Contemporary Wilderness Philosophy
From Resourcism to Deep Ecology

Men increase; country suffers. Though I sign up with organizations that oppose the process, I sign without great hope. . . . Islands of wildlife and native flora may be saved, as they should be, but the big, sloppy, rich, teeming spraddle will go on. It always has.
—John Graves, Goodbye to a River

There is no built-in mechanism restraining the human proclivity to use, and expand the use, of natural substances—this has to be consciously developed under special circumstances. In all other cases, the historical record is one of progressive expansion of resource conversion and growing impact on Nature.
—John W. Bennett, The Ecological Transition

Contemporary ideas of wilderness are implicit within activities as diverse as the legislative and judicial decision-making processes, policy implementation, and philosophical speculation. Ideally, some distinct idea might cut across this array of subjects and unite them along a continuum, much as the principles of liberal democracy unite diverse elements of the body politic. As Samuel Hays observes, environmentally oriented inquiry has not led “to a single system of thought such as social theorists might prefer, and it would be difficult to reduce its varied strands to a single pattern.” Typically, however, those concerned with the idea of wilderness offer either a stipulative definition that suits their purposes or, more characteristically among scholars, a potpourri of positions. This second approach, though it sometimes achieves a near exhaustive listing, suffers from a lack of rigor and clarity. The idea of wilderness is whatever anyone or group cares to think.

Although a definitive idea of wilderness does not exist, a reflective
synthesis emerging from a diversity of inconsistent positions might be possible. At a minimum, such a synthesis would transcend the impasse between the resource management or conservationist approach to wild nature and the preservationist school of thought and practice. Of course, the possibility as well as the methodology of such a philosophical reconciliation is at issue. Aldo Leopold’s struggle to develop a land ethic belies the dream of an easy passage from resourcism to preservationism and beyond. Even more complicated are the issues involved in articulating a wilderness philosophy that brings the principles of foundational ecology into an affirmative and pragmatic relationship with the ongoing cultural stream. Can such revolutionary paradigms for thought and action be effectively related to present-day intellectual, political, and economic process?  

The mainstream of wilderness philosophy is in some respects a house divided along the same lines as John Muir and Gifford Pinchot. The battle between contending forces, generally but imprecisely characterized as “conservationists” and “preservationists,” yet rages, perhaps reflecting the uncertainty of the past century and a half of American history. By attending briefly to the historical grounds that underlie contemporaneous wilderness philosophies, then at least the lines of battle among competing ideas can be drawn. The obvious place to begin is with Thomas Robert Malthus, who shocked the world in the early nineteenth century by arguing that population would increase geometrically and the means of production only arithmetically. Although Europeans were concerned, his predictions seemed not to apply to the United States, since the American economy rapidly converted wilderness into means for the good life. Two bombshells followed Malthus, however. Darwin’s *Origin of Species* showed that humankind did not stand above the natural world but was part of the web of life. Soon afterward George Marsh’s *Earth as Modified by Human Action* warned of the “dangers of imprudence and the necessity of caution in all operations which, on a large scale, interfere with the spontaneous arrangements of the organic or the inorganic world.” Suddenly an awareness dawned that human activity, however long established and well intentioned, could destroy environmental equilibrium.

As the nineteenth century ended many Americans, including members of the socioeconomic elite, became conscious of these discoveries, realizing that the supply of natural resources was finite. These ideas took hold in the corridors of power. In 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt organized the Governors’ Conference, an event sometimes cited as dating the emergence of conservation as a public philosophy influential at the highest levels. In a letter to the governors, Roosevelt wrote that “it is evident
the abundant natural resources on which the welfare of this nation rests are becoming depleted, and in not a few cases, are already exhausted." The conference participants convened with a sense of Malthusian urgency, although the question before them was practical, not philosophical. How could America more efficiently manage its natural resources? They concluded that fundamental changes were needed in the American political economy since laissez-faire economics promised environmental and, ultimately, economic ruin.

Many dramatic changes in the way our nation conceptualizes and approaches nature have followed in the wake of the Governors’ Conference. Propelled by the ideology of resource conservation, the federal government has assumed an ever larger role in managing nature. World War I hastened the move toward the rationalization and scientific management of natural resources. New inventions and technologies—especially the automobile—also had a dramatic impact. The automobile had a spreading economic effect: cars required roads and fuel, steel and rubber, and businesses to sell, repair, finance, and insure them. Wave after wave of consumer products—from appliances and cars to televisions and washing machines—helped propel America, in spite of temporary recessions and wartime disruptions, on an upward spiral of socioeconomic growth. Continued increases in population also contributed to increases in demand, intensifying the effort to manage nature. And the economic boom after World War II led to an enormous escalation in demand for wilderness resources (land and game) to provide recreational outlets for increasingly well-to-do middle and upper classes. Growing numbers of people with discretionary income and leisure time turned to the outdoors for alpine and cross-country skiing, white-water rafting, rock climbing, backpacking, motorized touring and camping, hunting, and fishing. The federal government responded with far-reaching public works, managing the nation’s parks and forests, building alpine highways and trails, providing water and electric hookups for campsites, restaurants, bathrooms, and even so-called wilderness exhibits. Yet, given the evolving system, the fundamental challenge of the twentieth century has been to provide natural resources to fuel socioeconomic growth.

In this century the resource management approach has dominated the conceptualization and management of nature. The Governors’ Conference perhaps marked the formal emergence of resourcism as governmental policy; two world wars, rapid socioeconomic growth, and deterioration of environmental quality further legitimated federal action and reinforced the conservationist philosophy. Resource conservation has
grown beyond concern for a mere husbanding and efficient use of non-renewable resources to include both environmental quality and renewable resources. Immense federal bureaucracies (the National Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service) support this rationale; private sector contractors have carried out the plans of these bureaucracies; and university programs that provide the technicians to administer public policy and manage wild nature have flourished. In short, there has grown and developed in America a resource management elite consisting of academic theoreticians, politician-administrators, and technicians who attempt to impose cultural purpose on and thereby control nature. The tools of the resource conservationist vary, ranging from the concrete and instrumental, such as bulldozers and dynamite used to build dams, to the abstract and theoretical, as in cost-benefit analysis used to account for such expenditures of public funds. Cost-benefit analysis is a theoretical bulldozer, clearing the way through thickets of ethical and legal questions, ostensibly by justifying resource conservation in terms of the public interest and economic efficiency.

Resourcism, though it enjoys cognitive hegemony, has not gone unchallenged. Critics have been abundant, and many resource conservation projects proposed in the name of the public’s interest have been vigorously opposed, both through direct political action and acts of civil disobedience. However beleaguered, the record shows that the American wilderness would probably be worse off today had the conservation movement not appeared. Given the inherent economic and technological dynamism of American society, and a basically unfettered ambit of opportunity for the entrepreneur, what is remarkable is that we have such things as air and water quality standards and that any significant wilderness areas yet remain. Whatever the theoretical insufficiencies of resourcism, it has afforded wild nature some protection. Earl Finbar Murphy’s perceptive study, Governing Nature, provides a useful vantage point on the issues before us: the facts of human metabolism and culture must be confronted. Life for any species is possible only in relation to an environment on which its continued existence depends. All species, except one, live in a naturally determined relationship with their environment, subject to change only through the workings of evolutionary process. The human animal, in distinction from all others, interposes culture between itself and environment, which is to say that Homo sapiens is a culture-dwelling animal. Given the cultural status quo—the multitudes that must be fed, clothed, and sheltered—and a commitment to maintenance of the present liberal-
democratic value system, then nature must be managed: there is no apparent alternative. By all indications the question is not whether advanced industrial society can choose to govern nature but how to do so.

Ironically, Marsh himself criticized the rationale underlying resource management. He wrote that "the equation of animal and vegetable life is too complicated a problem for human intelligence to solve, and we can never know how wide a circle of disturbance we produce in the harmonies of nature when we throw the smallest pebble into the ocean of organic life." Contemporary ecological studies appear to support Marsh's judgment, for not only are things environmental complicated, they are more complicated than they seem; and yet manage we must. Whatever an individual's idea of wilderness, mere stockpile of natural resources or Mother Earth, the mass of humanity so fundamentally alters nature that no laissez-faire position is rational. Neither is a romantic retreat to some contemporary Walden Pond, like Alaska or Montana, anything more than a temporary escape from the looming reality of advanced industrial society. Rather the conservation question arises at a more fundamental level: the issue involves the theorie upon which praxis will rest—the idea of wilderness itself. Whatever this idea, the conceptual difference will be reflected in practice.

To the modern mind such a contention seems a priori nonsensical. Any talk of wilderness, of unpolluted blue sky and noble savages living in harmony with nature, seems mere nostalgia for a way of life gone forever, a romantic belief that threatens the advance of modern civilization. In other words, the idea of wilderness represents primitivism. Yet the postmodern mind believes—or at least the posthistoric primitivist believes—that wildness is not just the preservation of the world, it is the world—self-organizing order out of chaos. Accordingly, our study has reached a critical juncture, confronted with a choice between two paradigms: Modernism and Postmodernism. These alternatives are themselves entangled in that natural and cultural stream which is history.

Here we shall hold in abeyance any assumption about the ultimate meaning of historical process. We refuse the ideas that history is either sound and fury signifying nothing, a position grounded in scientism and mechanistic materialism, or headed toward some Absolute or Omega, a position rooted in that peculiar Western fusion of Attica and Jerusalem. We accept the postmodernist position that we stand within a hermeneutic circle and that by examining the idea of wilderness we are also coming to understand the course of natural and cultural history that enframes human life. Such a study necessarily begins with resourcism—the conservationist
ideology that is supported by and therefore entirely consistent with Modernism; follows the rise of preservationism and other competing ideas of wilderness that, though inconsistent in some ways with Modernism, do not escape its grasp; and concludes (in chapter 10) with a conjectural articulation of a postmodern idea of wilderness. What the challenges to resourcism reveal most clearly are the many anomalies of Modernism. These puzzles warrant the conjecture that we are probably entering a revolutionary period of theorie and praxis. Here Glacken’s penetrating study again bears on ours, for his Traces on the Rhodian Shore concludes just as the second scientific revolution—engendered by Darwin and Clausius—began. As Anna Bramwell notes, he “decided to end his study at 1800, because after that date a qualitative change began in man’s view of his place in the world. . . . ‘What follows is of an entirely different order, influenced by the theory of evolution, specialization in the attainment of knowledge, acceleration in the transformation of nature.’”

Resourcism

The resource conservation idea of wilderness has a familiar appearance, since its roots lie in the Neolithic revolution. Unquestionably the dominant idea of wilderness, resourcism is the child of Western history, reflecting the intense homocentrism of Judeo-Christianity and the alchemy of Modernism. Neil Evernden contends that “resourcism is a kind of modern religion which casts all of creation into categories of utility.” From another vantage point, resourcism represents the transformation of modern people from Homo religiosus to Homo oeconomicus. Since resource conservation is the visible facade of a largely unquestioned and therefore absolute worldview, it short-circuits the potentially subversive power of foundational ecology. Evernden points out that ecology has in this century become little more than “a branch of classical physics, in spirit if not in exact content. The results of ecological research are therefore predetermined in some measure. Starting with mechanistic assumptions, it can only discover machines. Consequently it will always seem reasonable to assume that we can manipulate the ecomachine.” Here we have reached the same impasse that Aldo Leopold reached in his life and thought: the modern mind is confronted with a choice, whether that choice is recognized, between foundational and functional ecology (see table 4).

From a resource conservation perspective the wilderness in whatever guise is effectively reduced to an environment, a stockpile of matter-energy to be transformed through technology, itself guided by the market and
Table 4. Defining Characteristics of Resourcism

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<th>RESOURCE CONSERVATIONISTS believe that</th>
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<td>- natural systems are no more than collections of parts</td>
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<td>- Homo sapiens is related externally to the ecomachine</td>
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<td>- the ecomachine can be engineered to produce desired outcomes and prevent undesired consequences</td>
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<td>- the market objectively determines the worth and value of all things, cultural and natural</td>
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<td>- the national and per capita income accounts are the ideal measure of societal well-being</td>
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<td>- progress can be determined according to the utilitarian formula of the greatest good for the greatest number</td>
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theoretical economics, into the wants and needs of the consumer culture. The new industrial state would not be possible without science, for such knowledge of nature makes causal control possible. Humankind can produce desired effects, as in a technologically based agriculture that increases crop yield by hybridizing plant stocks and fertilization, and prevent undesired events, by using pesticides and herbicides to eliminate “pests” and “weeds.” Utilitarianism is the sacrosanct ethical justification for the industrial democratic state, since the good society is believed to be that which produces the greatest good for the greatest number.19 The “good” is itself reduced to a Benthamite calculus of pleasure, consumption is equated with pleasure, and high rates of economic throughput are thus equated with the good life.20 Mutatis mutandis, the better able each individual to achieve similar pleasure, the better off society. Therein, as we have seen, lies the great genius of The Wealth of Nations, for an “invisible hand” orchestrates the actions of all these selfish, pleasure-seeking consumers into the “good society.”

Although resourcism is a secular ideology, in some ways it mirrors Judeo-Christian traditions, especially in its anthropocentric outlook. Nature and natural entities are not sacred, have no end or justification in and of themselves, and exist solely as means in terms of which human ends might be fulfilled. Resourcism is bereft of any archaic sense of wilderness as the Mother Earth, of any Romantic sense of the connection of human purpose with nature, and of any Leopoldian sense of value in the wilderness. Human life takes place outside nature, and the boundaries between wilderness and civilization are definite. The value of wild nature is construed strictly in economic terms, either directly through operation of the
market according to "laws" of supply and demand, or indirectly through cost-benefit analysis.\textsuperscript{21} The market makes a mountain meadow worth more as a ski development and resort, complete with condominiums and shopping centers, than as a wilderness preserve; a forest preserve worth more as timber than as a home for wildlife; a mountain worth more as oil extracted from its shale than as a noble rock promontory thrusting into the sky. Cost-benefit analysis, a function of a resource conservation elite, reinforces the market. To take one example, a species of fish was destroyed by construction of the Tellico Reservoir. By a cost-benefit calculus of value, the economic benefits of the water provided for human consumption and the enjoyment of water-skiers and fishers was worth more than the existence of the snail darter. Little matter that such thoughtless acts are, as Holmes Rolston argues, "like tearing pages out of an unread book, written in a language humans hardly know how to read, about the place where they live."\textsuperscript{22} The so-called renewable resource concept further exemplifies the homocentric rationalism implicit in resourcism. The idea of forests as renewable resources, much publicized by Weyerhauser and other leviathans of the timber industry, exemplifies the model of nature as ecomachine—a virtual factory system pouring out an unending stream of commodities.

Within the context of American history the conservationist idea of wilderness can be seen as inevitable—the outcome of some ten thousand years of history. The exploitation of wilderness areas has continued without ideological limit or restraint: nature has been conceived as a limitless supply of convertible matter-energy, and production-consumption has been guided almost solely by the political and economic imperatives of the industrial state. Accordingly, modern society appears to evade not only the laws of ecology but the second law of thermodynamics. Of course, the laisser-faire approach of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been replaced by a more rationalized system of management: resource conservation. To the conservationist nature remains an adversary to be conquered by technology, and thereby brought into productive and sustaining relationship with human wants and purposes. Ecology becomes a tool by which this idea of wilderness is sustained. In other words, theoretical ecology provides the means through which industrial-democratic culture pursues its unquestioned goal. Namely, as Evernden states so clearly, "the maximum utilization of the earth as raw material in the support of one species." Functional ecology becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, since both dwindling supplies of natural resources and pollution confirm that nature is an adversary: an unruly force that can be harnessed to human purpose only through science and technology. Further, control of nature-
as-adversary necessitates an academic, political, and technical elite who create and wield the instruments of domination. Yet the question never asked, Evernden argues, is “the question of ends—why are we doing all this in the first place?”  

Preservationism

Although resourceism dominates contemporary thought and action, its triumph has not been complete. Preservationist ideas of wilderness, although clearly minority reports, have often manifested themselves in public policy debate (see table 5). The professional resource conservationist has largely controlled public policy administration, but a radical amateur tradition in preservation has persisted. A fundamental distinction between conservationist and preservationist ideas of wilderness revolves around the concept of a holistic as distinct from an atomistic view of nature. Preservationists, in contrast to resource conservationists, think of nature as an ecosystem, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, rather than as a stockpile of essentially interchangeable parts. The influence of holism (theorie) on the world (praxis) has not been inconsequential. Carolyn Merchant argues that holism underlies such laws as the Endangered Species Act (1973) and that ecology is “the most important example of holism today,” since it has led toward preservationism by “pointing up the essential role of every part of an ecosystem . . . . Each part contributes equal value to the healthy functioning of the whole. All living things, as integral parts of a viable ecosystem, thus have rights.” Consequently there arose “the necessity of protecting the ecosystem from

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Table 5. Distinguishing Characteristics of Preservationism

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<th>PRESERVATIONISTS believe that natural systems are</th>
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<td>– self-creating, evolutionary wholes with synergetic characteristics that preclude complete reduction and analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>– coordinating interfaces in natural hierarchies where all elements are internally related</td>
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<td>– Homo sapiens is related internally to the environment</td>
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<td>– human actions can impair the ability of natural systems to maintain themselves or to evolve further</td>
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<tr>
<td>– human values go beyond those measured by the national income accounts to include the preservation of wild lands and life</td>
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collapse due to the extinction of vital members," as in endangered species legislation. Donald Worster makes the same point somewhat more dramatically when he observes that we are now living in an age of ecology.

For the modernist, who assumes the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm as an absolute, the concept of a whole or an ecosystem is a lapse into what is derisively called "mystical ecology." The idea that natural systems are wholes with irreducible properties represents an alternative to the atomistic-reductionistic foundations of conservationist philosophy. To the preservationist, synergetic phenomena are irreducibly real outcomes of the interaction of component elements of natural process. Accordingly, there is no surprise when DDT devastates the reproductive cycle of fish-eating birds or acid rain pours down on the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada. Such phenomena are a consequence of the ecological reality that natural systems are functioning wholes greater than the sum of their parts. Barry Commoner eloquently expresses this principle by arguing that the first law of ecology is that "everything is connected to everything else." Consequently, synergetic phenomena cannot be explained satisfactorily in terms of either mechanical and reversible relations or external causation. By implication we can begin to understand the contemporary revolution in the physical sciences, where a dramatic reconceptualization of nature's basic processes is underway. As Prigogine puts it, the sciences "are moving from deterministic, reversible processes to stochastic [random] and irreversible ones."

Whitehead characterizes change in natural systems as the creative advance of nature into novelty; Prigogine terms such self-creation as the emergence of order out of chaos. The hypothesis of self-creation does not necessitate the assumption of extrasystemic purpose, such as Teilhard de Chardin's Omega point, but only the continuation with modification of already established patterns. Purpose exists but is revealed only through the irreversible movement of a natural system through space and time. Natural systems thus manifest "purposeless" purpose, which can be defined as a telic direction created by evolutionary process: the parts of a natural system find their reason-to-be within temporal context. The appearance of life was an inventive step into novelty from an already established order, as was the evolution of the genetic structure, and neither requires either extrasystemic purpose or agency for explanation. Natural history supports the judgment that evolution over time replaces the simple with the more complex. Stated somewhat differently, evolutionary process alone can account for the existence of life on earth.

From a preservationist perspective time is real and irreversible. Nature
is not simply an ecomachine moving regularly and mechanically but an intrinsically organic phenomenon that can be irreversibly damaged by human actions. Natural systems—consistent with the second law of thermodynamics—husband high-energy, low-entropy matter-energy, thus maintaining themselves in uniform configurations. The most stable natural systems are such physical phenomena as atoms and stars. Our sun fuels life on earth and concurrently balances the entropic account books, since the evolution of self-creating and self-maintaining biological systems on earth has occurred simultaneously with the increase of solar disorder (entropy). Gaia may be characterized as an open system operating within the constraints of the second law. Environmental changes (volcanism, ice ages, sunspots) can significantly influence evolution, as witness the disappearance of dinosaurs some 63 million years ago; yet ecosystems generally become increasingly resistant to change as their size and complexity increase. Strictly natural systems, relative to cultural systems, achieve a near steady state. Cultural systems are to natural ecosystems what day-lilies are to Sequoia sempervirens: a moment of splendor followed by a rapid wilting. Preservationists argue that natural systems, left to their own ends and free of catastrophic disruption, maintain themselves in a changing environment. Alpine and desert ecosystems are marvelous examples of nature's way of maintaining order in the face of challenging circumstances. Leopold's observations and comparison of the Rio Gavilan's integrity and stability with the precarious state of managed ecosystems in Germany illustrate the point.

Preservationists also argue that natural systems are coordinating interfaces in natural hierarchies. Through time, order increasingly prevails over chaos, without foreclosing further creative advance into novelty, by building on or developing from some existing structure. Such a principle almost defines an ecosystem: through functional coordination the constituent elements comprising the whole achieve integrity and stability. Preservationists think ecosystemically rather than atomistically, and so they view nature as an organic system of internally related parts rather than as an ecomachine made of externally related parts. Their idea of wilderness thus diverges in fundamental ways from resourcism, and therefore from the impress of Modernism. Ecosystems generally, and life in particular, are understood as fundamentally irreducible to, although consistent with, the laws of classical science. More important, preservationism paradigmatically reflects the second law of thermodynamics—here understood as a law of irreversible process that, when transgressed, results in the collapse of a natural system to a more primitive level of organization.
In spite of its evident dissimilarities with resourcism, preservationism has sometimes been equated with shallow ecology, little more than an instrument to sustain the economic development of Western civilization while forestalling such environmental disasters as the greenhouse effect. Deep ecologists argue that the preservationist agenda remains committed to the domination of nature through an ostensibly "value-free" science and technology. So viewed, ecology is simply a sophisticated tool that, in conjunction with such other Modernist techniques as cost-benefit analysis, will ensure that a full measure of value is gained from wild nature. Preservationists are also charged with being Modernist manqués, "green bigots" who place the interests of wildlife and lands over the legitimate needs of impoverished masses of humanity. Accordingly, preservationists are easily stereotyped as people who have made their fortune and become more interested in protecting birds and wildflowers, guaranteeing their access to unspoiled wilderness and cleaning the air and water rather than ameliorating the plight (health care, housing, education, and income) of the underprivileged. Finally, preservationism is sometimes seen as too little, too late by biocentric thinkers, and thus an inherently flawed idea of wilderness.

Biocentrism and Ecocentrism

Notwithstanding its virtues, the preservationist idea of wilderness simpliciter remains anthropocentric. By abandoning the view that nature is no more than an ecomachine or a stockpile of resources to fuel the human project, preservationists tend not to be bulls in an ecological china shop. They typically reject a strictly economic approach to valuing wilderness, and entertain other considerations such as rarity, species diversity, and even beauty. And by adopting a holistic view, preservationists are attentive to the pervasive linkages and interactions essential to any concept of a wilderness ecosystem. Yet from an ecocentric or biocentric perspective, preservationism remains anthropocentric, since human interests are the ultimate arbiters of value. In other words, biocentrism and ecocentrism go beyond strict preservationism by questioning speciesism: the idea that humankind is somehow superior to and therefore entitled to impose its values on nature.

Workable distinctions among the terms anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism are difficult and take us into the perilous waters of value theory and environmental ethics. In a preliminary way, we can under-
stand anthropocentrism as commencing with the rise of agriculture, biocentrism as beginning in the nineteenth century with Charles Darwin, and ecocentrism as originating recently, after World War II. Aldo Leopold's land ethic is a representative (if not definitive) example of an ecocentric outlook. Anthropocentrists see the human species as the most significant fact of existence, and accordingly evaluate all else from a human standpoint. Biocentrists take life rather than the human species as the central verity and thus assign value to all other things relative to life; protection of a single organism (as distinct from a species) is therefore important to a biocentrist. Ecocentrists take natural systems as the dominant reality, such that even life itself must be set in a larger evolutionary frame of reference that contains inorganic components; protection of a species (rather than an individual) and its supporting context is therefore critical to an ecocentrist. Ecocentrism, biocentrism, and anthropocentrism can be understood as in some ways connotatively and therefore denotatively overlapping. For example, the concept of life and the individual organisms presupposed by biocentrists are an abstraction (increasing connotation, decreasing denotation) from a larger ecosystemic reality that includes both biotic and abiotic parts organized into a synergetic whole. Similarly, the concept of human life presupposed by anthropocentrists is an abstraction from the web of life on the basis of some distinguishing characteristic (as for example the child of God or the rational animal).

Biocentrism and ecocentrism are clearly contradictory with resourcism. For the resource conservationist nature has use-value only. Beyond resourcism, however, biocentrism and ecocentrism are inconsistent even with preservationism, since it rests essentially on instrumental values. Preservationism expands evaluative criteria beyond those of resourcism, but strict preservationists continue to justify their prescriptive statements by an appeal to human utility, as in claiming that a wilderness area ought to be preserved because future generations will enjoy it. To biocentrists and ecocentrists this is a self-defeating prescription, since if wildlife and land are to be protected, then human interests must sometimes give way to biocentric and ecocentric interests. Strict biocentrists claim that wilderness areas ought to be preserved for reasons, such as the intrinsic value of life, that are independent of any instrumental value. Obviously, the idea of instrumental as distinct from intrinsic values is complicated, but it is fundamental to comprehending differences between preservationism and either biocentrism or ecocentrism (see table 6). Hereafter ecocentrism is assumed to include biocentrism on the presupposition that life cannot exist outside
Table 6. Distinguishing Characteristics of Ecocentrism

ECOCENTRISTS believe that
- natural systems are the basis of all organic existence, and therefore possess intrinsic value
- humankind is an element within rather than the reason to be of natural systems, and is hence dependent upon intrinsic value
- ethical human actions (actions which promote the good life for humankind) necessarily promote all life on earth (preserves such intrinsic values as diversity, stability, and beauty)

an ecosystemic context; thus a biocentric argument that contradicts ecosystem values is self-defeating. Further, ecocentric arguments remain open to both human and biological values but also include ecosystemic values.

The first principle advances from the preservationist understanding of nature as a living system of interrelated parts to the idea that natural ecosystems possess value in their own right, independent of human value judgments. The ecocentrist recognizes a level of organization and integration within wild nature that is independent of human purpose, whereas the strict preservationist, while recognizing that natural systems are organized wholes, understands and values nature strictly in the context of utility. Accordingly, ecocentrists recognize that human values do not exhaust the set of all possible values. But, even granted the premise that wild nature possesses intrinsic value, a number of complicated philosophical questions immediately arise. How is the idea of intrinsic value to be defined? How are such values manifested in nature? And how could such intrinsic values conceivably be related to instrumental values?

The nineteenth-century evolutionary insights of Thoreau again find contemporary relevance. What, he asked, is the human species but a mass of thawing clay? This question led him to the conclusion that "at least Nature has some bowels, and there again is mother of humanity." In short, sentient creatures such as himself had descended from the inorganic through a grand yet mysterious evolutionary process. The idea that nature is the mother of humanity is irreconcilable with mainstream Western culture and yet another idea flying in the face of Emersonian transcendentalism and Modernism more generally: for nature has a radical and absolutely autonomous value independent of humankind and the Oversoul. As Thoreau understood, the naked ape is dependent upon a primordial fount of value, and not vice-versa. Some twentieth-century evolutionists, such as Teilhard de Chardin, have recognized...
spective, is at the same time the centre of construction of the universe.” Jan Smuts observes more accurately that the realization that humankind is part of cosmic process also “impresses on us the necessity of that great lesson of humility which is the ethical message of Evolution.” More specifically, evolution obliges humankind to recognize that “the Great Society of the universe leaves a place for the most humble inanimate inorganic structure no less than for the... soul. To conceive the universe otherwise is to indulge in anthropomorphism, which may be pleasing to our vanity, but in reality detracts from the richness and variety of the universe.”

From an ecocentric perspective, Homo sapiens no longer lies at the center of all things (anthropocentrism) or culminates evolution (speciesism). An ecocentrist understands the human species as part of a natural community, a society that includes (as radical empiricists like John Muir saw clearly) poison ivy and azalea, rattlesnakes and scorpions, hurricanes and tornados. Ecocentrism wed the preservationist idea that nature is a living process with the idea that natural systems possess intrinsic values that undergird and are independent of human values. Such a position, though consistent with ecology and nonequilibrium thermodynamics, is cognitively meaningless to the modernist for two reasons. First, the modern mind assumes an absolute separation between mind and nature, fact and value; second, nature therefore cannot in its own right be a locus of value, for humankind (mind) assigns all value. In contrast, to the evolutionist an ecocentric perspective is required since the idea of Human Infinite—as the absolute locus of value—is empirically empty and logically inconsistent. Alternatively, Lord Man is extinct, since humankind (Human Finite) cannot live without even such elementary phenomena as sunlight and photosynthesis. In short, the human species is thermodynamically and biologically, and therefore inescapably, bound with natural process.

The third distinguishing characteristic of ecocentrism extends the logic of the first two principles to the conclusion that human values must be brought into harmony with intrinsic natural values. In other words, Homo sapiens must do certain things because of its membership in a natural community (just as a member of the civil community is obligated to do certain things). Ecocentrism moves beyond preservationism, for the idea of promoting all life entails a radical claim that human values which destroy intrinsic value must therefore be either modified or abandoned. Holmes Rolston argues that “the key idea [underlying an ecocentric perspective] is of nature as source of values, including our own. Nature is a generative process to which we want to relate ourselves and by this to find relationships to other creatures. Values include far more than a simplistic human-
interest satisfaction. Value is a multifaceted idea with structures that root in natural sources." Advancing from this premise, Rolston specifies several ecocentric maxims, including those of reversibility and scarcity, predicated on a holistic understanding of nature. The reversibility maxim assumes the vantage point of nonequilibrium thermodynamics and states that humankind ought to avoid introducing irreversible changes in natural process. Humankind can destroy beyond repair delicate ecosystemic processes that have required literally millions of years to create. The scarcity maxim assumes the vantage point of foundational ecology and states that humankind ought to take special measures to protect rare ecosystems (such as alpine tundra and old-growth forests) and endangered species. Crucially, in transcending the barriers of Modernism that have divorced humankind from nature, Rolston does not erect new barriers. As he points out, there is no necessary antagonism between human and natural values, since natural values face both inward and outward. Inward-facing natural values are values independent of humankind, as for example the snail darter or photosynthesis, and outward-facing values are values in a specifically human context, as for example the value of native genetic plasm to agronomists attempting to perfect hybrid plant stocks. Further, Rolston contends that nature itself—the evolutionary process—was enriched by species Homo sapiens: for in that experiment nature became self-conscious.

However appealing an ecocentric perspective is to defenders of the wilderness, it engenders several difficulties. John Passmore argues that apart from human experience there is no idea of wilderness, and therefore ecocentrism is an inherently flawed and nonsensical position since humankind cannot in principle view the environment from other than a human perspective. And Rolston observes that any argument that the human species is obligated to promote intrinsic natural values seems paradoxical, since nature "runs automatically and, within her more active creatures, instinctively; but persons do things by design, which is different, and we for the most part have no trouble distinguishing the two kinds of events." Yet according to this argument "no human has ever acted deliberately except to interfere in the spontaneous course of nature. All human actions are in this sense unnaturally because they are artificial, and the advice to follow nature is impossible. We could not do so if we tried, for in deliberately trying to do so we act unnaturally." The issue, simply stated, is this: If humankind is part of nature, then human actions cannot be construed as anything other than natural even if detrimental to the larger natural community. By contrast, if Homo sapiens is distinguished
by its cultural being from other natural kinds, then no consistent argument that humankind must follow nature's way seems possible. Stated somewhat differently, natural or evolutionary process led to human nature, and human nature to culture; but culture has paradoxically enabled behavior that impairs the integrity of nature. Thus no return to nature seems possible without contravening human nature and the reality of the past ten thousand years of history.

Passmore's observation that all ideas are linguistically and culturally enframed is neither unique nor a refutation of ecocentrism. Just as he maintains, Homo sapiens cannot escape having a human perspective on the wilderness, whether this be resourcism, preservationism, or ecocentrism. But in his critique of ecocentrism, Passmore assumes a modernistic and therefore anthropocentric perspective as the rule to measure all others. Such criticism is external, underscoring rather than resolving the inconsistencies and contradictions between anthropocentric and ecocentric vocabularies. The issue is not choosing between a human and a nonhuman viewpoint but discussing the relative adequacies and inadequacies of anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives. As Duerr observes, "Not all facts become apparent in every language, certainly not in the castrated variety customarily employed in academe. Not all wheels turn everywhere." More fundamentally, the question is the relation of thinking to reality. Passmore assumes that there is a necessary or logical rather than a culturally determined and therefore contingent correspondence between reality and an anthropocentric idea of wilderness, as if it were the only possible vocabulary for description and evaluation. Yet, as William James argues, "Reality is in general what truths have to take account of." But reality cannot in principle equal whatever human beings merely think it is, for that is a self-defeating position. Consequently, James continues, "what we say about reality thus depends on the perspective into which we throw it. The that of it is its own; but the what depends on the which; and the which depends on us." So understood, ecocentrism is a human but nonanthropocentric perspective on nature.

Here, however, a naive ecocentrist might object, and complain that through philosophical analysis we have fallen back into the subjectivism of the resource conservationist, where human beings have again become the measure of all things. The beauty of wild nature is often cited as an example of values in nature independent of humankind, that is, objectively real features of the environment. To assert that there is "beauty in nature" is clearly different than to say that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." The same mountain meadow, for example, might be beautiful to one person in
and of itself, a beauty independent of human action. From this perspective people bear witness to or celebrate the beauty of wild nature, but they in no way create that state of affairs. To the ecocentrists, intrinsic beauty needs unconditional protection from human encroachment, since to intervene is to destroy the condition that makes beauty possible. Furthermore, the naive ecocentrists might contend, if judgment of beauty is made relative to human standards, then the beauty of the mountain meadow might conceivably be enhanced by a ski resort and the pleasures and profits it might bring. Indeed, virtually anything might be justified under aesthetic criteria. Here, then, is a seemingly absolute distinction between anthropocentric and ecocentric aesthetics.

The problem with asserting that “beauty is in nature” simpliciter—independent of sentience—is that the idea rapidly leads to mysticism. To speak of values in nature, such as beauty, as if these were utterly objective qualities of the environment is to commit what Whitehead defines as the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Thus naive ecocentrism is ironically both mystical and modernist: mystical because the experience of beauty is private, and modernist because dualistic. The question is whether natural beauty is beautiful simpliciter or relationally, that is, independently of or conjointly with human understanding and appreciation of the marvels creation presents to sentience. To choose “the beautiful” simpliciter is, paradoxically, to reaffirm the very modernistic perspective against which the ecocentrists protests, for sentient humans have again been absolutely alienated from nature.

Ecocentric arguments encounter a second fundamental difficulty in the is-ought fallacy. Ecocentrists argue that wild nature has ends independent of human intentionality, that these are privileged, and that human agency ought to recognize these ends. Aldo Leopold’s land ethic is a paradigmatic case, for he asserts that humankind must “quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” The land ethic, however, has been used to exemplify the is-ought fallacy by analytic philosophers, the philosophical heirs to Modernism. They argue that no ethical prescription (an ought statement) can be validly deduced from any scientific description (an is statement), be it physics, chemistry, or ecology. Given this premise, the land ethic does commit the is-ought fallacy, for Leopold moves from statements of fact,
the observed integrity and stability of natural systems, to the claim that humankind ought to promote integrity and stability.\textsuperscript{45}

In Respect for Nature P. W. Taylor argues that the land ethic “is not sound from a logical point of view. It confuses fact and value, ‘is’ and ‘ought.’”\textsuperscript{46} But this judgment is itself rooted in a paradigmatic framework assumed as an absolute. The land ethic is not, as Taylor claims, unsound from a logical point of view but rather incommensurable with his self-imposed final vocabulary and its logic. Only if the modernist paradigm is assumed as definitive (as an ultimate vocabulary unproblematically used to evaluate all other vocabularies) can Taylor’s criticism be sustained. Yet Modernism, as we have seen, (1) is a cultural project lacking any isomorphic relation with an independent empirical reality to sustain its truth claims; even worse, (2) Modernism is bereft of an internally consistent theoretical demonstration of its cogency.\textsuperscript{47} We have no quarrel with the idea that any claim to knowledge of either truth or virtue must be justified: the issue is precisely that of the paradigmatic standards by which the justification itself is made—Taylor’s? or Leopold’s?

Here again lurk difficulties grounded in the modern age. If humankind is the measure of all things, and nature no more than matter-in-motion, then the Cartesian dream of absolute control over nature might appear to be realized. So viewed, science is merely a means to human ends, one of which is to dominate nature. Leopold attempted to face the paradoxical fact that the insights of science, and therefore knowledge of what is, have been divorced from ethical considerations, that is, knowledge of what ought to be. Granted, there can no immediate deduction (in a strictly logical sense) of legitimate normative statements from a collection of descriptive statements. Social Darwinism, for example, reveals the problematic side of basing prescriptive norms on any loose assemblage of scientific fact. Indeed, Social Darwinism reflected more than anything else the hidden value assumptions of a laissez-faire political economy. Yet it is equally clear, as Aristotle argued nearly 2,500 years ago, and John Dewey more recently, that factual information is crucial to making informed ethical decisions. Leopold lacked a philosophically adequate paradigm to transcend fact-value, means-end dualism, and thus the land ethic, from the unreflective vantage point of the modern mind (external criticism), appears to commit the is-ought fallacy. But the land ethic can be defended from a postmodern philosophical viewpoint that accepts the reality of time as irreversible process and the inevitability of interpretation.\textsuperscript{48}

Finally, once past the is-ought fallacy and the phenomenalistic predica-
ment, ecocentric ideas of wilderness face a host of problems in application. Do the needs of burgeoning masses of Third World peasants and the privileged elites of the developed world take precedence over the values of natural systems? And how can Western society argue to the Third World that the global ecosystem no longer permits "underdeveloped" nations to exploit their natural resources? Further, by what methods and strategies might reconciliation between culture and nature be achieved? And what is the value of the anopheles mosquito? poison ivy? and the smallpox virus? since these natural kinds seem to lack intrinsic value. And who represents nature's interests, for the plants and beasts are mute? 49

Resourcism does not confront such problems, since from its perspective wild nature has only instrumental value. Neither does preservationism confront these issues, since its primary claim is that human values (economic, scientific, and aesthetic) beyond those of efficiency and utility are thwarted by resourcism. But the ecocentrist has, in effect, no hiding place: there is neither any appeal to a human yardstick by which natural things might be instrumentally evaluated nor any petition to an inherent superiority possessed by species Homo sapiens that privileges human judgment, be this scientific, economic, or philosophic. Further, a consistent ecocentric position implies that wild nature actually teaches or reveals knowledge and values. Holmes Rolston advises us to respect an ecosystem as a proven, efficient economy. "When we step in, we need to be careful with our massive, irreversible, simplifying innovations, because the chances are that our disturbance will have some unintended bad consequences." 50 The ecologist Barry Commoner catches this dimension of ecocentric thought in his prescription that nature knows best, which he calls the third law of ecology. But what is nature's way? Does a natural mode of existence imply that humankind must go back to a hunting-gathering way of life? Or is it enough that we heed lessons of ecology (everything goes somewhere), steady state economics (minimize throughput, maximize the quality of life), and thermodynamics (haste makes waste, pollution, and entropy)? Crucially, recognition that the human species is merely an element within the web of life, and that nature's way offers alternatives, brings to the fore not the practical questions of economics and politics but the philosophical questions posed by Leopold, Evernden, and many others. Namely, why does Lord Man do what he does in the first place? Why has the human species assumed that nature's role is to serve only as the means to the good life of humankind? By raising such questions—even if unable to answer entirely the formidable philosophical problems raised by its prescriptive
claims—ecocentrism directly confronts resourcism and goes beyond the cognitive bounds of preservationism.

**Deep or Foundational Ecology**

Deep or foundational ecology (also called radical environmentalism) presents an idea of wilderness contradictory to resourcism and inconsistent with preservationism since it moves beyond any appeal to instrumental values as a ground for guiding human action. And deep ecology, while theoretically consistent with ecocentrism, goes beyond it by developing a pervasive critique of advanced industrial culture. In other words, foundational ecology advances from the idea that humankind is an element within natural systems, and therefore obligated to promote life on earth, to an ecocentric critique of Modernism. Deep ecologists also offer a variety of paradigmatic alternatives to the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm. Warwick Fox argues that deep ecology hinges on the idea that there is no ontological divide between human and nonhuman, implying that the perception of any absolute bifurcation between these elements of evolutionary process is grounded in a priori assumptions rather than any a posteriori appeal to facts. When “we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness.” George Sessions catches the critical side of radical environmentalism when he argues that “urban-industrial society is a dinosaur causing immense destruction in its death throes. New intellectual-social paradigms for postindustrial society are emerging. The paradigm which embodies contemporary ecological consciousness is called the ‘deep ecology movement.’”

These arguments are problematic, as Sessions is well aware; deep ecology is more a collection of diverse ideas than a well-defined paradigm (in contrast, for example, to resourcism). In the language of T. S. Kuhn, the many anomalies of the modern mind are apparent, and thus we find ourselves amid an intellectual revolution. Yet a new paradigm—which will enable normal science—has yet to appear. So the deep ecologist lives in a pre-paradigmatic age that abounds in “pretenders” to the cognitive throne long occupied by Modernism. Sessions lists Jeffer's inhumanism, the eco-poetry of Snyder, the philosophy of Lao Tzu and Spinoza, the counterculture of Rozak, the steady state economics of Daly, and so on ad infinitum as all being part of or relevant to the deep ecology movement. Many of the pivotal figures in this study, such as Thoreau, Muir, and Leopold, are also mentioned as seminal deep ecologists. This diversity perhaps indicates
that radical environmentalism is presently more of a conjectural umbrella, under which a family of critical responses to Modernism gathers, than a paradigm. Clearly the movement is edging toward a new and comprehensive vision of the relation between humankind and the natural world. Just as clearly the basic framework for a new paradigm that enables normal science is not yet in place.\textsuperscript{54}

Deep ecology is presently in a preparadigmatic period and thus partly defined in opposition to the status quo. Radical environmentalism is cognitively revolutionary apropos of shallow ecology in at least two respects. First, deep ecology does not accept the modernistic premise that science is value free but draws on the many resources of both philosophic and scientific critics of Modernism. Part of the research program of deep ecology, itself not a single discipline, is to explore alternative social ideals and values. In this regard deep ecology is part of a postmodern reformation of science. Second, deep ecology is committed to an explicitly ecocentric orientation where humankind is understood as a part of rather than apart from wild nature. Shallow ecology is the ecology of the resource conservation movement, and hence of the modern university and research institute; the shallow ecologist believes that “reforming human relations towards nature can be done within the existing structure of society.”\textsuperscript{55} Deep ecology, in contrast, is interested in the question of what is good for the natural system itself of which humankind is only a part. Unlike shallow ecology, which considers only questions of the means to achieve the established ends of advanced industrial societies, deep ecology questions ends; in other words, foundational ecology moves beyond purely functional inquiry to entertain explicitly ethical questions. However, Sessions cautions that deep ecology is misunderstood or misinterpreted when people assume “that its goal is to produce an ecological ethic in the sense of modern Western ethics,” since modern ethical theory has been based on the assumptions that the human species stands apart from and is superior to the rest of creation.\textsuperscript{56}

The Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess, viewed by many as the preeminent deep ecologist, has attempted to give the movement a defined profile through his many articles and books. In his recent work he argues that deep ecology might also be called ecosophy, in part to distinguish the movement from the science of ecology and in part to gather from the Greek root \textit{sophia} the connotation of eco- (or ecological) wisdom.\textsuperscript{57} Ecosophy encompasses three research foci: wild nature, society, and the interrelations of society and nature. This set of distinctions discloses why so many seemingly different kinds of inquiry are categorized as “deep ecology,” since
Table 7. Fundamentals of Deep Ecology

Deep ecologists believe that
- all life on earth has intrinsic value
- the richness and diversity of life itself has value
- human life is privileged only to the extent of satisfying vital needs
- maintenance of the richness and diversity of life mandates a decrease in human population
- humankind’s relations to the natural world presently endanger the richness and diversity of life
- changes (consistent with cultural diversity) affecting basic economic, technologic, and ideological cultural components are therefore necessary
- “Green societies” value the quality of life (e.g., beauty) more than the quantity of life (e.g., GNP)
- individuals subscribing to these fundamentals of deep ecology are obligated to promote sociocultural change

Each opens a different door for research. Thus a wilderness ecologist might study wildlife and land, a social ecologist might examine society, and an energy ecologist might explore relations between market economics and the production-distribution-consumption of energy. Yet this diversity of approaches, while creating a wealth of information, generates an embarrassment of riches: for there is apparently no theory which ensures that the perspectives ultimately converge on a common center.

Naess has attempted to delineate the principles that cut across the deep ecology movement (see table 7). Clearly, many deep ecologists focus on questions of value rather than method and paradigmatic structure. The need for a personal relation to wild nature is often mentioned as prior to any environmentally oriented action or the ecological reform of society. Still, deep ecology entails an implicit methodological commitment perhaps best described as a radical bracketing of the categories of modern existence, although no allegiance is given any one method. Such a methodological freedom is simultaneously a strength and a weakness. Because deep ecology is methodologically underdetermined, its project is open to input from multiple sources, including wilderness ecology, social ecology, ethnopoetry, history, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology. Thus, Heidegger, Spinoza, Leopold, Muir, Jeffers, and Snyder all have contributions of one kind or another to make to radical environmentalism. Yet this very wealth is also an embarrassment, for there seems to be no sense of the
relative value of any idea. Because of its theoretical freedom deep ecology invites criticism that it is (1) more a secular religion than a legitimate philosophy, and (2) more a mystical than a scientific discipline. And because of their ecocentric commitments deep ecologists invite the charges that (3) they are green bigots who ignore the legitimate needs of underprivileged human beings and that (4) their program for social reform borders on hopeless utopianism. Yet these criticisms are not entirely accurate, and in fact are better interpreted as pointing toward areas that need further consideration and development—before a deep ecology paradigm might legitimately be said to be in place—rather than fatal weaknesses.

The claim that deep ecology is more a secular religion or social phenomenon (like the counterculture) than a legitimate science or philosophical discipline results from its methodological openness. If, for example, both a Heidegger and a Leopold are members of the deep ecology research community, then by what criteria are they included? And by what criteria might anyone be excluded? Any one who attempts to reconcile Heidegger’s with Leopold’s contributions to deep ecology finds the going rugged. Granted, once terminological differences are settled, points of similarity, even isomorphisms, can be identified. Both argue that nature has been exploited through technology in the name of social progress and that fundamental changes in human behavior and ideology are needed. Heidegger calls for humankind to dwell in the fourfold and to let Being be; Leopold calls for the evolution of the land ethic and an ecological conscience. And yet their differences are enormous, both in method and in subject. Heidegger is a hermeneutical phenomenologist (a workable, if not entirely accurate categorization) who dwells on the reality of humankind’s historicity and linguisticality. His writing is intensely abstract, as in Being and Time. Further, the question of reflexivity is central to his project. Consequently, the pragmatic implications of Heideggerian deep ecology are obscure to all except the most determined students of his thought. Leopold is a wilderness ecologist whose writing is often practical, as in Game Management. In Sand County Almanac Leopold flirts with the theoretical boundaries of science and philosophy, yet even here the implications for practice remain relatively clear. The land ethic, whatever its insufficiencies, is firmly tied to ecological observation. But if both Heidegger and Leopold are part of the deep ecology movement, then the implications are devastating, for it must account for itself as both a philosophical discipline and an ecological science.

Although such an account may be possible in principle, radical environmentalism presently lacks any explicitly defined and widely accepted
paradigmatic platform. Naess and Sessions, in an effort to provide such a base, appeal to Spinoism. They argue that Spinoza's ideas of nature as a hierarchical system with which humans as knowing subjects are intrinsically bound, and his demonstration of the reliability of direct intuitive knowledge of God-Nature, are particularly suited to deep ecology's research program: that is, knowledge of both ends and means. Scsions also argues that Whiteheadian-inspired process-relational approaches merely reinforce existing anthropocentric ideas of nature and that Spinozism enables a true ecocentric perspective. True, Spinozism counters the atomistic-reductionistic tendencies of Modernism; but it is irreconcilable with evolutionary science and cosmology. And the ecocentric idea of intrinsic value in nature, surely a principle central to deep ecology, can be defended without appealing to Spinozism. Further, there is no uniformity of belief in Spinozism among deep ecologists, and no deep ecologist has shown any necessary connection between Spinoza and, for example, Heideggerian or Leopoldian deep ecology.

While the foregoing analysis is philosophically incomplete, at least one implication is clear. Deep ecology is in part guilty as charged—more an intellectual movement in process than a paradigm. So viewed, radical environmentalism adds nothing methodologically to the work of Leopold and Heidegger—indeed, to anyone who has found shelter under its research "umbrella." But collectively considered, not only Leopold and Heidegger but all those termed deep ecologists point toward a common problematic—that is, Modernism itself and the idea of nature as an ecomachine. What is more, the deep ecology movement not only can but perhaps should be understood, whatever else it might be, as part of a postmodern movement. Of course, Postmodernism itself is poorly defined, referring more "to a diffuse sentiment rather than to any common set of doctrines—the sentiment that humanity can and must go beyond the modern." Some argue that all constructive postmodernists share, as a minimum, a commitment to an ecological and organismic perspective on evolutionary process. Yet even accepting this stipulation does not resolve the question of understanding just what deep ecology represents, for some avowed postmodernists explicitly distinguish the deep ecology worldview, on the basis of its explicitly ecocentric value orientation, from a second ecological worldview that is consistent with the traditions of personalism and humanism.

Even beyond questions raised by its diversity of methods, deep ecology is vulnerable to charges that it is an exercise in mysticism and irrationalism. Here the critic can admit to the reality of ecological dysfunction but can claim that, given radical environmentalism's lack of methodological rigor,
society cannot trust the deep ecologist's ecstatic visions any more than that of the religious or political seer. Why should we believe that all life on earth has value? or that a decrease in human population is obligatory? or that fundamental sociocultural changes are necessary? Critics of the European, deep ecology–based "green movement" charge that its policy proposals are nothing more than "scare based legislation" that in final analysis are "anti-people." Deep ecologists "give no credit at all to the achievements of human civilization, achievements which have often involved the conquest of nature's cruelty. The Earth is not really a separate living entity with rights of its own." This position is perhaps too extreme a criticism to be taken seriously. More judicious critics might admit that individuals like John Muir have had Ur experiences, that such visions have psychically bonded those who have them with nature, and that such epiphanies might change the lives of all who have them. Then they lower the boom, pointing out that intuitions of any and all kinds have proven to be notoriously unreliable (just what are they, how are they to be interpreted, and what do they mean) and are often fraught with peril.

But the deep ecologist has an immediate rejoinder to this kind of criticism, drawing a clear distinction between "mystical ecology," which depends on achieving states of mind that are by definition private and incapable of communication, and the public and communicable cutting edge of deep ecology—that is, arguments resting on logic and evidence even if methodologically diverse. Further, once fundamental principles are questioned, then the "facts" are subject to change. For example, the resource conservationist assumes that the gross national product is an accurate index of the good life; to the deep ecologist, who frames human beings within the terms of a radical anthropology such as that of a Paul Shepard, a Stanley Diamond, or a Marshall Sahlins, the virtues of conspicuous consumption, and the quest for an ever greater quantity of life, appear illusory, self-defeating. Still, to so reduce contemporary experience appears mystical to those who do not so frame experience. Yet this is perhaps the greatest value of the deep ecologist's program: dialogue about and inquiry into fundamental questions of human beingness is opened, sustained, and encouraged with the aim of developing new insights and meaningful alternatives. If, as Aristotle and Hartshorne argue, wisdom lies in moderation, then deep ecology sometimes goes too far; for example, some deep ecologists imply that if modern people would live like archaic people, then the problems of urban-industrial society would be overcome. Such an apparently immoderate contention opens radical environmentalism to attack from a number of directions, and yet moderation can only be defined relative to
the end points that mark a continuum. Deep ecology, however mystical and ineffable it appears to the conservationist or shallow ecologist, nevertheless challenges the conventional wisdom. By so “stirring up the blood” deep ecology is inherently healthy: hardening of the categories is an insidious disease of culture, and by deconstructing the modernist categories of existence the radical environmentalist helps society begin to grapple with its problems. Although we cannot go back in time, we can—as deep ecologists contend—learn something from premodern culture.

The charge that deep ecologists are “green bigots” has been leveled by an offshoot from the main trunk of radical environmentalism: namely, the social ecologists who follow the lead of Murray Bookchin. Bookchin has made important contributions to environmental philosophy, not the least of which is his ecological critique of Marxist ideology. But recently Bookchin has become highly critical of the deep ecology movement (a problematic endeavor at best, since deep ecology is an elusive target). He charges that “deep ecology is becoming one of the most pernicious ideologies to invade the ecology movement in the United States,” largely because it identifies the wrong source of environmental malaise (which for Bookchin appears to be the traditional leftist scapegoat, that is, the exploitative capitalist bourgeoisie), denies the fundamental human rights of exploited masses of human beings, and mystically confuses wilderness with the real world. Social ecology, Bookchin continues, in contrast to deep ecology, “advances the view that the conflict between society and nature stems overwhelmingly from the conflict between human and human, notably within hierarchies and classes, and generally within a system of widespread oppression and economic exploitation. . . . Deep ecology . . . only deflects ecologically concerned people from the all-important need for radical social change.”

Individuals such as Kirkpatrick Sale and George Sessions have defended deep ecology against Bookchin’s criticism, and Robyn Eckersley has published a critique of Bookchin’s own ecological ethics. Sessions argues that Bookchin’s social ecology is actually a radical reinterpretation of the word ecology, indeed, that social-ecology is “a pre-ecological anthropocentric Enlightenment view of human technological progress, human domination over nature, a Lockean view of land as useless until developed, and a refusal to admit that there is a human overpopulation problem.” Eckersley—who recognizes the merits of portions of Bookchin’s work—believes that it contains a self-contradiction. She argues that his claim—that social ecology can best deliver freedom for all life-forms to express their unique nature—is undercut by his privileging of “second nature over first nature and from his presumptuous conclusions concerning the
state of human understanding of ecological and evolutionary processes.” Although we cannot dwell here on the ongoing debate, a few observations are in order. In-house battles within the larger framework of ecologically conscious Postmodernism are self-defeating; moderation remains a virtue, even among intellectuals. Clearly, different groups have different agendas for action in the world; just as clearly, mutual self-criticism—which points to errors of logic and fact, and openly discusses paradigmatic fundamentals—is beneficial to finite intellects. As C. S. Peirce observes in “Fallibilism,” those interested in bringing about existential change must not—above all else—block the way of inquiry; doctrinal purity serves only dogmatists. Deep ecology is clearly no panacea; neither is social ecology. And insofar as Bookchin insists that class opposition is the cause of ecological malaise, he blinds himself to a wealth of relevant data. Granted, as social ecology claims, ameliorating a global ecocrisis entails social reorganization, not only among individuals and classes within nations but between nations. But just as deep ecology claims, reorganization of relationships between human and nonhuman others is also required.

Another criticism of the deep ecology movement, usually made by proponents of either resourceism or preservationism, is that it is hopelessly utopian—or ecotopian, as deep ecologists themselves claim. Utopias by definition are visionary, radically imaginative, and opposed to the cultural mainstream; in addition, the checkered history of utopian communes illustrates that the best of intentions often fail to bring about lasting change in human ways. Conservationists and preservationists argue that the greater good for the greater number will come about through small but incrementally cumulative changes, rather than any attempt to create, for example, Paul Shepard’s techno-cynegetic society or Baker Brownell’s ecological society. Even the arguments for bioregionalism—the idea of a politically and economically decentralized culture where human beings attempt to live in accord with nature’s way—seem radically discordant with the modernist outlook.

Sessions and Devall partially meet this kind of criticism by observing that “nothing can be done, everything is possible.” In being methodologically open and culturally utopian the deep ecologist aims to do what the resource conservationist does not: that is, achieve a theoretical posture adequate to the rapidly changing picture of life on earth by grappling with the very categories that define the modern mind and then transcending the anomalies of that worldview. Radical environmentalism is therefore weakest precisely where resource conservation at least partially succeeds: we cannot be idle while we engage in a Chineselike critical purging
of the spirit. And deep ecology is strongest where resource conservation and shallow ecology are weakest; the cure proposed by resource conservationists betrays the fundamentally impoverished nature of Modernism. Humankind is left out of the picture; economics, politics, ethics, and philosophy are not seriously reconsidered. Thus, deep ecology recognizes the inherently dynamic potential of our species to modify the naturally given and then envisions this being done in a “sophisticated” and “unobtrusive” way in the context of an environment “left natural.”

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a relatively new way of thinking about the relations between the human species and the earth, so contemporary that Roderick Nash does not discuss it in Wilderness and the American Mind (1967). Yet viewed from the perspective of posthistoric primitivism, ecofeminism is in part a rediscovery of an ancient and premodern way of thinking about the natural world as intrinsically feminine that has grown out of the intersection of the women’s consciousness and environmental movements since World War II. As we have seen, the environmental movement is no one thing, and neither is the feminist movement, since feminist thought encompasses at least four distinct schools (liberal, traditional Marxist, radical, and socialist). We shall examine ecofeminism only insofar as it is related to other contemporary ideas of wilderness, attempting thereby to avoid entanglement in the nuances and “in-house” arguments of feminist thought.

Rosemary Ruether’s New Woman, New Earth (1975), Dolores LaChapelle’s Earth Wisdom (1978), and Carolyn Merchant’s Death of Nature (1980) could be used to mark the beginnings of what is now a burgeoning ecofeminist literature. Each of these women, however, is a distinguished scholar whose work transcends feminism: Ruether is a prominent theologian, LaChapelle a consequential deep ecologist (who denies association with ecofeminism), and Merchant a widely recognized historian of science. Four characteristics generally define ecofeminist thought (see table 8). Here we confront the standard paradox of definition: we can make clean lines of separation only by preparing a procrustean bed. Given the criteria in table 8, ecofeminism overlaps ecocentrism and deep ecology at least in part.75

One characteristic of ecofeminist thought is the deceptively obvious idea that the earth is fundamentally feminine rather than masculine. Merchant observes that “women and nature have an age-old association—an affilia-
Table 8. Defining Characteristics of Ecofeminism

ECOFEMINISTS believe that

- Mother Earth is a nurturing home for all life and should be revered and loved as in premodern (Paleolithic and archaic) societies
- ecosystemic malaise and abuse is rooted in androcentric concepts, values, and institutions
- relations of complementarity rather than superiority between culture and nature, the human and nonhuman, and male and female are desirable
- the many problems of human relations, and relations between the human and nonhuman worlds, will not be resolved until androcentric institutions, values, and ideology are eradicated

...tion that has persisted throughout culture, language, and history.”

Thus ecofeminists almost uniformly are engaged in a project to disclose a way of thinking about wild nature that has been hidden behind the androcentric face of Modernism. We have seen that the concept of the Magna Mater is nearly as old as self-consciousness itself. The idea that nature is feminine persists among archaic peoples today, as for example the Sioux’s belief in the Maká Iná. Similarly, Thoreau believed that nature is feminine and that “we are so early weaned from her breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man . . . [that in consequence we are] a civilization destined to have a speedy limit.” Gary Snyder’s spiritual ecology also brings the female principle to the foreground, as an animating principle not only of nature but of cosmos. Thus ecofeminism—in reawakening ancient sensibilities of the Mother Earth—is not sui generis. Merchant believes that interest in this ancient wisdom was dramatically reawakened “by the simultaneity of two recent social movements—women’s liberation, symbolized in its controversial infancy by Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963), and the ecology movement, which built up during the 1960s and finally captured national attention on Earth Day, 1970.”

Dolores LaChapelle uncovers a connection between the female principle and mountainous landscape forms venerated by archaic peoples in her book *Earth Wisdom*. She insightfully traces the symbolic and psychological connections between veneration of Mother Goddess mountains and the feminine principle, particularly as represented in the voluptuous feminine statuary characteristic of Paleolithic peoples. These statues were

“carved as the child knows the mother, all breasts, hips, and *mons veneris*, full and round.” Notice the word *mons*. Latin for mountain
In revering a mountain landscape displaying the V cleft, the archaic mind celebrates the mysteries of all creation, since the miracle of life is intrinsically bound with the female. To the modern—and therefore, according to ecofeminists, androcentric—mind, such beliefs in Mother Goddess mountains are mere superstitions; from a reflective standpoint, such worship is an enormous leap in consciousness from the immediate reality of birth, and thus life, to the explicitly self-conscious realm of the symbolic. Mother Goddess mountains re-present at a distance the same form present to a child as it comes to life, and the psychological association of mountains with birth experience thus symbolizes the intrinsically feminine character of life. From the modernist vantage point such a belief is clearly nonsensical. Just as clearly, the modernist can render such judgment only by holding personal beliefs as absolute standards used to measure all others.

For the ecofeminist the feminine principle is relevant to resolving the ecocrisis, since "the Earth's house and the human house are habitats to be cherished." Metaphorically, Lord Man has behaved toward the earth as if he were in a whore's rather than his mother's house: the relation has been one of physical exploitation rather than spiritual veneration. For the modernist an idea that nature is intrinsically feminine is incomprehensible, for the earth is nothing but inert matter subject to usurpation according to human plan: that is, phallo-technic society, as Mary Daly calls it, or the prevailing androcentric culture. Daly argues in Gyn/Ecology that "phallic myth and language generate, legitimate, and mask the material pollution that threatens to terminate all sentient life on this planet." The ecosystemic consequences of the attitude of Lord Man are all too evident (although the extent to which life itself is threatened is unknown); but here important questions arise as to just how nourishing and cherishing relationships between Mother Earth and her wayward sons and daughters might be reawakened.

LaChapelle argues that modern people might—indeed, must—recover these ancient sensibilities through ritual, breaking away from our homo-
centric and rationalistic schemes of thought. Nature is not just an occasionally unruly "other," a standing reserve to be harnessed through technology to the wants of the consumer culture, but an avenue of discovery leading toward concealed foundations of existence. Yet these realities remain hidden, and nature mute, because "we have idolized ideals, rationality and a limited kind of 'practicality,' and have regarded the conscious rituals of... other cultures as at best frivolous curiosities. The results are all too evident. We've only been here a few hundred years and already we have done irreparable damage to vast areas of this country now called... [the United States of America]." Through earth rituals and ceremonies LaChapelle believes that we might escape the imprisoning effect of the linear-logical side of our brain and thousands of years of cultural conditioning.\textsuperscript{83} In making her case, and we cannot begin to do justice to her arguments here, she draws on a rich variety of psychology, anthropology, ethology, and philosophy. "Ritual provides us with a tool for learning to think logically, analogically and ecologically as we move toward a sustainable culture. Most important of all, perhaps, during rituals we have the experience, unique in our culture, of neither opposing nature nor trying to be in communion with nature... but of finding ourselves within nature, and that is the key to sustainable culture."\textsuperscript{84}

A second characteristic of ecofeminist thought is the hypothesis that present-day environmental malaise results from gender conversion—a shift from thinking of nature as a nurturing mother to the masculine idea of nature as a foe to be conquered. According to Merchant,

The metaphor of the earth as a nurturing mother was gradually to vanish as a dominant image as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to mechanize and rationalize the world view. The second image [of nature as female], nature as disorder, called forth an important modern idea, that of power over nature. Two new ideas, those of mechanism and of the domination and mastery of nature, became core concepts of the modern world. An organically oriented mentality in which female principles played an important role was undermined and replaced by a mechanically oriented mentality that either eliminated or used female principles in an exploitative manner. As Western culture became increasingly mechanized in the 1600s, the female earth and virgin earth spirit were subdued by the machine.\textsuperscript{85}

A difficulty, not necessarily a fatal flaw, with this thesis is that machines in and of themselves are neither masculine nor feminine; some people view machines, such as ships and cars, as feminine. More fundamentally, gender
conversion, a shift from thinking of the natural world as revered female to thinking of it as a hostile foe or inhuman "other," occurred much earlier than the scientific revolution—perhaps in the transition from Paleolithic to Neolithic culture. Through the domestication of animals and the cultivation of grains nature slowly lost its feminine mystery and became a masculine foe requiring domination; the feminine principle retained currency only through association with fecundity or as a source of chaos and through assimilation into patriarchal ideology and institutions.86

The work of Rosemary Ruether is particularly relevant to understanding how the feminine came to be conceptualized as a source of disorder, thwarting human purpose. She argues that Judeo-Christianity has been and remains androcentric, and correlates "femaleness with the lower part of human nature in a hierarchical scheme of mind over body, reason over passions. Since this lower part of the self is seen as the source of sin—the falling away of the body from its original unity with the mind and hence into sin and death—femaleness also becomes linked with the sin-prone part of the self." Male monotheism subsequently reinforced this metaphysical distinction between male and female, spirit and matter, becoming "the vehicle of a psychocultural revolution of the male ruling class in its relationship to surrounding reality." From Ruether's perspective the Western world's relentless humanizing of wild nature is implicit in abandoning the matriarchal nature worship of our archaic ancestors and embracing Yahweh as the one, absolute God.

Whereas ancient myth had seen the Gods and Goddesses as within the matrix of one physical-spiritual reality, male monotheism begins to split reality into a dualism of transcendent Spirit (mind, ego) and inferior and dependent physical nature...87

Both the Hebrew Genesis story and the Platonic creation story of Timaeus retain reminiscences of the idea of primal matter as something already existing that is ordered or shaped by the Creator God. But this now becomes the lower pole in the hierarchy of being. Thus the hierarchy of God-male-female does not merely make woman secondary in relation to God, it also gives her a negative identity in relation to the divine.87

Ruether's analysis both theoretically and practically reinforces the work of others in the ecofeminist movement, especially the idea that humankind's unrelenting exploitation of the earth is a consequence of androcentric ideas and values. Contemporary feminist theology may very well, as Ruether claims, help expose "the Big Lie" (Modernism) as an illusion, and
disclose "the Divine Wisdom" as an alternative way of thinking about ourselves and our relations to the natural world. The big lie is, in part, that "man must drive the devils and witches from the world, restore order, put himself in charge, reduce nature to his control. With numbers and formulas he can search out her innermost secrets, learn all the laws of her ways; become her lord and master. The cosmos is reduced to elements, molecules, atoms, positive and negative charges, infinitely manipulatable, having no nature of her own, given to him to do with what he will." But mere criticism is in the end incomplete, and Ruether thus necessarily addresses the positive pole of ecofeminist theology: the Divine Wisdom.

Through the fissures of the system we glimpse the forgotten world of our homeland. We learn to walk again; to watch sunsets; to examine leaves; to plant seeds in soil. Turn off the TV; talk to each other to ease the frenetic pace; get in touch with our circulatory system, with the rhythms of our menstrual cycle that link us to the pull of the moon and tides of the sea.

The scales begin to fall from our eyes, and all around us we see miracles. Babies grow in wombs without help from computers. The sun rises every day. Con Ed sends no bill for sunshine. The harmony is still there, persisting, supporting, forgiving, preserving us in spite of ourselves. Divine Grace keeps faith with us when we have broken faith with her.

Again, from a modernist perspective this claim is nonsense. What do women know of pollution and its causes, or the economics of cleaning up acid rain? Then again, as Gary Snyder writes, we shall see who knows how to be.

A third characteristic of ecofeminist thought is its egalitarianism. Ecofeminists almost uniformly advocate reconsideration of male-female roles—both in the family and society—and relations between human and infrahuman species, and thus oppose long-established patterns of human behavior. By articulating a need for reexamination of gender-based roles, ecofeminism draws from its roots in the women's movement. And whatever the theoretical strengths and weaknesses of ecofeminism, its agenda for action underscores the idea that we live in an age of ecology. An ecological paradigm, with its emphasis on holism and internal relations, forces us to reconsider questions of human nature and culture that have usually been thought of as closed. Such reexaminations are difficult, in part because the age-old nature-nurture controversy immediately thwarts us, and in part because we are the subject of inquiry. Further, the data become increasingly
murky as we peer into the dim recesses of the Paleolithic and even dimmer as we look back to the protohumanoids. Archaeologists heatedly dispute the role of women in the Paleolithic age. Was our human beingness fundamentally shaped more by "woman the gatherer" than "man the hunter"? Did the erect posture of protohumanoids lead to premature birthing and thus cause females to seek out males for protection during the now extended period of caring for children? We cannot resolve these issues here, but have again encountered the fundamental questions of human beingness that so many wilderness philosophers and poets raise.

Once the assumptions of the intrinsic superiority of the human species over nature and of man over woman are held in abeyance, then alternative views of these relations—the human to the nonhuman, and male to female—become possible. Michael Zimmerman observes that "it is plausible to suggest that . . . women are in a better position than most men to help reconstruct the humanity-nature relation in light of their ongoing sensitivity toward and involvement with their own bodies and the rest of nature. We must be careful, however, not to fall prey to the sex-based stereotyping that has been so crucial to maintaining patriarchy." Obviously ecofeminism contradicts resourcism, and just as clearly ecofeminism seems difficult to reconcile with preservationism, which does not presume to challenge such idées fixes as the respective roles of male and female. Some ecofeminists have argued against biocentrism, believing that at base it remains androcentric by extending male rights to the nonhuman other. If so, then biocentrism "fails to include moral categories that arise from a feminine experience of self and world. The experience of relatedness reported by many women gives rise to a morality of caring for the concrete needs of those with whom one is related." Yet viewed ecologically either male or female simpliciter is an abstraction from a natural kind (the human species) and biological process (evolutionary history) and thus risks becoming a metaphysical entity independent of human experience. To believe that hormones and sexual organs are destiny is to denigrate the full potentiality of our human beingness. Zimmerman argues that "if patriarchy is an interpretive framework, is feminism itself not another such framework? Does feminism pretend to provide a nondistorted, impartial way of interpreting experience? Are feminists raised under patriarchy motivated by their own version of the power drive that is essential to patriarchy?" Male and female do not exist apart from a natural and cultural continuum, and in any case "authentic [nonexist] human existence would inevitably transform the current exploitative treatment of nature." 90

This assertion finds parallels in the ecofeminist literature. Merchant,
for example, believes that once we begin to view the world of human experience ecosystemically, rather than either homocentrically or androcentrically, we realize that “nature cannot continue to provide free goods and services for profit-hungry humans, because the ultimate costs are too great.” But transforming the relations between the human species and nature inevitably involves transforming male-female relations, since

the dualism of separate public and private spheres should be severed and male and female roles in both the household and the workplace merged. Cooperation between men and women in each specific context—childrearing, day-care centers, household work, productive work, sexual relations, etc.—rather than separate gender roles could create emotional rewards. Men and women would engage together in the production of use-values and would work together to scale down the production of commodities that are costly to nature. Technologies appropriate to the task, technologies having a low impact on the environment, would be chosen whenever possible.91

The Idea of Wilderness and the Hermeneutic Circle

Our inquiry into contemporary ideas of wilderness seems to have reached an impasse, where articles of faith preclude further discussion. Opposition among the contending forces appears irreconcilable. RESOURCISM rules the modern world, and this is no surprise. Humankind must live, and the conservationist idea of wilderness is entirely consistent with that cultural plan for existence called Modernism. The resource conservationist and shallow ecologist view wild nature as a means only to human ends. Accordingly, humankind is understood not as a part of but apart from the green world. Nature is presumed to be merely inert matter-energy devoid of value until the humanizing force of civilization is forced upon it. PRESERVATIONISM abandons the modernist faith that nature is only a collection of parts that obey the mechanical laws of nature, embraces the idea that nature is a living whole in evolutionary process, and affirms the importance of aesthetic and scientific values. But preservationism at paradigmatic base remains anthropocentric since all values rest on the assumption that human beings are the apex of creation and the measure of all worth. ECOCENTRISM attempts to escape this bias by inverting the relation between our species and the natural world. So understood, ecocentrism embraces holism and overcomes speciesism. Yet culture refutes any thesis that the human project is strictly natural or that the good life can
be equated with a natural life: to be human is to be enframed by language and history. Deep ecology is the leading and therefore ragged edge of a postmodern idea of wilderness—consistent with preservationism (holism) and ecocentrism (rejection of speciesism) even while going beyond these ideas of wilderness by embracing a mélange of additional ideas: bioregionalism, ecofeminism, and green politics. Yet deep ecology suffers from limitations of both theory and praxis. Pragmatically considered, green politics is likely too little too late, too radical to have more than a minimal influence on the cultural mainstream. More fundamentally, although deep ecology has exposed many of the anomalies of Modernism, it provides no philosophically adequate undergirding (ontological, cosmological, epistemological) for a postmodern project. Foundational ecology is now more multifaceted process than finished paradigm. And last, but not least, is ecofeminism, engendered by the same historical circumstances that have created preservationism, ecocentrism, and deep ecology. Yet ecofeminism is more identification of a complicated problematic involving sex-based ideology than a solution, for the modern world obliviously, and therefore androcentrically, marches on. Although the feminist critique offers insightful, often original perspectives on the anomalies of Modernism, it appears at its radical edges to be paradigmatically incapable of transcending them without falling into “feminarchy.”

Perhaps there is a way beyond, since the idea of wilderness conceivably entails larger questions that might transcend the conceptual quandary now confronting us. My conjecture, however preposterous this might seem to the modern mind, is that the theoretical spectrum before us—from resourcism through deep ecology and ecofeminism—remains entangled with that cultural project that is the West. Modernism yet rules the world, even if surreptitiously, and thus only by going beyond its bounds to Postmodernism can our dilemma be overcome. In this presumption I claim neither privileged dispensation nor insight, only to be carried along in a natural and cultural stream set in motion long, long ago. I admit to the inadequacy of the arguments to follow, for the matters of which I speak are those of possibility, not probability. And yet a new synthesis—a postmodern idea of wilderness that is a profoundly ecological and evolutionary point of view—is possible. This idea of wilderness presumes to cover the evolution of human consciousness from its first glimmerings of self-consciousness in the Paleolithic mind to the entirely reflexive consciousness of the postmodern mind, and to see the human project as taking place within rather than outside nature.

In hypothesizing that a transformation from Modernism to Postmod-
ernism is underway I invite criticism from those of Cartesian-Newtonian persuasion: that is, the majority of Western intellectuals. Yet, maybe, as many have suggested in different ways, we might emerge from the repressiveness that is the history of Western rationalism. Just as evolution was to any intellectual of the nineteenth century—that is, a stubborn factum that could not be denied without rendering any consequent argument irrelevant and fallacious—so Postmodernism. Clearly we cannot deny that the method of tenacity, as Peirce so aptly termed it, still rules the world and that the final vocabulary of the modernist worldview will abide as a privileged and putatively absolute perspective. Any pretense, however, to intellectual viability forces consideration of the questions of modernity. Here my critics might justifiably remark that I have lapsed into prophesy: but either history is sound and fury signifying nothing, or, as I have argued for nine chapters, this brief interlude of cosmic history—the history of humankind—does mean something. The question is what?

Let us proceed cautiously from what Neil Evernden has recognized as the common core of contemporary ideas of wilderness: environmentalism.

Environmentalism, like Romanticism, constitutes a defence of value. I am now asserting an even more fundamental role, the defence of meaning. We call people environmentalists because what they are finally moved to defend is what we call environment. But, at bottom, their action is a defence of cosmos, not scenery. Ironically, the very entity they defend—environment—is itself an offspring of the nihilistic behemoth they challenge. It is a manifestation of the way we view [and speak of] the world.

Thereby Evernden invites us to abandon the modernist worldview that is either explicitly or tacitly assumed by existing ideas of wilderness and to think like postmodern men and women. Yet paradox of paradoxes, we are people who conceive of the world in terms of the learned categorical scheme of Modernism. It seems impossible to understand any alternative, for that would entail abandoning the cultural project on which we have been so long embarked: the modern mind is inescapably enframed by language and history. Still, there is the possibility of understanding something beyond for those who are willing to stand within the hermeneutic circle, and to listen to the words of the edifying philosophers. “Where is the literature,” Thoreau asks, “which gives expression to Nature?”

He would be a poet who could impress the winds and streams into his service, to speak for him; who nailed words to their primitive
senses, as farmers drive down stakes in the spring, which the frost has heaved; who derived his words as often as he used them,—transplanted them to his page with earth adhering to their roots; whose words were so true and fresh and natural that they would appear to expand like the buds at the approach of spring, though they lay half smothered between two musty leaves in a library,—aye, to bloom and bear fruit there, after their kind, annually, for the faithful reader, in sympathy with surrounding Nature.  

And so we wend our way toward a postmodern idea of wilderness, one that is necessarily fragmentary. I have no illusions of solving the many problems of theory and practice that have confronted us throughout this study. Chapter 10 is grounded in the work of Martin Heidegger, who reveals so insightfully that humankind is language, and suffers from the illusion that it masters and possesses language; Paul Ricoeur, whose hermeneutic phenomenology turns attention toward the essential bidirectionality of language, and thereby helps reestablish contact with the bios, the Ursprung, the elemental and primitive that underlies the logos; and Marjorie Grene, among the first to see that the way back to the green world, or the path to healing the rift between wilderness and civilization, lies in taking a hermeneutical step back. But the most immediate linkage to the hermeneutic community is with Richard Rorty, who argues in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature that we—and by we he means anybody who ever looked beyond the end of his or her culture bound nose—"are well on the way to seeing conversation as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood." More recently, Rorty argues for solidarity, an idea that can be extended to include nonhuman others: the land, the plants, and the animals. The dramatic implication of all this is that wilderness philosophy and literature is the cutting edge by which nature's experiment in humanity is transforming itself from the modern to the postmodern era. In chapter 10 I attempt in part to confirm and exemplify the validity of the hermeneutical thesis—that conversation is the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood—by looking generally at the wilderness philosophy and literature genre during the past 150 years. In doing this we shall again gaze upon the work of the poetic thinkers and the thinking poets we have previously encountered.