Divided Natures

French Contributions to Political Ecology

Kerry H. Whiteside

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Kerry H. Whiteside

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Introduction

Could it be that we have unfairly neglected French contributions to green theory because of words written more than 350 years ago?[1] It was a sixteenth-century Frenchman who, in the opinion of many green thinkers, penned the most notorious line in the history of Western philosophy. René Descartes (1637: 40) proposed that we "make ourselves masters and possessors of nature"[2] by subjecting our material environment first to rational analysis and then to technological control. Fritjof Capra (1982: 61) speaks for many ecologists when he charges that the Cartesian view of the universe "provided a 'scientific' sanction for the manipulation and exploitation of nature that has become typical of Western culture."[3]

If Descartes's views are felt throughout Western culture, his influence has been even more pronounced in France. In France from the seventeenth century on, according to H. Stuart Hughes (1966: 4), "Cartesianism suffused the intellectual atmosphere so thoroughly that much of the time it went unnoticed"; Descartes was France's "official philosopher." French observers themselves acknowledge Descartes's impact on the aesthetics of their physical surroundings. In France, Roger Cans remarks (1992: 218), people "always favor a nature that has been domesticated, subdued, divided up." Even Jean Jacob, the author of the most comprehensive French-language study of ecological thought, calls his country "the land of artifice" and uses this notion to explain how hard the ecology movement has had to struggle to gain credit there (Jacob 1999: 310).[4] Anyone who has contemplated the regimentally aligned trees and the geometrically sculpted greenery of the Versailles gardens may find it difficult to suppress the suspicion that ambient Cartesianism makes France barren ground for the cultivation of environmental concern.[5]

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That suspicion is both unjustified and misleading. It is unjustified because since the 1950s the French have generated an abundant and original literature of environmental political thought. Comparable in its intellectual sweep to the range of green theory available in English, French ecologism deserves attention that it has rarely gotten. That is why I began a book that would serve as a bridge between versions of green political theory in two linguistic communities. French green thinkers such as Edgar Morin, Michel Serres, Bruno Latour, Alain Lipietz, and Denis Duclos merit a place in the otherwise robust and international-minded discussions of the aims of environmental politics.

As I proceeded in my study, however, it became clear that more was at stake than simply widening the field ecological discourse. Neglect of French ecologism, I came to conclude, misleads us by skewing understandings of environmental thought in general. Omitting the French from general accounts of ecologism reinforces the impression that debate over the roles of "humanity" and "nature" in instituting environmental values is the central controversy in the field of green political theory.

This debate gets played out through a key distinction that finds its way into almost every philosophical discussion of ecologism written in English. "Anthropocentric" ecologists contend that whatever reasons we have to protect our nonhuman surroundings derive ultimately from their role in fulfilling human interests and values. Calling the contrasting position "ecocentric," Robyn Eckersley (1992: 26) defends an ecologism that recognizes, in addition to human values, "the moral standing of the nonhuman world" and "seeks to ensure that it, too, may unfold in many diverse ways." In the English-language literature of environmental political thought, hundreds of books and articles discuss this distinction. They offer dozens of subtle definitional variations and develop innumerable arguments for the superiority of one perspective or the other.

The contrast with environmental discourse in France is stark. There, debate between nonanthropocentrists and anthropocentrists is peripheral at best. In fact, no French scholar makes this distinction central to an understanding of the varieties of *French* ecologism. Luc Ferry's *Le nouvel ordre écologique* (1992a) only seems to be an exception. Although Ferry's critique of environmental philosophy depends on the anthropocentric/nonanthropocentric distinction, most of his alarm is directed at English-speaking ecolo-

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gists, including Christopher Stone, George Sessions, and Aldo Leopold. His attempts to read a couple of French ecologists in light of "Anglo-Saxon" ecologism goes seriously awry,[6] for France has been a seedbed for green theories that, in varying ways, elude the categories of English-speaking environmental thought. The question raised by studying French ecologism is not who has the advantage in debates between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric ecologists. The question is whether that debate really has to be the leitmotif of ecologism at all.

In this book I argue that the absence of this debate in France has kept the discursive field open for different strategies of *noncentered* ecological argument. Rather than feel bound to situate their views in relation to some theory of the ultimate ground of environmental values, French green theorists tend to study how conceptions of nature and human identity intertwine. They elaborate green thought more often by *reciprocally problematizing* "nature" and "humanity" than by refining the distinction between them. In this sense French ecologists could be said to posit *divided natures*. They maintain that what "nature" is shifts in relation to epistemological, social, and political-ethical changes. Noncentered ecologists see "nature" as multiform and as inextricably confounded with humanity's projects and self-understandings. They are attentive to how the very meaning of being human is tied up with our constructions of "nature." For that reason, they believe, political ecology can pursue its tasks lucidly only by becoming aware of the processes linking "nature" and human identity. Noncentered green theorists forswear rhetoric that reifies nature and fashion a program whose content is as much "social" as "natural," all the while seeking to protect sources of experience that enrich human identity.

Typically, French theorists express their conception of political ecology as a form of renewed humanism. More particularly, I shall argue, they draw on traditions of *skeptical* humanism. Ecological humanism, therefore, is quite distinct from the epistemologically confident anthropocentric humanism that English-speaking ecologists eye with scorn—a tradition that exalts humanity and gives it unquestioned supremacy over nature. French ecologists draw on indigenous intellectual traditions associated with Montaigne, Pascal, and Rousseau. They use those traditions to question facile assumptions about human "nature" and thereby to tone down the hubris of Cartesian humanism. Simultaneously, skeptics challenge the adequacy

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of every apprehension of the "nature" of the external world. Humanism becomes ecological when it opens itself to reflecting on how nature and humanity are mutually defining.

Theory and Linguistic Communities

In recent years a few scholars have argued for the need to pay more attention to cultural distinctions in the way environmental issues are framed in different countries (Fischer and Hajer 1999; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997). This book is a contribution to such a project, with a caveat: it cultivates an ear for particular accents in the works of ecological political theorists, more than in expressions of popular culture or in the attitudes of environmental activists.

Why highlight cultural particularity in green theory? On the face of it, the more conventional approach seems reasonable. Nature, after all, is nature. It seems to be of no consequence whether environmental damage occurs in New York, in Nantes, or in Nairobi. The considerations brought to bear in evaluating the damage should be everywhere the same.

But matters are not so simple. To live in a distinct linguistic community is to inhabit a "lifeworld" (defined by Jürgen Habermas as "a culturally transmitted and linguistically organized reservoir of meaning patterns"[7]). And the contents of those cultural reservoirs can differ significantly. It is not hard to see how this can happen. Theorists in English-speaking countries frequently read one another's books; they critique one another in environmental journals; they meet in conferences; they exchange academic positions. A glance at the bibliography of any of the surveys of ecological thinkers reveals that the works of Americans, Britons, Australians, and Canadians cross one another's borders with barely a nod from an intellectual customs inspector. Yet works of French ecologism somehow have gotten lost in transit. To a certain extent, the converse is also true in France, where, although books by Barry Commoner and James Lovelock can be found in translation, the whole literature of English-language environmental ethics remains the province of specialized scholars (Larrère 1997) and has little resonance among French green theorists more generally.

As a result of such differences in the diffusion of ideas, the conversations of entire linguistic communities take on distinctive characters. Over the

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years, the ease with which conversation passes between thinkers allows certain modes of argument, a range of terminology, a sense of exemplary problems, and unintended partialities to build up almost imperceptibly. Theorists take for granted areas of government activity (or inactivity) that would be controversial in other communities, and ecologists absorb attitudes toward "wilderness" or "pollution" that are common among their compatriots but unusual in other nations. Even those who disagree with the prevailing assumptions find it necessary to construct their arguments to fit the contours of the debate. As a result, their contrarian views can end up being formatted by the very ideas they reject.

In effect, the prevalence of certain concepts and modes of reasoning within a linguistic community creates a *rhetorical field*. A rhetorical field favors pushing inquiry into certain territories while leaving others relatively unexplored.

I do not use the contrasting expressions "English-speaking ecologism" and "French ecologism" merely to call attention to the national or cultural origins of different thinkers. Much more than that, I use them to capture the sense in which a shared language has become the basis for broadly shared assumptions and patterns of environmental discourse in two linguistic communities.

The promise of doing systematic, cross-community comparisons of theory lies in its potential to expose widely accepted assumptions and to allow them to be challenged. I take seriously the idea that cultures are incubators and preserves of difference. As I see it, the purpose of detecting difference is not to sanction relativism. Difference invites comparison and, potentially, correction. Since the conversation of each linguistic community is incomplete in relation to a wider universe of discourse, each community stands to improve its understanding of issues by deliberately contrasting their fundamental ideas.

Cross-cultural comparisons have their dangers, too. They involve broad generalizations that can deteriorate into stereotypes. The risks may seem especially high when an argument throws together ideas from many different countries. Some may wonder whether British ecologism is entirely of a piece with its American cousin. Some may also suspect that what I call "French ecologism" really describes green thought coming out of *most* of the countries in Europe, where the environment has been altered by steady

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human habitation for thousands of years.[8] Moreover, generalizing about an intellectual phenomenon such as ecologism, which everywhere divides into numerous schools of thought, can easily run roughshod over different thinkers' carefully drawn distinctions. I try to minimize these dangers in several ways.

First, I try to approach the works of many significant thinkers closely enough to give a sense of their argumentative texture. This book is intended more as a work of political and social theory than as a work of intellectual history.[9] In each chapter I identify a number of philosophically related French thinkers who have written extensively and perceptively on environmental issues. In many cases, I also try to locate their arguments in the context of their larger oeuvre. Then, to develop comparisons at an individualized level, I examine French ideas in relation to the ideas of particular English-speaking green thinkers. At this level, there can be no question of claiming that these thinkers are representative of anything other than their own thought. Still, I have chosen them from a wide range of tendencies—including deep ecologism, social ecologism, liberal environmentalism, bioregionalism, and ecosocialism—in order to strengthen my contention that the typical argumentative patterns of English-speaking ecologism show up in unexpected ways in different theories.

In view of the vast number of English-speaking ecologists, however, it is impossible to review even a substantial fraction of them in a comparative work of this sort. Thus, I supplement my individualized investigations with broader assessments drawn from the synoptic works of scholars of green thought—Andrew Dobson, Robyn Eckersley, Brian Baxter, Tim Hayward, and John Barry, among others. Those authors review hundreds of books and articles (with very few exceptions, written in English) and themselves sympathize with different tendencies within English-speaking ecologism. Thus, it seems likely that any themes that are common to all of them can be regarded as widespread features of English-speaking ecologism.

Third, I take care to qualify my points in ways that respect other views without compromising the generality of my argument. Throughout the book I will call attention to claims coming out of one linguistic community that are reminiscent of those found in the other. I do not want to claim that English-speaking ecologists *without exception* are committed to centered theorizing. Nor am I saying that "French" perspectives can *never* be found

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outside of France. My thesis pertains to patterns of argument in two linguistic communities taken as wholes. These are patterns that usually pass unperceived, precisely because speakers *use* discursive styles rather than treat them as objects of study. Even where an idea typical of one community finds its way into the discourse of another, it is often inflected in unfamiliar ways, subtly reshaped, or pressed into the service of arguments that alter its significance. It is precisely because we can learn to discern these shifts in meaning that cross-community comparisons are worthwhile.

Acknowledging difference, of course, is not to equated with perceiving truth. I do not contend that France's contributions to ecologism are superior to anything written in English, and I often criticize French ecologists. I do hope to demonstrate, however, that French ecologists furnish insights and conceptual materials for alternative perspectives that could help extricate green theorists from endless debates over the real "center" of nature's value. Why might it be important to do so? I would suggest two reasons, one philosophical, the other practical.

Debating Centers

Centered ecologisms have the philosophical disadvantage of minimizing the important truth that the meaning of "nature" is highly variable and value laden. For some writers, "nature" refers to the conditions for the physical and psychological health of human beings. Environmental politics may be about enhancing the quality of urban life by reducing air pollution and adding green spaces. For pastoralists, it is not the city but the relative calm of rural life—its seasonal regularity and its proximity to organic realities of life and death—that constitutes a "natural" setting for human flourishing. For other writers, the cultivated countryside is hardly nature at all. Real nature is wilderness. It is a world untrammeled by man, mysterious, sometimes threatening, exhilarating in its beauty and awe-inspiring in its spontaneous, life-perpetuating complexity. From the point of view of scientific systems ecologists, "nature" is a vast, evolving, nested set of mutually supporting homeostatic systems. Avoiding disruption of Earth's life-sustaining systems has more to do with controlling the emission of greenhouse gases or protecting the continental shelves than with controlling urban pollution, preserving the countryside, or setting aside wilderness areas.

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Is only one of these natures real? Are the others secondary or epiphenomenal? Is pastoralism, for example, an understandable but ultimately retrograde expression of nostalgia—a holdover from a pre-industrial world, destined to die away as scientific systems ecology enables humanity to subject every part of the planet to rational control?

My position is that the array of natures expresses profound divisions in our apprehension and evaluation of reality. Each perspective is a different way of seeing what "nature" *is*. In addition, values insinuate themselves into each view. One nature seems to suppose that satisfying material interests is the pre-eminent need of an organic being. Another regards spiritual expression as more fundamental. Some natures presume that a life lived in accordance with truth requires devotion to scientific norms of objectivity. Others see truth in more poetic intuitions of wholeness and interconnectedness. Put this way, it also becomes evident that our understandings of nature correlate to equally divided views of our own subjectivity. Our views of nature imply answers—often contradictory answers—to questions about the very meaning of life.

To enter the centered environmental debate, one must pay the price of admission. The characteristic preoccupations of both sides divert us from seeing what is problematic in both nature and humanity. That is, by assuming that one notion of nature is fundamental and then focusing on whether that nature contains qualities sufficient to elicit respect by human beings, theorists tend to suspend inquiry into the identities of both parties to the relationship. Anthropocentrists and nonanthropocentrists assume that the division between humans and their nonhuman environment is ontologically fixed and can serve as the foundation of ecological reasoning. In the process, they discount the significance of natures that lie outside their field of theoretical vision.

Were theorists not wedded to the idea of ecological centering, they might feel less constrained to devise a theory of value that fixes the traits of genuine environmental concern a priori. What might most impress them is the *irreducible* diversity of "natures"—both nonhuman and human—implicit in environmental practice.

Noncentered ecologists are in a better position to see that the varieties of protests against environmental degradation derive their unity not from a theory of value but from the fact that they all see "nature" as a *problem*.

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And that, in itself, is an epochal shift. Serge Moscovici, one of France's earliest and most perceptive green theorists, sets the tone for his own ecumenical ecologism with the following observation (1990: 7):

> . . . the great new concern of our epoch is the question of nature. It is a question that catches us out, both when we consider our given conditions of existence from the point of view of the species, and when we reflect that science and technology have transformed us into one material force among others. . . . In short, the state of nature is not now just an economy of things; it has become, at the same time, the work of human beings. The fact is that we are dealing with a new nature.

Moscovici holds that never before has "nature," in so many guises, been so *consistently* and so *self-consciously* a focus of *critical* engagement. A violated nature has become an essential factor in multiple expressions of a world gone wrong.

The existence of a "new nature" in this sense is sufficient to challenge age-old traditions of political theory, even if no single nature is granted ontological primacy. Traditionally, the concept of "nature" has been central to debates about what it means to have a well-ordered society. Ancients argued about the perfection of man's "natural" virtues in the ideal city; modern liberals asserted that just societies preserve "natural" rights. But those natures were fixed and supposedly knowable. Even when "nature" obviously changed—as in modernity's great shift away from teleological and toward causational understandings of "natural" processes—a new, *true* nature was summoned to supplant an old and inadequate one. Centered ecologisms, I shall argue, for all that they challenge earlier understandings of nature's ability to absorb human-induced changes, continue this tradition.

Noncentered ecological theories of the sort commonly encountered in France, on the other hand, problematize the very founding concepts out of which environmental concern emerges. For Denis Duclos (1996: 301), "ecology is at the heart of today's philosophical, anthropological and political problems because it sends us back . . . to the question of the limits of human practices." Crucially, Duclos contends not that ecologism defends a determinate "nature" but that its various claims all raise the idea that there are goods we can never secure by continually extending our control over our surroundings. "Nature" has become the vehicle for expressing a vast array of worries about the quality of life. Environmental philosophies shortchange this truth when they force us to choose one nature rather than another.

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Centered theories also have a practical, political drawback. Polarizing humanity and nature, they create obstacles to imagining a political program that combines typically "environmental" concerns (e.g., preserving species and rainforest ecosystems) and sensitivity to broader issues such as social justice and the meaningfulness of everyday life (e.g., redistributing work, democratizing environmental risk decisions, improving life expectancy in developing countries).

Robert Goodin (1992) clarifies how tensions can arise between policies that often coexist in green parties' programs. Goodin advocates one version of nonanthropocentrism. He is fully aware that the programs of the green movement have included seemingly human-centered demands to make society more democratic, egalitarian, pacifistic, and multicultural. Seeing no way to derive such ideals from his theory of nature's intrinsic value, he maintains that their appropriateness as components of a green platform must depend, contingently, on whether or not they contribute to "producing good green consequences" (ibid.: 16). Asserting "nature's intrinsic value" thus puts various human values in a strictly subordinate position. Goodin draws the implication of that subordination: if participatory democracy or a commitment to nonviolence turns out to impede the achievement of green goals, it is the former that must give way, not the latter (ibid.: 120). Nonanthropocentrism can validate principled refusals to compromise nature's value.

Anthropocentric environmentalists tend to be more pragmatic. They are often more willing to seek a balance among goods, environmental or otherwise, insofar as all goods are weighed on the scales of human interest. Considerations of democratic participation, social inclusiveness, and cultural diversity mix with environmental concern. Each consideration is given its due out of respect for justice. Nonanthropocentrists remain dissatisfied. They suspect that people keep slipping their opposable thumbs on the scales of justice. They worry that the very process of balancing values leaves environmental goods too vulnerable to continued exploitation.

Such theoretical divisions lead all too easily to bitter rivalries among those who might otherwise have substantial grounds for political cooperation. So severe have strains within centered ecological theory become that they motivated Brian Norton to dedicate a whole book to working "toward unity among environmentalists" (1991). Significantly, however, Norton

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cannot end his book without revisiting the philosophical question that causes such disunity. At that point (p. 255), he decides for anthropocentrism! Thus, it may be that the only way to avoid lapsing into centered ecological debate is to take a different philosophical path from the start. That is what French ecologists do.

The prevalence of noncentered ecologisms in France stands to alter our understanding of ecological discourse in three ways.

First, within the writings of a single theorist, claims get developed independent of their potential contribution to either nonanthropocentrism or anthropocentrism. This is not to deny that readers will encounter green claims that are familiar to them from the literature of English-speaking ecologism (e.g., demands for holistic thinking and environmental justice and for caution in the application of technology). The difference arises in the way such claims get framed theoretically. As I shall show at many junctures, English-speaking ecologists tend to press the most varied observations—about ecological systems, about animal behavior, about the social construction of nature, about environmental justice—into the service of one value center or another. The French help us to see how familiar ideas can lead in new directions when they are no longer under this rhetorical pressure.

Second, exchanges between two or more French theorists suggest how ecological debate proceeds when the philosophical reach and consistency of a theory of environmental value are not the main issues. Noncentered thinkers challenge one another to confront the significance of their conceptions of nature and humanity for the distribution of power in a community. Every conception of nature, it turns out, has implications for how control is exercised over nonhumans and humans alike. Noncentered theorists are especially adept at teasing out such implications and subjecting them to critical scrutiny.

Third, with regard to the whole field of green political theory, adding French thinkers into the mix may rebalance our perception of its dominant controversies. Their presence may help dispel Goodin's (1992: 8) impression that "the insight that drives, most powerfully, the current wave of environmental concern" is that nature has "an independent role in the creation of value." A proper acknowledgement of French ecologism might help reorient green political theory generally away from interminable debates in environmental ethics. It might lend credence to a claim only occasionally

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heard and even less often heeded in the English-speaking world: that the future of green theory lies beyond anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism.

The Varieties of French Ecologism

French ecologism, like its English-speaking counterpart, is far from homogeneous. Green political thought splits into a number of variants that share philosophical kinship. Although no two taxonomies are identical, English-speaking scholars typically break green thinkers down into categories such as deep ecology, social ecology, ecosocialism, ecofeminism, postmodern ecology, and bioregionalism. Only one of these categories—ecosocialism—fits the French case neatly. French ecologism is best understood in terms of different ways of thinking about divided natures.

Each distinctive strain of French ecologism consists of a number of thinkers who share two things. First, by virtue of agreeing on certain methodological and ethical premises, they offer a common interpretation (broadly speaking) of the reciprocal implication of humanity and nature. One group sees it as a historical process of cumulative technological and social transformations; another points to conceptual crossovers between scientific and humanistic understandings of nature; another explores the psychological impulses driving different ways of constructing the nature/culture divide. Second, the distinct strains correlate to shared visions of the political implications of ecologism. Personalists, for example, believe that ecological ends are best served when political power is widely dispersed. Politicizers, in contrast, imply that overcoming environmental degradation requires gathering representatives of humans and nonhumans together in a more centralized legislative assembly. The diverse strains of French ecologism testify to a range of conceptual possibilities that open up when theorists ponder environmental challenges independent of a commitment to the center of value.

The French owe their independence to the peculiar intellectual and social circumstances of the birth of political ecology on their soil. Chapter 1 traces the origins of a rhetorical field in which noncentered ecologisms would develop. In a country without a strong tradition of protecting wilderness, environmental concern developed relatively late and in the context of an

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extremely wide-ranging movement of political contestation. As a result, the French ecology *movement* developed a program that addresses "social" issues as much as "environmental" ones. The early leaders of the movement asserted a connection between the "natural" and the "social"; however, they sometimes left the impression that they saw a contradiction. French green *theorists* have taken it as their task to devise a "humanistic" ecologism that avoids this potential dualism.

Each subsequent chapter pits a philosophically related group of French thinkers against certain English-speaking counterparts to show how reconceiving the *connection* between humanity and the world promotes an ecologism that stays attentive to divided natures.

This sorting of thinkers into varieties begins in chapter 2, which investigates the nature of "nature" as developed in the work of Serge Moscovici, France's most prescient green thinker. Moscovici's work exemplifies an ecologism in which "nature" and "society" get constituted historically out of human interaction with the material world. I distinguish such an orientation from one that defends nature's intrinsic value. Proponents of nature's intrinsic value are particularly hard pressed to explain how human beings can avoid imposing human interests on "nature" even as they seek to protect it. Moscovici's viewpoint differs from anthropocentric ecologism, too, because of his insistence that human subjectivity and nature are interdependent. Noncentered ecologists, I argue, displace the puzzles of centered theory by skeptically questioning both the unity of human reason and the knowability of the external world.

Chapter 3 takes up the pervasive influence of systems theory in French ecologism. Systems theory is a holistic approach to the study of goal-oriented entities: cybernetic machines, living organisms, entire ecosystems. Systems ecology helps anthropocentrists understand how far humanity can go in using ecosystems before thresholds are crossed that send them into decline. Nonanthropocentrists sometimes argue that systems theory does far more than identify nature's limits: that it grounds a new ontology of nature's intrinsic value. French theorists, in contrast with centered theorists, use systems theory more to unify understanding in the natural and social sciences and, at their most ambitious, to express a new theory of the historical development of ecological rationality. These efforts culminate in the monumental oeuvre of Edgar Morin, who tempers other French thinkers'

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enthusiasm for systems theory with the realization that even the most sophisticated cybernetic models of ecosystems belong in an open-ended series of ways of knowing nature.

"Politicizing" theorists, including Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, are the topic of chapter 4. Such theorists contend that political concepts (e.g., law, power, hierarchy) run through our conceptions of nature and technological risk. For these thinkers, humanistic disciplines such as literary studies, philology, and philosophy shed light on the representations of nature that structure environmental thought. Theorists of this type end up calling for more deliberative ways of setting up interactions between human communities and their environments. At times this approach appears "postmodern," but postmoderns who assert the utter incommensurability of values tend to relativize the very scientific knowledge that sparks much environmental concern. Latour and Serres, in contrast, exemplify an ecologism that questions science skeptically but steers shy of depicting it as only a form of knowledge/power.

Chapter 5 takes up applications of "personalism" to political ecology. Personalism is a spiritually oriented philosophy that was most powerful in the 1930s, when it was espoused by Emmanuel Mounier. Mounier's critique of modernity emphasized the dehumanizing effects of advanced technologies and the homogenizing consequences of bureaucratic social organization. The philosophical contribution of personalist ecologism is to suggest that the multiple objects of environmental concern designated by the term "nature" (e.g., pristine landscapes, healthful consumer products, complex ensembles of spontaneously evolving phenomena) correlate to different aspirations of the human personality. Denis Duclos's studies of how "nature" appears in relation to the passionate, decentered individual offer the most compelling updating of secularized personalist insights.

"Ecosocialism," the topic of chapter 6, is a strain of environmental theory common to France and the English-speaking world. Ecosocialists protest the relations among resource depletion, alienating work conditions, and the unjust treatment of Third World countries. Some ecosocialists have created unresolved tensions between centralizing and decentralizing approaches to ecological reform; others have championed relativistic theories that fail to translate the moral urgency of environmental concern. In recent years, however, a new strain of ecosocial discourse has taken shape

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in France. Social activists such as Jean-Paul Deléage and Alain Lipietz favor a contractual ecosocialism in which ideals of equality and autonomy are conceived as the fundamental values of ecological negotiators who seek to win the assent of diverse groups to a social order that is stable, distributively just, and environmentally responsible. English-speaking ecosocialists typically get drawn into debates over nonanthropocentrism. French contractual ecosocialists are freer to explore how human appreciation of nature is mediated by historically evolving modes of labor.

Chapter 7 situates ecologism in relation to liberal thought. Liberals sometimes worry that an ecologistic worldview is inherently undemocratic. They charge that ecologists assume that what is natural is good, thereby denying human communities the right to set their own purposes. Liberals contend that the distinction between nature and culture must be preserved if human freedom is not to be endangered. Too often, however, French liberals and French ecologists have allowed their debate to be stalled by hyperbolic mischaracterizations. The liberals have ignored efforts to devise a noncentered ecologism; the ecologists have not always faced up to the liberals' contention that humane and democratic theorizing cannot avoid centering on human reason. In chapter 8 I draw together the arguments for a more conclusive debate. Even in noncentered ecologisms, I maintain, it is possible to detect traces of some sort of rationality that contradicts the language of contingency and arbitrariness preferred by certain French theorists. I show how Habermas's theory of discursive ethics might account for those traces without requiring ecologists to abandon their insights about the reciprocal implications of "humanity" and "nature." At the same time, I argue, France's skeptical humanist heritage supplements the theory of communicative competence. It offers up an ideal of the political ecologist as a crossbreed whose ability to move among the worlds of scientific, humanistic, and social inquiry helps keep rationality balanced by insisting on the reality of divided natures.

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