can be created without due consideration of natural laws, or that nature is something that can be shaped to suit the needs or laws of society. Indeed, beyond this, more than simply undermining this narrowly anthropocentric view, the modified version of the 'great chain of being' can actually be used to reverse this trend. By equating natural law with ecological law, anarchists are effectively making nature sovereign; humans must follow nature – must shape society to suit ecological laws; as Barry Commoner's (1971: 41) third law of ecology states, 'nature knows best'.

Now that the philosophical underpinnings of the naturalistic mode of normative justification have been outlined, it is possible to focus in on its more specific formulations. The next two sections critically examine the naturalistic aspects of the theories of Kropotkin and Bookchin and bring to light several problems inherent in naturalistic arguments which undermine their ability to castigate the state as being unnatural.

### ***3.4 Kropotkin's Darwinian Justification of the Stateless Society***

Kropotkin's ethical naturalism developed out of a critique of the Social Darwinism of 'Darwin's bulldog', Thomas Huxley. In his essay, 'The Struggle for Existence: A Programme', Huxley (1888) forwarded an interpretation of Darwin which posited intraspecies competition as the driving force of evolution. Nature, for Huxley, is red in tooth and claw; competition, struggle and strife are inevitable, indeed necessary, for progress; they ensure 'the survival of the fittest'.

As David Macauley (1998: 301) explains, Kropotkin recognised how this version of Darwinism could be "socialised" (and sociologized) to provide ideological support for a laissez-faire philosophy by validating [competition] as a "law of nature" that applied as well to human communities'. Huxley (1888: 165) in particular used it to justify the state, arguing that before its advent 'life was a continuous free fight, and beyond the limited and temporary relations of the family, the Hobbesian war of each



against all was the normal state of affairs'. Kropotkin's field studies in the Vitim regions of Siberia, on the other hand, led him to different conclusions. It is worth emphasising, though, that Kropotkin's target was never Darwin himself, nor the positivist method employed by Huxley. Kropotkin was a great believer in the inductive method and its applicability to all phenomena, physical, biological and human (Miller 1983: 328). Rather, his concern was to show that Huxley's *interpretation* of Darwin was erroneous, and to demonstrate that Darwinian ideas, when accurately represented, could be used to support the anarchist position.

From Huxley's theories we would hypothesise the existence of a high degree of *intraspecies* competition. Kropotkin, however, amassed evidence which demonstrated that, where struggle is to be found, it is not between *individual* entities of the same species, but between the species *as a whole* and 'inclement nature', by which Kropotkin meant the adverse conditions which surround them. Intraspecies relations, on the other hand, are largely characterised by support and cooperation – what Kropotkin terms 'mutual aid', the title of his best-known work.

Kropotkin packs *Mutual Aid* with examples which, for him, demonstrate animals to be naturally cooperative. As Miller (1983: 330) observes, this evidence can be split into four categories. First, there is evidence demonstrating a general sociability amongst animals: they often live in colonies or herds, migrate in groups and so on. Second, there is evidence that animals cooperate to achieve goals which would be unattainable for organisms operating in isolation: many species of animal hunt in packs for example. Third, there are examples of animal behaviour which is directed solely at benefiting fellow members of the species: for instance, various species signal when a predator is near or to indicate the location of food. And finally, there is evidence of animal behaviour which not only assists its species-kind, but does so at risk to the assisting party: for example, monkeys have been observed rescuing injured members of a hunting group. For Kropotkin ([1914] 2006: 47), rather than demonstrating competition to be the driving force of evolution, this evidence suggests that 'under *any* circumstances sociability is the greatest advantage in the struggle for life. Those species which willingly abandon it are doomed to decay;

while those animals which know best how to combine have the greatest chance of survival and of further evolution'. Survival of the fittest is survival of the most sociable and cooperative; mutual aid is therefore 'the principle factor, the principle active agency in what we may call evolution' (Kropotkin 1924: 47).

Kropotkin's subscription to a monistic conceptualisation of nature-society relationship – based on the observation that humans, like any organic entity, are products of evolution and therefore subject to its laws – allows him to derive normative claims for human society from his observations of non-human nature:

“Don't compete! – competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it!” That is the *tendency* of nature, not always realized in full, but always present. That is the watchword which comes to us from the bush, the forest, the river, the ocean. “Therefore combine – practice mutual aid! That is the surest means for giving to each and all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral.” That is what Nature teaches us; and that is what all those animals which have attained the highest position in their respective classes have done. (Kropotkin [1914] 2006: 61)

Moreover, cooperation, or mutual aid, is not only a tendency of non-human nature, but is also inscribed in *human* nature. The fact that sociability is vital for survival, and therefore further evolution, has led it to become what Darwin termed a 'permanent instinct': 'the sophisms of the brain cannot resist the mutual-aid feeling, because this feeling has been nurtured by thousands of years of human social life and hundreds of thousands of years of pre-human life in societies' (Kropotkin [1914] 2006: 228). Indeed, Graham Purchase, a self-labelled disciple of Kropotkin, goes as far as stating that 'humankind ... cannot help but develop complex patterns of socially beneficial organisation (Purchase 1997: 82).



Kropotkin ([1914] 2006) uses anthropological evidence to reinforce such claims. He stresses that human beings have always lived in tribes, clans or communities in which various customs, practices and institutions act to contain conflict and ensure the practice of mutual aid. Even the appearance of the coercive state failed to eradicate this tendency: the village commune proved to be particularly resistant to the encroachments of the state, while in the cities the instinct for mutual aid, rather than being eradicated, was redirected into trade unions and a multitude of voluntary and charitable associations. As Kropotkin ([1914] 2006: 241) states in the conclusion to his account of the evolution of human society: ‘neither the crushing powers of the centralized State nor the teachings of mutual hatred and pitiless struggle ... could weed out the feeling of human solidarity, deeply lodged in men’s understanding and heart, because it has been nurtured by all our preceding evolution’.

The final component of Kropotkin’s naturalistic theory is outlined in his unfinished work, *Ethics* (1924), in which he goes on to apply ideas expressed in *Mutual Aid* to the field of morality. His aim in this text was to use the scientific study of nature to uncover the origins of moral sentiments, and to illuminate the function that morality plays in social life. Kropotkin (1924: 37, 16) argues that sociality, or mutual aid, is ‘the common source out of which all morality originates’; it is ‘the Natural origin not only of the rudiments of ethics but also of the higher ethical feelings’. Crowder (1991: 162) explains that, for Kropotkin, ‘In the practice of mutual aid among the social animals can be seen the seeds of a sense of justice or equity, and beyond this lies the emergence of the “higher” ethical practices of altruism and self-sacrifice’: ‘*Mutual aid – Justice – Morality* are thus the consecutive steps of an ascending series, revealed to us by the study of the animal world and man’ (Kropotkin 1924: 45). The higher ethical practices of justice and morality require the mental capacity of reason, and as such exist only in man, at least for the moment.<sup>5</sup>

At this point it is worth summing up Kropotkin’s naturalistic theory and its implications for social and political organisation. The morality taught by nature, the ‘first ethical teacher of man’ (Kropotkin 1924: 45), is the law of mutual aid. Mutual

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<sup>5</sup> For a fuller account of the ethical aspects of Kropotkin’s naturalism see Morris (2002)

aid is vital for species survival, is the factor driving the evolutionary process and is 'the best guarantee of the loftier evolution of our race' (Kropotkin 1924: 234), in the sense of being the source of morality. As Miller (1983: 329) points out, 'The implication that he obviously intended should be drawn from this was that anarcho-communism, a social system which would develop these practices to the greatest degree, would be the "highest" and most beneficial form of human society'. For Kropotkin, 'human community is entirely natural, whereas the state – which weakens or destroys tribal, group, and communal bonds – is not' (Macauley 1998: 305). The state is 'an artificial and malignant growth' (Marshall 1993: 323) which runs counter to the lessons of nature and suppresses the natural sociability inscribed in our instincts by the evolutionary process.

There are, however, serious problems which undermine Kropotkin's naturalistic critique of the state. To begin with, the argument that mutual aid is the driving force behind evolution imbues Kropotkin's theories with a 'mechanistic fatalism' that sits uneasily with his emphasis upon the importance of education, the propaganda of the deed and the role of the creative will in general. If mutual aid is as essential to survival as Kropotkin at times makes out, then its further propagation is all but assured. As Malatesta (quoted in Richards 1965: 44) commented, if this is the case, 'what meaning can the words 'will, freedom, responsibility' have? And of what use would education, propaganda, revolt be? One can no more transform the predestined course of human affairs than one can change the course of the stars'.

A second criticism levelled at Kropotkin is one that will be familiar to anarchists in general: if humans are naturally cooperative, and if mutual aid is the driving force of evolution, how is the appearance of the state to be explained? Pepper (1993: 172), focusing on the question of human nature, asks:

If humans are naturally cooperative, why have they acted *against their nature* by setting up the state? If they are naturally social, why have they acted against their nature by setting up property? If social, why have they created anti-social religion and the church? ... If free and non-



hierarchical, why have we set up hierarchies? Why do we keep acting against our own nature?

As Morland (1997b: 9) observes, 'human nature... is an evaluative tool by which rival ideologies are either welcomed or spurned' (Morland 1997b: 9); to found one's politics on an unrealistic conception of human nature is to found it on quicksand. However, when the concept is evoked, anarchism invariably finds itself in the spurned camp, the argument being that its proponents forward a naïve, one-sided, utopian account of human nature. For example, Heywood (1992: 198) accuses anarchists of 'an unashamed optimism, a belief in the natural goodness of humankind', while de George (1978: 37) concludes that the anarchist's 'faith in the rationality and morality of the ordinary person [is] so little in accord with what many people experience in their dealings with their fellow man ... that he is not a political realist but an idealist utopian'. Many commentators (see Goodwin 1992) see the anarchist view of human nature as being indistinguishable from the account forwarded by Rousseau in *The Discourse into the Origin of Inequality* (1754). For Rousseau, humans are naturally good; in the state of nature they are noble savages, guided by *amour de soi*, that instinctive, benign self-love concerned only with self-preservation. However, society corrupts and *amour de soi* is gradually replaced with the more malignant *amour propre*, a relational form of self-love which finds satisfaction only in favourable comparison to others:

if we have a few rich and powerful men on the pinnacle of fortune and grandeur, while the crowd grovels in want and obscurity, it is because the former prize what they enjoy only insofar as others are destitute of it; and because, without changing their condition, they would cease to be happy the moment the people ceased to be wretched. (Rousseau [1754] 1993: 112).

April Carter (1971), David Hartley (1995) and Morland (1997a; 1997b), however, view the accusation that anarchism espouses a one-sided, optimistic view of human nature as a perennial half-truth, or oversimplification, of what is a more nuanced

position. Morland (1997b: 12) stresses that ‘anarchists are proprietors of a double-barrelled conception of human nature. Human nature is composed of both sociability and egoism’; Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin were, according to Morland (1997a, 1997b) and Hartley (1995), thoroughly aware of humanity’s capacity for wickedness; indeed, anarchism’s rejection of the Marxist strategy of gaining control of the state is based on the belief that power corrupts.

It is important to be clear about the exact manner in which this double-barrelled conception of human nature is formulated. At times the anarchist position is construed as arguing that humanity’s capacity for mutual aid is innate, whereas egoistic behaviour is the result of the influence socio-environmental factors. For example, Thomas (1980: 8) claims that ‘anarchists insist that once men are unfettered by an inappropriate political system that does violence to their individuality and commonality, they will at last fulfil their potentialities, become what they really are; artifice will have given way to nature, bad standards to good, and men will be reborn’. Morland’s (1997b: 14) account, on the other hand, states that, for anarchists, *both* are ‘innate components of human nature, the development of which is encouraged by the environmental context within which individuals find themselves’.

Shifting the focus back to Kropotkin, Morland’s account would seem to be more accurate. Indeed, Kropotkin ([1914] 2006: 4) criticises Rousseau’s romanticised account of nature, accusing him of ‘excluding the beak-and-claw fight from his thoughts’ and therefore for being as culpable as Huxley in failing to present ‘an impartial interpretation of nature’. Kropotkin instead finds within nature a ‘*double tendency* – towards a greater development on one side, of *sociality*, and, on the other side, of a consequent increase of the intensity of life, which results in an increase of happiness for the *individuals*, and in progress – physical, intellectual, and moral’. This, he claims, generates within humans two opposing sets of feeling: ‘In one set are the feelings which induce man to subdue other men in order to utilise them for his own ends, while those in the other set induce human beings to unite for attaining common ends by common effort’ (Kropotkin 1924: 22).



For Kropotkin, the egoistic, anti-social aspect of human nature feeds a second current in human evolution out of which springs the state. Within village communities a class of chieftains emerged out of the combination of the military power of professional warriors and the judicial power of experts in customary law. This class was able to utilise its power to force the rural population into serfdom, in turn transforming themselves into the feudal nobility and signalling the advent of the centralised state. The double-barrelled view of human nature and human evolution would therefore enable Kropotkin to answer the earlier question posed by Pepper. However, it does so at the expense of throwing up a series of other, perhaps insurmountable, problems. In particular, it is questionable whether Kropotkin actually demonstrates there to be a *directional* evolutionary movement towards *increasing* sociality, which is essential if mutual aid is to be considered the driving force of the evolutionary process. On the one hand, his accounts of the behaviour of non-human nature are snapshots in time which demonstrate the existence of sociality without being able to show whether such behaviour increases or decreases over time. On the other, in his account of evolution of human society he not only acknowledges the existence of an egoistic current which gave rise to the state, but admits that modern society has made people *increasingly* egoistic. Kropotkin argues that the *scope* of mutual aid has widened, from being practiced solely amongst fellow kinsmen, to those in a particular locality, right up to the national and international level. However, although mutual aid practices have become wider, they have also become weaker as the state has increasingly assumed their functions (Miller 1983: 333).

As Miller (1983: 337) points out, then, although Kropotkin does enough to demonstrate the existence of sociality amongst animals and humans:

This would only show ... that some degree of behaviour altruism has instinctual origins. It would not show that altruism tends to increase as we move along the evolutionary scale, which was the stronger point that Kropotkin wanted to establish ... Although he is able to point to a number of examples of mutual aid, both animal and human, the evidence

cited does nothing to prove that species and groups are more likely to survive the more they practice it; it would be equally compatible with the view that there is an optimum level of mutual aid, above which a species' or group's chances of survival are lessened.

Adopting an alternative line of argument, Kropotkin suggests that the survival of mutual aid against the backdrop of the state demonstrates it to be more enduring than egoism. However, this is unconvincing, as egoism could just as easily be claimed to be the more persistent given that it has survived in the face of centuries of Christian cultural conditioning (Crowder 1991: 165).

Kropotkin's attempts to demonstrate mutual aid to be the driving force of evolution are therefore unconvincing; and this in turn undermines his attempts to present the state as 'artificial' or 'unnatural'. However, before writing off the naturalistic critique of the state completely it is necessary to explore the ideas of its most influential modern exponent, Murray Bookchin. Bookchin, as Takis Fotopoulos (2002) notes, took the attempt by Kropotkin to create a liberatory ethics based on natural evolution to its logical conclusion.

### ***3.5 Bookchin's Evolutionary Ethics***

Bookchin, in many ways, is the latest major thinker to hail from the Aristotelian-Hegelian teleological tradition, the influence which is made manifest in his account of evolution as a directional process: a dialectical unfolding of latent potentialities inherent in all natural phenomena. For Bookchin, evolution progresses towards complexity, diversity and subjectivity. Humans, as self-conscious beings, currently stand on the highest rung of the evolutionary ladder. However, self-consciousness is not a capacity which marks humans off from nature. On the contrary, it is a natural outcome of an evolutionary process which 'eventually yields mind and intellectuality' (Bookchin, 1982: 364): 'the striving of life toward a greater complexity of selfhood – a striving that yields increasing degrees of subjectivity –



constitutes the internal or immanent impulse of evolution toward growing self-awareness' (Bookchin 1987a: 30). Rather than viewing self-consciousness and reason as capacities which serve to separate humans from nature, then, Bookchin claims that humans should be seen as 'nature rendered self-conscious' (Bookchin 1982: 316). As Albrecht (1998: 94) notes, 'this ability of nature to become self-conscious was a life potential that was latent until the evolution of the ancestors of humans'.

Bookchin incorporates the social realm into this evolutionary process, thus creating the type of monistic or unitary ontology outlined earlier. Society is viewed as a natural growth from that which existed prior to humans:

It is eminently *natural* for humanity to create a 'second nature' from its evolution in 'first nature'. By *second nature*, I mean the development of a uniquely human culture, a wide variety of institutionalised human communities, an effective human technics, a richly symbolic language, and a carefully managed source of nutriment (Bookchin 1987a: 21).

Bookchin clarifies society's place in the unfolding of nature's potentialities with reference to a familiar teleological metaphor: 'what is potential in an acorn that yields an oak tree or in a human embryo that yields a mature, creative adult is equivalent to what is potential in nature that yields society and what is potential in society that yields freedom, selfhood and consciousness' (Bookchin 1993: 19). For Bookchin, this 'self-evolving patterning', this 'grain' of evolution, 'is implicitly ethical'. The values of mutualism, freedom and subjectivity are not strictly human values or concerns, they are *objective* values which inhere in all natural phenomena.

The actualisation of these potentialities, however, should not be considered inevitable. Indeed, Bookchin rejects the term teleological due to its deterministic connotations. As Clark (1990: 6) points out, 'the unfolding of potentiality is best described as a "tendency or nisus", rather than the "sure win" of classical teleology'. Such an open-ended, contingent teleology is necessary if Bookchin is to be able to

claim, as indeed he does, that second nature – our social ecologies – are at odds with first nature, or natural ecology, in that they ‘cut across the grain of nature’, or run counter to the general thrust of evolution.

It is humanity’s responsibility as the ‘self-reflexive voice of nature’ to transform society in a way which restores the harmony between first and second nature. This involves not only explicating those values which are implicit in nature, but also finding social expressions for these values. In other words, we must derive the principles of our social ecology from natural ecology; we must discover and implement those social principles which assist the evolutionary process in the direction of greater freedom and subjectivity, thus creating ‘a radical integration of second nature with first along far-reaching ecological lines’ (Bookchin 1987a: 32). As Eckersley (1998: 61) notes, paraphrasing Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, Bookchin’s naturalistic ethic dictates that ‘a thing is right when it tends to foster the diversity, complexity, complementarity and spontaneity of the ecosystem. It is wrong when it tends otherwise’. Whereas Kropotkin’s focus on the importance of *interspecies* cooperation at times leads him to imply that humanity as a species is engaged in a struggle with the rest of nature, Bookchin’s focus on the evolutionary thrust of nature *as a whole* means his aims are more ecocentric. By deriving the principles of his social ecology from natural ecology, Bookchin believes himself to have imbued humanity and nature with ‘a common ethical voice’.

The social principles which Bookchin derives from an examination of the ‘grain of nature’ are unity-in-diversity, spontaneity and non-hierarchical relations. Evolution is, for Bookchin, ‘immanently self-elaborating’ and ‘spontaneously self-organising’. As such, ‘a true politics of freedom will only be attained when society is based on self-management’ (Cochrane 2000: 170). His studies of nature, therefore, ultimately provide the ontological justification for his vision of a stateless society – libertarian municipalism – which is based on a confederal network of decentralised communities, which are self-managed through directly democratic, face-to-face assemblies (this will be examined in more detail in the next chapter). This vision is, for Bookchin, based on an ethic which is grounded in nature, and as such is designed



to complement evolution. The state, on the other hand, as the hierarchical institution *par excellence*, is unnatural and runs counter to the thrust of evolution.

There are, however, good reasons for rejecting Bookchin's attempt to use a naturalistic ethic to justify his libertarian municipalism and undermine the legitimacy of the state. The main problem is, as Castoriadis (1991: 105) explains, is that:

The operative postulate that there is a total and "rational" (and therefore "meaningful") order in the world, along with the necessary implication that there is an order of human affairs linked to the order of the world ... conceals the fundamental fact that human history is creation – without which there would be no genuine question of judging and choosing, either "objectively" or "subjectively". (Castoriadis 1991: 104-105)

As noted, Bookchin recognises that humans are currently the most developed product of the natural evolutionary movement towards ever-greater degrees of complexity and subjectivity. This very level of subjectivity, however, means that the potential pathways for human development are infinitely more diverse, and their selection less predictable, than is the case with the rest of nature. As Eckersley (1998: 64) explains with reference to Bookchin's acorn analogy: 'there are very real limits to the extent to which the "objective" developmental path of an acorn can be reasonably compared with that of the human species as a whole and, in particular, with that immensely more complex and open-ended phenomenon we can human society'. Indeed, as Fotopoulos (1997: 331) stresses:

The fact that societies, almost always and everywhere, have lived in a state of *instituted heteronomy* (namely a state of non-questioning of existing laws, traditions and beliefs that guarantee the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of elites), with no trace of an 'evolution' towards democratic forms of organization securing individual and social autonomy, clearly vitiates any hypothesis of a directionality towards a free society.

This being the case, Bookchin is required to justify why the path of *human* development must be made to complement and assist *natural* evolution in the manner he prescribes. His response, however, is to stress that the objective grain of evolution is implicitly ethical: the mere fact that evolution *is* developing along these lines is enough, for Bookchin, to justify following it. This, however, is to commit the naturalistic fallacy of deriving values from facts, or 'what should be' from 'what is'. There are good reasons to accept Bookchin's account of evolution and the telos implicit within its development (see Albrecht 1998); however, Eckersley (1998) is correct to observe that 'merely asserting that these principles constitute an "objective" statement of what is implicit in nature does nothing to elevate such principles over other potential pathways of evolution'. There must always be a subjective valuation sandwiched between is and ought – a subjective moment which translates the 'fact' into a 'value', the 'is' into the 'ought'. Having celebrated evolution's movement towards increasing subjectivity, however, Bookchin seeks to trump this subjectivity and the creative will with appeals to objective truth. Subjectivity is restricted to a mode of thinking which Bookchin calls *eduction*, which concerns explicating the nature's latent potentialities. Bookchin's ethical naturalism is therefore little more than a sophisticated articulation of the 'nature-knows-best' argument.

This is not to say that observations of the natural world should be precluded from inspiring and informing social and political organisation. To dismiss an idea on the sole basis that it reads social relations off of nature is analogous in its intellectual poverty to advocating a proposition on the sole basis of its naturalness. Rather, the point being made is simply that any inspiration gleaned from nature must be presented as a desirable norm rather than an objective truth. As Eckersley (1998: 81) notes, 'the important issue is surely which pathways are *desirable and defensible* rather than which pathways are *objective or natural*'. Indeed, Bookchin's libertarian municipalism would be more convincing were he to restrict himself to methods of normative justification which do not appeal to some form of objective truth etched in the logic of evolution.



It is also the case that Bookchin's attempt to impose closure on considerations over alternative pathways for political and social organisation by appealing to 'objective truths', stands in tension with his commitment to democracy. As Fotopoulos (1997: 330) notes, by concealing the fact that 'history is creation', appeals to the 'objective truth' of certain pathways of human development are essentially linked to heteronomy. Moreover, Regina Cochrane (2000: 164) notes that, 'the scientific authority that is associated with claims of objectivity exacerbates this basically anti-democratic stance by contributing, even if inadvertently, to the rise of new forms of political hierarchy'. As noted above, the unitary ontology which predominated during the middle-ages, in which natural law was synonymous with God's law, justified the existence of a priestly elite, headed by the Pope, on the basis of their insight into the objective truth that is God's will. Bookchin is in danger of replacing this priestly elite with an ecological elite, whose access to objective truth stems from its superior ability in employing the 'dialectical reasoning' necessary in identifying the latent potential inherent in nature.

### ***3.6 Conclusions***

The main conclusion to be drawn from this chapter is that naturalistic justifications for the stateless society are both undesirable and untenable. There is a tendency in both Kropotkin's and Bookchin's theories to understate the influence of the creative will on human development. As Castoriadis (1991: 34) again notes, 'History does not happen to society: history is the self-deployment of society'. Kropotkin's claim that mutual aid is the driving force of evolution leads him to lapse into the type of mechanistic fatalism identified by Malatesta, in which mutual aid will emerge victorious irrespective of the content of human subjectivity – a fatalism which is wholly unjustified given Kropotkin's inability to demonstrate a movement within either human or natural evolution towards increasing sociability. Kropotkin fails to provide convincing evidence that mutual aid is the driving force of evolution.

Similarly, Bookchin's insistence that the grain of evolution is implicitly ethical – an objective value – and that social and political organisation should therefore complement this movement, downplays the fact that human development is, due to humanity's increased subjectivity, infinitely more complex and open-ended than that of non-human nature. As such, Eckersley (1998: 83) is correct to argue that, 'the "is" of nature (whether past, present or future) cannot stand alone as an argument for the "ought" of human individuals and the communities to which they belong'. Moreover, as shown, Bookchin's appeals to objective truths etched in nature have adverse implications for democratic processes.

In sum, then, claims that the state should be dismantled on the sole basis that it is unnatural or artificial are unconvincing. However, this far from exhausts anarchism's pool of ecology-related anti-state arguments. Whereas this chapter has sought to identify what, if anything, studies of the laws, processes or tendencies inherent in nature can tell us about the plausibility of a stateless society, in the next chapter the focus is shifted to the non-naturalistic reasons forwarded by ecoanarchists for viewing the state as an inherently ecologically unsustainable form of social and political organisation. These arguments are viewed as part of a wider examination of differing ecoanarchist visions of the sustainable stateless society.



## Chapter 4: Anarchism, the State and Environment II:

### Stateless Visions of the Ecological Society

*Many environmental activists remain fully opposed to the administrative world, viewing state and economy – the present organization of public and private power – as requiring nothing less than a total and immediate transformation. The alternative is catastrophe. They will have nothing to do with Leviathan. (Paehlke and Torgerson 2005: xiii)*

As argued in the previous chapter, naturalistic arguments do not represent sound bases for critiques of the state or defences of stateless visions. This recognition, however, by no means exhausts the ecoanarchist reserve; there are a number of arguments forwarded in favour of stateless forms of social organisation and against the state which do not derive their normative appeal solely from claims to the effect that they are somehow anchored in nature.

This chapter focuses on these very arguments. With regards to those directed against the state – the reasons why ecoanarchists ‘will have nothing to do with Leviathan’ – two particular categories of criticism are identified: critiques which focus on the problematical spatial configuration of the political and economic systems which are in some way associated with the state; and critiques which emphasise the anti-ecological implications of hierarchy, of which the state is viewed as the ultimate expression. These criticisms, however, are examined in the context of a wider discussion of the ecoanarchist vision. In particular, two models of the stateless vision, which may be described as belonging to the *communal* strand of anarchism, are picked out for in-depth critical analysis: bioregionalism and social ecology. The reasons for focusing on these particular ecoanarchist theories are two-fold. First, they are the two dominant visions of ecoanarchism to originate from the communal strand; and second, their near-polar variance on several issues means that any account focusing on these two models does justice to the *breadth* of this strand.

Indeed, Barry (1999: 79) goes as far as arguing that ‘as one moves along the green political continuum from bioregionalism to social ecology, the ecoanarchist position “shades into” an understanding of green politics which sees its primary goal as the *democratic transformation* of the state and civil society’.

Following this, the focus shifts to anarchism’s *syndicalist* strand. The first part of this discussion examines the reasons why green political theory has tended to overlook this particular model of the stateless society. This is argued to be the result of a tendency within green political theory to overextend new social movement (NSM) theory’s critique of class analyses. This generates an indifference towards the labour movement and, in turn, those ideologies intimately connected with such a movement, of which syndicalism is one. In opposition to this tendency it is argued during the course of this chapter that there are good reasons why environmentalists should focus on cultivating stronger links with the labour movement. Once this is accepted, labour-based political theories such as syndicalism gain relevance as potential avenues of research for green political theory. As such, an attempt is made to assess the environmental implications of the role syndicalists envisage trade unions fulfilling in political struggle, as an educational institution capable of cultivating a consciousness amongst workers which rejects capitalist values; and the environmental and democratic credentials of the syndicalist vision of a stateless society which is organised from the workplace.

In the course of the chapter, various problems with these three models are identified. From these it is possible to formulate a more general statist critique of ecoanarchism. In particular, three categories of problem are identified: problems with securing collective action among individual communes; problems securing inter-communal distributive justice; and problems concerning the relativism which may result from the anarchist’s insistence on self-determination and voluntary forms of confederalism. The final section, however, attempts to mount a defence of ecoanarchism by arguing that statist have tended to overstate the need for a federal body with powers of coercion, and have unfairly applied a more stringent standard of justification to the state-system than to the ecoanarchist vision.



#### ***4.1 Spatial Concerns and the State***

Of all the varying arguments to emanate from anarchist circles, those concerning the spatial configuration of social forms of organisation, be they political or economic or social, have had the most success in filtering into green thinking. The question of appropriate scale; the proximity of decision-makers to the impact of decisions; and the manner in which territorial boundaries are constructed have become central to discussions over the green vision of a sustainable society. Problems in each of these areas are deemed to contribute to ecological disembeddedness, which, as will be shown presently, can take political, economic, cultural and even psychological forms.

To begin with the problem of scale: ever since E. F. Schumacher declared that 'small is beautiful' in his 1976 book of the same title, a central argument of the green movement has been that the nation-state's territorial organisation is of a scale which not only renders it unable to deal with ecological problems, but is itself the central cause of such problems (see, *inter alia*, Sale 1980). Indeed, Adolf Gundersen (1998: 192) claims that scale is 'perhaps the central institutional problematic in environmental political philosophy'. Goodin (1992: 147), following on from his observation that greens are basically 'anarchists-cum-libertarians', sees this overriding concern with scale as being the main factor in ensuring that: 'If there is anything truly distinctive about green politics, most commentators would concur, it must surely be its emphasis on decentralization'.

The problem of scale manifests itself in various ways, as can be seen in the following quote from Theodore Roszak (1979: 33):

Both person and planet are threatened by the same enemy. The bigness of things. The bigness of industrial structures, world markets, financial networks, mass political organizations, public institutions, military

establishments, cities, bureaucracies. It is the insensitive colossalism of these systems that endangers the rights of the person and the rights of the planet. The inordinate scale of industrial enterprise that must grind people into statistical grist for the market place and the work force simultaneously shatters the biosphere in a thousand unforeseen ways.

A common green argument is that the scale of the nation-state as a territorial unit, when combined with the centralised nature of the state as a decision-making entity, ensures that it is insufficiently responsive to the idiosyncratic needs of specific ecosystems. State actors make decisions at a distance from the specific sites at which the effects of resource extraction or consumption are felt. As John Dryzek (1987: ch. 16) notes, these, what he terms socio-ecological feedbacks, need to be shortened if ecologically rational decisions are to be made a possibility. The specifically anarchist manner of doing this has found popularity amongst greens; as Michael Saward (1993: 71) comments, 'Most visions of green democracy are variants on a model of direct democracy in small, often rural, face-to-face communities'. The idea is that such changes would render decision making more responsive to the needs of particular ecological regions.

Paterson *et al.* (2006) note that the state has also been implicated in the process of enclosure, which provided the essential preconditions for an extensive market economy and is required if growth is to be able to transcend local limits. As explained in chapter 1, whereas in pre-capitalist peasant-family production the division of labour was consciously planned and regulated *prior* to production, under capitalism the market regulates the division of labour *postproduction*. However, for such a system to become the dominant, generalised form of production there must be a social separation of workers from the conditions of production, of which nature is included. This process, of enclosure, 'ushers in a new political order which disembeds economic activities from their social constraints and reconstructs them in terms of private property rights, monetary exchange systems, legally binding contracts, and of course the state apparatus to enforce them' (Paterson *et al.* 2006: 137).



It also fundamentally alters our relationship with nature. People in capitalist countries no longer obtain the necessary use-values for our survival directly from nature, but indirectly through interaction with the market, and an acute division of labour ensures that they experience an increasingly narrow relationship with nature, stemming from their increasingly specialised role within the productive process. As a result, they have no overarching knowledge of the totality of our productive relationship with nature, but only of their particular part in that process. For the rest of the time they occupy the role of consumer, gaining use-values indirectly through the market rather than directly from nature.

As mentioned above, such a disconnection is necessary for a growth economy, as it allows for the transcendence of natural limits. Were the towns, cities and indeed nation-states of the developed world restricted to producing and using resources only within their immediate surroundings, while maintaining current consumption rates, their resources would be exhausted within a short space of time. The transcendence of localised natural limits requires the market to cast its net over an ever-increasing geographical area, providing access to an ever-greater resource base, until it has come to engulf the globe as a whole. At this global level our relationship with nature is at its most indirect and distant. The global market serves to mask the origins of products, the manner in which they are produced, the impact this production has on nature, and indeed the extent of our dependence upon nature as a whole. The impression that local adaptive fitness has been replaced by global adaptive fitness is achieved through the exporting of production and pollution to either uninhabited areas or developing countries.

It must be stressed, though, that the above criticisms are directed at the nature and scale of the global market economy rather than the scale of the state. It is quite possible that such an economy would be compatible with the anarchist ideal of smaller scale, decentralised communities. The deficiencies of the market economy, therefore, can only be viewed as a critique of the state if a state-centred approach is

employed and it is argued, as Alan Carter (2004: 316) does, that such an economy is selected *by the state*.

The scale of the nation-state, and indeed the global market, are nonetheless seen to generate what may be termed an *epistemic* disconnection from nature: we lack knowledge of the relationship between our consumption and production patterns and the environment. Peter Berg challenges us to ask the city dweller where their water comes from: 'most will answer with something like 'the faucet, of course. Want water? Turn the tap handle'' (Berg 1990a: 137). The separation of workers from the conditions of production also generates a more mobile citizenry. This process only serves to exacerbate the epistemic disconnection; as Kirkpatrick Sale (2001) laments, 'We don't live on any one part of the land long enough to know very much about it'.

Another aspect of this disconnection is psychological. In particular, those who subscribe to a deep ecological viewpoint tend to emphasise the lack of human *identification* with the biotic communities that constitute the ecological regions they inhabit. For example, McGinnis *et al.* (1999: 206) mourn the loss of an 'ecology of shared identity'. Such a dysfunctional consciousness is also often expressed in spiritual terms; for example, Kirkpatrick Sale laments the abandonment of Gaea worshipping religions in which nature is viewed as sacred (Sale 2000: 12-15).

These more individual forms of disconnection contribute in turn to a more general cultural disconnection from nature. Deep ecologists claim that our lack of psychological and spiritual identity with, and knowledge of, the biotic community, has fuelled the mutation of a misfit mass culture: an abstract, homogenous and rootless social entity, disconnected and floating above the idiosyncratic and heterogeneous natural regions which form the patchwork quilt beneath. Such a maladaptive, misfit culture cannot help but be damaging to such regions, which it inhabits but ignores.

Bioregionalists make a further point regarding the state's spatial dimensions, which feeds into the forms of disconnection outlined above. This is that political boundaries



are superimposed onto geographical regions in an ecologically arbitrary manner, which takes no account of the existing natural regions and their boundaries. As Gary Snyder (1980: 24-25) points out:

We are accustomed to accepting the political boundaries of counties and states, and then national boundaries, as being some sort of regional definition; and although, in some cases, there is some validity to those lines... the lines are quite often arbitrary and serve only to confuse people's sense of natural associations and relationships.

Such an arbitrary grafting of political boundaries onto natural ones precludes an adaptive fit between societies and the natural systems, or bioregions, which they inhabit. McGinnis (1999: 72-74) stresses the autopoietic, self-generating nature of ecological regions or ecosystems. They are, to a degree, organisationally closed, in that the self-generating or self-correcting processes that sustain them are largely contained within set boundaries, which emerge as the system's components interact. This being the case, where political boundaries cut across such systems, there is a greater probability that the impact of any social interaction with nature will occur outside these boundaries, and therefore outside the field of perception of the polity inhabiting that region.

#### ***4.2 Bioregionalism***

As indicated, then, bioregionalism is a body of thought concerned with contemporary society's disconnection from its natural base. Its proponents advocate the creation of decentralised, self-sufficient, self-ruling, sustainable communities whose boundaries 'reflect the self-producing and self-withdrawing characteristic of living systems' (McGinnis 1999: 73). Milbraith (1989: 211) is correct, therefore, to view the idea that 'economic, social and political life should be organised by regions that are defined by natural phenomena' as a central principle of bioregionalism. This realignment of political and natural boundaries, when combined with autarkical

decision-making and a self-sufficient economy in which land is held in common at the community level, allows for a return to the practice of *living-in-place* – of ‘following the necessities and pleasures of life as they are uniquely presented by a particular site, and evolving ways to ensure long-term occupancy of that site’ (Berg and Dasmann 1977: 399). Indeed, the bioregion offers ‘a scale of decentralisation best able to support the achievement of cultural and ecological sustainability’ (Aberley 1999: 37); ‘culture is integrated with nature at the level of the *particular ecosystem*’ (Gorsline and House 1974: 39).

A prevalent perception within both the deep ecology and bioregional camps is that there is some form of link between the two theories. As Bron Taylor (2000a: 269) notes, ‘bioregionalism has almost universally been grafted onto deep ecology, becoming its de facto social philosophy’. Bioregionalism puts ‘the flesh on the skeleton of a deep ecology platform that was strikingly bereft of political conviction’ (Taylor 2000a: 273). The result is that bioregionalism is often underpinned by a deep ecological moral philosophy. More precisely, many bioregionalists have come to assimilate identification – the ultimate norm of Arne Naess’s deep ecology (see below) – as a core aim of bioregionalism itself. However, the reasoning behind this perceived connection is rarely scrutinised. The following sections seek to rectify this by explicitly focusing upon the coherence of this linkage and its implications for bioregionalism. This focus is relevant to the aims of the present chapter as it brings to light various tensions within bioregional theory and therefore casts doubt on the internal coherence of the bioregional vision of the stateless society.

The first of the sections dealing with this relationship provides an outline of the central tenets of deep ecology. The following then explores the various ways in which the two theories may be connected. The main finding here is that there is nothing exclusive to the central principles of deep ecology that provides a coherent rationale for a specifically bioregional form of decentralisation. The link between deep ecology and bioregionalism is found to be contingent at best, contradictory at worst. This is not to say that the *perception* of a link between the two theories has had no impact. On the contrary, deep ecology’s central concern with changing the



worldview of the individual, and in particular with engendering identification with nature, has been assimilated into bioregional thinking. The second main finding is that this assimilation has created various problems for bioregionalism. A section dealing with the problem of defining the concept of the bioregion demonstrates how a preoccupation with identification can translate into an overly idealist and relativist delineation of the term. The final piece of the discussion regarding bioregionalism moves from an exploration of its internal coherence to the implications of its advocacy of strict autarky and in particular the relativism which may arise for this.

#### *4.2.1 Deep Ecology*

The term deep ecology first appeared in Arne Naess's 1973 paper 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movements'. In this article, Naess separates a deeper, more trenchant critique of industrial society and its value base from reformist, utilitarian, or shallow forms of environmentalism.

The first important deviation Naess's deep ecology makes from its shallow adversary concerns the conceptualisation of nature. Deep ecology rejects the 'man-in-environment image', instead favouring 'the relational, total field image' (Naess 1973: 95). Following Barry Commoner's first law of ecology, according to which 'everything is connected to everything else' (Commoner 1971: 3), deep ecologists conceptualise nature holistically rather than atomistically, as a self-regulating, interdependent whole rather than a collection of disparate elements. Nature is more than the sum of its parts and displays a complexity beyond human comprehension. This has considerable implications. Our knowledge of nature's workings is, and always will be, limited. Deep ecologists therefore advise that we get off our self-erected pedestal, accept the fact that 'nature knows best' (Commoner 1971: 41), and set about minimising our impact upon natural systems, as we will always be uncertain of the detrimental effects such impacts may have.

There are also significant implications for our view of mankind's place in nature. Enlightenment humanism locates the essence of humanity in its ability to break with natural determinants, be they instinctual, biological or otherwise. As Luc Ferry (1993: 5) puts it, man's '*humanitas* resides in his freedom'. For deep ecologists, such thinking has fuelled the misperception that humanity stands apart from nature. It is only a short step from this to an anthropocentric value system in which man is viewed as the sole source of value in the world – a view that, for deep ecologists, serves to legitimise the domination and exploitation of nature. In opposition to this, deep ecologists stress that man is a part of the interconnected web of life that constitutes nature, as dependent on the biosphere as the next life-form and no more intrinsically valuable. This leads to the principle of 'biospherical egalitarianism', according to which every living entity is ascribed 'the equal right to live and blossom', even if this is only subscribed to in principle, as 'any realistic praxis necessitates some killing, exploitation, and suppression' (Naess 1973: 95; 96).

The foundation of this principle is articulated in the first of the eight points that collectively constitute the deep ecology platform.<sup>6</sup> Here Naess claims that 'the wellbeing of non-human life on Earth has value in itself' (Naess 1984: 266). Therefore, rather than being solely concerned with the wellbeing of human life, deep ecology has as its objective the flourishing of human *and* non-human life. However, it is not merely the *inclusiveness* of its sphere of concern that is defining of deep ecology; the *type* of value ascribed to non-human life is as important as the bare fact that it is valued at all. As Naess explains, 'this value is independent of any instrumental usefulness for limited human purposes' (Naess 1984: 266). Such thinking forms the basis of an ecocentric value system, according to which non-human entities have interests of their own and thereby possess a value intrinsic to themselves rather than merely as means to the achievement of human ends.

However, deep ecology has undergone corrective surgery since Naess's original articulation in the early 1970s. As Alan Carter (1995: 329) implies, this was perhaps inevitable: the principle of biospherical egalitarianism seeks to have all life-forms



treated equally, whereas the principle of the total field image seeks to blur the boundaries of these life forms by conceiving them not as distinct, compact entities, but as 'knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations' (Naess 1973: 95).

Such tensions could only be resolved by one principle taking precedence. In the early to mid-eighties a series of articles by Devall and Sessions, which, combined, form the basis of their *Deep Ecology* (1985), and Warwick Fox (1984a; 1984b), set about the task of enthroning the total field image as the guiding principles of deep ecology. The fact that this principle is an ontological principle, a statement regarding the nature of being, rather than a normative or ethical axiom, has led John Barry (1999) to define this shift in emphasis as the 'ontological turn' in deep ecology. It turns the central aim of deep ecology away from constructing an ethical theory around the idea of intrinsic value and towards what Fox (1995) calls a 'transpersonal' form of ecology, which is concerned with engendering *identification* with non-human nature – with the process of what Naess terms '*Self-realization*'. By the mid-nineties this form of deep ecology had achieved dominance, with the translation into English of Naess's own *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (1989) making an influential contribution to this shift.<sup>2</sup>

As indicated above, central to the ontological articulation of deep ecology is the notion that through an increased *identification* with nonhuman life we can expand the self beyond its egoistic liberal sense to encompass parts of nature external to the individual organism. Naess's theory of what he terms *gestalt thinking* provides a useful starting point from which to explore this process. He explains the basis of the theory by means of an analogy with music:

When we hear the first tones of a very well-known complex piece of music, the experience of those few tones is very different from how they would be experienced if we had never heard the piece. In the first case, the tones are said to fit into a *gestalt*, into our understanding of the piece

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<sup>6</sup> Arne Naess and George Session's original account of this platform is reproduced in Devall and Sessions (1985: 70-73). It is Naess's (1984) articulation of this platform that is referred to here.

*as a whole*. The basic character of the whole influences *decisively* our experiences of each of the tones. (Naess 1989: 57)

A *gestalt* is therefore a holistic understanding of the whole. Such an understanding is qualitatively different from an understanding of the workings of the individual parts which constitute that whole, as understanding the whole itself changes our perception of these parts. Naess applies such thinking to our perceptions of nature. Once we understand nature as an interconnected whole, our perception of its differing parts, ourselves included, alters dramatically. In particular, such a holistic understanding reveals a *commonality of interest* within nature. All parts of nature partake in, contribute to and depend on the whole for their existence. Our goals and interests are therefore tied-up with the rest of nature, thereby rendering nonsensical any notion that we can pursue them in isolation. This includes not only other beings, but also landforms, watersheds, rivers and the systems which they constitute. For Naess, through experiencing such a unity and commonality of interest, we acquire a sense of solidarity with such entities. We come to *identify* with other parts of nature by seeing ourselves in the other, and as such expand our sense of self to include the other.

Dissolving the barriers between the self and the other and therefore the valuer and the valued, allows deep ecologists to side-step the persistent problem of finding value independent of a valuing subject, a problem which has haunted intrinsic value theory. By a process of identification we no longer perceive the I and the not-I as separate things. The implication of this, as Andrew Brennan (1988: 43) points out, is that 'provided I am valuable, then so is my extended self, the natural world'. We need no longer worry about finding objective value 'out there', as there is no 'out there'. The defence of nature becomes a form of self-defence; it rests not on moral law or ethical obligation, but is instead intuitive, natural and automatic. Our actions become part of the process of Self-realization, where *Self* is capitalised to indicate that the development of the potentialities of all beings is experienced as part of our own individual self-development.



For Devall (1988: 71), this bypassing of the difficulties inherent in traditional ethical theorising is essential, as ‘Our ontological crisis is so severe that we cannot wait for the perfect intellectual theory to provide us with the answers. We need earth-bonding experiences’. Following Kant, Naess (1989: 85) distinguishes between ‘beautiful’ and ‘moral’ actions: ‘Moral actions are motivated by acceptance of moral law, and manifest themselves clearly when acting against inclination. A person acts beautifully when acting benevolently from inclination’. For Naess, ‘fostering inclination is *essential* in every aspect of socialization and acculturation, and therefore also in the global ecological crisis. Moralizing is too narrow, too patronizing and too open to the question, ‘Who are you? What is the relation of your preaching and your life?’’ (Naess 1993: 71, emphasis added). And it is the process of identification, of Self-realization, that is essential to fostering this ‘inclination’ towards caring for the environment (Naess 1989: 85-86). For Fox (1995: 246-247), ‘This is why one finds transpersonal ecologists making statements to the effect that they are more concerned with ontology or cosmology... than with ethics’; this shift ‘is (and should be) deep ecology’s guiding star’ (Fox 1984b: 204).<sup>7</sup>

#### ***4.2.3 Connecting Deep Ecology and Bioregionalism***

As Eric Katz (2000: 24) correctly observes the deep ecology position, as it presently stands, can be boiled down to three basic features: ‘(1) identification with the nonhuman natural world; (2) the preeminent value of Self-realization; and (3) a relational holistic ontology as the basis of normative values and decisions’.

A useful starting point for an exploration of the perceived connection between bioregionalism and deep ecology is the developmental aspect Naess introduces to his theory of *gestalt* thinking. For Naess, as we mature we come to perceive greater and more encompassing *gestalts*, and therefore encompass an ever-greater diversity of nature into one’s self. However, it is an identification with what may be termed

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<sup>7</sup> For a fuller discussion of the issues involved in defining deep ecology see Davidson (2007).

*home-place* – the immediate natural surroundings of our developmental years – which is the most vital for the health of our self:

To move from the [home] area implies the loss of an appreciable part of one's self – loss of *gestalts* which comprise 'one's roots', 'my surroundings', 'our surroundings'. New *gestalts* must be built up at the new location, but after the developmental years it is not possible to recreate the most fundamental *gestalts* and symbols. One remains a stranger towards or in oneself; or one preserves the old associations, and a self which belongs to somewhere else, an emigrant. (Naess 1989: 62)

For Naess then, without this fundamental identification with home-place, we are in a sense psychologically damaged and unable to cultivate higher-level *gestalts*. This is particularly worrying for deep ecologists given their belief that identification is essential to the cultivation of a caring attitude towards nature. Our identification with home-place and other regional *gestalts* are essential if we are to view their defence as being our self-defence.

Such concerns clearly resonate with bioregionalism's emphasis on reinhabitation, on 'becoming native to a place through becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships which operate within and around it' (Berg and Dasmann 1977: 399). As Andrew McLaughlin (1993: 207-208, emphasis added) correctly observes, 'It is care for other life forms, *engendered by an identification with place*, that is one of the reasons for the affinity between deep ecology and bioregionalism. One can truly love what one knows'. However, beyond merely *resonating* with the aim of identification, it may be that a bioregional form of decentralisation is an important *contributor* to this process. As Mathews (1996: 66) comments, 'small face-to-face communities provide conditions for the growth of relational selves'. Naess similarly believes that local autonomy and self-sufficiency provide the conditions for identification and self-realisation, as people have more control over their environment in decentralised, self-sufficient, autonomous local communities than in centralised polities where the sources of need satisfaction are remote (Naess 1989: 204-206).



Such observations help explain why deep ecologists have perceived bioregionalism to be the most suitable vehicle for the implementation of their goals. Bioregionalists themselves have generally embraced this linkage; indeed, as Taylor (2000b: 57) notes, at the second *North American Bioregional Congress*, the principles of deep ecology were adopted almost intact. This has imbued bioregionalism with a tendency to focus upon the ideological aspects of society's disconnection from nature and to lend explanatory primacy to the notion that we are suffering from a dysfunctional worldview when explicating the causes of the current ecological predicament. It is unsurprising that, where this cause is forwarded, the solution prescribed is to transform this worldview – to engender an ecological consciousness, particularly through identification. McGinnis (1999: 67) emphasises that 'bioregionalism requires the natural incorporation of interior with the exterior, and the field of bodily expansion to include others and place'; Berg (1990a: 139) stresses that 'bioregional politics originate with individuals who identify with real places'; adopting a more spiritual tone, Sale (2000: 41) pleads for us to 'regain the spirit of the ancient Greeks, once again comprehending the earth as a living creature and contriving the modern equivalent of the worship of Gaea'; while Snyder (1990: 41) emphasises the need to identify with 'the spirit of the place' and realise 'that you are a part of a part and that the whole is made of parts, each of which is whole'.

However, there are problems with this form of linkage. If we are conceptualising a process in which identification is the product and *aim* of decentralisation, it cannot also provide the motivation for it. That is, if deep ecologists believe, as has been shown to be the case, that an ecological consciousness based on identification is an essential prerequisite for a caring attitude towards the environment, why would anyone wish to undertake such a radical programme of decentralisation?

Of course, the deep ecological literature is peppered with arguments which stress the ecological virtues of decentralisation without alluding to identification. To pick just a couple of examples, Sale stresses that decentralisation and self-sufficiency precludes the transcendence of localised natural limits, as 'people do not, other things being

equal, pollute and damage those natural systems on which they *depend for life and livelihood*' (Sale 2000:54), while Naess (1989: 144) sees decentralised polities as more compatible with small-scale 'soft' technologies. But the point still stands: identification with, and a caring attitude towards, the environment would have to exist already for these arguments to have motivational purchase. Viewing decentralisation as a means to engendering identification therefore seems to put the cart of political change before the horse of moral motivation.

Turning this argument on its head, another way of interpreting the idea that deep ecology and bioregionalism are linked via the notion of identification with place would be to start with the recognition that community identification with the bioregion can be cultivated *prior* to decentralisation. If this is the case, the argument could plausibly be made that identification with the bioregion would ignite a community's desire for decentralisation on the grounds that it allows them to better manage and protect such regions. However, the above analysis of society's economic disconnection from the land highlights difficulties with such reasoning. First, as shown, one of the functions served by society's disconnection from nature is that it acts to keep to a minimum, especially in the developed world, the perception that current economic practices are unsustainable. Environmental degradation – for example in the form of waste or damaging forms of production – is often exported either to areas where there are no human inhabitants, or to the developing world, where debt and the threat of capital flight are used to ensure that such conditions are accepted, or more accurately, not actively rejected. Consequently, for those in the *developed* world to *focus* solely on their own bioregion will not necessarily reveal the damaging effects of our current economic system. As Marius de Geus (1996: 195) argues, 'local communities lack a general overview of the "total ecological situation"'. Following on from this, even if a knowledge of the destructiveness of the current economic system were acquired, if a community only *identifies* and cares for their own bioregion, the perverse situation may arise where it becomes irrational for it to wish to move to the type of self-sufficient economy advocated by bioregionalists, as in the ways identified above, the market protects the environment of the developed world from the degradation our consumption patterns would



otherwise inflict upon it. As Barry (1995: 189) implies, this would especially be the case for developed countries occupying resource poor ecosystems.

Naess' theory of *gestalt* thinking provides us with a further avenue to explore. The argument could be made that it is possible to generate, prior to decentralisation, not only identification with the region, but with higher-level *gestalts* and indeed the biosphere as a whole. Once this global identification has been achieved, the motivation to decentralise will be based not only on a care for our region, but for the biosphere as a whole. This would reduce the danger of caring and identifying with one's own bioregion at the expense of global sustainability. It is also the case that those arguments for decentralisation which do not allude to its ability to assist in engendering identification will derive motivational purchase from the existence of such a global consciousness.

Such a view resonates with the spirit of the 'think globally, act locally' slogan, and, as shown, deep ecologists clearly believe that the cultivation of higher-level *gestalts* is possible; indeed, as Tony Lynch (1996: 150) points out, with deep ecology 'not only... are we to 'think like a mountain, to think like a bear', we are to think like every mountain and every bear and everything else'. However, deep ecologists also highlight that this process is hindered by our current mobile society. Indeed, Naess critiques contemporary society on the basis that its increased mobility destroys *gestalt* understandings (Naess 1989: 62). On this thinking it is difficult to see how deep ecologists could subscribe to the view that a *global* consciousness could be achieved within our current society. There may also be a tension between the need for such a global consciousness and deep ecology's insistence on our inability to comprehend the complexity of nature according to the total field image. Can we really understand our unity with all life without an understanding of the biosphere's workings? Sale states that perceiving our dependence upon nature 'cannot be done on a global scale, nor a continental, nor even a national one, because the human animal, being small and limited, has only a small view of the world and a limited comprehension of how to act in it' (Sale 2000: 53). Sale cannot, therefore, rely on the

attainment of a global ecological consciousness to motivate people to decentralise without descending into complete contradiction.

However, even if these tensions were to be resolved, stating that higher-level *gestalts* can be cultivated prior to decentralisation, and can act as the motivational thrust behind other arguments for decentralisation, may in fact undermine the link between deep ecology and bioregionalism. Were such an argument to be deployed, identification with the *region* would no longer be viewed as the *aim* of decentralisation, nor would a specifically *regional* form of identification be viewed as the *motivation* for decentralisation. This being the case, despite the fact that the arguments for decentralisation in general gain motivational purchase from, and are operationalised by the existence of, such a form of identification, the link between deep ecology and a *specifically bioregional form of decentralisation* is removed. In other words, why match political and natural boundaries?

Of course, deep ecologists could rightly point to the argument outlined in the overview of bioregionalism, to the effect that feedback loops between society and nature are improved when political and natural boundaries are matched. To embed a polity in this way could undoubtedly help offset the epistemic disconnection caused by the separation of workers from the conditions of production, and there is nothing which precludes deep ecologists from subscribing to bioregionalism on the basis of this rationale rather than via some form of connection with the process of identification. However, the important point to be made here is that such a rationale is not exclusively available to deep ecologists; on the contrary, it is external to any particular ethical or moral doctrine, in that it can be embraced by ecocentrists and enlightened anthropocentrists alike. In other words, there is nothing *specific* to the logic of deep ecology which provides us with a rationale for decentralisation taking a *specifically bioregional* form. The link between the two theories is most coherent when at its most contingent.

Despite this, it is still the case, as demonstrated earlier, that many bioregionalists have incorporated identification as a core aim of bioregionalism. The proceeding



section demonstrates, however, that giving this aim precedence may actually undermine one of bioregionalism's central rationales: that there are advantages to be gained from matching political and natural boundaries. This occurs when the very process of defining the bioregion is tied to, and viewed as the outcome of, the process of identification – the result being overly relativistic and idealist definitions of the bioregion.

### ***4.2.3 Defining the Bioregion***

Given its obvious centrality to bioregional thinking, it may come as a surprise to the reader unfamiliar with bioregional literature that the term bioregion itself remains an elusive and contested concept. Definitions range from those of a more objective and scientific nature, to those that place more emphasis upon subjective and cultural sensibilities.

Sale (2000) provides a definition that can be used as a springboard from which to trace a range of possible positions on the path from science to sensibility. Sale (2000: 55) defines the bioregion as 'any part of the earth's surface whose rough boundaries are determined by natural characteristics rather than human dictates... The general contours of the regions themselves are not hard to identify using a little ecological knowledge'. This definition relies upon objective natural characteristics and is in line with Allen Van Newkirk's original description of the bioregion as a 'biogeographically interpreted culture area' (quoted in Aberley 1999: 22). As a biogeographer, Van Newkirk has no problem in leaving the definition of bioregions to the scientist. However, Sale (2000: 55-56) takes the initial step toward allocating a definitional role for the community when stating that '[bioregional] contours are generally felt, understood, or in some way sensed by those closest to the land'. Communities living on the land are capable of perceiving natural boundaries; all that is required is the employment of a 'little ecological knowledge'.

Further along the line, we find Berg and Dasmann (1977: 399) emphasising that communities are not capable of merely *perceiving* such boundaries; such boundaries are in fact '*best described* by the people who have lived within it, through human recognition of the realities of living in place'. Thus, the privileged task of defining the bioregion is wrestled from the scientist and placed in the hands of those inhabiting the region itself; it is the experience of living within a natural region that provides the 'little ecological knowledge' that is required defining their boundaries.

Despite this change in definitional responsibility though, the natural world is still presented as a patchwork quilt of neatly separated bioregions simply awaiting discovery. As Snyder notes, 'biota watersheds, landforms, and elevations are just a few of the facets that define a region' (1990: 41). However, Donald Alexander is correct in stating that such a multiplicity of criteria does not necessarily translate into a sounder definition of the bioregion, as such criteria cannot be employed simultaneously due to their mutual exclusivity. As Alexander (1990: 168) explains, 'a river watershed may yield a bioregion which is long and narrow, biotic shift... usually encompasses several watersheds, and using elevation can yield yet another type of bioregion'. A choice is therefore foisted upon us regarding which criteria to employ, and subjective judgement will inevitably be required in making it.

However, there is also a danger of going too far in the direction of subjectivity. Daniel Berthold-Bond's (2000) article exemplifies how a deep ecological stance, and in particular an emphasis upon engendering identification, can lead to an overly idealist and relativist definition of the bioregion. If we first take the definition of *region*, we find Berthold-Bond quoting Westfall's remark that 'there are no 'natural' regions. Rather, the land is divided into formal regions only as abstract criteria are applied to it' (Berthold-Bond 2000: 14). However, in contrast, James O'Connor (1998: 49) notes, 'while it is true that linguistic access to the material world is the only access available in human discourse, and that struggles over the meaning of this world are always linguistic, it is also true that the material world does exist'. It may be true that the overlapping characteristics of natural regions opens up a space for normative debate regarding which *form* of bioregion is to be used *politically*.



However, the mere existence of multiplicity of available criteria to choose from does not inevitably lead us to conclude that such regions do not exist, because it is precisely the overlapping reality of the existing material world that such criteria are derived from.

Berthold-Bond also makes the mistake of defending his position regarding *region* through a discussion of *place*. In particular, he quotes Francis Violich: 'places and people are inseparable. Places exist only with reference to people, and the meaning of place can be revealed only in terms of human responses to the particular environment used as a framework' (Berthold-Bond 2000: 15). However, region and place are distinct concepts, and their conflation should be resisted. Region is a natural space, whereas *place* is best described by Yi Fu Tuan's equation 'space plus culture equals place' (quoted in Flores 1999: 48). Place, by definition, is inseparable therefore from people. Berthold-Bond may be correct in stating that 'places do not exist apart from meanings which are created through experience' (Berthold-Bond 2000: 15). However, this cannot be said about natural regions to the same extent, as the linguistic struggles regarding the definition of place and the selection of natural region are qualitatively different. The definition of place is directly intersubjective, whereas discussion regarding which type of bioregion to utilise already acknowledges the objective existence of natural region as defined by purely natural criteria.

The problem with Berthold-Bond's idealist definition of region is that it leads to a situation where the bioregion is what the community defines it to be, seemingly coming into existence with such a definition in a 'we think therefore it is' sense. This discounts the possibility of any asymmetry between community definition and material reality, creating an extreme relativism in which the community enjoys definitional infallibility. There is no way for the community to define the bioregion in an arbitrary manner.

It is Berthold-Bond's deep ecological leanings which impel him to view the bioregion in such manner, as identification is his primary aim. Through this process:

the very boundary lines which we typically think of as distinguished between self and place are blurred: the stakes are raised, uprooted; we *become* “placed”; the place becomes essential to our self-identity, a self-identity which extends beyond the traditional ontological border stakes of “subject” and “object,” “self” and “other”. (Berthold-Bond 2000: 19)

In deep ecology, identification entails extending the self *outwards* to encompass ever greater *gestalts* in what is viewed as an experiential process. It is a process of incorporating non-human life into the self. The process is inherently idealist in the sense that the region identified with, and thereby defined as, the bioregion or home place, is dependent upon the evolving worldview of the individual. What is viewed as a natural region is determined by consciousness rather than any objective natural characteristics of the region. This does not present a problem to the deep ecological bioregionalist, because identification is the overriding concern and communities are allowed to identify with whatever level of *gestalt* they see fit. What communities are identifying with is of secondary importance to the fact that they *are* identifying, and that such an experiential process of identification is ongoing, moving towards ever-greater *gestalts*.

As a result of his preoccupation with identification, and the idealist definition of the bioregion this produces, if Berthold-Bond were to advocate decentralisation to the bioregional level, he would not be matching the political with the natural, but the political with the larger self as determined by the experiential and spiritual process of identification. This is clearly anthropocentric. Deep ecologists would be expected to be drawn to bioregionalism for the reason that it defines regions according to non-human characteristics. However, an emphasis upon identification leads to a reversal of this position. This has led Stephen Avery (2004) to define deep ecology as a form of deep anthropocentrism rather than non-anthropocentrism.

The most damaging result of tying the definition of the bioregion to the process of identification in the manner outlined by Berthold-Bond, however, is that it



undermines one of the central rationales for a bioregional form of decentralisation: that there are advantages to be gained from matching political boundaries with natural ones. If such a definition is used to define the boundaries of a polity, these boundaries are unlikely to match those of the type of autopoietic ecosystems emphasised by McGinnis (1999). This being the case, the polity will be less likely to gain from the type of improvements made to the feedback loops between society and nature outlined earlier. This is not to say that more objective definitions of the bioregion are unproblematic; for example, there is potential for the boundaries of such bioregions to cut through existing communities, which may in turn generate a distrust of scientific criteria. It is merely to note that a level of objectivity will be essential if the definition of the bioregion is to be compatible with the rationale highlighted.

If internal consistency is to be achieved, then, it would seem to be the case that both bioregionalists and deep ecologists should jettison the idea that bioregionalism is a means to engender cross-species identification. This would separate bioregionalism from a necessary connection to any particular moral or ethical doctrine; it would be seen as a *social* philosophy which is justified on its own merits, as a form of social organisation which improves feedback loops between society and nature, rather than as a means to achieving specifically deep ecological goals. When viewed in this manner we can better understand how Bookchin – a virulent critic of deep ecology – can nonetheless subscribe to a bioregional form of institutional organisation. However, this is not to say that deep ecologists are precluded from subscribing to bioregionalism; any environmental ethic may underpin this social philosophy. Rather, the point is that the link between deep ecology and bioregionalism should be seen as contingent if it is to remain coherent. Following on from this point, if matching political and natural boundaries is to be a rationale for bioregionalism, the process of defining the bioregion should be separated from the process of identification. This is essential if the bioregionalist is to avoid the type of relativistic definition which undermines this rationale.

However, this merely brings us back to the problems associated with more objective definitions of bioregions. First, there is the problem highlighted earlier regarding the mutual exclusivity of definitional criteria. Second, although such bioregions display a degree of organisational closure, they are also materially open. Even if we take autopoietic systems that exhibit more obviously solid boundaries, such as the cell or the human body, such systems continually ingest and discharge material from outside their boundaries – a process essential to their maintenance. Natural regions are similar, meaning that the feedback loop can never be completely closed. Given these problems, it is perhaps unsurprising that the most popular form of bioregion used within the literature is moulded around one of the main channels of material throughput – that is, the watershed.

The watershed is ‘a visible container of all our coexistent life forms’; (McGinnis *et al.* 1999: 215) they are defined by ‘the ridgetops that separate drainage basins from one another’ (Barham 2001: 184). Such river basins are relatively easy to identify. As Dodge points out, “considering the relationship between topography and water, it is not surprising that land form distinctions closely follow watersheds” (Dodge 1981: 8). Such regions are also exhaustive as “in a geographic sense, there is no outside to the watershed model; the entire planet can be partitioned and analysed in a way that would have been inconceivable only a few decades ago” (Barham 2001: 187). All life, and all settlements, are dependent upon water, and are therefore part of a watershed. It is also the case that given the relatively large size of watershed regions, there will be less chance that ecological considerations will conflict with established community boundaries. Watersheds encompass various communities within them, and the nature of their boundaries ensures that they are unlikely to cut through community boundaries. Perhaps more importantly, because rivers are major channels of material throughput, matching political boundaries with watershed boundaries may further increase the feedback loop between society and nature. However, *increasing* the extent to which ecological processes are contained within bioregional boundaries is still far from materially closed – air and wildlife are no respecters of boundaries, whether natural or otherwise. As will be explained in the following



section, this has implications for bioregionalism's commitment to the creation of autarkical communities.

#### ***4.2.4 Bioregionalism, Autarky and Relativism***

As mentioned at the outset of this discussion, bioregionalism is a body of thought concerned with contemporary society's disconnection from its natural base. The scale of the nation-state; the global market economy; arbitrary political boundaries: these factors preclude the achievement of ecological embeddedness.

Bioregionalists aim to reverse this situation through reinhabitation – by integrating community with nature at the level of the bioregion. Bioregion-based cultures must be cultivated, which 'are knowledgeable of past and present indigenous cultural foundations, and seek to incorporate the best elements of these traditions in "newly indigenous" or "future primitive" configurations' (Aberley 1999: 37). These cultures are to be reinforced and celebrated through ceremonies and rituals, dance and language. Chet Bowers (1999) emphasises the importance of reforming the education curriculum. For Bowers, the current curriculum is orientated towards generating abstract, decontextualised, 'high-status' forms of knowledge. These forms of knowledge are underlined by assumptions of 'the autonomous nature of the individual ... the progressive nature of change, the anthropocentric view of nature, the increasing reliance on technological approaches to the redesign of nature, and the commoditization of knowledge and relationships' (Bowers 1999: 195). These assumptions 'contribute to the disintegration of previously self-reliant cultural groups, to widespread chemical changes in the life-processes of the earth's ecosystems, and to the development of technologies and centralized systems of control that further degrade natural habitats already under stress' (Bowers 1999: 191). In place of this, Bowers wishes to install a bioregionally-orientated curriculum, which is context-driven, place-specific and orientated towards relational thinking and 'low-status knowledge'. Such knowledge encompasses 'the knowledge accumulated

over generations of communal experience with the cycles and patterns of life-forms that make up the environment' (Bowers 1999: 197).

Sale (2000: 53) links the idea of bioregional learning back to the discussion of appropriate scale:

The only way people will apply 'right behaviour' and behave in a responsible way is if they have been persuaded to see the problem concretely and to understand their own connections to it directly – and this can only be done at a limited scale ... Then people will do the 'correct thing' not because it is thought to be the *moral*, but rather the *practical*, thing to do.

The implication that decentralisation is necessary for the cultivation of a bioregionally-aware citizenry would again seem to put the cart before the horse, at least as far as political strategy is concerned. However, more importantly, in such statements we see a harder edge to bioregionalism – an edge which is often hidden under the veneer of bioregional learning, cultural adaptation and cross-species identification. Sale (2000: 54) insists that decentralisation 'solves so many of the abstract and theoretical problems the philosophers dither themselves into'; it allows one to avoid the 'abtruse [*sic*] effluvia of ethical responses', which, for Sale, are so much just 'rarefied academic issues'. As the above quote indicates, the manner in which decentralisation does this is by demonstrating the *practicality* of ecologically 'correct behaviour': 'people do not, other things being equal, pollute and damage those natural systems on which they *depend for life* and livelihood' (Sale, 2000:54 emphasis added).

The impression given by such statements is that Sale wishes to use the reintroduction of community dependence upon immediate natural surroundings, via decentralisation, autarky and self-sufficiency, to force them by ecological necessity to act in a sustainable manner. In other words, autarky and self-sufficiency bind the fate of the social community with the fate of the biotic community. It is not simply



that Sale wishes to increase a community's knowledge of its impact upon its natural surroundings, or its abstract awareness of its dependency upon nature, as this would still leave open a space for moral discussion over whether we *ought* to refrain from ecologically damaging behaviour. Sale explicitly refers to using people's *dependency for life* on their immediate environment as the motivating factor behind their change in behaviour. As Sale (2000: 109, emphasis added) goes on to explain, bioregionalism is a system whose 'civil and social structures work to minimise errant behaviour ... community transgressions are known to everyone *and their unfortunate consequences visible to all* ... the evil-doer, whether an individual or a whole community, is held in check by the limits of bioregional decentralism'. As such, 'it is *practical* to do so' seems to be little more than a euphemism for 'it is *necessary* to do so'.

Barry (1999: 86) attacks the 'autarky imperative' upon which this type of thinking is based, on the basis that it precludes the redistribution of resources across bioregional boundaries, which Barry regards as 'a core part of any green or environmentally informed theory of global distributive justice'. Such transactions, whether trade or charity based, would be seen by bioregionalists as undermining the creation of an adaptive fit between a community's economy and culture and the specific bioregion it inhabits. The upshot is, as Barry (1999: 86) notes, 'that those living in resource-poor ecosystems are condemned to their fate'. Barry is correct in this assessment; however, the above analysis would seem to indicate that this is Sale's aim rather than an unintentional consequence of his system.

It is worth stressing, though, that it is not the *scale* of political arrangement proposed by bioregionalists that causes distributional issues here. Although bioregionalists aim to match political and natural boundaries, they are faced with the problem noted earlier regarding the fact that natural regions are overlapping, of different sizes, 'like Chinese boxes, one within another, forming a complex arrangement from the largest to the smallest' (Sale 2000: 56). They are also faced with the problem that morphoregions – the smallest type of bioregion identified by Sale – can cover several thousand square miles (Sale 2000: 58), whereas Sale (2000: 64) claims that the most

appropriate scale for a political community would be between 1000 and 10,000. Obviously each 10,000 strong village commune cannot be allocated land totalling several thousand miles. Sale (2000: 95) also recognises that there will be 'countless occasions' which call for cooperation between communities.

The conclusion, for Sale (2000: 96) is that 'isolationism and self-sufficiency at a local scale is simply impossible, like fingers trying to be independent of hand and body' (Sale 2000: 96). He envisages instead a bioregional confederation of communities: 'Communication and information networks would be – would need to be – maintained among the communities of a bioregion, and possibly some kind of political deliberative and decision-making body would eventually seem to be necessary' (Sale 2000: 96). Given the size of bioregions, as they are conceptualised by Sale, it is clearly not the scale of such confederations that is the central cause of distributional difficulties. Many nation-states are of comparable scale.<sup>8</sup> What is problematic is Sale's insistence that 'Any larger political form is not only superfluous, it stands every chance of being downright dangerous'.

This insistence on autarky stands in tension with bioregionalism's claim that society should 'mimic natural systems' (McGinnis *et al.* 1999: 207). As noted, ecosystems – bioregions included – are materially open. The creation of small-scale polities that are strictly autarkic, and therefore close their boundaries around such systems, would seem to contradict the lessons of nature; bioregionalists create social isolation when nature is interconnected. Just as the human organism opens itself up to the possibility of degrading its environment when it fails to recognise its interconnections with this environment, so too would the bioregional polity create this danger were it to blind itself to its connections with the wider biosphere.

This utilisation of ecological necessity to ensure ecologically 'correct' behaviour throws up questions regarding the extent to which ecological necessity – what is necessary for ecological sustainability – may be seen to determine socioeconomic form. Sale provides us with a useful starting point to examine such questions:

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<sup>8</sup> For comparative purposes it may be useful to note that Cyprus has an area of 9,250 square miles.



Bioregional diversity, it must be understood, means exactly that. It does not mean every community in a bioregion, every subregion within an ecoregion, every ecoregion on a continent, would construct itself along the same lines, evolve the same political forms. Most particularly, it does not mean that every bioregion would be likely to heed the values of democracy, equality, liberty, freedom, justice, and the like, the sort that the liberal American tradition proclaims. Truly autonomous bioregions would inevitably go in separate and not necessarily complementary ways, creating their own political systems *according to their own environmental settings and their own ecological needs*. (Sale 2000:108, emphasis added)

The question is, to what *extent* is the political system of any community shaped by the environmental setting in which it is situated? If it is *significantly* shaped, in the sense that it is *determined* by its environment, then ecological diversity will translate into social diversity, as the social form connected to any bioregion will differ according to the ecological necessities of that particular environmental region. This combination of bioregional diversity and an environmental determinism would in turn make it difficult to talk of aspects *universal* to the bioregional polity. Sale, however, stipulates 'bioregional principles' that would need to be respected by all bioregional communities: limitations on scale, the necessity for conservation and stability, the importance of self-sufficiency and cooperation, and the desirability of decentralisation and diversity (Sale 2000:108). Such principles he views as essential to engendering sustainability irrespective of environmental diversity. This is still in line with a deterministic position, the only difference being that it is the *universal* environmental context that is the determinant rather than the local environmental context. This explains why such principles are kept at a broad and general level – they are designed to correspond to the broad similarities and universalities covering all diverse bioregions. It also means that the more precise principles that lie beyond being thought of as universally necessary, for sustainability that is, such as

democracy and social justice, cannot be stipulated as bioregional principles, as their necessity for sustainability will be dependent upon the ecological needs of the *particular* bioregion.<sup>9</sup>

Sale, however, avoids the trap of environmental determinism by arguing that ‘it is quite possible that an extraordinary variety of political systems would evolve within the bioregional constraints, and there is no reason to think that they would necessarily be compatible – or even, from someone else’s point of view, *good* (Sale, 1985:108). Here, he takes up the more philosophically defensible position of possibilism, which, as Flores (1999: 48) explains, states that ‘a given bioregion and its resources offer a range of possibilities, from which a given human culture makes economic life choices’ (Flores, 1999:48). This can be conceptualised in terms of an ecological leash constraining society; a significant debate surrounds the slackness of the leash, but with possibilism at least some manoeuvrability is acknowledged. As Ryle points out, ‘a variety of visions, most of them dystopian, can be entertained, all of them feasible in ecological terms – and none of them particularly green. Ecological limits may limit political choices, but they do not determine them... We should not assume that ‘ecology’ can satisfactorily define the new politics we are trying to develop’ (Ryle, 1988: 8).

It is not, therefore, the necessity of illiberal measures that stops Sale stipulating democracy as a bioregional value, but rather a lack of ecological necessity *for* democracy. This would seem to open the door for Sale to construct an alternative, non-ecological, defence of democracy and social justice; however such a defence is not forthcoming. Sale’s commitment to decentralisation and bottom-up forms of political organisation drives him to leave such decisions to individual communities. As Barry (1999: 87) explains, no guarantee of democracy and justice is provided because ‘bioregionalists place the communal right to self-legislate as the highest social value. The affirmation of communal solidarity is prioritized over “contingent”

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, a variety of arguments have been forwarded which stipulate that democracy *is* an essential component of a sustainable society, and these will be explored in chapter 5. However, the failure of democracy to command a place on Sale’s list of bioregional principles indicates that he does not find such arguments convincing.



and non-local values such as equality, fairness or democracy'. This may be contradictory with regards to democracy, as democracy is a necessary condition if we are to be able to talk sensibly of the community making its own decisions. How can the community make a decision over whether it should be democratic or not without recourse to a democratic form of decision-making?

It may also be that, even *if* Sale were to advocate that communities subscribe to the principles of democracy and social justice, his commitment to autarky, and the attendant lack of federal bodies with powers of enforcement, means that there is no mechanism built into his bioregional vision which could ensure that such communities abide by such principles in any case. Arguments for universal principles not necessitated by ecological need would therefore have a hollow ring to them. For Sale, the price of theoretical consistency is that the dystopian visions mentioned by Ryle are a distinct possibility. Dobson (2000: 103) weighs up the likely response to such a prospect:

At this point the wider green movement is likely to lose its bioregional nerve ... as images of slavery and sexism come to mind, misty eyes will snap into focus and greens will remember that they are as much the heirs of the Enlightenment as its committed critics.

There are, then, various problems which cast doubt on both the theoretical coherence and the appeal of the bioregional project. However, before drawing any conclusions as to the viability of the ecoanarchist canon as a whole, it is first necessary to examine its other dominant strand, social ecology. In chapter 3 Bookchin's ethical naturalism was found wanting. The following sections, therefore, assess Bookchin's criticisms of the state and his vision of libertarian municipalism separate from any consideration as to whether they are consonant with principles that somehow constitute an objective statement of what is implicit in nature. The first examines Bookchin's social hierarchy thesis; the second outlines and assesses his ecoanarchist vision – libertarian municipalism.

### ***4.3 Social Ecology, the State and Domination***

There is no lack of support for the view that the state *may* be used as an instrument of domination: feminists of differing shades have viewed it as an instrument of patriarchal domination, while, as demonstrated in chapter 1, various Marxists have viewed it as an instrument of class domination. For liberals, the more general threat the state poses to individual liberties warrants the application of the label 'evil'; anarchists, on the other hand, agree with this label but not with the liberal contention that the state is nonetheless necessary. For anarchists, the only necessity regarding the state is to be found in Weber's claim that one of its defining aspects is its monopoly of legitimate violence: *every* state is a tool of domination; this is its *raison d'être*.

Bookchin provides the most well-known and detailed account of the ecological implications of the state's intrinsically dominating nature. In his *magnus opus*, *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), Bookchin provides a detailed anthropological account of the development of hierarchy and domination in which he traces the history of these concepts from their nascent forms in gerontocracies and gender divisions, through to class domination and the state. Bookchin regards the state as the ultimate hierarchical institution and the institution which consolidates all other hierarchical institutions. The crux of Bookchin's argument is that 'the attempt to dominate nature stems from the domination of human by human' (1980: 67).

Bookchin begins his account by examining the outlook of 'preliterate' or 'organic' societies. Within such societies there were divisions according to social function, which in turn generated distinct social spheres and subcultures. These divisions tended to be organised along biological lines, and in particular according to age and gender: women ran the 'home, garden, cleaning, food preparation, parenting and many other functions', while males were responsible for hunting and taking part in



the 'civil sphere', or politics – a sphere in which the elders of the community also enjoyed a disproportionate influence (Bookchin 1993: 17-18).

Bookchin stresses, though, that these early biosocial divisions were not hierarchical or marked by domination; the civil sphere was 'not very important to the community' and was 'markedly counterbalanced by the enormous significance of the woman's "domestic" sphere. Household and childbearing responsibilities were much more important in early organic societies than politics and military affairs' (Bookchin 1982: 5-6). More importantly, perhaps, although social divisions were based upon biological difference, this variety was prized 'as a priceless ingredient of communal unity'; people were visualised 'in terms of their "uniqueness" rather than their "superiority" or "inferiority" ... notions such as "equality" and "freedom" [did] not exist. They [were] implicit in the very outlook itself' (Bookchin 1982: 44). In other words, these forms of variety were not accompanied by a hierarchical mentality.

Nevertheless, for Bookchin, these early forms of biosocial division bore within them the tensions which would lead to the gradual emergence and institutionalisation of social domination. Gerontocracy, for Bookchin, was the first form of institutionalised hierarchy, it stemming from the need of the elderly to enhance their social status in order to counter their loss of physical power and the vulnerabilities which this brings.<sup>10</sup> Elders achieved this by surrounding themselves with a shamanistic, quasi-religious aura. For Bookchin (1982: 43), this is the first step in 'The breakdown of primordial equality into hierarchical systems of inequality':

The division of clans and tribes into gerontocracies in which the old began to dominate the young; the emergence of the patriarchal family in which women were brought into universal subjugation to men; still further, the crystallization of hierarchies based on social status into social classes based on systematic material exploitation; the emergence of the city, followed by the increasing supremacy of town over country and territorial over kinship ties; and finally, the emergence of the state, of a

professional military, bureaucratic, and political apparatus exercising coercive supremacy over the remaining vestiges of community life – all of these divisions and contradictions that eventually fragmented and pulverized the archaic world yielded a resocialization of the human experimental apparatus along hierarchical lines. (Bookchin 1980: 62)

As the allusion to socialisation suggests, for Bookchin, these shifts ‘profoundly altered not only social life but also the attitude of people towards each other, humanity’s vision of itself, and ultimately its attitude to the natural world’ (Bookchin 1982: 43). The material aspect of the shift toward hierarchy, which is ‘embodied in the emergence of the city, the State, an authoritarian technics and a highly organized market economy’, engenders a corresponding subjective shift, which finds expression ‘in the emergence of a repressive sensibility and body of values – in various ways of mentalizing the entire realm of experience along lines of command and obedience’ (Bookchin 1982: 89). These ‘epistemologies of rule’ (Bookchin, 1982: ch. 4), which Bookchin also refers to as a ‘hierarchical mentality’ (Bookchin 1980: 60), ‘arrange experience itself – in all its forms – along hierarchically pyramidal lines’; they represent ‘a mode of perception and conceptualization into which we have been socialized by hierarchical society’ (Bookchin 1980: 60), and are characterised by coercive and domineering values. As such, they provide a conceptual apparatus which enables humans to see other humans as objects of manipulation. For Bookchin, therefore, the state ‘is not merely a constellation of bureaucratic and coercive institutions. It is also a state of mind, an instilled mentality for ordering reality... the state has a long history – not only institutionally but also psychologically’ (Bookchin 1982: 94).

It is this dual aspect to hierarchy which is central to Bookchin’s explanation of how humanity’s domination of nature stems from human domination by human: we have been socialised by hierarchical society into accepting the domination and coercion of human by human, and ‘from this self-imagery, we have extended our way of visualizing reality into our image of “external” nature’ (Bookchin 1982: 350). As

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<sup>10</sup> Alan Rudy (1998: 275) is correct to note, however, that Bookchin emphasises different aspects of



Bookchin stresses, 'human domination by human gave rise to the very *idea* of dominating nature... Men did not think of dominating nature until they had already begun to dominate the young, women, and, eventually, each other' (Bookchin 1990: 44). Again:

the very concept of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human, indeed, of women by men, of the young by their elders, of one ethnic group by another, of society by the state, of the individual by bureaucracy, as well as one economic class by another or a colonized people by a colonial power. (Bookchin 1980: 76)

Eckersley (1992: 148) is correct, therefore, to observe that Bookchin's thesis represents a reversal of the Marxist reading of history, in which the domination of nature is often seen as giving rise to class domination.

As noted in the previous chapter, Bookchin's normative vision is informed by his reading of the thrust of evolution, which is towards ever-increasing diversity, complexity and subjectivity; as Eckersley (1992: 149) notes, social ecology 'looks to nature as the *ground* of freedom and seeks to re-embed humans in the natural world'. For Bookchin (1980: 60), there is no hierarchy in nature: 'There are no "kings of the beasts" and no "lowly ants". These notions are the projections of our own social attitudes and relationships on the natural world'; 'the seemingly hierarchical traits of many animals are more like variations in the links of a chain than organized stratifications of the kind we find in human societies and institutions' (Bookchin 1982: 29). *Social* hierarchy, on the other hand, is contrary to the thrust of evolution as it inhibits self-determining behaviour.

The implication of this, for Bookchin, is that 'to harmonize our relationship with the natural world presupposes the harmonization of the social world' (Bookchin 1980: 67). It is essential to dismantle the state, and indeed all forms of social hierarchy, as they are contrary to the grain of evolution and generate hierarchical sensibilities

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this process in different texts.

between humans that in turn translate into domineering and ecologically damaging attitudes towards nature. In its place he forwards his own ecoanarchist vision, 'libertarian municipalism'.

However, before outlining Bookchin's ecoanarchist vision, it is worth highlighting some of the problems with Bookchin's social hierarchy thesis. Alan Rudy (1998) points out that the empirical data used to back Bookchin's account of preliterate societies is seriously lacking, as it is based solely on two 1950's anthropological studies of modern day North American tribes. First, such studies are overly restrictive to draw generalised conclusions. Later anthropological studies of the type of preliterate society examined by Bookchin have shown that social relations vary considerably. And second:

To extrapolate from two studies of modern, long post-European contact, tribal entities to a unified theory of social organization within preliterate societies is to practice an extreme form of unevolutionary thinking. Contemporary forms of social relations can only be assumed to represent historical predecessors in highly problematic fashion, assumptions as problematic as the idea that modern chimpanzees and gorillas provide linear information about the common ancestor we share with those two species. (Rudy 1998: 280)

It is also the case that Bookchin, in his attempts to demonstrate that the domination of human by human historically precedes the domination of nature, and that it is the latter that generates ecological degradation and scarcity, is driven to assert that ecological scarcity either never existed, or had no systemic effect on social institutions in early human societies. However, as Rudy (1998: 278) notes, Bookchin forwards no evidence to support this thesis. Bookchin instead claims that the 'periods of difficulty' which led to the insecurities of the elderly, and which in turn led to the onset of hierarchy and domination, were caused by the geographic expansion of horticultural societies. This resulted in isolated intra-society competition for resources and space. However, Rudy (1998: 279-280) highlights two problems with



this view. First, the need for population and geographical expansion suggests that resources were being exhausted by cooperative and mutualistic societies, *prior* to any inter-society competition. And second, it is nonetheless ecological scarcity which generates the need within the elderly for institutionalised domination. As Rudy (1998: 280) states, 'Bookchin, no different from those theorists he attacks, cannot escape attributing domination's ideological and material roots to anything other than material scarcity'.

Bookchin may also be criticised for forwarding an overly rigid and decontextualised conceptualisation of social hierarchy. As Eckersley (1992: 150) notes, any *necessary* connection between social hierarchy and the domination of non-human nature can easily be refuted with reference to historical examples, such as Benedictine communalism and feudalism, of hierarchical societies which nonetheless cultivated a relatively harmonious society-nature relationship. If, on the other hand, social hierarchy is viewed as a necessary *but not sufficient* condition for the destructive domination of nature all one would need to do is demonstrate the theoretical possibility of a society which is non-hierarchical yet dominates non-human nature. Here Eckersley (1992: 152) believes that Marx's vision of the communist society would be an example. Whether this is a fair claim or not, there would seem to be nothing which necessarily precludes a decentralised, directly democratic society from choosing to dominate and exploit nature for its own material ends. Similarly, although Eckersley would disagree given her ecocentric leanings, those subscribing to an *enlightened* anthropocentrism would argue that it is possible to hold a hierarchical mentality yet avoid ecologically *destructive* types of domination (see Norton 1991; Light and Katz 1996).

#### **4.3.1 Libertarian Municipalism**

Bookchin describes libertarian municipalism as involving 'a redefinition of politics, a return to the word's original Greek meaning as the management of the community or *polis* by means of direct face-to-face assemblies of the people in the formulation of

public policy based on an ethics of complementarity and solidarity' (Bookchin 1991). The appeal of such a direct, participatory democracy is clear from the preceding discussion and the preceding quote:

To create a society in which every individual is seen as capable of participating directly in the formulation of social policy is to instantly invalidate social hierarchy and domination. To accept this single concept means that we are committed to dissolving State power, authority and sovereignty into an inviolate form of personal empowerment. (Bookchin 1982: 340)

For Bookchin, bringing about such a system requires that we 'decentralise our cities and establish entirely new ecocommunities' (Bookchin 1980: 68). These 'libertarian municipalities', represent the 'living cell which forms the basic unit of political life ... from which everything else must emerge: confederation, interdependence, citizenship, and freedom' (1987b: 249); they are to be 'artistically moulded to the ecosystems in which they are located' (Bookchin 1980: 68); and are to allow for 'direct popular administration ... yet be large enough to foster cultural diversity and psychological uniqueness' (Bookchin 1980: 110). At their heart lie their popular assemblies, which, for Bookchin, 'are the minds of a free society' (Bookchin 1989a: 175).

The municipal economy would again be guided by the maxim: from each according to his or her ability, to each according to his or her need. However, Bookchin views the municipalisation of the economy as being distinct from *nationalisation*, as the latter reinforces the centralised power of the state; the ideal of collectivised self-managed enterprises, as these fail to challenge capitalist property relations; and argues that the use of unions as coordinating bodies is the first step to centralisation and bureaucratisation (Bookchin 1986. This final point will be examined in greater detail in chapter 5). Municipalisation, on the other hand, *politicises* the economy by dissolving it into the civic domain: "property" is integrated into the commune as a material constituent of its libertarian institutional framework, indeed as a part of a



larger whole that is controlled by the citizen body in assembly as *citizens*' (Bookchin 1986). Elsewhere, Bookchin has provided a vision of how such an economy would operate:

decisions made about the economy are not simply made by the workers, who work in a print shop or by the farmers who work on a particular farm growing cabbages ... Quite the contrary: everybody meets in an assembly. And everyone, no longer thinking of his or her own particular enterprise, thinks of the general good. They discuss what shall we do, how many cabbages do we need. And the people who make cabbages talk about how many tables we need to make, how many lamps we need to make. They do this in a town meeting, all of them. (Bookchin 1987b: 273)

Although Barry's (1999: 91) claim that bioregionalism is 'rural-based' is something of a caricature (see for example, Berg 1990b), he is nonetheless correct to highlight Bookchin's greater insistence that institutional decentralisation be pursued *within* urban agglomerations. Bookchin's position on bioregionalism also diverges from the strong communitarianism forwarded by many orthodox bioregionalists. Although, Bookchin stresses that ecocommunities should be 'delicately attuned to the natural ecosystem in which it is located' (Bookchin 1989a: 168), he backs away from the type of ecologically grounded culture forwarded by bioregionalists such as Clark, where 'The community becomes ... an extension of one's very self-hood. Individualist concepts of choice, rights, justice, and interest lose their validity in this context' (Clark 1998: 180). For Clark (1998: 180), Bookchin's failure to 'take the risk of this kind of strong communitarian thinking' runs counter to the social ecological commitment to unity-in-diversity, 'in which the unique, determinate particularity of each part of the whole is seen as making an essential contribution to the unfolding of the developing whole', as it fails to acknowledge that the formation of 'bioregional particularities' relies on 'ecologically grounded cultural creativity' – on the cultivation of bioregion-based cultures through 'dialectical, cooperative endeavour[s] between human beings and nature' (Clark 1998: 181). The problem is,

however, that a diversity of bioregion-based cultures is achieved through the elimination of cultural diversity *within* communities (see Barry 1999: 83-90). In this sense, Bookchin's *Gesellschaftliche* understanding of community represents an advance on the potentially stultifying *Gemeinschaft* conception advocated by orthodox bioregionalists.

Bookchin is also more willing to accept the need for cooperation beyond the level of the municipality. His confederal vision consists of 'a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities' (Bookchin 1989b). As noted above, Sale (2000) accepts the need for inter-bioregional cooperation, but warns against institutionalised interaction beyond this level. Bookchin, however, is less concerned with achieving self-sufficiency and autarky: 'Economic interdependence is a fact of life today, and capitalism itself has made parochial autarchies a chimera. While municipalities and regions can seek to attain a considerable measure of self-sufficiency, we have long left the era when self-sufficient communities that can indulge their prejudices are possible' (Bookchin 1991). The important point, for Bookchin, is to ensure that power nonetheless is placed firmly in the hands of individual municipal assemblies. To this end, he stipulates that 'Policymaking is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies' (Bookchin: 1989b). The confederal councils fulfil purely administrative and coordinative functions, while their members are 'strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies' (1989b).

The fact of economic interdependence, however, is not the only reason Bookchin advocates confederalism. He goes on to observe that 'many in the ecology movement tend to ignore the very real problems with "localism"' (Bookchin 1989b). In particular, Bookchin emphasises that 'decentralism [and] self-sufficiency ...do not constitute a guarantee that we will achieve a rational ecological society. In fact, [these principles] have at one time or another supported parochial communities, oligarchies, and even despotic regimes'. For such reasons, 'there is a compelling need for democratic and truly communitarian forms of interdependence – in short,



for libertarian forms of confederalism' (Bookchin 1989b). Such forms of interdependence, for Bookchin, provide an escape route from the relativism which is so unappealing in Sale's bioregionalism:

If particular communities or neighborhoods – or a minority grouping of them – choose to go their own way to a point where human rights are violated or where ecological mayhem is permitted, the majority in a local or regional confederation has every right to prevent such malfeasances through its confederal council. (Bookchin 1991)

It is difficult to see how this fits with Bookchin's insistence that confederal councils are to have a purely administrative and coordinative remit. The traditional anarchist conception of federalism differs from the liberal idea in stipulating that no federal decision may bind constituency members against their will (Miller 1984: 55). As Bakunin (quoted in Guerin 1970: 6-7) forcefully puts it:

each individual, each association, commune or province, each region and nation, has the absolute right to determine its own fate, to associate with others or not, to ally itself with whomever it will, or break any alliance, without regard to so-called historical claims or the convenience of its neighbour.

By claiming a legitimate right for confederal bodies to intervene in municipal affairs Bookchin clearly violates this principle, and in doing so Barry (1999: 93) believes he bestows 'state-like institutionalized powers on the council'. In other words, Bookchin has 'failed to convincingly demonstrate the *stateless* nature of libertarian municipalism' (Barry 1999: 92). His commitment to the universal principles of human rights, democracy and ecological integrity, while laudable and an improvement upon the relativism of Sale, stands in tension with the particularism which may result from his insistence that communities enjoy self-determination. Bookchin is stuck between a rock and a hard place: where he advocates the enforcement of universal principles through confederal councils, he violates self-

determination and sneaks the state in through the back door; where he emphasises the sanctity of self-determination, he must accept the relativistic conclusions this leads to or, as seems to be the case, descend into complete contradiction.

#### ***4.4 Syndicalism***

The two dominant strands of ecoanarchism which have been assessed thus far – bioregionalism and social ecology – are examples of communal forms of anarchism, in that the commune is deemed to be the building block of the stateless society. The proceeding sections, however, shift the focus to syndicalism – a stateless vision in which society is organised largely from the workplace. Before examining the syndicalist model in detail, though, the following section first seeks to explain why, for a body of thought so heavily influenced by anarchism, green political theory has, until recently, taken little interest in syndicalism. The central argument is that a tendency within green political theory to overextend new social movement (NSM) theory's critique of class analyses in turn generates indifference towards the labour movement and, by association, syndicalism, a body of thought intimately connected with this movement. This source of indifference needs to be challenged. Social movement theorists are correct to highlight that the field of contemporary social struggle is now marked by a greater heterogeneity both in terms of the variety of movements and in terms of the values and goals they pursue, and that consequently the working class should no longer be considered a hegemonic class, if indeed it ever should have been. However, there are good reasons nonetheless why environmentalists should focus on cultivating stronger links with the labour movement. Once these reasons have been examined, an historical overview of the development of syndicalist ideas is provided. This highlights the roles syndicalists envisage for the trade union: 1) as an educative institution aimed at cultivating a system of values counterposed to the self-interested, individualistic hegemony of capitalist ideology; and 2) as the central coordinating institution in a stateless, bipartite model of social and political organisation. The sections following this historical overview then go on to examine the environmental implications of these



proposed functions. In particular, an exploration of the 'Green Syndicalism' of Graham Purchase (1993; 1994; 1997) is undertaken to examine the viability and ecological credentials of the syndicalist version of the stateless society. Also, three examples of union-environmentalist cooperation are examined in order to assess the capacity of trade unions to act as bearers of a counter-hegemony which challenges the 'jobs versus environment' framework, and therefore to reconstruct the labour-environmentalist relationship (LER). These examples suggest that the criticism of unions as inherently economistic, and concerned only with the redistribution of the spoils of growth, are overstated.

#### ***4.4.1 New Social Movements, Class and the Environment***

Environmentalism is normally defined as one of the NSMs which arose in the 1960s and 70s, the 'New' prefix being employed to emphasise that such movements are in various ways distinct from the labour movements of old. When seeking to explain the emergence of the NSMs, social movement theorists have often focused, as a starting point, on the ways in which advanced capitalism differs from early industrial capitalism. Structural transformations and long-range political and cultural changes – some of which were brought about by the success of the labour movement itself in securing economic and social rights – are seen by social movement theorists to have created 'a field for new social conflicts and movements' (Touraine 1985: 781). Capitalism is seen by some as having entered a new 'disorganised' stage (Offe 1980; Lash and Urry 1987), while others emphasise that advanced capitalist countries are now 'post-industrial', in that their economies are dominated by the information and service sectors (Bell 1973). As Fred Rose (1997) explains, advocates of 'New Class Theory' have used the latter observation to explain the emergence of NSMs, viewing them as expressions of the interests of a 'new middle class' (NMC) – a professional and managerial stratum which has arisen as a result of the shift towards a post-industrial economy. Indeed, various empirical studies attest to the prevalence of such a class in the environmental movement. For example, a Greenpeace survey of its own members found that 32% had incomes over \$50,000 compared with 17% of the U.S

population, while 60% had college degrees compared with 19% of the population (Rose 1997: 464; see also, amongst many others, Dalton 1994; Rorschneider 1988, 1993; Poguntke 1993). The European school of NSM theory, on the other hand, has concentrated on the former observation. Its advocates view NSMs as reactions to the encroachment of the production process into what Habermas (1987) terms the 'lifeworld', and in particular its imposition of increased levels of control over social relations. Their criticisms of New Class Theory mirror their criticisms of Marxism, which, as Canel (1997: 190) notes, NSM theorists consider incapable of understanding the full complexity of NSMs, largely due to its propensity to engage in economic and class reductionism. Politics and ideology are conceived as mere reflections of the economic 'base', while the identity of social actors are deemed to be determined by their objective interests as an economic class. Paul Norton (2003: 108) labels this manner of explaining group formation the 'interest thesis', and where New Class theorists use such an approach to explain NSMs they are seen to replicate the deficiencies of the Marxist approach. As Offe (1985: 883) explains, such an approach cannot explain the type of politics which 'is typically a politics of class but not on behalf of class'. In particular, New Class theorists struggle to account for the fact that NSMs, despite their predominantly NMC membership, often promote issues which cut across class lines, such as gender, locality and the environment, and indeed run counter to the technocratic and bureaucratic interests of the middle class (Rose 1997: 467). As Melucci (1980) has observed, NSMs often oppose the over-rationalisation and bureaucratisation of society, and favour participatory democracy over the dominance of expert knowledge.

When addressing questions regarding the prevalence of the New Middle Class in NSMs, NSM theorists tend to favour a form of 'advantage thesis', according to which the NMC are seen to dominate the class make-up of NSMs, not because such movements reflect its particular class interests, but because it is better equipped to comprehend and articulate concerns over what is a more general threat to society (see Eckersley 1989). The disproportionately high number of the NMC active in NSMs, therefore, is in line with a longer-standing tendency for the middle class to involve itself in *any* political conflict. This is backed up by evidence that the NMC is as



involved with more traditional social movements as it is with NSMs. For example, Mario Diani (1995: 58) found the NMC to be as equally active in the more traditional and conservative conservation movement as it is in the newer political ecology movements.

A third manner of explaining NSMs is what Rose (1997) terms the 'Cultural Shift Approach', and is to a large extent inspired by the work of Ronald Inglehart (1977; 1990). Theorists belonging to this strand of social movement theory focus on the claim that citizens in post-industrial societies have largely been released from economic scarcity and insecurity; they are more likely to concern themselves with needs located in the upper ranks of Maslow's hierarchy, and with issues of culture, lifestyle, identity – what Inglehart (1977) termed 'post-material' values – rather than economic needs. As Calhoun (1995: 187) explains, 'affluence [has] made it feasible to stop worrying about old economic issues'. Inglehart (1997) then explains the prevalence of the NMC in NSMs by claiming that, as the first class to have made such a cultural shift, they are the first harbingers of its values.

At this point it is worthwhile drawing out those conclusions of NSM theory which have particular relevance to this chapter. NSM theorists rightly point out that the object of social struggle for NSMs is often not economic gain. NSMs are 'geared towards cultural politics' (Martin 2002: 80), and pursue goals which cut across traditional class lines. As such, the field of contemporary social struggle can no longer be conceptualised in terms of the competition of largely undifferentiated, monolithic classes – be it the dualistic conception of social division forwarded by traditional Marxism or the marginally more complex account provided by New Class Theory – in which group interest is seen to be determined by its members' objective location in the process of production. NSMs are the product of ideological and political processes, their identity being defined in relation to the particular issues raised, be they environmental, gender based or otherwise, rather than economic class (Canel 1997). Traditional Marxist class analyses are therefore considered to be outmoded at best, and trans-historically inaccurate at worst (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Late modernity has borne witness to what Melucci (1989) calls 'class

decomposition', and as a result, social change is now more likely to come about as the result of 'social struggles of a variety of social movements *which are not class-based*' (Turner 1986: 142, emphasis added; see also Melucci 1981). Any claim that either the working class *or* the NMC has some hegemonic role to play in bringing about the type of social change which will resolve all previous contradictions must therefore be rejected.

The field of contemporary social struggle, then, is characterised by a greater diversity of groups and movements, and a greater heterogeneity in terms of the values these groups espouse and the goals they pursue. And this very heterogeneity generates difficulties when it comes to cultivating any semblance of cross-movement unity (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1992). One of the most lingering examples of such difficulties concerns the labour-environmentalist relationship (LER). However, with the LER, it is not merely the case that cross-movement cooperation has proved difficult to cultivate and sustain; at times the relationship has been marked by open, rancorous conflict. This normally occurs where workers and their respective trade unions conceptualise the LER in terms of a 'jobs versus environment' framework, and consequently align themselves with employers against environmentalists. This in turn leads environmentalists to look upon workers as 'part of the problem', resulting in what Carroll and Ratner (1996: 100) term 'an incongruity of visions' between both camps. However, these subjective interpretations of the LER as being necessarily characterised by conflict due to an insurmountable incongruity express a subscription to corporate ideology rather than objective truth. As noted in chapter 2, the exploitation of both labour and nature are manifestations of the fundamental contradiction inherent within capitalism between production for the needs of capital and the needs of human beings. To be more precise, as the Polanyian framework highlights, rather than the interests of labour and nature being diametrically opposed, the exploitation of both results from them being conditions of production, not produced capitalistically, yet are treated as if they are. It follows that the emancipation of both – and therefore the interests of both the labour and environmental movement – lies in resolving capitalism's basic contradiction. Indeed, even within the capitalist framework the extent to which both groups' interests clash



has been overstated. A number of studies have shown that environmental and workplace regulations, and increased environmental spending by companies, rarely affect employment patterns to any significant degree (see, *inter alia*, Kazis and Grossman 1982; Sprenger 1997; Morgenstern *et al.* 2002). Indeed, Obach (2002: 82) notes that ‘Instances of conflict between unions and environmentalists are rare and largely isolated in certain employment sectors’. Paul Norton (2003: 100) is correct to note, then, that “‘jobs versus environment” tensions in the LER are not so much an objective reality as a function of the use of corporate power and state power to discursively construct employment and environmental goals in opposition to each other’.

This should not, of course, take away from the fact that conflict does occur, despite its extent and regularity being overstated. Delegates arriving at the 1992 Rio Earth summit were greeted by billboards saying ‘Ecologists Go Home’ (Pepper 1993: 237), while environmentalists’ attempts to protect the habitat of the Spotted Owl in the Northwest of the U.S. in the late 1980s led to increased sales of bumper stickers proclaiming ‘I love Spotted Owls – Fried’, and ‘Are You An Environmentalist, Or Do You Work For A Living?’, as loggers vented their frustration at having to face increased job insecurity and possible injury resulting from acts of eco-sabotage, such as tree-spiking. Rather than attempting to build bridges, however, theoreticians of the labour movement have at times fanned the flames by painting environmentalism as a bourgeois ideology reflecting the interests of its middle-class base – interests which are at odds with those of the working class (Enzensberger 1996; Beresford 1977; Pepper 1984; Weston 1986). Although such works make a valid point when warning against the reformist type of environmentalism which does little more than create market opportunities by advocating the use of green products, when environmentalism as a whole is presented as representing purely middle-class interests, such thinkers merely replicate the deficiencies of New Class Theory.

Environmentalists, on the other hand, have a tendency to distance themselves from the labour movement. Heeding the conclusions of NSM theory, they reject the notion that the working class may play a hegemonic role in bringing about social change. As

Leff (1996: 153) notes, 'In contrast to orthodox Marxism's concept of a class – the proletariat – as the protagonist of social change, the environmental movement presents itself as an explosion of interests and identities that rejects a unitary class response to capitalism as a mode of production'. Their theoreticians, on the other hand, when addressing the question of who is most likely or best placed to bring about social change, have often emphasised that avoiding the ecological crisis is in *everyone's* interests. Hence, rather than concentrating on a particular class, environmentalism is viewed as an ideology for the whole species: 'Like the utopian socialists and communists who Marx sought to dispense with, we must once again take the species interest as our fundamental point of reference' (Bahro 1982: 65).

However, it is not simply that green theorists consider the working class to be a spent force. As mentioned, there has been a tendency within green literature to go beyond this and castigate workers for being 'part of the problem'. Bookchin (2004: 114) notes that an increasingly interventionist welfare state has effectively blunted the immiseration of the proletariat and therefore removed its revolutionary potential. This, for Bookchin, has turned workers into a reactionary force:

The factory serves not only to "discipline," "unite," and "organize the workers, but also to do it in a thoroughly bourgeois fashion. In the factory, capitalistic production not only renews the social relations of capitalism with each working day, as Marx observed, it also renews the psyche, values and ideology of capitalism ... rather than representing a revolutionary force, traditional class struggle stabilizes capitalist society by correcting its abuses (in wages, hours, inflation, employment, etc.). (Bookchin 2004: 115-116; 117)

For Bookchin (2004: 118), therefore, 'to infect the new revolutionary movement of our time with "workeritis" is *reactionary to the core*' (2004: 117). 'Social revolution', on the other hand, 'can only emerge from the decomposition of the traditional classes' (Bookchin 2004: 117). In a patronising attempt to acknowledge



the predicament faced by loggers, Dave Foreman, cofounder of Earth First!, makes a similar point:

The loggers are victims of an unjust economic system, yes, but that should not absolve them from everything they do ... Indeed, sometimes it is the hardy swain, the sturdy yeoman from the bumpkin proletariat so celebrated in Wobbly lore who holds the most violent and destructive attitudes towards the natural world (and those who would defend it). (Foreman, in Chase 1991: 51-52)

This passage has an ironic resonance with Marx's allusions to the 'idiocy of rural life' – a passage which environmentalists themselves have often used to buttress arguments to the effect that Marxism is inherently anti-ecological (see Foster 2000: 136-7). Such perceptions have imbued the environmental movement with a particularly insensitive approach to questions regarding the social justice implications of environmental policies (Bullard 1993; Pulido 1993).

A closer look, however, reveals that green commentators, when downplaying, ignoring or rejecting the class aspects of environmentalism, overextend NSM theory's critique of class analyses. It is essential to highlight that hierarchy and domination come in broader, more complex forms than those outlined in traditional Marxist class analysis; and it is important to outline the flaws in those theories which assign a hegemonic role to any specific economic class. It is also true to say that NSMs embody values not necessarily defined by class interest. Rather than being solely concerned with redistributing the benefits of economic growth, the environmental movement in fact challenges the value of growth, consumerism and mass consumption. It aims to bring about changes in the way the environment is valued and even the way people identify (or fail to identify) with nature. There is some truth, therefore, to the claim that NSMs are 'geared towards cultural politics'; they have a strong cultural element. However, to ignore the fact that cultural politics intersect with issues of political economy, and therefore class, can only lead to what Shantz (2004) terms an 'uncritical culturalism'. As O'Connor (1998: 308) argues,

NSMs 'are not fully explicable from a social science point of view unless some attention is paid to political economy'. Although they challenge capitalism at the predominantly cultural level, they nevertheless 'have an objective referent in production conditions'. By questioning economic growth, consumerism, and the value-form of representing nature, the environmental movement may be viewed in Polanyian terms 'as "society" fighting the commodification of production conditions ... or as "society" fighting the specific forms of capitalist restructuring of already commodified conditions of production'. The environmental movement is explicitly challenging the capitalist mode of appropriating nature, and this has class implications. As O'Connor (1996: 215-216) notes in an earlier work, and as demonstrated in chapter 2, 'issues pertaining to production conditions are class issues (even though they are also *more* than class issues), which becomes immediately obvious when we ask who opposes popular struggles around conditions?' Social movement theorists such as D'anieri *et al.* (1990) and Foweraker (1995) view such observations as evidence that the new/old distinction is overdrawn. NSMs have material or class aspects to them, while 'old' social movements were not as one-dimensional and devoid of cultural aspects as is often made out.

It is also the case that, while avoiding global ecological catastrophe is, as Bahro puts it, in our species interest; this does not mean that environmental issues affect all in the same way and to the same degrees. As the burgeoning environmental justice movement has consistently argued, lower-income groups are more likely than their wealthier counterparts to suffer the effects of environmental degradation, be they framed as health or quality of life issues. For example, a high proportion of sewage and chemical plants are to be found near poor and often minority communities (Rowell 1996; Tokar 1997). This situation – as mentioned above – finds its parallel on the global level in the disproportionately high level of wasteful and polluting industries to be found in poorer nations. Poorer groups also suffer the effects of environmental disaster disproportionately. This can be because the poverty of a particular nation renders it incapable of responding to such disasters, such as was the case with the Asian tsunami in 2004. And it can also be because the poverty of certain groups residing *within* wealthier nations render them impotent in the face of



environmental catastrophe, as was starkly demonstrated when Hurricane Katrina swept across Louisiana in 2005. Although Katrina destroyed almost everything in its path, it was no coincidence that it was the poor who remained to meet its arrival. Lower-income groups were the least likely to be able to pay for an out of town hotel or indeed a car to take them to it – problems compounded by the fact they were also the most likely to occupy housing which would be described as dire under normal circumstances, but hopelessly inadequate when faced with a category five hurricane. The abandonment these groups faced in the period leading up to the hurricane's arrival was then followed by further abandonment in its aftermath. The failure of the US government to reopen public housing projects ensured that the reconstructive effort was placed solely in the hands of a private sector with little interest in those unable to pay for its services. With 200,000 homes destroyed and whole neighbourhoods written off, there then came a rise in demand for rented accommodation. Landlords sought to cash in on the resulting doubled monthly rental rates by employing enforced evictions on those unable to afford the rise. The poor who had been unable to afford to leave the city suddenly found themselves unable to afford to stay, while those poor who managed to find an escape route, were unable to return.

Of course, highlighting the class aspects of environmentalism should not be taken as an attempt to reinstate the working class as *the* hegemonic class. It obviously is not. However, there are good reasons why environmentalists should give particular attention to building a more cooperative relationship with the labour movement. First and foremost, as noted above, the labour and environmentalist movements should, theoretically, make natural bedfellows. To put it bluntly, they share a common enemy, even if they fail to recognise this at times. Second, the structural position workers occupy in the production process ensures that:

As the ones most situated at the nexus of ecological damage ... workers in industrial workplaces may be expected to have some insights into immediate and future threats to local and surrounding ecosystems. Such awareness derived from the location of the workers at the point of

production/destruction may allow workers to provide important, although not central, contributions to ecological resistance. (Shantz 2002: 29)

Workers also occupy a position within the production process which endows them with the ability to halt that process through strike action. Trade unions provide vital organisational and financial assistance here, and by doing so provide the labour movement with the type of economic leverage which the environmental movement sorely lacks. As Purchase (1993: 33) rather patronisingly puts it, 'Groups of peace protestors or environmentalists singing songs outside nuclear bases, although not irrelevant or unproductive, do not by themselves represent an organisational basis for sustained resistance to the state-capitalist system on a country-wide basis'. As shall be shown below, coalition strike actions have been used in various instances to halt environmentally damaging forms of production.

Workers, therefore, occupy a place in the production process which is of strategic use to environmentalists. Indeed, it is difficult to envisage any radical change occurring *without* the collusion of the working class. This is particularly evident when we note the extent to which changing the nature and value of work has been a central issue for greens (see Dobson 2000: 91-99). As Shantz (2002: 26) notes, 'It cannot be expected, except where an authoritarian articulation is constituted, that industrialism will be replaced by non-hierarchical, ecological relations without workers' confronting the factory system in which they are meshed'. Similarly, Purchase (1993: 13) claims that 'Without agro-industrial working class or trade union organisation, revolutionary anarchism will remain an intellectual fantasy and a philosophical pipe dream'.

There are, then, compelling reasons why environmentalists should seek to cultivate as strong a cross-movement coalition with the labour movement as possible. Moreover, once it is recognised that the labour movement may play an important role in bringing about the ecological society, labour-based political theories gain relevance as potential avenues of research for green political theory. Indeed, Shantz (2004: 703) sees syndicalism acting as 'As a corrective to the retreat of class in much



anarchist, new social movement and “radical” thought’ (Shantz 2004: 703). It is to this vision of the stateless society that the following sections turn. The proceeding sections provide an historical overview of the development of syndicalist ideas in order to highlight the roles syndicalists envisage trade unions playing in both the post-revolutionary stateless society and in the political struggles aimed at bringing such a society into existence.

#### ***1.9.4 A Background to Syndicalism***

Rudolph Rocker’s ([1938] 1989: 56) insight that ‘The permeation of the labour movement by socialist ideas led to tendencies which had an unmistakable relationship to the revolutionary syndicalism of our day’, is helpful in indicating the starting point for any account of the history of syndicalist ideas. If we were to take up the thread of syndicalist ideas and trace them back through history, we would eventually be led to the point where socialism was first inspired by, and in turn impacted on, the industrial workplace.

It is unsurprising that the syndicalist tendencies identified by Rocker first appeared in Britain. As Hobsbawm (1962: 44-45) once commented, ‘If there was to be a race for pioneering the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, there was really only one starter’. It is therefore with the English labour movement of the 1830s – a movement which burst onto the political scene as a result of the repeal of the Combination Acts (1824) – that we find the first forerunner to syndicalism.

This movement was heavily influenced by the ideas of Robert Owen. Although Owen is probably best known for his advocacy of worker cooperatives and ‘villages of cooperation’, Mellor *et al.* (1988: 17) note that ‘Trade unionism and cooperation were integral parts of the same movement during the early growth of the working class under capitalism’. These strands – of what may broadly be termed radical workplace democracy – are not mutually exclusive, and Owen’s ideas can be seen to influence the early development of both.

Owen himself was actively involved in the English trade union movement, and his views greatly influenced the form and aims of the *Grand National Consolidated Trade Union* (GNC); indeed, he was its office president during the last year of its existence. The founding of the GNC was stimulated by the disillusionment felt at the restrictive nature of the 1832 Reform Act, which extended the democratic franchise to only 14 per cent of adult males (Thornley 1982: 17; Judge 1993: 23). It sought to provide coordination for movements fighting for improvements in workers' daily conditions, and to lend financial and organisational assistance for strike actions. However, it also set itself the more radical aim of overthrowing the capitalist economy. As Rucker ([1938] 1989: 62) notes, the GNC paper, *The Pioneer*, consistently argued that the collectivisation of social wealth would render political institutions such as the British Parliament superfluous, their place being taken by labour councils and industrial federations.

Syndicalist tendencies – in embryonic form at least – were also in evidence in France during the same period. Although worker combinations which aimed to alter the social relations of production were prohibited, French workers were able to construct ostensibly reformist mutual benefit societies (*mutualités*) as cover for the more radical secret organisations for resistance (*sociétés de résistance*). The movement of the *Workingmen's Associations* then arose in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution. This cooperative / trade union movement aimed to reconstruct society along syndicalist lines; however, it was swiftly brought to a halt by Louis Bonaparte's 1851 *coup d'état*, which ushered in the second French empire (1852-1870) (Rucker [1938] 1989: 67-68).

A further advance in the development of syndicalist ideas is evident in the discussions held in the forum of the first *International Working Men's Association* (1864-1876). The First International arose out of the recognition that that the labour movement required some form of international coordination – a recognition of which was undoubtedly stimulated by the need to put a halt to the increasingly prevalent importation of foreign workers as strike-breakers. It aimed to foster labour



movements across Europe, to provide assistance for worker actions in the form of international collections and to furnish the working class with an international consciousness. It became, as Rucker ([1938] 1989: 69) claims, 'the great school mistress of the Socialist labour movement'.

The direction of the First International was, to a large extent, dictated by Marx and his supporters. However, at the Basel conference of 1869 there was a noticeable injection of syndicalist ideas. The focal point of this came in the form of a resolution tabled by Eugène Hins of the Belgian delegation, in which he stated that 'The councils of the trade and industrial organisations will take the place of the present government, and this representation of labour will do away, once and for all, with the governments of the past' (quoted in Rucker [1938] 1989: 72). It is no surprise that this injection coincides with the more general rise in influence of anarchist elements within the International. The Basel conference was the first conference at which Bakunin was present, attending as a delegate of the Geneva branch. Bakunin himself supported the idea of workers' self-administration and the idea that workers' councils may be charged with the responsibility for organising the economy: 'The organization of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labor creates a great academy in which all the workers can and must study economic science; these sections also bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself' (Bakunin [1871] 1980: 254). Marx recognised the educative role which may be played by unions, and their usefulness in gaining concessions within the system; however, for Marx, this was their limit, as the transition to socialism could only be achieved by grasping state power and achieving a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat. The anarchist and syndicalist factions, on the other hand, sought to avoid perpetuating the monopolisation of power in the state by investing it in unions or labour councils.<sup>11</sup>

Although it is difficult to measure the success of the First International, it undoubtedly played a significant role in the wave of labour unrest which swept

through Europe from 1868 to 1873, and if we take Austrian figures alone in the period from 1869 to 1872, its members grew from 10,000 to 35,000 in Vienna, from 5,000 to almost 17,000 in the Czech lands, and from 2,000 in Styria and Carinthia to 10,000 in Styria alone (Hobsbawm 1975: 138). However, it was seriously weakened by Marx's disputes with anarchist factions – first with the Proudhon-inspired Mutualists, then, most infamously, with Bakunin and his supporters – and eventually disintegrated in the face of the same wave of counter-revolutionary activity which brought an end to the Paris Commune. Marx effectively wrote it off in 1872 by transferring its headquarters to New York, with it officially disbanding at the 1876 Philadelphia conference (Thomas 1980: 250-251).

While these movements display syndicalist ideas in nascent form, it is generally accepted that it is at the beginning of the twentieth century that these ideas were moulded into a body of thought – encompassing a critique of contemporary society, a theory of social change and a vision of the future – coherent enough to be defined as a distinct *ideology*. It had a notable impact on Spanish and Italian politics; however, France was the main source of syndicalist ideas. As such, much of this section will focus on France, and in particular the *Confédération générale du travail* (General Confederation of Labour, or CGT).

French syndicalism was forged in opposition to the reformist parliamentary socialism of Kautsky and Bernstein. Bernstein focused on what he perceived to be fundamental flaws in Marx's class analysis. He noted that, at his time of writing, rather than a movement towards increasing class polarisation and homogenisation being observable – as predicted by Marx – the middle class and peasantry were actually expanding. This, he reasoned, meant that state control could not be attained without the support of the non-proletarian classes. Meanwhile, practical reformism, based on an ethical rather than materialist basis, was, for Bernstein, the most appealing route forward. He rejected the notion that there was an inexorable and objective movement towards crisis and revolutionary transformation, and instead called for the 'piecemeal realization of socialism':

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<sup>11</sup> Council communism may legitimately be viewed in distinction to syndicalism; however, the two are



I frankly admit that I have extraordinarily little feeling for, or interest in, what is usually termed 'the final goal of socialism'. This goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me, the movement is everything ... What Social Democracy should be doing, and doing for a long time to come, is organize the working class politically, train it for democracy, and fight for any and all reforms in the state which are designed to organize the working class and make the state more democratic. (Bernstein [1898] 1961: 15)

Kautsky disagreed with Bernstein's rejection of capitalism's inevitable movement towards crisis; as he famously put it, 'irresistible economic forces lead with certainty of doom to the shipwreck of capitalist production' (Kautsky [1891] 1971: 117). He also advocated, somewhat sketchily, the use of the general strike. Kautsky did agree, however, that until a revolutionary situation arises, parliamentary reform should be pursued in order to democratise the executive and socialise the means of production; this way, when capitalism inevitably crumbles, the SPD would be ready to take over.

Revisionist views such as these found support in France around the turn of the century, particularly from parliamentary socialists such as Jean Jaurés, Jules Guesde and Alexander Millerand. The syndicalists made three arguments in opposition to this position. First, as Miller (1984: 128) observes, they pointed out that because political parties group people according to belief rather than class position, they inherently represented a compromise between classes and therefore could not be relied upon to defend the true interests of the workers. Second, they forwarded the traditional anarchist argument that participation in parliamentary politics and the state inevitably had a corrupting effect and forced representatives to water down their principles. As Rucker ([1938] 1989: 83) remarked, 'The ancient proverb: "Who eats of the pope, dies of him," has held true in this context also; who eats of the state is ruined by it'. This was also the argument they aimed at the Bolsheviks and the authoritarian implications of their particularly Jacobin interpretation of the concept

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often intertwined; this is especially the case in their early development.

of the dictatorship of the proletariat. And third, any legislative gains for one sector of the workers tended to be gained at the expense of another sector rather than capitalists themselves. Capitalists, with their greater knowledge of legal matters, tended to be able to vitiate any legislative gains.

Syndicalists recognised that there were two pillars to working class strength: first, it had a numerical advantage; and second, its centrality to the productive process provided it with the capacity to bring it to a standstill via strike action. However, both these strengths were being undermined by any partaking in parliamentary activity; what was needed was an alternative form of organisation.

The model of organisation which would eventually become syndicalist orthodoxy developed in France out of the merging of the *Bourses du Travail* (Labour Exchange) and the CGT. The Bourses were local federations of syndicates engaged in educating the workers; they aimed to furnish them with a class-consciousness, to provide them with the technical abilities required by a producer controlled economy, and to develop a system of values which rejected the avarice of bourgeois society. These local bodies were united in an umbrella institution, established in 1892, which was able to provide coordination between different localities. The CGT on the other hand came into being in 1895 after the Trade Union Congress at Nantes. Its express purpose was bringing together all trade union alliances under common control. It declared itself independent of all political parties shortly after its inception and set about organising strike actions and campaigns for improvements in the workers' situation.

In 1902 these two organisations merged and in 1906 adopted The Charter of Amiens, which explicitly committed the CGT to the syndicalist principles of autonomy of working class struggle, political neutrality, and revolutionary general strike:

In daily protest work the union pursues the coordination of working class efforts, and the growth of the well being of workers, through the carrying out of immediate improvements, such as the diminution in work hours,



the increase in salaries, etc. But this task is only one side of the work of syndicalism: it prepares complete emancipation, which can only be fulfilled by expropriation of the capitalists; it advocates as a method of action the general strike; and it considers that the union, today a resistance group will be, in the future, a group for production and redistribution, the basis of social reorganization. (CGT 1906)

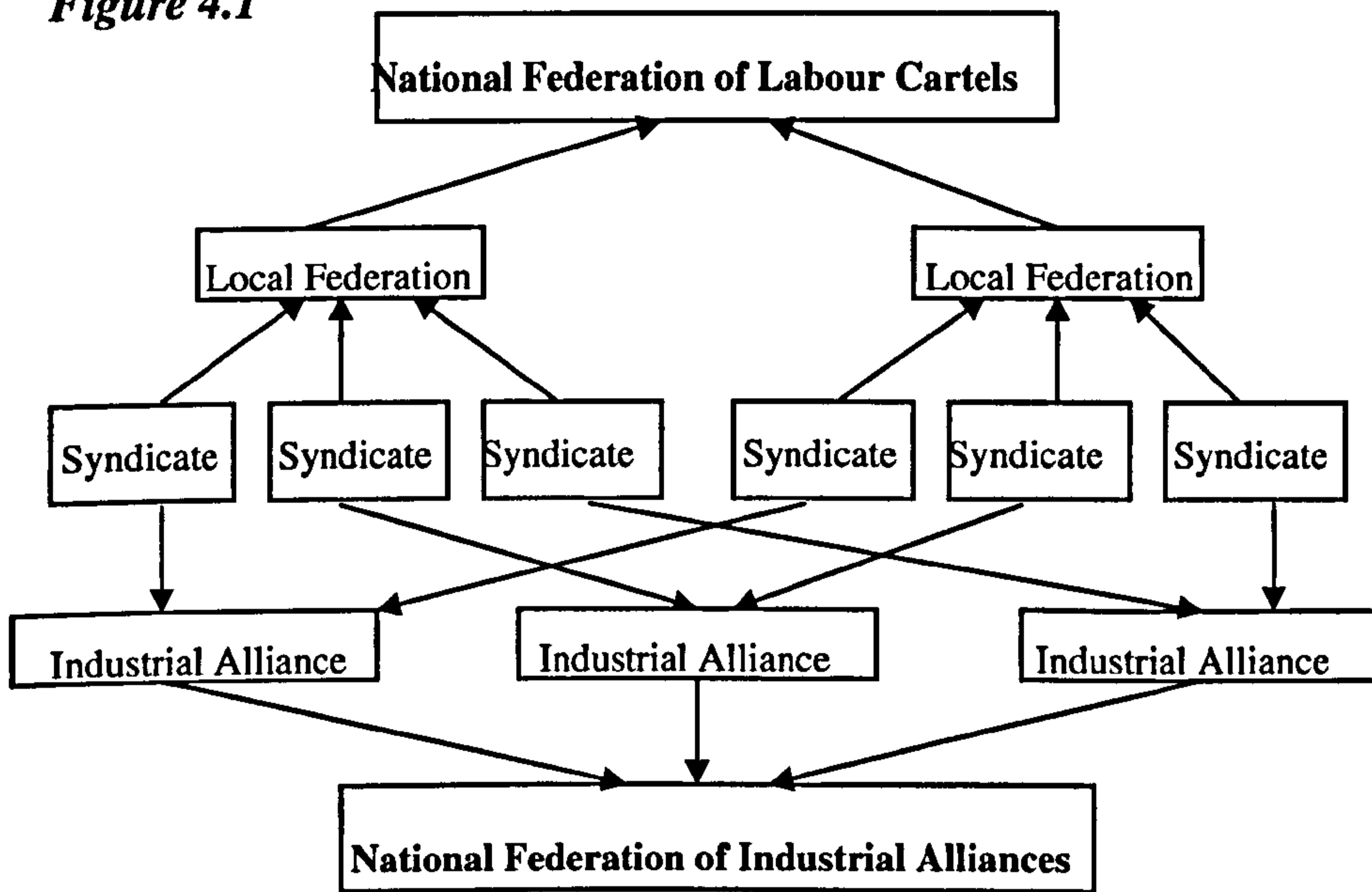
The unions, then, were not simply organs of resistance, but also represented the germ of the new socialist society. A bipartite model of organisation was envisaged: the unions, particularly through the federal body encompassing all industrial alliances, would plan and organise production, while the Bourses, or local federations, would organise consumption within and between different localities. They would gather information regarding local consumer interests and translate these to the unions so that they would have more of an overview of the production process; as Schechter (1994: 26) notes, 'in economic terms they functioned like decentralised planning bodies'.

The general strike was viewed as the most powerful weapon in the working class's armoury. The idea was that if a large enough proportion of the workforce went on strike, the government would be unable to provide basic amenities and thus lose legitimacy. At this point a revolutionary situation arises where the syndicates and their federal bodies are able to take over the responsibility for production and distribution. Georges Sorel was probably the most influential theorist of the general strike; he called for it to be turned into a working class myth, on the belief that myths motivate people more than reason (see Sorel [1908] 1999: ch. 5).

Although the French labour movement at the turn of the twentieth century – in particular the history of the CGT – provided the syndicalist movement with much of the theoretical foundations of syndicalism, one must guard against overstating the *political* influence of the CGT. Although it was involved in instigating a series of strikes, it never attracted more than half of the total number of unionised French workers and as such was unable to spark the type of general strike that would be

capable, in turn, of leading to revolutionary change, and after 1914 became a reformist trade union movement divorced of its radical syndicalist edge (Marshall 1993: 443).

**Figure 4.1**



However, we can, from this brief history of French syndicalist thinking and action, derive an abstract model of what the syndicalist polity may look like. In any given location, workers are to organise themselves into syndicates (unions) based on their occupation. These unions then federate horizontally, combining to create local federations. In the immediate struggle with the bourgeoisie, these local federations would act as educational institutions, spreading propaganda and fostering support between workers during times of struggle; as Rucker ([1938] 1989: 93) puts it, ‘they weld the workers together as a class and prevent the rise of any narrow-minded factional spirit’. Unions would also federate vertically, with unions of the same branch of industry in different locations, creating industrial alliances such as a national union of miners. These would then combine to a national federation of industrial alliances, the body which would spearhead the movement (see figure 4.1).



### ***4.4.3 Green Syndicalism***

Different relationships between unions and the state are contained within different visions of the ecological society. The more revisionist strands of green political theory, according to which capitalism, liberal democracy and the administrative state are viewed as preferable, or at least insurmountable, conclude that the aim should be to pursue environmental reforms within these existing structures (see, for example, Gunderson 1995; Goodin 1992). Here unions offer the environmental movement more stable channels of access to government. This is especially the case when it comes to the issue of health and safety legislation, which is typically the subject of a tripartite bargaining structure between unions, business and government. A greater cooperation between unions and environmentalists in this area may open up the possibility, not simply for a redefinition of health and safety in an environmental direction, but for a more 'democratic deliberation over the environmental risk of production processes' (Mason and Morter 1998: 22).

As noted in chapter 2, Beck (1992; 1999) takes us in a more radical direction by championing this type of move towards a more democratic definition of environmental risk as part of a broader shift from class politics to risk politics, and from industrial society to risk society (Beck 1992: 11). The adequate response to increased risk is, for Beck, to democratise risk definition, not simply by democratising state structures, but by providing opportunities for elements of civil society, including unions, to participate in decisions. In more general terms, a revitalised union movement, acting in cooperation with other social movements, may assist in the formation of a more democratised civil society, which in Dryzek's opinion may then pressure the state, via its legitimation imperative, to take on a stronger environmental agenda.

Within the context of this chapter, though, the work of Graham Purchase (1993; 1994; 1997) is most relevant. Purchase is one of the few theorists who have attempted to 'green' or 'ecologise' the syndicalist vision. However, although

Purchase's vision is syndicalist, it is also informed by communal anarchism, and, in particular, debates surrounding the appropriate scale of human settlement and ecologically informed ways of defining regional boundaries. Indeed, Purchase's foundational organisational principle is that, 'The primary unit of social and economic life should be that of the ecologically-integrated and self-governing city' (Purchase 1994: 105). The city-scale of settlement represents 'a midway point between the isolated nuclear family and the Nation-State while avoiding the drawback of tribal or small-scale communal lifestyles of old' (Purchase 1997: 77), which Purchase charges with being suffocatingly parochial. Such 'traditional', small scale settlements are also considered to be ill-equipped to produce the variety of products society requires:

Although the local, small-scale production of manufactured items should be encouraged in every ecological region, it would be absurd to expect that every village, town or region would produce its own can openers, razor blades, nails, and windmill blades. Even if it were possible ... it would surely involve an enormous waste of time and energy. (Purchase 1994: 39)

They would also, for Purchase (1994: 35), be unable to organise the production of essential inter-community services:

it seems obvious that telecommunications, transportation and postal networks all require organization which extends far beyond the individual ecological region, and activities like road building between communities require cooperation beyond that of individual locales. Thus, a return to a community-based lifestyle need not and cannot imply a return to the isolation of the walled medieval city or peasant village.

However, this latter criticism may also be levelled at proposals for autarkical, self-governing cities; as may Barry's criticism of bioregionalism's inability to ensure the distribution of scarce resources. Purchase recognises this and concludes that



'insisting upon a concept of total self-sufficiency, as anti-syndicalist anarchists [presumably all of them] are apt to do, is unrealistic and dogmatic' (Purchase 1994: 38). Distancing himself from the type of bioregional purism discussed in the previous chapter, Purchase (1997: 107) claims that, although it is essential for the self-governing city to tailor itself to the particular region it inhabits, a '*soft* determinist' position is preferable, according to which a city's 'economic and cultural patterns are *integrated with* rather than *determined by* their surrounding ecological regions'.

The most interesting aspect of Purchase's vision, though, is that he posits syndicalist forms of organisation as *correctives* to the deficiencies of communal anarchism: 'The fact that trade unions are universal in character and not linked to a particular city or commune makes them ideal vehicles for a host of economically vital inter-communal activities' (Purchase 1994: 152). They would be able to 'organize to supply the basic necessities of the individual city-region (transport, energy, raw materials, bulk food, consumer production etc.) and to ensure their equitable distribution' (Purchase 1997: 90). In addition, beyond the city-level, 'Each industry... would become a trade organization in its own right, managed by all its workers and coordinating its activities... *globally* for the common good' (1997: 91, emphasis added).

One of the main criticisms of syndicalism, in its traditional form, concerns its worker-centric outlook: it was primarily concerned with liberating the *producers* by organising all aspects of production through their respective unions and workplaces. However, in doing so syndicalists failed to take into account how those members of the community *not* engaged in the production process, such as the unemployed, the disabled or the elderly, were to be allocated some form of representation in this vital sphere. In other words, although control over society's material resources would be exercised democratically, this would be according to a severely restricted franchise. The implications are that all those affected by production decisions would not necessarily have a say in their making, and could mean that those suffering as a result of the environmental impact of certain production practices are unable to voice their concerns through the institutionalised decision making practices. Pelloutier recognised such representational problems and therefore envisaged the Bourses

operating in conjunction with community bodies. However, it would seem that the communal anarchists' call for economic planning to be brought under the control of community bodies would be the only way to *ensure* that such control is sufficiently democratic. This is not to say that unions may not control the actual process of production; it is simply to note that in a democratically controlled economy it must respond to the demand signals of a wider constituency.

However, as mentioned, Purchase's vision differs from that of traditional syndicalism. Rather than having a completely planned economy, Purchase advocates a network of mutual aid associations and worker cooperatives, operating below the level of union within Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS). These are non-profit skill exchanges in which credits are allocated according to labour-time spent. These credits may then be exchanged for services and products offered by others operating within the system. The problem is that Purchase never stipulates where union planning stops and LETS begin. Although he stresses that 'there is simply no need to collectivize or industrialise those services that do not require elaborate structures' (Purchase 1997: 47), having unions organise the supply of 'the basic necessities of the individual city-region', including transport, energy raw material, bulk food, consumer production *etc.*, seems quite comprehensive. If this is the case, the criticism of syndicalism as being unrepresentative still applies. This is particularly the case given that Purchase is silent on the possibility of unions operating in conjunction with civic bodies over questions of economic planning.

The communal strand of ecoanarchism therefore retains a democratic advantage over the syndicalist vision. As noted above, this is not to say that economic democracy plays no part in the communal model. For example, in Fotopoulos's model of a 'Confederal Inclusive Democracy':

people at the workplace, apart from participating in the community decisions about the overall planning targets, would also participate *as workers* (in the above sense of vocationally orientated groups) in their respective workplace assemblies, in a process of



modifying/implementing the Democratic Plan and in running their own workplace. Thus, the democratic planning process would be a process of continuous information feedback from community assemblies to workplace assemblies and back again. (Fotopoulos 1997: 247)

A further criticism which is often levelled at syndicalism the argument is that trade unions are inherently 'economistic' and concerned primarily with securing concessions within the capitalist system – hence Lenin's ([1902] 1989) lamentation regarding workers' inability to move beyond a 'trade union consciousness'. The environmental consequences of such reformism would be that Unions are solely concerned with seeking fairer share of the spoils of growth rather than challenging the growth-orientated capitalist system which is the cause of so many environmental problems (see Bookchin 1993b). Shantz (2004: 699), on the other hand, stresses that, rather than being strictly economistic, 'the historic anarcho-syndicalist and industrial union struggles have exhibited [a] conscious awareness that class struggle entails more than battles over economic issues carried out at the workplace' (Shantz 2004: 699). As described above, the French syndicalists, and in particular Fernand Pelloutier, envisaged an educational role for the Bourses, not simply in the context of raising the workers to the level of technical competence required for a producer-controlled economy, but also in the sense of cultivating a system of values counterposed to the self-interested and individualistic hegemony of capitalist ideology. The question is whether unions could play a similar role with regards environmentalism, and act as bearers of a counter-hegemony which explicitly challenges the 'jobs versus environment' framework.

There is evidence that in certain circumstances unions can break with narrowly economistic concerns, organise in defence of the environment and cultivate links with environmental groups. A history of fruitful cooperation between environmental groups and the US Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) union can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s (see Gordon 1998; Moberg 1999). In its conflict with German chemical giant Badische Anilin und Soda-Fabrik (BASF) in particular, OCAW forged links with the Sierra Club, Greenpeace and local groups

such as the Louisiana Environmental Action Network (Hax 1989). This coalition was able to highlight to the media, and an increasingly concerned Louisiana population, both the flouting of environmental regulations by BASF in particular, and the more general correlation between increased occurrences of respiratory illnesses and cancer, and proximity to chemical plants (see Minchin 2003).

In 1990, Earth First! activist Judi Bari was left disabled after a pipe bomb wrapped with nails exploded under the driver's seat of her car. Fellow activist Darryl Cherney was also in the car, but escaped with lesser injuries. In the aftermath of the attack, Bari and Cherney were arrested by the FBI and accused of knowingly transporting the explosives which injured them, and of conspiring to use them against the timber industry. However, despite Bari's death in 1997, both she and Cherney received \$4.4 million in damages in 2002, when a jury ruled that there was no evidence to substantiate the FBI's claims (Campbell and Burkeman 2002). Commenting on the motive behind the attack, Buhle and Pyle (2005: 63) note that Bari was 'plainly dangerous to powerful corporations and to the modus operandi of property-first law enforcement, emphatically including the FBI'. This danger, however, did not stem solely from her being an Earth First! activist who sought to organise resistance against the destruction of the ancient redwood forests. It was the *form* of organisation she advocated which was particularly troubling to the timber industry. Bari envisaged a coalition between Earth First! and the International Workers of the World (IWW), a revolutionary umbrella-union, which in the early twentieth century was the main organ of resistance against the timber companies. As Bari (1994: 18) explains,

Historically, it was the IWW who broke the stranglehold of the timber barons on the loggers and millworkers in the nineteen teens. The ruling class fought back with brutality, and eventually crushed the IWW, settling instead for the more cooperative business unions. Now the companies are back in total control, only this time they're taking down not only the workers but the Earth as well. This, to me, is what the IWW-Earth First! link is really about.



As Shantz and Adam (1999: 55) note, the rather wordy IWW/Earth First! Local 1 coalition 'managed to strengthen relations with workers in a manner previously unimagined', and significantly undermined the attempts of logging firms to employ the jobs versus environment discourse (Ditz 1991: 25).

Another notable example of environmental action undertaken by a labour union took place in New South Wales, Australia. The movement was headed by the construction workers' union, Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF), and concerned the environmental consequences of the reconstruction of Sydney in 1970s (see Burgmann and Burgmann 1998). As land value rocketed, developers became increasingly indiscriminate in what would be cleared to make space for projects designed to maximise the return from the property boom, such as skyscrapers. Heritage-listed buildings and historical suburbs, and parks and bushland were targeted as developers sought to re-model Sydney in a way dictated by prerogatives of capital rather than those of human need or environmental sensitivity. The BLF responded with a series of 'green bans' – used in distinction to the more traditional term 'black ban' – which were remarkably successful and saved vast areas of natural bushland, parks and various historical suburbs. Notable victories saved the Woolloomooloo and Rocks areas – the protection of which halted vast skyscraper developments – the Centennial Park and the Sydney Botanical Gardens area. In-all, 42 green bans were imposed during 1971-74 before the federal leadership took the decision to dismiss those in control of the NSW branch on the basis that it had overstepped the bounds of traditional union business.

For unions to break with their narrowly construed economic interests and organise in defence of the environment, then, it would seem vital that both unions and environmental groups develop a counter-hegemonic discourse which recontextualises ecological threat so that 'workers and environment are connected within a context of shared exploitation' (Shantz and Adam 1999: 60). It is also important that links are drawn between environmentally damaging workplace practices and their effects on

the communities inhabiting this environment, particularly where the workers themselves are also members of these communities.

Both environmental groups and unions stand to benefit from a more cooperative relationship. As Lier and Stokke (2006: 807) point out, the environmentalist-union relationship is based on 'a rationale of mutual exchange: unions provide economic leverage and organisational resources, whereas social movements and community organisations provide direct links to communities and mass mobilisation'. This latter point is particularly prescient given that unions – in Britain and the US at least – were the target of an unrelenting state-led assault on their power during the 1980s and early 90s. The success of this assault significantly reduced their influence in politics (see Marsh 1992; Millward 1994). Marsh and Savigny (2005: 165) respond by observing that, in the UK, Trade Union Congress (TUC)-affiliated unions still command a membership of 6.7 million workers. However, this should not mask the fact that in Britain in particular, workplaces with ties to recognised unions fell from 52 to 40 percent between the years 1984 and 1990 (Mason and Morter 1998: 5).

In response to this, 'social movement unionism', or 'Global Social Movement Unionism' (GSMU), has been forwarded as a strategy capable of revitalising the union movement (Robinson 2000; Waterman 2001; Taylor and Mathers 2002). As Mason and Morter (1998: 9) note, 'the progressive political potential for unions in challenging the capitalist restructuring of the conditions of production rests on their ability to recruit support from a far wider constituency'. This constituency must be wider in the sense of being *social* and *global* (Lambert and Webster 2001: 350). It is *social* in that unions must look beyond their normal economic concerns and forge links with other actors in civil society, in either single issue campaigns or movements pursuing more extensive social agendas. It is *global* in that unions must build alliances across national borders. In doing so, unions better equip themselves to embrace the increasingly complex and multifarious identity of working people worldwide, and to respond to the new political cleavages which they are concerned with. As Lier and Stokker (2006: 807) explain, 'Social Movement Unionism is based



on the assumption that the interests of the organised working class harmonise with the interests of broader working-class public’.

It must be emphasised, however, that evidence demonstrating that unions can act to foster a more cooperative LER and are capable of engaging in actions orientated towards protecting the environment, even where this is not in the immediate *economic* interests of its members, is a far cry from Purchase’s insistence that the syndicalist vision can only be brought to fruition as a result of a ‘permanent, world-wide general strike’ (Purchase 1994: 44). Beyond the IWW there is little evidence to suggest that unions subscribe to a syndicalist ideology and a world-wide general strike would seem to be little more than a pipe dream. Moreover, as Dryzek (1996b) points out, the revolutionary seizure of power has historically meant its centralisation in undemocratic institutions. Shantz’s (2004: 698) position on this matter is more appealing: ‘While struggles at the level of the workplace should not, indeed cannot, be elevated to the sole site of transformation, the corrective to this is not to abandon these struggles all together’. As we shall see in the final section of this chapter, workplace struggles and the setting up of alternative, cooperative or demotic enterprises may be seen as part of a wider prefigurative transitional strategy aimed at bringing about a communal stateless society. However, before looking at strategies for social change in more depth, the next section attempts to respond to some of the criticisms of ecoanarchism which have been identified during the course of this chapter thus far.

#### ***4.5 Response to the Statist Critique of Ecoanarchism***

Having critically assessed bioregionalism, libertarian municipalism and green syndicalism, it is now possible to draw up a list of the central components of the statist critique of ecoanarchism. These may be separated into three general categories of problem. The first revolves around claims that the transnational nature of environmental problems necessitates cooperation beyond the level of the small-scale, self-reliant eco-community or indeed the bioregion. Goodin (1992: 168) in particular

employs a game-theoretic approach to demonstrate that ‘centralized coordinating agencies at the global level’ will be required to overcome collective action problems. Indeed, as noted earlier, de Geus (1996: 195) is correct to observe that, even if all such communities *were* committed to ensuring green ends, they would be unable to act in a manner which would bring about such ends without some knowledge of the ‘total ecological situation’. Dealing with environmental problems, then, would seem to necessitate the type of centralised institutions which anarchists are traditionally wary of, if not downright hostile to. The second category of problem concerns issues of inter-communal distributive justice. As noted, Barry (1999: 86) is particularly critical of bioregionalism on the basis that its subscription to autarky rules out the redistribution of goods between bioregions, whether it be through trade or other means – effectively condemning those in resource-poor bioregions to their fate. And the third category concerns the relativism associated with a pure anarchist vision. There can be no *guarantee* that individual communities will be committed to democracy or social justice. Indeed, smaller-scale polities are more susceptible to stultifying parochialism, while the cultivation of *gemeinschaft* communities may represent a threat to individual liberties.

For critics of ecoanarchism, each of these criticisms points toward the need for a centralised body. The next section, however, attempts to mount a defence of the ecoanarchist position. Given the deficiencies of the syndicalist vision, this defence will be of the communal form of ecoanarchism. It demonstrates Barry (1999) to have overstated the need for a federal body with powers of coercion, and to have unfairly applied a more stringent standard of justification to the state-system than to the ecoanarchist vision.

The first response to be made to the above critique is that it is unlikely that ecoanarchists would object to the existence of centralised institutions with a purely coordinative and administrative remit. Sale’s insistence on having no institutionalised cooperation beyond the bioregional level is not representative of the anarchist canon as a whole: Proudhon, Kropotkin and Bakunin all accepted the need for federal institutions. An understanding of the ‘total ecological situation’ which de



Geus (1996) talks of could therefore be cultivated through the information-pooling function such bodies would fulfil. A more difficult problem to overcome concerns whether such bodies are capable of overcoming collective action problems without legislative and enforcement powers or coercive capabilities. As Paterson (1999: 81) acknowledges, the free-rider problem is only circumvented when all parties subject to an agreement are convinced that that other parties will in fact implement the arranged changes. However, the argument is that in the absence of a body with coercive powers this is not assured.

This type of criticism is familiar to anarchists. One of the most common questions posed of them is how communes, being free associations in which people are not obligated to abide by their decisions and which lack formal machinery of punishment, are to maintain social control. The standard response revolves around two claims. First, in the type of society anarchists propose, the conditions which generate the motive to commit crime are removed. For anarchists, theft and violence are born of poverty and alienation, both of which will be eliminated in a society in which goods are made freely available and work is meaningful and fulfilling. Second, society itself, rather than the state, tends to be the main source of social control. Edward Goldsmith (1978) has consistently argued that public opinion – for example, ridicule and the threat of ostracism – is more effective at restricting crime than the formalised justice systems of the state (see also Kropotkin [1886] 2005a, [1887] 2005b). Miller (1984: 56-57) claims that, while such measures constitute a form of authority, unlike state authority it is non-coercive, non-compulsory and collectively exercised.

The above criticisms of the anarchist notion of federalism are an inter-communal replica of this problem. The question is whether the anarchist response may also be replicated at this level, and what it would look like. This is something which Barry (1999) fails to explore, possibly as a result of his focus on bioregionalism and social ecology. As noted, bioregionalism calls for strict autarky, whilst Bookchin ends up imbuing his confederal councils with state-like powers. However, by mistakenly

viewing these positions as exhaustive of the options available to ecoanarchists, Barry ignores the possibility of other mechanisms of social control.

The first part of the standard anarchist response could be reformulated thus: an anarchist form of social organisation removes the conditions which generate the motivation for a commune to degrade the environment. Indeed, the claim could be extended to combat the problems of relativism: an anarchist form of social organisation removes the possibility that a commune may renege on its commitment to the principles of social justice and human rights, and to the use of democratic decision-making mechanisms.

For the purpose of argument the assumption is made that anarchist communes would be democratic, socially just and have an economy which is more use-value orientated in the first place. Such an assumption is not totally unreasonable, as the social movements pushing for such a vision are committed to such principles. The question is, then, whether this starting point is such that the motive for violating these principles is removed. Now, the pressure for economic growth, and therefore the environmental degradation associated with such growth, would be reduced in a use-value orientated economy; and decentralisation may plausibly increase citizens' awareness of their impact and dependence upon nature. However, it would be unreasonable to move from this to the assumption that the *possibility* of a commune degrading the environment is removed by such conditions. In particular, cases where environmental degradation occurs outside of the boundaries of the degrading commune remain a potential problem. Similarly, it would be unreasonable to assume that direct democracies are incapable of declining into authoritarianism or violating principles of social justice. Replicating the first anarchist response is thus insufficient.

The focus must therefore shift to the second argument forwarded by anarchists: has the *inter-communal* community (what Bookchin 1989b calls a 'community of communities') the type of non-coercive and non-compulsory means of social control available to it that are conceivably available to *individual* communes seeking to



secure *intra*-communal social order? The answer to this question would seem to be dependent upon the extent and forms of inter-communal cooperation in evidence. Putting aside calls for bioregional autarky, this is likely to be considerable. As Purchase (1994: 35) observes, the creation, up-keep and running of transportation, telecommunication and postal networks requires such cooperation. Similarly, Ryle (1988: 23) notes that ‘fridges, bicycles, kidney dialysis machines ... which few of us would willingly dispense with ... cannot be made in domestic enterprises or craft workshops’; again, inter-communal cooperation would be required if the type of industries required to make such products are to be a possibility. It is also the case that cooperation is required for purposes of re-distribution. This being the case, the threat of exemption from participation in, and the benefits of, these various forms of inter-communal cooperation, may act as a serious deterrent to the types of errant behaviour being discussed. Thence, while Barry (1999) is correct to highlight the contradictions in Bookchin’s libertarian municipalism, by not exploring the potential of non-coercive and non-compulsory forms of inter-communal sanctions, he may have overstated the need for institutionalised enforcement mechanisms at the federal level. Ironically, however, the greater the level of self-sufficiency, the less available and the less effective such sanctions will be.

This, of course, is not to say that the non-coercive and non-compulsory forms of inter-communal sanctions will always be effective. No such guarantees can be given. However, this leads to a second counter to the critique of ecoanarchism: that the criticisms made of the ecoanarchist position may be levelled at the state system itself. For example, Paterson (1999: 76) responds to the observation that ecoanarchism cannot guarantee that all communities would be democratic by pointing out that ‘Though, for Barry, this becomes a nail in the coffin for an anarchist version of green political theory, it is surely the case that no political form which accepts the division of the world into different communities can guarantee that all of those communities are democratic’ (Paterson 1999: 76). Barry, therefore, is culpable of applying different standards of justification to the green statist position and the anarchist position: ‘one has to guarantee the principles, while the other only has to make it possible for them to flourish’ (Paterson 1999: 77).

This type of counter-criticism may be directed at other claims made against anarchism and in defence of the state. In the case of collective action problems, Paterson (1999: 82, 83) notes that: 'Despite the institutions of state sovereignty, there remains a significant implementation deficit on most environmental problems'. It is also the case that: 'The objection that small-scale communities may be too parochial could just as easily be a charge levelled against sovereign states'. The dominant realist theory in International Relations theory stresses that the anarchic state system, composed of self-interested states competing for scarce resources and security, militates against the possibility of collective action, creating a state-level tragedy of the commons (see, *inter alia*, Walker 1989; Johnston 1989).

Paterson *et al.* (2006: 145), in a later article, claim that redistribution is one area where the state does seem to be at an advantage over autarkical communities: 'It is hard to see how Greens can pursue egalitarian politics without some state-like institutions to enact measures to reduce inequalities of various sorts'. Why this is deemed to be the case is not made immediately clear. It is true that, in the absence of enforcement powers, federal bodies would be unable to *guarantee* redistribution across territorial boundaries. However, it is manifestly clear that such a problem also arises in a global environment of sovereign states. And, as is the case with anarchist communities, there can be no *guarantee* that states will engage in internal distributional policies, at least to the extent wished by greens. Indeed, as noted in chapter 2, the state's redistributive capacity is curtailed by its accumulation imperative and by the dominant ideology propagated by dominant classes. Paterson *et al.* (2006: 144, 145) are therefore correct to qualify any optimism on this account with the recognition that the state is a necessary but not sufficient institution for lessening socio-economic equality, its potential in this matter being dependent upon the particular state-economy relations in existence

The conclusion which can be drawn from these counter arguments to the critique of ecoanarchism is that, if 'state-like' institutions are deemed necessary to ensure that ecocommunities adhere to environmental agreements, then by the same logic a



centralised, state-like global body will be necessary to keep individual states in check. Conversely, if Eckersley's (2004: ch. 2) optimism regarding the possibility of effective environmental multilateralism is well placed, then this optimism must also be extended to the possibility of this happening between ecocommunities. Where statisticians may have an advantage over ecoanarchists would be *if* it were accepted that state-like global institutions are necessary, as they are not as *theoretically* and ideologically opposed to the notion of shared sovereignty as ecoanarchists. However, as noted earlier, such conclusions are not as easily reached as statist theorists make out.

It may also be possible, though, to formulate a weaker critique of ecoanarchism which avoids the criticism that the same arguments against the ecoanarchist vision may also be levelled against the state system. Rather than insisting that the ecoanarchist vision cannot achieve what the states-system can, it may be more accurate to claim that the anarchist form of social organisation exacerbates and intensifies problems *already encountered* in the state-system. At times eco-statisticians frame their arguments in terms which are compatible with such a weaker critique. For example, Eckersley (1992: 174, emphasis added) states that: 'Successful ecodiplomacy of this kind is *more likely* to be achieved by the retention and reform of a democratically accountable State that can legitimately claim to represent in the international arena at least a majority of the people in a nation'. Barry (1999: 90) similarly notes, 'Co-operation may be possible in a world of bioregions, but reaching agreement may be more difficult under stateless conditions because of the increase in the number of parties to the agreement'. It could also be argued that the existence of a plurality of small-scale communes would increase distributional problems. The territorial scale of the nation-state allows it to draw from a wider resource base, which furnishes it with a greater redistributive capacity within its territorial boundaries and lessens the need for redistribution across territorial boundaries.

There is something unsettling about this type of response, though. As Paterson (1999: 81) recognises, coordination is made easier *between* units through centralisation, but only at the expense of making coordination *within* units more

difficult. More worryingly, it may be that arguments which stress that coordination is made easier in centralised units unintentionally end up appealing for a less responsive democracy. Much would hinge here on how convincing claims are that the state can be significantly democratised. These will be examined in the following chapter.

#### ***4.6 Anarchism and Political Strategy***

One final area in which statist may have an advantage over ecoanarchists concerns their strategies for social change. Bioregionalists are particularly culpable of underestimating the extent to which, and the implications of, their vision being in direct conflict with the interests of capital. Sale insists that bioregionalism is in line with current social trends towards regionalisation, and that it can be brought about through a process of gradualism: ‘the processes of change – first of organising, educating, activating a constituency, and then of reimagining, reshaping and recreating a continent – are slow, steady, continuous, and methodical, not revolutionary and cataclysmic’ (Sale 2000: 176). However, as Kovel (2002: 175) notes, this is ‘a pretty gross understatement of what history shows to be needed to transform society in a “communist” direction... And if this rose up to take such control, how much imagination does it take to see what would be the response of the capitalist state?’ (Kovel 2002: 175).

Of course, most anarchists are only too aware of the extent to which any attempt to implement their proposals will draw a response from the state. However, their refusal to attempt to gain control of the state, either through the ballot box or through revolutionary seizure, remains steadfast. The former is thought to inevitably lead to cooption and reformism, whilst the Marxist-Leninist idea that a ‘workers-state’ may be used to usher in the new communist society leads anarchists to object ‘the new state would be much more omnipotent and oppressive than the bourgeois state, due to the whole economy being the property of the state, and that its ever-growing bureaucracy would refuse to wither away’ (Guérin 1989: 121). A plethora of



strategies have been advocated by anarchists; some of these are orientated towards breaking state dominance, such as direct action, trade-union activism and the general strike; others seek to bypass the state through the formation of informal economies and decentralised community bodies. The important point for anarchists, though, is that, whatever strategy is to be employed, it must be 'prefigurative', in that 'the means used must be entirely (or nearly so) consistent with the model of society which *eventually* will emerge' (Cahill 1989: 235-236).

The establishment of worker cooperatives is seen to fit this bill. As Cahill (1989: 245) again notes, 'It is through the visible structure of co-operatives and their support organisations that the spirit of anarchism can best express itself. However, anarchism is not the only body of thought to support their use'. The most promiscuous of organisational forms, the worker cooperative garners support from a variety of ideological sources. It finds itself a place in utopian, guild and market forms of socialism; anarchism (in both its communal and syndicalist forms); and strands of liberalism, social democracy and Marxism. This being the case, it finds itself saddled with a diverse array of expectations. It has been proposed variously as a means of increasing productivity, improving democracy and the quality of democratic citizenship, of countering unemployment, inequality, exploitation and worker alienation, as a vision of a new social order and a prefigurative means of transcending capitalism. As Neil Carter (1996: 71-72) observes, 'a vessel into which almost any meaning can be poured and from which many different meanings can emerge, the cooperative is truly in the eye of the beholder'.

This promiscuity is replicated within green political theory. Again, cooperatives find a place in, amongst many others, the ecological Marxism of O'Connor (1998) and Kovel (2002); Purchase's (1993; 1994; 1997) green syndicalism; Bookchin's libertarian municipalism; and Callenbach's (1978) bioregionally inspired *Ecotopia*. However, the green case for cooperatives has, in general, been poorly articulated. As Mellor *et al.* (1988: 145-146) indicate, cooperatives tend to be lumped in as part of an all-embracing, yet inadequately theorised, green wish-list. Carter (1996) has gone further than most in piecing together the green case for worker cooperatives. This he

boils down to four arguments: 'cooperatives should produce the following features to a greater degree than current capitalist ownership: small-scale production, participatory democracy, greater equality at work and in society, and a better quality of life at work – all of which are core dimensions of a green political programme'. More importantly, green supporters of worker cooperatives believe that 'these features will also ensure that cooperatives display a more benign concern for the environment than capitalist organisations' (Carter 1996: 59). However, as Carter (1996: 72) recognises, the behaviour and characteristics of a cooperative cannot be fully understood divorced from considerations over the nature of the economy within which it is situated. When situated in a market economy cooperatives are subject to the same competitive pressures which drive ordinary enterprises towards unsustainable productive practices. This being the case, although the democratic structure of the cooperative makes it more *likely* to incorporate the concerns of the immediate community into its thinking, this outcome is far from certain.

For such reasons, anarchists envisage cooperatives as being part of a wider prefigurative strategy. As Cahill (1989: 235) notes, 'unless the co-operative movement finds a practical way to retain the vision of the idealists who began it, the new co-operatives will be absorbed into the dominant economy as a weak third sector of contemporary capitalist structures' (Cahill 1989: 235). Similarly, Fotopoulos (1997: 298) notes that, for cooperatives to be successful, 'they should be part of a comprehensive programme to municipalize the economy'. Fotopoulos (1997: 284) advocates a comprehensive programme of social change which sees the creation, from below, of 'popular bases of political and economic power' (Fotopoulos 1997: 284). These must be cultivated at:

- the political level (creation of 'shadow' political institutions based on direct democracy, neighbourhood assemblies etc.);
- the economic level (establishment of community unity at the level of production and distribution which are collectively owned and controlled);
- the social level (democracy at the workplace, the household etc.);



- the cultural level (creation of community-controlled art and media activities). (Fotopoulos 1997: 285)

For Fotopoulos (1997: 284-285), the introduction of these elements of an 'inclusive democracy' will gradually erode the dominant social paradigm: 'A new popular power base will be created. Town by town, city by city, region by region, will be taken away from the effective control of the market economy and the nation-state – their political and economic structures being replaced by the confederations of democratically run communities'. Of course, similar to bioregionalists, Fotopoulos could be criticised for underestimating the state's response to alternative forms of social, political and economic organisation which threaten its dominance. Fotopoulos (1997: 299) recognises that the implications of his transition strategy will 'receive a hard time from the elites controlling the state machine and the market economy'. However, he remains optimistic that such a strategy is realistic as long as 'the level of consciousness of a majority in the population has been raised to adopt the principles included in a programme for an inclusive democracy' (Fotopoulos 1997: 299)

Accusations of utopianism could once again be levelled at these proposals. However, before we can judge whether such accusations are warranted it is important to assess the plausibility of strategies aimed at democratising and 'greening' the state. Utopianism is a double-edged sword, in the sense that reformist proposals can be as utopian as radical proposals (see Pepper 2005). Therefore, one strategy can only be properly judged in comparison with other available strategies.

#### ***4.7 Conclusions***

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that, while there are serious problems associated with the *particular* visions of bioregionalism, social ecology and green syndicalism, claims that the statist vision has scored a decisive victory over ecoanarchism *in general* may be premature. Many of the criticisms aimed at

ecoanarchism can be levelled against the state-system itself, while claims regarding the need for *coercive* federal bodies may be overstated. Nevertheless, it is true that the obstacles in the way of bringing about a stateless society are many. As a result, if it is judged that the possibilities for democratising and 'greening' the state are substantial and capable of rendering states sustainable, then the ecoanarchist vision may be sufficient yet unnecessary. Chapter 2 outlined some of the obstacles to this process and suggested that a radical reform of the economy is necessary to break the state from the shackles of the accumulation imperative. The following chapter will examine the prospects for democratisation.



## Chapter 5:

### Green Democratisation and the State

*There are grounds for believing that democratizing the state further is akin to the strongest version of promoting a “green state” that avoids the drift into relatively worthless utopianism (Saward 1998: 352)*

At this point it is worthwhile clarifying the stage we are at within the broader structure of the thesis. Chapters 1 and 2 used the insights of Marxism as a springboard to examine the forces which impede and even preclude the specifically *capitalist* state from implementing the type of policies necessary for the achievement of ecological sustainability. Chapters 3 and 4, on the other hand, examined those characteristics of the state-form *in general* which are deemed by ecoanarchists to render it inherently anti-ecological. In addition to this, chapter 4 in particular went on to outline and assess various stateless visions of the ecological society.

This chapter reconnects with attempts to reform existing state forms. A section of chapter 2 was devoted to outlining the deficiencies of the primarily *economic* reforms proposed by ecological modernisation theory. The focus here is primarily on the effect the *political* system – and in particular the form of social choice mechanism employed by the state, and through which it derives its popular legitimacy – has on the state’s capacity to protect the environment.

The first sections outline the reasons why the social choice mechanism employed in most Western states – liberal democracy – should be considered inherently ill-suited, if not antipathetic, to the achievement of green goals and values. Observations of this kind have led some green thinkers to abandon democracy altogether, in favour of ‘ecoauthoritarian’ solutions (see Hardin 1968, 1977; Elrich 1971; Heilbroner 1974; Ophuls 1977). Such a response, however – as will be explicated in more detail below

– involves an unjustifiable conflation of liberal democracy with democracy *per se*. Given the poverty of the ecoauthoritarian model, greens have rightly tended to call for more democracy rather than less, and for a reconceptualisation of what democracy entails. As noted in chapters 3 and 4, within ecoanarchist circles the process of ‘green democratisation’ is viewed as part of a more radical programme of decentralisation. However, an alternative strand of thinking on green democratisation focuses on the democratisation *of the state*. As the quote that introduces this chapter states, this project represents, for Saward (1998), the strongest articulation of the green state which retains a sense of practicality and realism. This chapter is more specific, however, in that it focuses on the relationship between green politics and specifically deliberative forms of democracy, the reason being that such a model has dominated democratic theory for the last two decades, and green approaches to democratic theory for at least the last decade.

The discussion over deliberative democracy begins with a section outlining the central tenets of this form of democracy. This is followed by an exploration of the reasons why this model may be regarded as appropriate to dealing with ecological problems. In particular, this section draws out the ecological implications of the epistemic and educative value of deliberation, and its capacity for engendering a public mode of reasoning among participating citizens. The argument forwarded is that there are various reasons for thinking that deliberation is a form of communication which, if its procedures and requirements are adhered to by participants, is amenable to the generation of ecologically superior decisions. However, the section following this outlines reasons why such optimism should be tempered by the recognition that existential conflict and partial, strategic and misleading forms of communication cannot be purged from deliberation in all circumstances.

The chapter then moves on to discuss the tensions which exist between democratic procedures, which are unable to guarantee specific outcomes, and green imperatives. As mentioned earlier, this has led some green political theorists to jettison democracy in favour of authoritarian solutions. It is argued, however, that such solutions are



themselves fundamentally flawed, and that the critique of democracy which forms the motivation for looking to such solutions is itself directed at a particularly thin, liberal conception of democracy. When it comes to a deliberative model, which has an educative value and is able to generate a public form of reasoning capable of overcoming collective action problems, this critique has less of a purchase. This does not rescue a non-contingent link between democracy and green politics, though. Even deliberative procedures are unable to *guarantee* specific outcomes. This section, however, concludes by following Matthew Humphrey (2007: 93) in calling for green theorists to ‘grasp the nettle of contingency and argue in the public sphere for one’s values and beliefs’. Deliberative democracy seeks to provide a forum in which green arguments may be articulated and considered; if green theorists believe their arguments to be ‘correct’, therefore, they must *prove* this to be the case *in this forum*.

The second half of the chapter deals more with the institutionalisation of deliberation. It examines proposals for integrating deliberative mechanisms into representative structures, such as deliberative opinion polls, citizens’ juries and developments in e-participation, before concluding with an assessment of the extent to which deliberative mechanisms have been used in the formulation of environmental policy. It is argued that there are three powerful forces which militate against the institutionalisation of deliberative devices. First, there are vested interests which have much to lose from such a move, particularly if it is to be believed that deliberative devices will lead to more stringent environmental regulations. Second, deliberative mechanisms are more likely to forward proposals which would rub against the core imperatives of the state. By doing so they may unmask the state’s capitalist character and thereby undermine its legitimacy. And third, deliberative mechanisms undermine the representative model of legitimation and may instigate what Judge (2004: 700) terms a ‘self-generated and self-perpetuating “legitimation crisis”’. The conclusion of this section is that there are reasons for doubting the possibility that deliberative mechanisms can be attached to representative structures in a manner which is both effective – in that the potential of deliberation as a form of

communication is fulfilled – and stable, in that it does not lead to the type of legitimisation crisis identified by Judge.

The existence of barriers to the deliberative democratisation of the state leads Dryzek to offer an alternative, discursive model of democracy, which concentrates on fostering deliberation within the public sphere. A section is dedicated to outlining and assessing Dryzek's theories. It concludes by arguing that Dryzek has a quixotic view of the public sphere, that legitimacy cannot be so cleanly disconnected from aggregative methods and that Dryzek underestimates the almost hegemonic dominance of the representative model of legitimisation.

### ***5.1 The State and Liberal Democracy***

Liberal democracy remains a contested concept; it can be defined in wider or narrower senses depending on whether one focuses on the theoretical ideal or the actuality of how this ideal is operationalised. This chapter works from a narrow definition of liberal democracy – one which reflects the realities of *actually existing* liberal democracies and the forms they take in order to be compatible with contemporary society (see Holden 1993: ch. 3; Macpherson 1977).

As Bikhu Parekh notes, 'Although democracy preceded liberalism in Western history, in the modern age liberalism preceded democracy by nearly two centuries and created a world to which the latter had to adjust' (Parekh 1992: 161). The liberal world to which Parekh refers here is also an industrial capitalist one; as Macpherson (1977: 20) notes, 'what is usually considered to be the liberal tradition, stretching from Locke and the Encyclopédistes down to the present, has from the beginning included an acceptance of the market freedoms of a capitalist society'. Liberalism's core belief that each should be free to flourish according to her own particular conception of the good life, represented, on the one hand, a direct challenge to ascribed status and the feudal order of inherited rights and privileges – those fetters to the further development of the forces of production – while on the other, provided



the justification for an open, egalitarian and meritocratic society. Early liberals were unanimous in their belief that this new order would be best realised in a free market economy. The bourgeoisie of eighteenth century Europe, therefore, found in liberalism a philosophical system which reflected their social and economic aspirations, while the 'philosophers' and 'economists' behind the liberal ideology found in the bourgeoisie a class with the revolutionary potential to bring this order to fruition.

As Parekh notes, however, the state was liberal and capitalist long before it was democratic. There are a number of possible explanations for this. Early liberal theorists were generally more equivocal in their support for democracy and an extended franchise than their contemporary counterparts. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, who were able to shape the institutional structure and rationality of the state more than any social movement since, were more focused on ensuring the conditions for economic reform rather than for a democratic society. As Hobsbawm (1962: 79) notes, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens – the document which best reflects the demands of the French bourgeoisie of 1789 – 'is a manifesto against the hierarchical society of noble privilege, but not one in favour of democratic and egalitarian society'. We may even go further and ask whether a non-democratic state was *essential* to the process of economic reform. As Jessop (1990: 176) argues:

During the transition from feudalism the state could not be democratic since it needed to use force to establish the conditions in which a free market economy based on wage-slavery could be made to work (e.g. through the dispossession of peasants from their land and the creation of a reserve of industrial labour) ... Indeed, it would have been dangerous to extend full citizenship rights to the working class as long as profits hinged on the extension of the working day and the intensification of labour ... and as long as there was only limited room for material concessions to win working-class support in the electoral process.

It may be the case, then, that all major advanced capitalist societies have democratic systems; however, the oft-advanced argument that this in some way demonstrates that capitalist societies are necessarily democratic is as methodologically flawed as it is historically inaccurate. The near universal extension of the democratic franchise was not generally secured until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and only as the result of lengthy internal struggles, through which it became apparent that an increasingly politically astute working class could not be placated without it.

The pressure for inclusion, however, was only one factor – albeit a vital one – which led to the democratisation of the state. It was also necessary that the *model* of democracy instituted could absorb popular inclusion without this very inclusion becoming a threat to the liberal-capitalist order. As Macpherson (1977: 10) notes, ‘The concept of liberal democracy became possible only when theorists – first a few and then most liberal theorists – found reasons for believing that “one man, one vote” would not be dangerous to property, or to the continuance of class-divided societies’. Miliband (1982: 38) similarly explains:

the crucial problem for the people in charge of affairs is to be able to get on with the business at hand, without undue pressure from below, yet at the same time provide opportunities for political participation to place the legitimacy of the system beyond serious question. The point is not to achieve popular exclusion altogether; that would be dangerous and ultimately self-defeating. The point is rather to give adequate and meaningful scope to popular participation; but to “depopularize” policy-making and to limit strictly the impact of the market-place upon the conduct of affairs.

Miliband (1982: 38) goes on to argue that liberal democracy resolves this seeming paradox, as it ‘simultaneously enshrines the principle of popular inclusion *and* that of popular exclusion’. However, in order to fully understand what this means we need to explore in greater detail the central components of liberal democracy and detail how this model differs from previous formulations.



As liberals, the architects of the liberal democratic state fully subscribed to the market system and, perhaps more importantly, market assumptions about the nature of man and society. As Macpherson (1977: 4) notes:

The first formulators of liberal democracy came to its advocacy through a chain of reasoning which started from the assumptions of a capitalist market society and the laws of capitalist political economy. These gave them a model of man (as maximiser of utilities) and a model of society (as a collection of individuals with conflicting interests).

These assumptions led to the formulation of a model of democracy which radically departs from its precursors with regards both the practice and aim of democratic participation. In particular, there are two major ways in which liberal democracy is at variance with the 'classical doctrine of democracy', which Schumpeter ([1943] 1976: 250, emphasis added) defines as 'that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realises the *common good* by making the *people itself* decide issues'.

First, and in line with market assumptions regarding human nature, liberal democracy jettisons the notion that democratic participation is orientated towards realising the common good of a body politic. Participation is restricted to the isolated and private act of voting, which is viewed as an articulation of personal preference, with public decisions being arrived at via the aggregation of these private decisions. *Public reasoning*, therefore, need not apply; as John Dryzek (1992: 112-113) notes, 'politics in liberal democracy is mostly about the pursuit of self interest'. Indeed, as Mathews (1996: 69, emphasis added) stresses, liberal democracies '*cannot* be founded on a public morality – since if they were, this would in itself violate the autonomy of their members, such autonomy entailing as it does the freedom of individuals to choose their own conception of the good'.

With liberal democracy, then, the ideal of cooperative participation orientated towards realising the common good is replaced by a political sphere which may be likened to the marketplace. For Schumpeter ([1943] 1976: 259) the defining feature of liberal democracy is 'competition for political leadership'; it is 'that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for people's vote' (Schumpeter [1943] 1976: 269). Political entrepreneurs produce policy packages and offer them to the voter-as-consumer, who judges the product according to a narrowly self-interested rationality (see Downs 1957; Buchanan and Tullock 1961). Carole Pateman (1970: 4) goes as far as comparing the way political parties regulate competition in the political realm to the role played by trade unions in the economic realm.

The second deviation liberal democracy makes from Schumpeter's conception of the classical doctrine of democracy is that it drops the notion that democracy necessarily entails citizens themselves participating in the formulation of government legislation. It is a *representative* rather than participatory form of democracy.

As Max Weber observed, representative democracy differs from direct democracy in being a form of legitimation of rule rather than a type of rule (Hirst 1990: 24). Central to the logic of this system is the notion that executive power is seen as legitimate only to the extent that its exercise is controlled by, and therefore dependent upon the *consent* of, a body – the legislative assembly – which is *representative* of the 'political nation'. As David Judge (2004: 683) notes, though, representation 'is not exclusively a part of the lexicon of "democracy"'. In the British case, parliaments embodying principle of legitimation via representation and consent can be traced to the late thirteenth century (see Judge 1993: ch. 1). However, the 'political nation', as noted, did not encompass the majority of citizens until the twentieth century. As such, an important, but generally overlooked, distinction must be made between representative government and representative democracy. As Judge (2004: 683) goes on to explain, 'the institutional structure of representative government predates the growth of representative democracy in Britain and has never fully accommodated itself in practice to the idea of popular sovereignty



inherent within democratic theory'. This insight can be generalised to most representative institutions in their infant forms. For example, in France, although the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen stated that all should have the right to cooperate in the formation of law through their representatives, the representative assembly which was envisaged was not necessarily democratic. Indeed, Hobsbawm (1962: 80) notes that most bourgeois liberals favoured 'A constitutional monarchy based on a propertied oligarchy expressing itself through a representative assembly'.

The notion of popular sovereignty, then, is extrinsic to the logic of the representative form of legitimating rule. Indeed, beyond this, representative government has been, and remains, an effective means of *excluding* people from a more *direct* participation in the decision-making process. However – and it is here we get back to Miliband's point – it does so in a way which generates legitimacy by simultaneously *including* citizens in the *indirect* and infrequent election of representatives. It is through this method of inclusion that liberal democracy generates legitimacy while protecting the liberal capitalist order by keeping interference from below to a minimum.

That one of the conditions for instituting liberal democracy was its ability to protect property relations and class-divided societies is evidenced in the way that, at each stage, increases in the democratic franchise were conceded only 'to those who already had internalised the values and norms of liberal society and who simply demanded their own competitive place in the established political order' (Judge 1993: 22). This inclusion in turn ties participants – both those competing for office and those participating in the electoral process – to the constitutional 'rules of the game'. As Manin (1997: 86) notes, 'The expression of consent through election [has] proved itself as an effective way of generating obligation amongst the population'. Inclusion in the democratic franchise, therefore, 'was more an act of containment than of emancipation' (Miliband 1982: 25); rather than representing a threat to the established powers, it reduced the possibility of excluded groups seeking political change through more radical means. The state remains very much in the business of rule. Poggi (1990: 59) notes – speaking of Weber's analysis of the modern form of representation as 'free', on account of electors being unable to issue binding

instructions to representatives – that ‘*vis-à-vis* the elector the typical representative constitutes not a “servant” (*Deiner*) but a “ruler” (*Herr*)’.

It is useful to sum up this account with a definition: liberal democracy is founded on an ideological commitment to individual freedom and autonomy; it is an indirect and representative model of democracy where political leadership is selected through the aggregation of votes in periodic multi-party elections which are based on universal, or near universal, suffrage. Popular rule, however, is tempered by the prioritising of basic judicial, civic and political rights which are deemed to be in some sense above politics. These typically correspond to those rights and freedoms set out by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*: freedom of thought, speech, press, association and religion, the right to vote and hold public office, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure (Rawls 1971: 61). Between elections participation is typically limited to interest group politics, which is more restrictive and tends to have less of a decisive impact on government than do changes in electoral fortunes (Dunleavy and O’Leary 1987: 32).

### ***5.1.1 The Green Critique of Liberal Democracy***

As mentioned, greens find fault with various aspects of the specifically liberal model of democracy. First, there is the problem of time-scale. As briefly noted in chapter 2, there is a gap between the operational logic of liberal democracy, which generates short-term policy horizons as a result of the four-five year time-frame of its electoral cycle – and the time-frame of environmental problems. Often environmental crises are the culmination of processes of incremental change which have been building up over a relatively long period. Crisis inducing processes may therefore be identified far in advance of the actual critical juncture. However, this very remoteness means that it is generally not in the interests of state actors to factor such problems into the decision-making process, especially given that dealing with environmental problems are often costly, involve potentially unpopular restrictions on behaviour and may even threaten GNP. Representatives in liberal democracies are concerned with the



more immediate problem of winning the next election. Schumpeter ([1946] 1976: 287) sums up the nature of this problem nicely when commenting that, 'the prime minister in a democracy might be likened to a horseman who is so fully engrossed trying to keep in the saddle that he cannot plan his ride'. The flip side of this, as Lafferty and Meadowcroft (1996: 7) point out, is 'an acute problem of accountability: how can politicians be brought to book for decisions whose consequences will only be fully felt long after the individuals concerned have retired from the public stage?'. As noted in chapter 2, this makes it likely that the state will respond to environmental problems with 'symbolic politics, token gesturism, the 'greening' of legitimating ideology and responsibility displacement' (Hay 1996: 427).

Eckersley is correct, then, to argue that 'liberal democracy is not accountable enough from the perspective of those suffering or concerned about present or future ecological harm' (Eckersley 2004: 93). As mentioned in chapter 4 in the section dealing with the spatial dimensions of the liberal state, greens also highlight problems which stem from the fact that representation in liberal democracies is based on territory, and that the boundaries of the 'political nation' as a whole are the fixed boundaries of the territorially defined state. The effects of environmentally irresponsible behaviour do not respect territorial boundaries; there is therefore the possibility that those who are affected by certain decisions are nonetheless excluded from taking part in their formation.

The green critique of liberal democracy also focuses on the implications of basing decision-making on individual self-interest. As noted above, the architects of liberal democracy subscribed to market assumptions regarding human nature, according to which humans are judged to operate according to a narrowly self-interested economic rationality. Liberal democracy reflects this rationality and its underlying individualism; it erases citizenship – that is, the idea that democratic participation should be based on some form of public reasoning. Indeed, beyond this, it actually acts to cultivate further this form of rationality. As Mathews (1996: 71) notes

‘Liberal institutions foster individualism by allowing social status to be won (or lost) through competition, rather than inherited through bloodlines or custom’.

This narrowly self-interested form of rationality is best viewed as a contingent feature of human interaction arising with capitalism, rather than some universal component of human nature. However, in some ways this cultivation assisted the democratic project. Adam Smith contrasted this narrowly calculated rational self-interest to the not so rational passions that ruled mankind’s behaviour previously. In comparison with passions such as glory, fame and honour – which are predominantly achieved in the furthering of group self-interest rather than a narrowly individualistic self-interest – the seemingly innocent pursuit of a calculated, rational self-interest seemed a calming influence, more conducive to a peaceful and democratic society (Dryzek 1996a: 95).

The cultivation of an economic rationality also helped extend the democratic franchise when combined with another creation of capitalism: a relatively unitary, politically conscious working class. It was in the interests of the proletariat to seek democratic representation in order to push for a greater material equality; and, as noted, significant sections of the bourgeoisie recognised that it was in their interests to give them it in order to quell revolutionary passions.

However, the jettisoning of the idea that democratic participation is in some way concerned with realising the public or common good creates its own problems. Social choice theorists such as Kenneth Arrow (1970) claim that there is no fair and rational way of aggregating vote preferences in order to reach a meaningful collective choice. Any method of aggregation is inevitably open to sabotage through strategic voting and agenda setting, and therefore provides only an arbitrary and unstable link between individual preferences and the resulting social choice (Richardson 2002: 49). It is also the case that different aggregative methods lead to different results; and there is no way of choosing one method over another which is not arbitrary.



To get back to the ecological implications of this shift in democratic rationality: as explained above, public decisions in a liberal democracy are reached via the aggregation of *individual* preferences. However, as Jacobs (1997: 219) notes, environmental goods are not private: 'Forming attitudes towards them is therefore different from forming arguments (preferences) towards private goods. It involves reasoning about other people's interests and values (as well as one's own)'. Indeed, for Dryzek (1990a: 55), 'The continuing integrity of the ecological systems on which human life depends could perhaps be a generalizable interest par excellence'. As such, environmental goods, as public goods, are not well served by a democratic process which is based on the private articulation of narrowly self-interested preferences. John Barry (1999: 65-66) couches this point in the language of citizenship, which he sees as being erased under liberal democracy:

individuals as *consumers* have interests which are different to those they have (or potentially have) as *citizens*, and on the whole, "ecological interests" are not well served by the former ... In other words, *qua* consumers in the market, individuals have a narrower set of ecological interests than would be the case *qua* citizens'.

This attack on the individualistic, self-interested conception of democratic participation inherent in the liberal democratic model can be expanded so that it forms part of a wider critique of atomistic conceptualisation of the self which lies at the heart of liberalism. The argument is not simply that liberal democracy fosters a self-interested mode of *behaviour*, but that the self to which this interest satisfying behaviour is orientated is conceptualised in an overly narrow manner. As Eckersley (2004: 104) explains:

The fundamental problem with the liberal ontology of the self is that it reduces both human and nonhuman others to a set of constraints against which, or as instrumental means through which, individual self-realization is to be achieved. The needs and requirements of others are cast as external to those of the lone, self-contained, rational maximiser

who, by virtue of what is seen to be a competitive social environment, necessarily enhances his/her autonomy at the expense of others and the environment.

This obviously ties in with the arguments of deep ecologists, as outlined in the previous chapter, regarding the need for an expansive self which breaks down the distinction between the I of the liberal self and the not-I of non-human nature.

A final aspect to the green critique of liberal democracy ties in with many of the discussions covered in chapter 1. A representative form of democracy, with infrequent elections, is normally characterised by interest group politics. However, as we have seen, power in capitalist society is invariably skewed: business is able to obtain a privileged position by utilising the financial resources available to it. It is able to colonise, or at least influence positions of power within the state and government, and is able to manipulate public opinion through its control over the media and through the use of PR companies. And, as we have seen, business has unified around a particularly toothless conception of sustainable development, which is concerned mainly with the maintenance of growth, envisages market solutions and self-regulation (if any).

For these reasons, Eckersley (1996b: 217) notes that 'by the time green political theory began self-consciously to develop in the late 1970s, it looked for "stronger" forms of democracy than liberal democracy'. The previous chapter examined proposals for democratisation which form part of a wider, anarchistic, programme of decentralisation. However, more recently, green political theorists have come to subscribe in increasing numbers to strategies aimed at democratising the state, and in particular to deliberative models of democracy.

## ***5.2 Deliberative Democracy***

Deliberative democracy, although not necessarily the only show in town, is definitely the darling of democratic theory. Since the late 1980s – the period which Dryzek



(2000) identifies with the 'deliberative turn' in democratic theory – an impressive body of work has been generated on the subject. As Bohman (1998: 400) notes, deliberative democracy begins with a critique of liberal democracy – of aggregative methods of decision-making and the narrowly self-interested behaviour encouraged by this model. Some of the green aspects of this critique have been outlined above. However, when it comes to explicating what deliberative democrats are actually *for* rather than *against*, it becomes obvious that, as is often the case, increased academic interest in a subject, rather than lending it precision, has led to a proliferation of diverse interpretations. The term 'deliberative democracy' now spans a variety of positions. The first task of this chapter is to locate those elements which are common to all models of democracy that may reasonably be defined as deliberative.

Claus Offe and Ulrich Preuss (1991: 157) pose the following question: 'should democratic institutions or constitutions be built around the "empirical" or the "reasonable" will of the people?' The answer, for deliberative democrats, is the latter: political decisions should be based on reasoned judgements rather than unreflective private preferences. As Dryzek (2000: 1) explains, 'The deliberative turn represents a renewed concern with the authenticity of democracy: the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic, and engaged by competent citizens'. The question that arises from this answer is what should be considered 'reasonable?' Offe and Preuss (1991: 156-157) answer that a will is 'rational' or 'enlightened' when it is "*fact regarding*" (as opposed to ignorant or doctrinaire), "*future-regarding*" (as opposed to myopic) and "*other-regarding*" (as opposed to selfish). This raises a third question: 'How is the "raw material" of the will of the people, with all its blindness, selfishness and short-sightedness, to be transformed into reasonable and non-regrettable outcomes?' (Offe and Preuss 1991: 156) Deliberative democrats respond that there are mechanisms endogenous to the process of public deliberation which induce this type of transformation. Social choices must be politically justified through the giving of publicly defensible reasons – explanations and arguments which others have reason to accept, or at least are not able to reasonably reject (Bohman 1998: 402). Where proposals are not defensible from the perspective of others – whether it be because they are deemed ignorant,

myopic and/or selfish – they will fail to withstand public scrutiny and will be rejected. Deliberation, therefore, generates a public mode of reasoning among participants. It demands citizens take a more reflective consideration of issues and allows for preference transformation through persuasion and rational argument.

For the purpose of clarity, then, a definition of deliberative democracy may be split into two elements. The first concerns the deliberative element. In Habermasian terms, deliberative democracy is a *communicatively rational social choice mechanism*. Jon Elster (1998: 8) concludes his search for a ‘robust core of phenomena that count as deliberative democracy’ with the observation that ‘all agree that it includes decision making by means of arguments offered *by* and *to* participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality’. For deliberative democrats, the institutionalisation of the ideal of political justification is essential to improving the quality of citizenship, participation and democratic decision-making in general. As Cohen (1997: 412-413) explains, ‘Not simply a form of politics, democracy, on the deliberative view, is a framework of social and institutional conditions that facilitates free discussion among equal citizens’. Legitimacy is reformulated to emphasise this deliberative element: ‘Legitimacy in complex democratic societies must be thought to result from the free and unconstrained deliberation of all about matters of common concern’ (Benhabib 1996: 68). That *all* those deemed to be subject to a collective decision are to be able to take part in its deliberative formation provides the second defining element of deliberative democracy: its democratic element. This may lead to an overly demanding criterion of legitimacy, as shall be discussed below. However, before dealing with such problems the following sections explore in more detail the ways in which public deliberation improve democratic decision-making, and the ways in which such improvements intersect with the aims of green thinkers.

### ***5.2.1 Deliberative Democracy and the Environment***

There is a long tradition in democratic theory of defending democratic forms of decision-making on the basis that they are epistemically valuable<sup>12</sup> – that they

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<sup>12</sup> This term was coined by Cohen (1986) in his article, ‘An Epistemic Theory of Democracy’.



produce decisions which in some sense 'track the truth' (List and Goodin 2001). Perhaps most notably, Rousseau defended democracy on the basis that it is the decision-making mechanism most capable of tracking the 'common good'. The Marquis de Condorcet, on the other hand – a contemporary of Rousseau – sought to demonstrate the superiority of majority rule in problem solving. According to the Condorcet jury theorem, if voters are better than chance at answering a yes/no question correctly, then majority rule will be even more likely to be correct, and increasingly so as the size of the of the jury grows (see Grofman and Feld 1988; Estlund *et al.* 1989; List and Goodin 2001).

For deliberative democrats, the act of public deliberation or discussion yet further improves the epistemic value of democracy (Elster 1998: 11; Estlund 1997). As Fearon (1998: 49-50) points out, deliberation may lessen or overcome the impact of what Herbert Simon termed 'bounded rationality' – the fact that our imaginative and calculative abilities are limited and fallible. It is 'additively' valuable, in that it allows for a number of viewpoints to be expressed, thereby increasing the chance that one or more of these viewpoints will be correct (Fearon 1998: 50). This may seem at first glance to be the point the Condorcet jury theorem seeks to make regarding aggregative methods: the greater the number of participants, the greater the chance of a majority decision being correct. However, participants in such a process are restricted to selecting from a list of pre-set alternatives. It is not the case, then, that it is additively valuable in the sense of bringing a variety of viewpoints to the table. Even if someone were to think of the correct solution, this solution may not be contained within the options available for voting. Indeed, even *if* the correct solution were contained within the list of choices provided, and even *if* a selection of the participants were able to recognise this option as being correct, there is no mechanism endogenous to a purely aggregative system that allows for the communication of this to other participants. A minority holding the truth will remain a minority. With a *communicative* social choice mechanism, on the other hand, this need not be the case. As Diego Gambetta (1998: 22) notes, 'If information skills are, for whatever reason, unevenly distributed among deliberators, deliberation improves their allocation and the awareness of the relative merits of different means'. Fearon

(1998: 50) also believes that deliberation is 'multiplicatively' valuable, in that it at least makes it possible that a solution will be arrived at which none of the participants had conceived of before entering into the process. Here deliberation is presented as a form of brainstorming, through which new alternatives are generated.

Such points are of particular relevance to ecological problems, which arise from a context which Baber and Bartlett (2005: 56) describe as being 'fact-rich and imperfectly understood'. Such problems are complex in the sense of being varied, interconnected and therefore non-reducible. Dryzek in particular has consistently argued that deliberation leads to decisions which are more ecologically rational than those produced via aggregative methods. As he points out, a '*sine qua non* of extensive competent participation means that a variety of voices can be raised on behalf of a wide variety of concerns' (Dryzek 1992: 39). Deliberation develops a broad information base which, rather than 'exacerbating complexity and making problems still more intractable', increases sensitivity to feedback signals by opening up 'the possibility of felicitous understanding across the individuals who represent the diverse facets of complex problems' (Dryzek 1992: 39; see also Dryzek 1987 and 1990b).

These qualities convince Smith (2003: 65) that the institutionalisation of deliberation is the most suitable response to the onset of what Beck (1992, 1999) calls 'second modernity' – a period characterised by an increase in both risk and uncertainty: 'deliberative institutions promise an ingenious mechanism through which the application of scientific and technological knowledge and expertise might be democratically regulated – an institutional setting within which the barriers between "expert" and "lay" knowledge can be challenged and reformulated'. This is not to say that technical and expert knowledge has no place within a deliberative democracy. As Manuel Arias-Maldonado (2007: 242) notes, 'any definition of sustainability requires technical implementation through science and technology'. However, sustainability is also more than this: it is an undeniably *normative* concept, in that it 'cannot be ideologically or scientifically pre-determined, but defined



according to value judgement' (Arias-Maldonado 2007: 242). What deliberation can do, however, is:

make expert judgement on complex and technical issues compatible with lay judgement, whose technical incompetence is however balanced by the contribution of different points of view and personal experiences on the environmental risk at stake ... it facilitates the politicization of risk without neglecting its technical dimension. (Arias-Maldonado 2007: 242)

Habermas (1970: 75-80) emphasises the importance of translating scientific information into ordinary language. This, for him, is essential to engendering effective communication between experts in estranged disciplines, experts and political representatives, and representatives and the general public.

The capacity of deliberation to engender public and generalisable arguments is also viewed as being of relevance to greens. As noted above, the liberal democratic method of calculating social choice through the aggregation of individual, private interests, has various drawbacks from a green perspective. Deliberation is forwarded as a potential corrective here on account of its ability to engender public forms of reasoning. David Miller (2003: 189) refers to the 'moralising effect of public discussion': morally repugnant ideas, such as racist ideas, will find few bearers willing to advance them in a public context. For Elster (1997), preferences which are narrowly self-regarding will suffer the same fate. As Elster (1997: 12) notes, 'By the very act of engaging in public debate – by arguing rather than bargaining – one has ruled out the possibility of invoking such reasons. To engage in discussion can in fact be seen as one kind of self-censorship'. There are two distinct pressures which can be seen to induce this type of self-censorship. First, forwarding narrowly *self*-regarding arguments in a *public* discussion will be seen as 'bad form' by other participants. As with morally repugnant ideas, the anticipation of public reproach may therefore dissuade participants from forwarding such arguments. And second, it is strategically inexpedient to forward such arguments. Being an *effective* participant in public discussion – in the sense that one's arguments will impact upon the group decision –

requires one to provide reasons which are at least potentially acceptable to others. Arguments to the effect of 'it is good for me' will fail to survive the test of discursive scrutiny (Dryzek 1992: 40).

Deliberation has also been promoted as a mechanism through which participants are induced to internalise the interests of nature. As Eckersley (2004: 115) explains, deliberation is not only 'the process by which we learn of our dependence on others (and the environment)' – and thereby develop what Hayward (1998) terms an 'enlightened self-interest' – it is also 'the process by which we learn to recognise and respect differently situated others (including nonhuman others and future generations)'.

The reasons why this is considered to be the case may not be immediately evident considering the inherently anthropocentric nature of deliberation. It is an obvious yet significant fact that only humans are capable of participating in communicative practices. Habermas's discourse ethic explicitly discounts the consideration of non-human entities as *moral* subjects – in the sense of being ends-in-themselves – precisely because it is theoretically grounded in speech acts (Eckersley 1992: 111). As Habermas (1982: 248) himself puts it, 'the in principle egalitarian relation of reciprocity built into communicative action ... cannot be carried over into the relations between humans and nature in any strict sense'. Eckersley (1999: 42), however, counters this by observing that the employment of such a strict criteria leads to morally repugnant conclusions. All beings unable to participate in moral discourse – such as the senile or mentally impaired – would be considered unworthy of moral recognition.

For Eckersley (1999: 42), on the contrary, 'it is not necessary that a being be a *morally responsible agent* in order to receive recognition as a *morally considerable subject or being* ... it is enough that a being is a centre of agency, however rudimentary, with its own life and special mode of flourishing' (Eckersley 1999: 42). Once this is accepted, there are two ways in which deliberative democracy may be seen to foster the internalisation of the interests of nature. The first connects with



claims regarding the ability of deliberation to engender public and generalisable arguments. Participants, rather than representing themselves in the narrow, partial sense, are expected to engage in what Arendt termed 'representative thinking', in that, if they are to be successful in arguing in terms which are acceptable to others, they must in some sense anticipate and 'assume the perspectives and interests of others and give them equal weight to their own in the course of argumentation about the general acceptability of the consequences of proposed norms' (Eckersley 1999: 26). As Goodin (1996: 847) argues, the formulation of arguments which are to be forwarded in public deliberation involves the 'anticipatory internalisation' of the interests of others: deliberation 'creates a situation in which interests other than your own are called to mind'.

Eckersley (1999: 27) develops these arguments yet further by claiming that it is not necessary for those affected by a decision to be actually present during its formulation. It is enough, Eckersley believes, that they be included as 'imaginary partners in conversation' by those who *are* present. Non-human entities which are affected by a particular decision may be given a kind of 'virtual presence' by those who have internalised their interests and are willing to give them discursive recognition.

This last sentence is telling, however. Because the presence of non-human nature is limited to being virtual at best, there would seem to be less reason for participants to anticipate that their arguments need be formulated in a manner which takes its interests into account. Such an 'anticipatory internalisation' would only be logical were the assumption made that other participants will be present who have already internalised such interests, *prior to deliberation*. Thus, the internalisation of the interests of nature cannot be seen as resulting solely from deliberation's orientation towards public and generalisable arguments. Such an observation must be supplemented with an allusion to the *inclusivity* of deliberation. It is only because deliberation is a process which does not restrict in advance the arguments which are permissible for debate, that it is likely that those who *have* internalised the interests

of non-human nature will be present to force others to at least consider incorporating such interests into their deliberations.

Having said this, deliberative democracy is not always praised for its inclusivity. Somewhat paradoxically, by emphasising the importance of rational argumentation, deliberative theorists may actually exclude those individuals, groups or sections of the public who struggle to limit themselves to this form of communication. As Lynn Sanders (1997: 348) comments, 'some citizens are better than others at articulating their arguments in rational, reasonable terms'.

Iris Marion Young (1996: 122) argues that one of the principle virtues of a deliberative model of democracy is that, by insisting on 'the force of better argument' as the only legitimate force in decision-making, deliberative theorists promote 'a conception of reason over power in politics'. Economic power must be separated from political power to ensure participants are free from domination and coercion and have an equal opportunity to forward proposals and challenge others. However, Young (1996) goes on to point out that, by focussing on the bracketing of political and economic power, deliberative theorists have tended to overlook the way in which disparities in power re-enter the political arena as a result of the cultural specificity of the deliberative conception of communication. Such a conception is, for Young (1996: 123), 'derived from the specific institutional contexts of the West'. The 'institutional forms, rules, and rhetorical and cultural styles' of the ruling institutions that arose from the bourgeois revolution, 'have defined the meaning of reason itself in the modern world' (Young 1996: 123). However, the elitist and exclusionary characteristics of these institutions 'mark their very conceptions of reason and deliberation, both in the institutions and in the rhetorical styles represent' (Young 1996: 123). They generate what Young terms an 'agonistic' form of communication, which is competitive rather than conciliatory and favours assertive, confrontational, formal and dispassionate forms of speech – forms of speech which Young believes benefit white, middle-class males at the expense of others.



Dryzek (2000: ch. 3) in particular has responded to such criticisms by calling for an expansion of the forms of communication which are permissible in the deliberative arena. Storytelling, testimony, greeting, rhetoric and argument should be admitted so long as they do not involve coercion and that any partial points which are made are also generalisable. Smith (2003: 63-64) also backs this move and believes there are good reasons why greens especially should support it. As an example Smith (2003: 63-64) points out that a narrative form of communication may facilitate the expression of the value which is felt by an individual, group or society toward a particular landscape: 'Through narrative, the sense of place can be evoked such that those who do not share that relationship with the non-human nature might come to an understanding of the experience and the values of the narrator'. Story-telling in particular is viewed as an important form of bioregional expression (Aberley 1999: 24).

### ***5.2.2 Expunging Deliberative Democracy's 'Heroic Assumptions'***

Despite the optimism generated by the types of argument outlined above, it is important not to overstate the transformative potential of deliberation. As James Johnson (1998: 165-166) notes, an important feature of political discussion is that 'it frequently involves parties who seek to challenge one another at a quite "fundamental," even "existential," level'. Where this occurs there is a conflict concerning the basic framework of the moral assumptions from which participants are working. There is no common criterion of public justification, leaving reasoned argument impotent as a framework for conflict resolution. Of course, such existential conflict will be more prevalent in countries marked by 'value pluralism'. As Mills and King (2000: 140) note, 'consensus tends to be reached far more easily in societies marked by high levels of homogeneity'. However, this begs the question: 'Since very few modern industrial societies conform to this characteristic, why would deliberation not produce polarization as opposed to agreement?' (Mills and King 2000: 140).

Smith (2003) believes that a parallel situation is to be found within the context of debates over the environment. Using John O'Neil's (1993: 107-9) example of value conflicts over wetlands, Smith (2003: 23) notes that

We can make a series of judgements about the value of such a location. For example, in judging its value as a landscape, we will evoke aesthetic criteria and look to the judgement of poets and artists. To judge its scientific value, we would appeal to scientific practices and accord the ecologist authority. Judging its economic, spiritual or cultural value will require an appeal to different sets of criteria and practices.

Any particular environmental good is the depository of multiple values – values which are incommensurable in the sense of there being no independent standard from which to judge conflict between them. For Smith (2003: 25), however, an acknowledgement of a plurality of value orientations towards the environment need not lead to an *indifferent* relativism. It is only through contact with other perspectives that we become fully able to comprehend the diversity of environmental values and become capable of richer and more reflective judgements: 'judgements will not be based solely in individual resources and private considerations, but will benefit from the knowledge, experience and insight of others' (Smith 2003: 260). Indeed, he goes as far as stating that: 'Through understanding the judgement of others we come to recognise that our own perspectives may be limited and fallible, in that certain values may be ignored or misrepresented' (Smith 2003: 25). However, Smith is unable to escape the conclusion that, although deliberation opens up the *possibility* that shifts in perspective may take place, due to the incommensurability of value judgements, this is not inevitable: 'The exercise of judgement does not mean that conflict will be overcome' (Smith 2003: 26).

Johnson (1998: 172) also points out that the mechanisms identified by Elster do 'not so much generate reasoned agreement as induce a conformity that is at once rather shallow and normatively suspect'. Self-censorship based on an anticipation of public reproach is a far cry from the ideal of the 'force of better argument', and as such



'does not afford a justifiable way of constraining the range of views admissible to the deliberative arena' (Johnson 1998: 172).

There is also the danger that, rather than inducing a genuinely public mode of reasoning, deliberation simply forces participants to pay lip service to the common good – to couch self-regarding arguments in the language of public reason. In such cases participants are engaged in strategic rather than communicative action. One could respond by claiming that if the reasons given are publicly acceptable, then the disguised motivation is irrelevant. The legitimacy of such a claim would rest on the information regarding the predicted *outcomes* of a proposal not being misrepresented along with the motivation behind it. Under such circumstances the self-regarding motives of the participant are in alignment with the public good, thereby rendering the disguised motivation irrelevant from a consequentialist perspective. Elster supplements this type of argument with an allusion to something akin to cognitive dissonance theory. According to Elster (1997: 12), 'One cannot indefinitely praise the common good "du bout des lèvres," for ... one will end up having the preferences that initially one was faking'. In other words, for Elster, the psychologically uncomfortable cognitive dissonance that is generated when one is forced to express other-regarding preferences to which one does not actually subscribe, will lead participants to shift their internal preferences to fit with their publicly expressed preferences. However, at the last moment he backs away from this argument, recognising that 'Dissonance reduction does not tend to generate autonomous preferences' (Elster 1997: 12). It is also unlikely that proposals based on narrowly self-interested motives will consistently converge on outcomes which truly reflect the public good. In some cases, therefore – where strategic communication has been successfully employed – the ironic situation may arise where a better outcome would have been attained if no deliberation had taken place (Simon 1999: 51). Participants may be convinced to shift their preferences on the basis of the strategic and essentially self-regarding arguments of others.

More defensible responses to such claims focus on the fact that deliberative scrutiny allows for the exposition of ostensibly public reasons for what they really are. It must

also be remembered, though, that in the vast majority of cases – especially where decisions *have* to be taken due to time constraints – deliberation will end in voting. As Adam Przeworski (1998: 141) argues, this opens up the possibility that ‘People may discover that their arguments are not sufficient to persuade others, listen to their arguments, and yet vote in favor of their interests’. The bottom line is that ‘a plausible argument for deliberation cannot be utopian in the sense that it makes heroic assumptions about participants’ (Johnson 1998: 173). As Arias-Maldonado (nd.: 15) concludes, ‘citizens *should* open their preferences to a process of comparison, discussion and, if rational valuation recommends it, transformation; however, it is uncertain if they will do so’.

### ***5.2.3 Must Greens Be Democrats?***

The optimism felt by greens towards deliberative democracy, then, should be qualified by the observation that, despite the fact that deliberation is more *likely* to produce more informed, publicly orientated and therefore environmentally benign decisions, there can be no *guarantee* that this will be the case – that decisions will necessarily embody environmental values. Such guarantees would undermine the very conditions of deliberation (Smith 2003: 71). This fact, etched in the very nature of democracy, has implications for the relationship between ecological politics and democracy. As Saward (1993: 64) points out, there is real potential for a contradiction between green imperatives and democracy: ‘To the extent that the realization of certain green principles – like dealing urgently with over-population – is seen as essential, we are dealing with an imperative that has a no-real-choice quality’. This ‘no-real-choice quality’ was amplified in the late 1960s and early 1970s where, as Eckersley (1992: 11-17) notes, the dire projections of *The Limits to Growth* and *Blueprint for Survival* fostered an urgent, pragmatic and empirical frame of mind that was preoccupied with survival above all else.

Garret Hardin (1968; 1977), Robert Heilbroner (1974) and William Ophuls (1977) – to whom Barry (1999: 195) attaches the group-moniker ‘the terrible trio’, and to



whom we may legitimately add Paul Ehrlich (1971) – questioned the likelihood that the changes in values and behaviour necessary to avoid ecological collapse could be brought about through the voluntary mechanisms of democracy. For Ophuls (1977: 8), ‘the relative scarcity or abundance of goods has a substantial and direct impact on the character of political, social and economic institutions’. Liberty, justice and democracy, rather than being eternal and inalienable rights, are products of a historically ‘abnormal’ ‘golden age’ of material abundance. However, this ‘golden age’ is set to be replaced by a period of material scarcity with which such principles are incompatible. For this group of thinkers, the prioritisation of human survival must simultaneously involve, and indeed justifies, the downgrading of democracy and liberal rights. What is required is an ‘ecoauthoritarian’ solution – a strong state capable of coercing individuals into acting in a manner compatible with human survival. As Hardin (1977: 148) states, ‘injustice is preferable to total ruin’.

Having said this, the term ‘the terrible trio’ may still be something of a misnomer. As is implicit in the above logic, authoritarian solutions are framed by these thinkers in terms of necessity; they were, as Mathew Humphrey (2007: 27) observes, ‘reluctant authoritarians, the political solutions they proposed came about as a result of what they saw as immediate, fundamental, and severe ecological constraints’. However, it follows from this that, where this immediacy is downplayed, their arguments lose purchase, as it becomes more likely that the necessary changes in behaviour and values may be brought about gradually, and without the *necessity* of a centralised, coercive body. However, debates over the extent and time-scale of the ecological crisis are as hotly contested now as they were in the 1970s. As Humphrey (2007: 26) again observes, ‘The optimists and the pessimists have been slugging it out for decades, and here they stand, punch-drunk, in exactly the same spot where they started’.

An alternative strand to the critique of the ecoauthoritarian argument challenges its proposed political and institutional solutions rather than its underlying premises. This avenue has at least produced a set of commonly agreed conclusions. Indeed, Dryzek (1996: 108) goes as far as claiming that ‘if two or more decades of political ecology

yield any single conclusion, it is surely that authoritarian and centralized means for the resolution of ecological problems have been discredited rather decisively'.

The environmental performance of actually existing authoritarian regimes forms part of the case which leads to such a conclusion. As Paehlke (1996: 19) observes:

there is now ample evidence that, however ineffective democratic regimes have been regarding environmental protection, they have been far more effective than were the authoritarian regimes of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe ... Indeed, there is no evidence that any authoritarian regime anywhere has ever been very effective as regards either environmental protection or the equitable distribution of scarcity.

Holden (2002: 75) puts some theoretical flesh on this empirical claim by pointing out that: 'It is only if, or to the extent that, popular consent is given for policies that would otherwise be unpopular, and their enforcement thereby legitimated, that they can be successfully implemented' (Holden 2002: 75). Indeed, even if it *were* possible for an authoritarian state to impose environmental policies on an unwilling populace, coercion is always going to play second fiddle to persuasion when it comes to producing stable and long-term solutions. As Barry (2002: 147) argues: 'changes in people's behaviour motivated by the internalization of norms is more effective and longer lasting than behavioural changes based on external or coercive imposition'.

An argument *against* authoritarianism does not equate to an argument *for* democracy, though. There is, therefore, an onus on democrats to counter the ecoauthoritarian claim that humans are incapable of voluntarily altering their ecologically destructive behaviour. To be more specific, there is an onus on democrats to counter the claims that: 1) human behaviour is guided by a narrow and short-term conception of *self-interest*. We are, according to this view, unable to understand where our long-term, enlightened interests lie. And 2) that even if we *were* made aware of such enlightened interests, we would be unable to bridge the gap between individual actions and collective outcomes. We are locked in an ecological



version of the prisoner's dilemma – what Hardin (1968) famously termed 'the tragedy of the commons'.

What these criticisms should make clear, however, is the extent to which the ecoauthoritarian argument is founded upon a particularly thin conception of democracy. As explained above, greens themselves have sought to criticise the extent to which democracy is driven by the steam of self-interest. Baber and Bartlett (2005: 5) claim that 'Neither true democracy nor environmental protection is possible where citizens become mere competitors with no commitments beyond their own self-interests'. However, as implied in this quote, greens have tended to view this as a product and deficiency of a specifically liberal form of democracy rather than as a component of the human condition which undermines democracy *per se*. A deliberative form of democracy, on the other hand, is less susceptible to such criticisms on account of its educative capacity and its ability to engender a mode of reasoning which is more favourable to the acceptance of ecological arguments. What is required, therefore, given the poverty of the ecoauthoritarians' institutional solutions, is more democracy rather than less, despite the fact that there is no *guarantee* that ecologically benign outcomes will result from deliberatively democratic procedures.

This brings us back to the starting point of this section. Despite the fact that the ecoauthoritarian argument has been adequately dispatched, it is still the case that a non-contingent connection between ecological thought and democratic procedures cannot be legitimately forged by focussing on the outcomes of the latter. Where outcomes are uncertain this form of link remains contingent. This has led green theorists to explore alternative ways of forging a non-contingent link. As Mills and King (2000: 137) note, one popular method 'has been to anchor instrumentalism in values perceived to be compatible with democracy and which would secure the self-binding nature of democracy itself'. In particular, Dobson (1996) employs a two-pronged argument to link ecological thinking to democracy (see also Eckersley 1996a, 1996b). First, he follows Saward (1993) and Dryzek (1990; 1995) in arguing from preconditions: there are certain conditions which must be fulfilled if discursive

democracy is to be possible. In order to avoid contradiction, the procedures of democracy must be formulated in a manner which does not endanger these procedures themselves. In other words, 'Democracy – and discursive democracy in particular – cannot be purely procedural. It is concerned with outcomes, either negatively in the sense of proscribing those that endanger it, or positively in terms of encouraging those that enhance it' (Dobson 1996: 136-137). The link to environmentalism is then drawn by highlighting that an environment capable of sustaining life is an essential precondition for discursive democracy.

Dobson rightly recognises, though, that environmental preconditions are too widely drawn by Dryzek, as the argument could be made that any form of political communication, including authoritarian communication, relies upon the existence of such preconditions. He therefore supplements this with an 'argument from principle' – specifically, from a concern with the principle of autonomy, which is both a feature of green discourse and a precondition for democracy. As Dobson (1996: 143) explains, 'democracy and green thinking are ... linked by the common core notion of autonomy, in that the defence and extension of autonomy are what green thinking is about, while a belief in autonomy underpins defences of democracy'. However, as Dobson (1996: 146) recognises, 'autonomy is somewhat empty without the material conditions for its practice. In this way the "argument from principle" points us back to the "argument from preconditions": the former democratises green theory and the latter sensitises democratic theory to environmental concern'.

Humphrey (2004, 2007), however, convincingly demonstrates the incoherence of such arguments. A detailed account of his particularly forensic analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter. The main thrust of his argument, though, is that:

The environmental argument cannot have it both ways, it cannot hold both (a) that there is an intrinsic connection between autonomy and democracy, and (b) that (a) still holds even though we radically reconceive the notion of autonomy, without offering an argument that



links the *new* conception of autonomy to democracy. (Humphrey 2007: 92)

In other words, the conceptual innovation which is undertaken in order to render the notion of autonomy applicable to non-human nature disables that concept as a grounding for democratic theory. As such, Humphrey (2007: 93) concludes:

That there may be both good reasons to hold green values and also good reasons to be a democrat does not entail (although it is consistent with) a non-contingent, watertight and necessary connection between ecology and democracy. Better that one grasps the nettle of contingency and argues in the public sphere for one's values and beliefs. (Humphrey 2007: 93)

To sum up the arguments of this section thus far: there are good reasons for thinking that deliberation as a procedure is more *amenable* to the production of public, generalisable and therefore ecologically benign decisions than a purely aggregative method. However, this optimism must be tempered by the recognition that deliberation is by no means beyond strategic manipulation, and that participants cannot be counted on to always engage in the type of communicative action which is central to the deliberative process. It is also the case that value pluralism will at times preclude conflict resolution and the movement towards consensus. And lastly, despite deliberation's orientation towards a public form of reasoning, there can be no *guarantee* that environmental values will be given a higher priority in decisions, or that green arguments will necessarily prevail in group deliberations. The link between deliberative procedures and environmental values and goals must remain contingent if these procedures are not to be undermined by the type of fundamentalist impulse which may be found in the ethical monism of some ecocentric thinkers. What deliberative democracy *does* do is provide a space in the political process where such views may be articulated and reflected upon. As Hayward (1995: 98) perceptively notes, 'If ecocentrism is "true", then this is a truth, like any other, which will be proved in practice'.

### ***5.3 Institutionalising Deliberation***

Despite the qualified optimism of the above arguments, Smith (2003: 79) is correct nonetheless to concede that: 'It is a fair criticism of the deliberative democracy literature that it generally remains a highly abstract and theoretical endeavour – that it fails to systematically engage with the “messy” and more detailed task of institutional design'. This is a serious deficiency; as Joseph Femia (1996: 377) argues, 'it is not enough ... for deliberative democracy to be *desirable*; it must also be *possible*'. This possibility, moreover, should not be measured purely in terms of the *theoretical* coherence of its institutional vision. As Macpherson (1977: 98) commented 30 years ago, 'the central problem is not how a participatory democracy would operate but how we could move towards it'. It is essential that deliberative democrats outline not only an institutional model, but also the means by which this model is to be brought to fruition. The following sections examine what Caroline Hendriks (2006) terms 'micro' conceptions of deliberative democracy, which are concerned with institutionalising deliberation within the liberal democratic state.

#### ***5.3.1 Deliberative Opinion Polls***

One of the first proposals for institutionalising deliberation was through the use of deliberative opinion polls, as pioneered by James Fishkin (1991; 1997). As Fishkin (1991: 81) explains, 'a deliberative opinion poll models what the electorate would think if, hypothetically, it could be immersed in intensive deliberative process'. In other words, it reveals 'the views the entire country would come to if it had the same experience of behaving more like ideal citizens immersed in the issues for an extended period' (Fishkin 1997: 162). Using probability-based sampling techniques a representative 'microcosm' of the population is selected. These participants are then interviewed in order to measure their views on a range of issues prior to taking part in a weekend of deliberation. This deliberative weekend is typically composed of two



forms of interaction: briefings by experts, stakeholders and politicians, of whom participants may ask questions; and discussions amongst participants themselves. The group is then re-interviewed, or 'polled', so that pre-and post-deliberative opinions may be compared.<sup>13</sup>

Fishkin views deliberative opinion polls as a potential supplement to representative institutions rather than an alternative democratic model: 'We shouldn't expect new forms of public deliberation to replace the ordinary mechanisms of democracy. Rather, we should appreciate their potential to infuse representative democracy with new life' (Fishkin 1992). Such polls will have more *prescriptive* purchase than normal opinion polls, providing they are well publicised (Fishkin 1991: 4; 1997: 162). They may have the double effect of persuading the public to take a more reflective view of their own preferences, and being instructive to representatives or electoral candidates regarding what is required for them to accurately reflect the interests of the public. In particular, Fishkin (1997: 170) recommends the use of such polls as a 'more thoughtful and representative way of launching the [US] primary season'.

More recently, Fishkin and Bruce Ackerman have forwarded an alternative, and in some ways more ambitious, proposal – Deliberation Day (see Fishkin and Ackerman 2003; 2005). This is to be a new national holiday, held one week before major national elections. On this day participants in small, randomly sampled groups of 15, and larger samples of 500, will gather across the country to deliberate on issues connected to the campaign. Again, Fishkin and Ackerman hope that the publicising of such events will have the prescriptive effects noted earlier. They will not only 'change millions of minds; they will change the nature of the larger political environment ... dare we say it? Deliberation Day may come to symbolize a genuine renaissance of civic culture in America' (Fishkin and Ackerman 2003: 8, 25).

There is evidence to suggest that deliberative days/weekends can have a significant transformative effect on participants' preferences. For example, in 1999 a

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<sup>13</sup> A more comprehensive account of this methodology may be found in Lushkin, Fishkin and Jowell

representative sample of 347 Australian voters gathered at the Old Parliament House in Canberra for a weekend of discussion over proposals to replace the British monarch with an elected head of state. The event was broadcast by two TV stations and had *The Australian* newspaper as a partner to the event (Fishkin nd.).

**Table 5.1: The 1999 Australian Referendum: Deliberative Opinion Poll Results**

	Before deliberation %	After deliberation %	Difference in % points
<b><i>Approval of the proposed alteration to the constitution:</i></b>			
Yes	53	73	+20
No	40	27	-13
Undecided	7	-	-7
<b><i>First choice model:</i></b>			
Change to a republic with a President directly elected by the people	50	19	-31
Change to a republic with a President appointed by Parliament	20	61	+41
Not change anything, keeping the Queen and the Governor-General in their current roles	26	15	-11
None, don't know	4	6	+1

*Source:* Adapted from Fishkin (nd.)

As can be seen in Table 5.1, the weekend's deliberative pursuits increased the majority in favour of the proposed constitutional amendments by 20 percentage points. However, the most impressive effect of deliberation concerned discussions over the more precise model participants would advocate. Here support for a president appointed by parliament shot from 20% to 61%, while support for a democratically elected president fell by 31 percentage points.



It is one thing to say that deliberation can have a transformative effect on *participants'* preferences; however, determining the extent to which the publicising of such a process would influence the wider public is a trickier matter. Fishkin believes that the representative and deliberative qualities of deliberative polls increase the likelihood that members of the *public* will alter their preferences. Were he not to make this claim one could reasonably question the necessity of a specifically deliberative poll, given that the public is already subjected to a media deluge at election time. Thus, the transformative effects of deliberative polls would seem to depend not only on members of the public understanding and accepting the logic of random sampling, but also on them perceiving their interests, beliefs etc. as being *discursively* represented, as the former does not lead inexorably to the latter. Indeed, we may go further and surmise that members of the public must be convinced, not only that their beliefs have been discursively represented, but that the participants expressing them have done them sufficient justice. This, however, can never be guaranteed, as the discursive competencies of participants will inevitably vary.

**Table 5.2: Political Attentiveness, 1999 referendum**

	% who said 'good deal'
<i>Political Interest</i>	
Politics Generally	35
In the election campaign	38
Cared about the outcome	71
<i>Interest in Media Coverage</i>	
Television	28
Newspapers	24
Radio	18

*Source:* Adapted from McAllister (2001: 253)

For such reasons, Dryzek (2001: 645) argues that 'it is not easy to see how the outcome of a deliberative poll could be justified without somehow involving the

population at large in deliberation'. Dryzek (2001: 645) points out that, despite the televising of the deliberative opinion poll in 1999, the Australian electorate voted for the opposite of the deliberators' recommendations, with the republican amendment being defeated 45.1% to 54.9%. This, however, tells us little about the effect of the deliberative poll. First, there is no way of isolating the poll as a variable of influence upon public opinion. Second, as table 5.2 shows, public interest in the campaign and in the media coverage of the campaign was low. Only 28% of respondents claimed to be a 'good deal' interested in the television coverage of the campaign.

The most that can be said on this matter is that evidence demonstrating the transformative effect of deliberative opinion polls *on the general public* is scant and inconclusive. A more solid drawback of deliberative opinion polls, however, concerns the fact that participants are asked to express their own opinions on the issues at hand rather than a collective viewpoint. There may therefore be less of an orientation towards wider, generalisable social concerns, at least regarding the final expression of individual opinion.

### 5.3.2 Citizens' Juries

Citizens' juries share many similarities with deliberative opinion polls. They bring together a group of citizens, randomly sampled from the wider population, to deliberate on a particular issue or set of policy options. Again, participants would first be exposed to the relevant information on the issue via briefings from those with a relevant expertise; they would then be able to 'cross-examine' these experts before taking part in a separate group discussion. Where citizens' juries differ from deliberative opinion polls, though, concerns their role vis-à-vis the sponsoring body, be it a government department, local authority or other agency. They have a more direct advisory role, providing government with a representation of an informed public opinion, and will typically produce a report to which the sponsoring body will respond, either by acting on its recommendations or outlining the reasons for its disagreement (Coote and Lenaghan 1997). By stimulating such a response they may



foster 'deliberative accountability', not in the sense that governments are made directly accountable to juries – they are not – but as 'conduits for the information and arguments that voters need to make informed judgements about elected officials' (Brown 2006: 211). There are no real-world examples of citizens' juries being allocated legislative powers, and few propose that this should be the case.<sup>14</sup> Whereas legislative assemblies derive their legitimacy from being elected by a near universal franchise, citizens' juries lack this source of popular legitimacy.

Due to there being more emphasis upon expressing something approximating a collective viewpoint, it is reasonable to surmise that citizens' juries will be more likely to orientate themselves towards wider, generalisable concerns than deliberative opinion polls (Ward *et al.* 2003: 284). Indeed, as Smith (2001: 83-84) points out, this has been demonstrated in the few citizens' jury experiments which have been directed towards environmental issues, where participants have produced recommendations which take environmental concerns more seriously than public opinion and existing policy (Aldred and Jacobs 1997; Kuper 1996, 1997; Petts 2001). It is important, however, that participants do not feel pressured into suppressing disagreement in order to manufacture a false consensus. This is a danger with citizens' juries in particular, given the relatively short time participants have to generate agreement (Renn *et al.*, 1995). Consensus should be an aim or ideal rather than a requirement, and any report produced by a jury must illuminate areas of disagreement rather than papering over the cracks.

The time constraints placed on citizens' juries may also impinge upon their deliberative capacity. Kuper's (1996; 1997) study of a Hertfordshire citizens' jury, set up as part of a series of experimental juries sponsored by the Local Government Management Board, found that the majority of jury members felt discussion time was too limited. This means that participants have less to gain from what Ward *et al.* (2003: 288) describe as the 'reputational benefits of truth-telling' (the flip side of this being that there is less chance with citizens' juries that deliberation will uncover those engaged in the type of strategic behaviour outlined earlier).

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<sup>14</sup> Leib (2004) is a notable exception, advocating that a 'popular branch of government', comprised of

It is also the case that there is uncertainty regarding the extent to which citizens' juries, and indeed deliberative opinion polls, are, or indeed should be, representative. As noted, Fishkin stresses the importance of ensuring that the sample is a 'microcosm' of the population. It is the resemblance of the sample to the wider population that Fishkin believes makes a deliberative opinion poll 'an opportunity for the country ... to make recommendations to itself through television under conditions where it can arrive at considered judgements (Fishkin 1997: 173). It is this quality that makes such sample 'a statistical model of what the electorate *would* think if, hypothetically, all voters had the same opportunities that are offered to the sample'. However, Mark Brown (2006: 218) points out that any participant will belong to 'multiple statistical categories,' and that 'it is impossible to know in advance how particular individuals rank their various identities in their self-conception and behaviour'. It is also the case that by emphasising the importance of achieving microcosmic representation the implicit assumption is that participants are unable to identify with interests beyond those of their own particular social strata. The role of participants is framed in terms of representation rather than deliberation (Smith and Wales 2000: 57). Smith (2005: 225), on the other hand, stresses that:

The primary task of participating citizens should instead be understood in terms of *deliberation* rather than *representation*. The democratic value of these deliberative techniques rests on drawing a range of citizens together so that they are able to reflect upon a wide variety of experiences and perspectives. (Smith 2005: 225)

Brown (2006: 218) takes up a similar position when commenting that 'Rather than thinking about descriptive representation as a means of interest representation, it seems helpful to view it primarily as a matter of representing – i.e., making representations of – what have been called "social perspectives"'. Given this, the selection of juries should be governed by the criterion of 'inclusiveness' rather than 'representativeness' (Smith and Wales 2000: 54). Fishkin's stress on producing a

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randomly selected members, should be allocated legislative powers.



proportional microcosm of society through the use of simple random sampling may be jettisoned in favour of a sampling technique which amplifies diversity, in the sense that it is stratified in order to ensure that small but politically significant groups are included. As Brown (2006: 220) explains, where inclusion is the aim, 'the injustice of oversampling minority groups is outweighed by the benefits of assembling a more socially diverse panel'.

There are also concerns over the potential for sponsors to control the agenda of citizens' juries. Rather than generating their own solutions, juries are often limited to selecting from a restrictive set of options chosen by jury organisers (McIver 1998). Sponsors may also "cherry pick" from the recommendations of the jury, using it merely as an exercise in legitimation. In order to counter this problem, Smith and Wales (2000: 61) advocate the drawing up of a pre-jury contract which necessitates a formal response from the sponsoring body – one which outlines the recommendations which will be implemented and provides reasons why other recommendations have not been taken up. A more fundamental problem, however, concerns the ability of sponsors to select those issues which are to be subjected to the deliberations of citizens' juries in the first place. It is unlikely that government is going to invite problems onto its own doorstep by allowing an unknown quantity to comment on matters which could impact upon state functioning vis-à-vis the imperatives forced upon it by the wider social structure. There is therefore a danger that government will only employ citizens' juries in areas peripheral to the core functions of the state. Given the accumulation imperative's relevance to ecological concerns, this would seriously compromise deliberative democracy's green credentials.

### ***5.3.3 E-Participation***

As outlined at the outset of this discussion, one of the main aims of deliberative democracy is the use of discussion as a means of improving the political competency of citizens, and thereby of improving the quality of democratic decisions in general.

As such, legitimacy is often reformulated so that it is seen to result ‘from the free and unconstrained deliberation of all about matters of common concern’ (Benhabib 1996: 68). As Goodin (2000: 82) notes, though, one of the obstacles to the achievement of such an aim is that the face-to-face deliberation of all who are subject to a decision is impossible. Given this problem, it is surprising that the leading proponents of deliberative democracy have tended to overlook the potential of the internet as a means of expanding citizen communication. As Fuchs (2007: 47) explains, whereas the conventional media is restricted to a ‘very-few-to-almost-all’ form of communication, in that it is the deliberations of the very few which are transmitted to the very many, the virtual space created by the internet surmounts the restrictions of real space: ‘the Internet permits interactive communication by any number of participants at any spatial distance’.

The number of internet based public fora dedicated to political discussion is immeasurable. These fora may take the form of stand-alone sites, or be connected to blogs or online versions of newspapers or political magazines. Indeed, the magnitude of the proliferation of such sites of communication has led McCullagh (2003: 163) to suggest that ‘the Internet medium of communication has the potential to function as a “public sphere” locus, connecting large numbers of people in a forum of civic dialogue, in concurrence with the Habermasian ideal of democracy’. The question that arises from this – and which arises for Habermas in his original account of the public sphere – concerns how to ensure an *effective* transition of public opinion from these sites to state policy.

The UK Government’s International Centre of Excellence for Local eDemocracy (ICELE), launched in 2006, acts as a focal point for research into using digital technology to engage citizens in local politics. The ICELE lists various e-tools for enhancing e-democracy, including e-panels – which are similar to standard citizens’ panels, except that they are able to include greater numbers – interactive blogs, e-petitions and online surveys. The Scottish parliament has been particularly active in promoting such initiatives, at least in rhetoric, and allows the submission of e-



petitions, which are then passed on to the Public Petitions Committee.<sup>15</sup> At first glance this device would seem to have little in the way of deliberative potential. However, each proposal is accompanied by a discussion board. At the time of writing these boards are extremely underused, but the overall deliberative potential of this combination is considerable. Citizens are able to set the agenda by putting forward proposals; the boards then allow for public discussion over their content, with each individual able to express their support by signing the petition if they are convinced by the arguments. With a few changes to the system it would also be possible to allow for the content of the proposal to change as discussion develops.

Despite the obvious potential here, McCullagh (2003: 158) notes that most governmental websites are not used to their full potential. This seems to be particularly the case with regards their deliberative potential, partly because 'website creators adhere to the traditional model of communication, which treats the consumer as a passive recipient of information rather than recognising that a citizen may wish to interact'. It is also the case that questions remain regarding the extent to which such measures have any impact upon legislation. As Held (2006: 250) notes, although with internet technology 'the costs of deliberative participation are reduced, and the range of possible engagement enhanced. The extent of actual political change that results remains, of course, another question'. Such concerns are backed up by a United Nations report on e-government, which concluded that the countries examined:

are not doing a particularly good job of involving the public in participatory and deliberative thought processes that would feed into the government's decision making. The top 20 countries, on average, are currently providing on-line opportunities for citizen participation that are seriously lacking in relevancy and usefulness, and are at only about a third of the potential of what they could offer. (UN 2003: 176)

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<sup>15</sup> For an overview of the Scottish Parliament's e-democracy initiatives see Seaton (2005).

A study by Mahrer and Krimmer (2005) into the views of Austrian Parliamentarians toward e-democracy helps shed light on why this is the case. According to Mahrer and Krimmer (2005: 38) the parliamentarians interviewed were actively opposed to the notion of e-democracy: they ‘strongly believe in the concept of representative democracy and are with the same dedication opposing any concept of deliberation’. In particular, the authors found this stance to be ‘driven by the fear of a lasting loss of power for the political elite when supporting e-democracy’ (Mahrer and Krimmer 2005: 38). At times this was framed as scepticism towards the ability of ordinary citizens to participate adequately in discussions over complex issues. However, on other occasions the parliamentarians’ reasoning could be summed up by the old adage ‘turkey’s don’t vote for Christmas’, in the sense that they were concerned for their own political future. For Mahrer and Krimmer (2005: 38) ‘This leads to a special situation – the “middleman paradox” – as the very same parliamentarians who would be responsible for introducing new forms of citizens’ participation for political decision-making are explicitly and implicitly opposing these reforms’ (Mahrer and Krimmer 2005: 38).

Fuchs (2007) identifies two further problems with electronic forms of participation. The first is that, although the internet surmounts the problem of distance, it does not surmount problems which stem from the number of citizens contained within a nation-state. In other words, it is logistically impossible for millions of people to deliberate effectively in an internet chat room. As a result: ‘the Internet public sphere is fragmented ... and as such, lacking one of the advantages of conventional mass communication. And a fragmented public can hardly contribute to interactively constituting a common will of the demos’ (Fuchs 2007: 47). The second concerns the virtual nature of the presence of participants in the internet public sphere. Fuchs (2007: 48) notes that numerous studies have found internet communication to be ‘primarily a superficial expression of view by anonymous sources [that] has little to do with deliberation’. This is seen to result from the fact that communication does not take place between identifiable persons in either a physical or visual form.



### ***5.3.4 Deliberation and Environmental Policy-Making***

Graham Smith (2005) is one of the few to have examined in any detail the institutionalisation of deliberation in environmental policy-making. However, his optimism regarding the potential for institutionalising deliberation within the liberal state sits uneasily with his own findings.

Smith begins his examination of potentially deliberative bodies operating within parliament with the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC), a cross-party committee of 15 backbenchers with a 'peripheral scrutiny function', which by its own admission has failed to effectively audit the government against its own targets, 'because the government has provided few targets', and because 'the EAC lacks the resources to fulfill all its objectives' (Smith 2005: 217). Such problems are compounded by the fact that, despite being allowed to present evidence to the committee, the public are unable to participate in its deliberations. It is, therefore, highly exclusive.

Next up are the British Governmental Panel on Sustainable Development – an even more exclusive group of five appointed by the Prime Minister – and the Round Table on Sustainable Development. These bodies merged into the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) in 1999. The SDC operates according to a stakeholder philosophy: 'When making the appointments, Government takes into account the need to draw expertise from across the UK; from business, local government and non-government sectors' (SDC nd.). It is, therefore, composed of representatives from various organisations, appointed by the Prime Minister in agreement with the First Ministers in Scotland and Wales, who are drawn from various sectors of society involved in the sustainable development debate. For Smith (2005: 219), the SDC's functions are 'explicitly deliberative': it aims to educate areas of agreement amongst its participants in the hope of generating a common understanding of the requirements of sustainable development. He also finds optimism in the fact that SDC is sponsored by the core executive and reports directly to the chief executives of each of the UK assemblies, as this, according to his thinking, will ensure that it is less likely to be ignored. However, one must be wary

of underestimating the capacity of political executives to ignore the findings of reports it itself has sponsored. For example, the Scottish Executive recently launched a public inquiry into the likely effects of the proposed extension of the M74. Despite the inquiry concluding that the extension would encourage congestion rather than reduce it, worsen social exclusion, have a detrimental environmental impact and cause potential harm to local business, the Scottish Executive pushed forward with the extension anyway.

More direct disadvantages of the SDC concern its stakeholder arrangement, which is restricted to mainstream environmentalist groups and other groups representing organised interests, rather than directly engaging with citizens. The extent to which stakeholder representation of this form is compatible with the notion of preference transformation is questionable. It is also the case that, rather than including ministers or chief executives in the deliberative process, the SDC merely reports to these figures. The transformative effect of deliberation is therefore not extended to decision-makers.

More recently, in 2006, the SDC launched its 'virtual panel', which will comprise 1000 members by 2008. This panel will be engaged via online consultations, online forums and online polls, and through face-to-face group discussions, the aim being to allow the commission access to a greater breadth and depth of opinion. The panel published its first consultation paper, *Redefining Progress*, in March 2006 (SDC 2006). However, the extent to which this improves the commission's deliberative credentials is questionable. First, the selection of panel members is again based on a stakeholder philosophy. As explained on the SDC website, 'It is a "stakeholder" panel – i.e. people are selected for their interests and expertise, rather than as representative members of the public' (SDC 2007b). Second, it remains to be seen whether the Commission will follow through on its pledge to use a more discursive form of communication. The *Redefining Progress* paper was the outcome of an online questionnaire rather than any deliberative process. At the moment, therefore, it is difficult to adduce why Smith believes the SDC to be more deliberative or democratic than any other advisory committee.



Although these bodies may represent ‘a vast improvement on the often highly exclusive policy networks that populate the policy-making landscape’, Smith (2005: 220) is forced to admit that ‘The British government has not paid systematic attention to citizen engagement in the environmental policy process’. This being the case, he turns his attention to government rhetoric rather than action. Here there is more evidence of support for the institutionalisation of deliberation, particularly in the form of the 1999 *Aarhus Convention*, which was signed by member states of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution’s (RCEP) 1998 report, *Setting Environmental Standards*, the Select Committee on Public Administration’s *Sixth Report on Public Participation: Issues and Innovations*, 2001, and the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology’s *Open Channels: Public Dialogue in Science and Technology* report, published in 2001. Smith (2005: 222-223) is right to note that these reports promote many of the deliberative designs outlined above, such as citizen’s juries, deliberative opinion polls and consensus conferences. However, he is unfortunately also correct in noting that the bodies which produced them are outwith the core executive and therefore easy for figures of power to ignore (Smith 2005: 227).

Towards the end of the chapter in question, Smith asks the question: ‘What incentive do powerful actors have to open up the policy process if they are concerned where deliberations might lead?’ The answer provided by Dryzek (1992: 36) is legitimation: ‘liberal democracy’s continued quest for legitimation can lead to its discursive modification’. When attacked for their inability to cope with the conflicting demands placed on the state, the response of state-actors has often been to introduce discursive designs which offer ‘concessions to a more participatory model of democracy’ (Dryzek 1992: 33). However, there are powerful incentives not to open up the policy process to deliberation. The first harks back to an instrumentalist view of the state. As Smith (2005: 227) himself recognises, ‘The resistance to increasing deliberation is further engendered amongst those interests hostile to environmental considerations because of the evidence that the outcome of most

deliberative processes tends to be more environmentally sensitive than existing policies. Powerful interests have much to lose'. A second moves beyond the opposition of subjective vested interests to examine the objective constraints placed upon the state. As Dryzek (2005: 90) notes, 'Policy-making discursive designs could not afford to upset market confidence any more than the administrative state could'. By agreeing to subject itself to deliberative scrutiny, however, the core executive may find itself unable to mask its capitalist character; and in violating Offe's exclusion principle in such a way may conceivably offset any gains in legitimacy which result from concessions made to a more participatory model of democracy. A third reason for government to resist the introduction of deliberative mechanisms concerns the implications this may have for the *process* of governmental legitimation. As noted above, governmental legitimacy in a parliamentary democracy is derived from the fact that the representative assembly, from which it is drawn and to which it is accountable, is selected through periodic elections. As Judge (2006: 390) explains, this representative logic of legitimation involves, in its idealised sense, involves 'a serial flow of legitimacy from the people through their elected representatives to an accountable and responsive executive'. By offering 'concessions to a more participatory model of democracy', however, governments undermine this very source of their own legitimacy. Deliberative devices such as citizens' juries, consensus conferences and planning cells, represent alternative loci of governmental legitimation, and are devices whose legitimating capacity is authorised with reference to a participatory rather than representative criterion. By instituting such devices governments are acknowledging participation to be an alternative, even superior, source of legitimacy than that of the ballot box and thereby the representative assembly that it elects. They are therefore playing with fire:

they may yet reap – in the inversion of the precepts of that [Westminster] model – the whirlwind of a self-generated and self-perpetuating "legitimation crisis". In those circumstances, governments may yet be confronted, by their own actions, with the necessity of rebalancing the



“parliamentary” and the “democratic” in the conceptualisation of “parliamentary democracy” (Judge 2004: 700).

Attempts to institutionalise deliberation within the liberal-democratic state, then, are plagued by problems which arise from the questionable compatibility of participatory mechanisms and representative logics of legitimation. The latter, as Judge (2006: 390) again explains in the context of a discussion of the UK parliamentary system, ‘privileges representation based upon UK parliamentary elections above all other forms of representation and popular participation’. Deliberative mechanisms are therefore relegated to a consultative or advisory role, or in fostering ‘deliberative accountability’, as executive actions are only legitimate, according to this logic, to the extent that they are authorised by the representative assembly or parliament. And it is difficult to see how this could be otherwise without a radical restructuring of the democratic system, as deliberative mechanisms lack an alternative source of popular legitimation. The democratic model envisaged by micro deliberative democrats is, therefore, only marginally less ‘thin’ than the standard liberal model, and there is the real possibility that governments simply use deliberative mechanisms as tools of legitimation, ignoring them when they produce findings which conflict with their outlook or agenda. Moreover, questions arise over the extent that these proposed mechanisms realise the potential identified in the more abstract theorising over deliberation as a form of communication. For example, the ‘additive’ and ‘multiplicative’ value of deliberation outlined by Fearon (1998) is severely tempered by the fact that only a small number of citizens are able to participate in citizens’ juries. It is also the case that, while there is evidence that deliberation can lead to significant preference transformations amongst *participants*, the extent to which deliberative opinion polls and the findings of citizens’ juries, in which discussion is conducted in front of citizens rather than by them, have an effect on the preferences of the wider, non-participating public is unknown. Some supporters of deliberation are sceptical: ‘To effect the asserted deliberative transformation, deliberative procedures must be carried out in practice’ (Fuchs 2007: 48-49).

In sum, it is questionable whether deliberative mechanisms can be latched onto representative assemblies in a manner which is both stable, in the sense that it does not spark a self-perpetuating legitimation crisis; and effective, in the sense that deliberation is extensive enough to realise its potentially educative and epistemic value.

#### ***5.4 Discursive Democracy***

There are, then, various barriers to, and problems with, democratisation *within* the institutions of the liberal state. First, democratisation within the state fails to overcome green problems associated with liberal democracy and its aggregative method of decision-making (Barry 1999). Second, the instrumental mode of rationality which is predominant within the state is both ethically biased and unable to deal with the non-reducibility and complexity of ecological problems (Dryzek 1990, 1992; Dobson 1993). Third, as noted in chapter 2, state imperatives constrain the actions of state institutions and therefore undermine their democratic authenticity (Hay 1994, 1996). And fourth, a narrow focus on the institutions of the state leads liberal theorists to underestimate extra-constitutional agents which may distort the type of free political dialogue, or communicative action, which is central to the successful formation of a communicatively rational public opinion. These include dominant discourses and ideologies, intertwined with structural economic forces (Dryzek 2000: 17-18). In sum, as Dryzek (2000: 29) puts it, 'liberal democrats might argue that there is plenty of scope for increased democratic authenticity within the confines of the liberal state; I would argue that there is not'.

This being the case, Dryzek laments the assimilation of deliberative democracy to liberal constitutionalism and its consequent lack of critical orientation towards the state. Instead he wishes to revive deliberative democracy's critical theoretic heritage and its emphasis on civil society and public spheres as the proper location for communicative action. Hendriks (2006) terms such approaches macro conceptions of deliberative democracy, in distinction to their micro counterparts. Macro conceptions



are concerned with opinion formation and unrestrained communicative action taking place outwith the state, in associations, networks and social movements, rather than with decision making and the construction of ideal models of structured fora for deliberation in state institutions (Hendriks 2006: 492-495).

Dryzek terms his own model *discursive* democracy in order to distinguish it from micro conceptions of deliberative democracy. As noted above, Dryzek follows Habermas in viewing civil society and public spheres as the most promising location for communicative action. For Dryzek (1996a: 47), a public sphere 'exists whenever individuals congregate to scrutinize freely their relationships with one another and with broader systems of political power in which they are enmeshed and to determine how they might act and interact' (see also Keane 1984: 2-3). They may be described as sites of political association and interaction in which discourses may be constructed, disseminated and deliberated upon according to a communicative rationality; 'the subject of the public sphere is, as the name implies, *public* affairs' (Dryzek, 2005: 91). They are separate from the state, and therefore free from its imperatives and the straightjacket of administrative rationality (Dryzek 1996b). In functional terms, they are politicised realms of social life, situated within civil society, acting in response to the failures of the state or economy (Jänicke 1996).

The best historical example of such spheres is the bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth century. This was most notably described by Habermas in his first major work, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (originally 1962, published in English in 1989). This sphere developed in opposition to the feudal state, from which the rapidly expanding bourgeoisie was excluded, and manifested itself in various forums of public discussion such as the London coffee houses, French salons, newspapers and journals, clubs and other forms of political association. As Held (1984: 79-80) explains it arose because 'Merchants, traders and others with property and education became actively concerned about the government of society, recognizing that the reproduction of social life was now dependent upon institutions which exceeded the bounds of private domestic authority'. It declined, however, with the entry of the bourgeoisie into the state, and with the commercialisation of the

press, which altered the nature of journalism from being an occupation motivated by principled conviction to one dictated by profitability (Dryzek 2000: 23).

The important point is that, for Dryzek (1996a: 48), the workings of the bourgeois public sphere:

embodied a kind of deliberative democracy of competent citizens unconstrained by the occupation of formal positions of political authority. Its members sought to develop and exercise informed public opinion in opposition to states that continued to uphold feudal privileges and limitations on liberal economic and political rights.

According to Dryzek (2000: 23), 'Contemporary parallels to the early bourgeois public sphere could be found in new social movements'. Such movements demonstrate a commitment to 'relatively free and open interaction in their internal workings' (Dryzek 2005: 88) and are characterised by their self-limiting radicalism, in that they do not seek a share in state power (Dryzek 1996a: 50). Instead they represent *oppositional* public spheres which seek to expose power and influence policy from a distance.

This is not to say that Dryzek discounts *completely* the possibility of further democratisation along deliberative lines *within* the state, although his position on this question is more ambiguous and seems to have shifted over time. He recognises 'A need for the rationalized lifeworld to assert its primacy through being "objectified" in social and political institutions' (Dryzek 1990: 40). With more specific reference to the state, Dryzek (2000: 79) notes that there 'have to be moments of decisive collective action, and in contemporary societies it is mainly (but not only) the state that has this capacity'. There are therefore good reasons to pursue democratisation within the state.

As mentioned earlier, Dryzek claims that the quest for legitimation can lead to the modification of the state in participatory and discursive directions. Such



modifications include 'environment and social impact assessment, participatory models of planning, right-to-know legislation, public hearings, public inquiries, regulatory negotiation, and environmental mediation' (Dryzek 1992: 33). However, Dryzek is quick to label such discursive designs *incipient*, as their association with the state distorts them in such a way which ensures that they only represent 'imperfect approximations to the ideals of free discourse' (Dryzek 1992: 33).

Dryzek, therefore, although noting that state actors may seek to introduce discursive policy-making designs as a means of increasing state legitimacy, is nonetheless sceptical regarding the possibility that such designs will achieve deliberative authenticity. And in later works this scepticism seems to have been replaced with outright rejection: 'Policy-making discursive designs could not afford to upset market confidence any more than the administrative state could' (Dryzek 2005: 90). In other words, Dryzek questions the presentation of the institutionalisation of discursive mechanisms as a positive-sum game. For these reasons, he recommends caution for environmental organisations seeking inclusion within state policy-making structures. Often inclusion is cooptive, in that it delivers little in the way of policy substance while depleting the oppositional public sphere and therefore society's democratic vitality as a whole (Dryzek *et al.* 2003: 78, 106). As noted in chapter 2, Dryzek links the potential success of inclusion to the extent that a movement is able to connect with the state's legitimation or accumulation imperatives.

For Dryzek (1996a: 52), 'one possible democratic future for industrial societies would consist of public spheres and movements in permanent opposition with the capitalist state'. However, elsewhere, he recognises the inevitable criticism which arises with such a vision:

The rather glaring problem with this emphasis is that it may leave public policies unchanged. Civil society would become a realm of reciprocal recognition, a site for the development and discussion of identities, and the location of authentic egalitarian discourse. Meanwhile, the

administrative state would still grind out policies completely insensitive to the play of civil society. (Dryzek 1996b: 119).

To the charge of incompleteness, Dryzek (2000: 78) responds by emphasising the degree to which 'the relative weight of competing discourses in the public sphere can be transmitted to the administrative state ... thus affecting the content of public policy'.

There are two main departures Dryzek makes from the liberal democratic model. First, public opinion is reconceptualised as the outcome of intersubjective communication across competing discourses in the public sphere (Dryzek 2000: 50). Democratic decisions, if they are to be legitimate, must accurately reflect the weighting of such discourses. Second, Dryzek favours discursive over electoral mechanisms when it comes to conceptualising the manner(s) in which public opinion is transmitted into legislation. This may be seen as partly due to his greater concern with the implications of the social choice critique of aggregative methods (see Arrow 1977; Riker 1982; Miller 2003). Habermas (1996a, 1996b) envisages a two-track transition model in which public opinion, although formed in the public sphere, is transmitted into communicative power through elections, and then in administrative power via legislation. Dryzek, on the other hand, wishes to broaden the means by which public opinion is seen to be transmitted from the public sphere to the state. He points to the ways in which actors in the public sphere are able to alter the terms of political discourse 'in ways which eventually come to pervade the understandings of governmental actors' (Dryzek 2006: 62). At this point Dryzek highlights the success of the environmental movement in introducing new conceptual categories and values which have permeated the assumptions of state actors and ushered in a raft of legislative changes. As Hajer (1995: 264) notes, 'developments in environmental politics depend critically on the social construction of environmental problems'. A second example which Dryzek alludes to is the power of rhetoric, which may also reach from the public sphere to the state. Specifically, he notes the examples of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, whose rhetorical arguments had a



significant effect on state structures and legislation. Dryzek also alludes to demonstrations, boycotts and protests.

There are, however, several problems with Dryzek's vision of discursive democracy. The first concerns the potential for distorted communication within the public sphere. As Habermas (1996a: 307-8) acknowledges, the public sphere is more vulnerable to the exclusionary effects of inequalities in social power than are the institutionalised spheres of parliament. Macro deliberative thinkers such as Dryzek are optimistic over the capacity of 'indigenous' actors in the public sphere, and in particular new social movements, to counter attempts to distort communication and forward illegitimate claims. However, as Hendriks (2006: 494) explains, 'when the weak and marginalised fail to muster enough discursive potential, macro deliberation can easily collapse into the very kind of adversarial interest group politics that deliberative democrats reject (Hendriks 2006: 494). Indeed, Hendriks (2006: 495) goes on to correctly observe that the communication forwarded by new social movements is as susceptible to distortion as the agendas pursued by commercial organisations and their respective interest groups.

It is also difficult to see how legitimacy can be so cleanly disconnected from aggregative methods. How is the relative weighting of discourses in the public sphere to be calculated if not numerically? If it is based on superiority of argument, who decides? Government? As Przeworski (1998: 140) notes, 'If a dictator listens to a discussion and then makes the decision, deliberation is political but not democratic'. On the contrary, as Parkinson (2003: 186) stresses, it would seem to be that 'provisional outcomes in the public sphere will be challenged precisely in terms of the numbers of people who subscribe to, owe allegiance to, or co-author the contesting discourses – why should a discourse that commands the reflective assent of only some of the people be decisive?'

Dryzek may also be criticised for underestimating the almost hegemonic dominance of the representative model of legitimation, in which elections play a pivotal role. While this hegemony holds sway, protests, boycotts and other mechanisms for

transmitting public opinion may be trumped by appeals to 'the constitutional rules of the game'. As Judge (2004: 687) explains,

MPs are elected while demonstrators and campaigners are not. In this specific sense, numbers do not matter in representative democracy; and even if they did, no matter how many hundreds of thousands take to the streets they still do not match the 26 million who voted at the last election. No matter how strong the case of the campaigners and demonstrators, they are not obliged to confront and respond to criticism, or to contemplate alternative policy configurations.

As noted, the representative model of legitimation may be being challenged by calls for the institutionalisation of participatory devices, and by voter abstention. However, for the moment, the point at which government is forced to recognise protests and demonstrations as some kind of legitimate barometer of public opinion seems far off.

And finally, if the strategic options open to state actors are severely restricted by state imperatives, thereby precluding authentic deliberation within the state, it could be questioned whether there is any reason to believe that critical discourses will have any greater impact. Indeed, as demonstrated in chapter 1, environmental discourses are as susceptible to cooption as the movements which espouse them.

## ***5.5 Conclusions***

The concluding sections of the previous chapter noted the extent of the challenge faced by anarchists in bringing about their vision of a stateless society. Often their optimism in this regard has been labelled utopian. However, utopianism is a double-edged sword in the sense that reformist measures can be as overly optimistic as radical ones. For instance, as argued in chapter 2, ecological modernisation is utopian 'in the pejorative, abstract, non-transgressive sense', as the premises of EM 'ignore



the dynamics of capitalist economics and the constraints of the forces of production within which they are set' (Pepper 2005: 15). The question is, whether the proposals of deliberative democrats are utopian in a similar manner. As argued, there are good reasons to believe that the process of deliberation is more likely to generate ecologically superior decisions, even if this is by no means guaranteed. However, institutionalising deliberation is more problematic. For micro deliberative democrats, who aim to latch deliberative mechanisms on to the representative system, questions arise over the extent that these proposed mechanisms realise the potential identified in the more abstract theorising over deliberation as a form of communication. With only a small percentage of the populace able to participate, the epistemic, transformative and educative effects of deliberation are severely tempered. It is also the case that, with deliberative mechanisms lacking the popular source of legitimacy that parliaments have, there is a possibility that deliberative mechanisms become little more than tools for legitimating governmental decisions.

An alternative scenario is also conceivable. By agreeing to institutionalise deliberative mechanisms, governments are playing with fire, as they are implicitly acknowledging public participation as an alternative, even superior, source of legitimacy – an acknowledgement which may trigger an unquenchable demand for ever-increasing participation and the general undermining of a parliamentary system which, as Judge and Miliband explain, so effectively confers legitimacy on governments while simultaneously excluding citizens from popular participation. In Judge's (2004) words they may instigate a 'self-generated and self-perpetuating "legitimation crisis"'. This is but one reason why we might expect governments to be wary of institutionalising deliberation. Others identified in the course of this chapter concern the increased likelihood that deliberative bodies will produce recommendations which rub against the (subjective) interests of vested interests with power over state managers and the (objective) accumulation imperative. The refusal of governments to take on board such recommendations may consequently highlight the capitalist nature of the state.

Reasons such as these convince Dryzek that authentic deliberation is unlikely to be institutionalised within the state. However, his discursive formulation of deliberative democracy is riddled with problems, and in any case, as Dryzek (1990) admits, does not forward an alternative *model* of democracy in the strictest sense; it is more a theory of how the environmental movement may pressurise the state into accepting a strong version of EM.

In sum, then, this chapter has demonstrated the social choice mechanism employed in the majority of Western nation-states – liberal democracy – to be ill suited to the achievement of green goals. It has also thrown doubt on the proposals of deliberative democrats for rectifying this situation. This latter conclusion, in particular, runs against the thread of contemporary green thinking regarding the state. As noted in the introduction, the currently fashionable ‘greening the state’ thesis is dominated by the ideas of EM theory and deliberative democracy. The combined findings of chapter two and the current chapter, however, provide compelling reasons for revising the notion that the capitalist state can be sufficiently ‘greened’. State imperatives act to thwart attempts to pursue ecologically sustainable policies and to institute more participatory forms of democracy. State democratisation would be a more realistic prospect in a post-capitalist society. However, as the analysis here demonstrates, attention would still need to be paid to the uneasy relationship between participatory and representative logics of legitimation. Deliberative democrats have yet to convincingly demonstrate that such logics can be coexist within a stable democratic system. This being the case, the anarchist’s calls for decentralisation and direct democracy appear less utopian than the likes of Saward suggest.



## Concluding Remarks

As mentioned in the introduction, the last 15 years has borne witness to a shift in orientation on the part of green theorists towards the state. One of the conclusions which may be derived from this thesis, however, is that assessing whether this shift should be viewed as indicative of a 'loss of innocence' (Paterson *et al.* 2006) on the part of Greens, or as a laudable step back from 'worthless utopianism' (Saward 1998), is perhaps a more difficult task than many would have us believe. Saward (1998: 345) comments that:

It seems clear that green political theorists now largely accept that the liberal representative state as we are familiar with it cannot, and probably should not, be transcended. The critique of so-called eco-authoritarianism has been decisive. Further, the opposite green notion that small, autonomous, largely self-governing communities would replace the state (and the nation-state) is of little practical use. (Saward 1998: 345)

For the moment, let us focus on one of the observations contained in this quote: that the liberal representative state *should* not be transcended. Such a claim may be backed by two sorts of argument: 1) that the alternatives to the liberal representative state are in some sense untenable and/or unattractive; and 2) that the liberal representative state is capable, or indeed best suited, to dealing with environmental problems, either in its current form or as a result of reforms which do not significantly alter its core characteristics. As to the first form of argument, Saward highlights eco-authoritarianism and eco-anarchism as prominent alternatives to the liberal representative state. With regards eco-authoritarianism, the findings of this thesis back Saward's contention that the critique of such a form of social organisation has been decisive. The unattractiveness of ecoauthoritarianism is unquestioned, even by its proponents; however, it is also untenable as an institutional solution to environmental problems, as coercion is less likely to have an effective and lasting effect on behaviour than will persuasion. When it comes to ecoanarchism, however, Saward is on shakier ground. As argued in chapter 4, while there are

legitimate criticisms which may be levelled at both bioregionalism and social ecology – the two most prominent versions of ecoanarchism – the idea that the statist critique has scored a *decisive* victory here may be premature. Criticisms emphasising the need for coercive bodies at the federal level are overstated and may also be levelled at the state system. And while it is true that, by increasing the number of parties to any multilateral agreement, anarchism may exacerbate already existing collective action problems, Paterson (1999: 81) is correct to note that centralisation only alleviates these difficulties at the expense of making coordination within its boundaries more difficult.

This brings us to the second form of argument identified above, which stipulates that the liberal representative state is best placed to deal with environmental problems. Chapter 5 argued to the contrary: the liberal democratic state, in its current form, is inherently antipathetic to the achievement of green goals and values. Environmental goods, as public goods, are not well served by a social choice mechanism based on the aggregation of privately formed, narrowly-construed, individual interests. Plus, the liberal capitalist state is amenable to domination by economic elites promoting ineffectual forms of environmentalism. As chapter 1 demonstrated, irrespective of whether business elites are conceptualised as a coherent capitalist class, or as composed of fractions of capital, they are nonetheless able to mobilise their financial resources in order to secure a disproportionate influence over environmental policy-making. Recognising this, statist greens tend to promote the ‘green democratisation’ of the liberal state. Saward (1998: 350-351) calls for the introduction of proportional electoral systems, federal structures and the extension of nascent deliberative structures prior to decision-making. For him, seeking to further democratise the state is the only ‘practical and realisable response to a range of compelling green analyses’ (Saward 1998: 345). The question of whether we *should* transcend the state becomes a largely moot point, as we *cannot* transcend the state.

As acknowledged in chapter 4, the path to the ecoanarchism is filled with numerous obstacles, not least of which is the fact that the attempted implementation of such a vision will likely draw an unfavourable response from the state, whose authority is



explicitly being challenged. It is difficult to see, therefore, how the anarchist vision can be brought about without the concurrence of the state. However, it is worth noting that reformists are just as capable of being unrealistic and utopian as radicals. This is the case where they expect too much from minor changes. In chapter 5 it was argued that 'micro' deliberative democrats are particularly culpable in this respect. Beyond the fact that serious questions remain over the compatibility of participatory and representative logics of legitimation, the 'thin' form of democratisation envisaged by micro deliberative democrats is unlikely to fulfil the green potential identified in abstract theorising over deliberation as a form of communication.

If the deliberative democratisation of the state may be characterised as the political side of reformist attempts to 'green' the state, ecological modernisation (EM) theory represents their economic aspect. However, EM theory, particularly in its 'weak' form, is equally, if not more, utopian than micro conceptions of deliberative democracy. It has not been sufficiently proven that economic growth can be 'decoupled' from environmental degradation in the way that proponents of EM suggest. As such, this form of EM theory fails to divert us from the conclusion that, if the state is to be effective as a 'facilitator of progressive environmental change rather than environmental destruction' (Barry and Eckersley 2005: x), it must necessarily be unleashed from its accumulation imperative, which in turn requires a radical restructuring of the economy within which it is situated.

Strong EM, on the other hand, is a particularly protean category, and its proponents tend towards vagueness when describing their position regarding economic growth. Eckersley's (2004) comments are particularly confusing in this context. After stressing that 'A deep and lasting resolution to ecological problems can ... only be anticipated in a post-capitalist economy' (Eckersley 2004: 81), Eckersley goes on to suggest that 'the green state would still be dependent upon the wealth produced by private capital accumulation ... and in this sense would still be a capitalist state' (Eckersley 2004: 83). It would seem that Eckersley here misleadingly interprets 'post-capitalism' as 'green social democracy'. Moreover, as noted in chapter 2, Eckersley envisages the green state intervening to curtail that which she recognises it

to be dependent upon – economic growth. This could be taken to mean, as Eckersley (2000: 245) implies elsewhere, that the state should intervene to ‘encourage only “green” or “qualitative” growth’, while curtailing ecologically damaging forms of growth. However, this merely brings us back to the decoupling thesis and its deficiencies. The idea that sustainable growth may be pursued *within a capitalist economy* is seriously flawed.

Eckersley’s unwillingness to confront these conclusions is most starkly demonstrated when she first recognises the ‘brute fact – which is central to the ecosocialist’s case – that a green state will remain fiscally parasitic on private accumulation to fund its reforms. Far from disciplining the market, the green state – like all states in capitalist societies – is likely to be disciplined *by* the market’ (2000: 249), before going on to argue that: ‘Ecosocialists may have the correct *analysis*; however, for the foreseeable future at least, green social democrats are more likely to build the necessary political consensus to develop a socially just and ecologically sustainable society’ (Eckersley 2000: 250). The strategy of building political consensus around a vision which one recognises as unable to achieve ecological sustainability is highly questionable. As Gouldson and Murphy (1997: 75) point out in a discussion over EM theory, reformist visions, rather than acting as some form of stepping-stone to more radical structural changes, ‘legitimise and sustain the very structures and systems that have been responsible for environmental decline’.

The aim of this thesis has not been to promote a definitive blueprint of the green polity. Rather, it has been to explicate the environmental dimensions of various theories of the state and critically assess their validity. In doing so, however, it has gathered enough evidence to suggest that the increasing acceptance of capitalism and the capitalist state on the part of green political theorists and large sections of the environmental movement is misguided. Attempts to ‘green’ the *capitalist* state are utopian and run the risk of legitimising an inherently anti-ecological ecological system. This is not to say that the state-form *in general* is anti-ecological. As chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, ecoanarchist critiques of the state, while highlighting various problems with the manner in which the state is currently constituted, fail to



deliver a knock-out blow. Naturalistic arguments are not legitimate bases from which to critique the state, while Bookchin's critique of hierarchy is overly rigid and decontextualised. Bioregionalists, on the other hand, end up violating their own insistence that nature should be 'mimicked' (McGinnis 1999) when they stipulate strict autarky and self-sufficiency as ecological imperatives. It is quite possible that an ecosocialist state, unshackled from the straightjacket of the accumulation imperative, could achieve ecological sustainability. Eckersley (2000: 246-248) is correct to highlight the various problems associated with centralised, command-and-control regimes. However, ecosocialists (see, *inter alia*, O'Connor 1989, 1998; Kovel 2002) have, understandably, sought to distance themselves from such models, and in doing so have incorporated proposals more commonly associated with the libertarian/anarchist wing of the socialist movement. The cultivation of local economies managed by decentralised, community planning bodies, informal market systems, workplace assemblies and self-managing worker cooperatives, will be essential in lessening the burden on the democratic state.

An ecosocialist platform infused with libertarian ideas would therefore seem to hold the greatest hope for creating a sustainable society. How to get from here to there remains a difficult question. Pepper (1999: 30) is correct to observe that such proposals are 'not likely to be attempted in the mainstream until the inability of global modernisation to meet the requirements of strong sustainability become more starkly apparent than at present'. The great irony of green political theory is that ecological crisis – the very thing greens are looking to avoid – would seem to be the only thing likely to trigger the type of economic and legitimation crises capable of forcing the state to take the radical steps necessary for the creation of a sustainable society. The only hope would be that the environmental degradation which triggers liquidity crises and/or legitimation crises is not sufficient enough so as to be irreversible. The problem is that there is no guarantee this would be the case. Indeed, John McNeil (2000: 358) points out that: 'it is impossible to know whether humankind has [already] entered a genuine ecological crisis'. We may have passed the critical juncture at which it is the last opportunity to take action to avert global catastrophe. In any case, Dryzek (1996: 115) is correct to stress that: 'A *strategy* of

awaiting the apocalypse is a mistake'. However difficult a task, green political theory must concern itself with developing strategies capable of avoiding ecological crises; and in this respect there is no shortage of suggestions. One thing this thesis does is provide a framework for assessing such strategies. Paterson (1999: 85) argues that: 'the diversity of current green strategies [is] something to be positively valued, rather than [seen] as a sign of incoherence'. This is true as far as it goes. As chapter 1 demonstrated, agency is by no means redundant; however, it will be subverted by ecologically damaging structural influences unless it is orientated towards changing those structures. Whether greens are operating through the party system to 'capture the state'; or outside the state, whether it be in direct action struggles, or in fostering prefigurative forms of political organisation; it is essential that they maintain a critical stance towards capitalist structures and the reformist policies which legitimise them, and thereby continue to contribute towards the development and dissemination of a counter-hegemonic discourse commensurate with ecological sustainability. As Pepper (1999: 30) notes, this discourse is 'one that the victims of increasing failures within the mainstream approach to sustainable development might need to draw on before long'.



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