

## ▪ INTRODUCTION

Most people know about radical ecology from headlines featuring Greenpeace members risking life and limb to confront polluters and whalers; from stories about the women of Greenham Common spending years in a vigil next to a British air base to protest nuclear weapons; or from reports of Earth First!ers resisting attempts to log old-growth forests in the Northwest. This book, although acknowledging the importance of such groups, concerns itself with the less publicized work of radical ecological *theorists* who represent three major branches of radical ecology: deep ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism. To be sure, in addition to writing essays, these theorists also take other political steps to protest and to alter ecologically destructive practices. In what follows, however, I focus on analyzing, comparing, and evaluating their attempts to provide philosophical frameworks to justify and guide such activism. Although initially attracted to deep ecology, I have learned much from social ecology and ecofeminism. Hence, my intention is to offer an equitable reading of all three branches of radical ecology, though I acknowledge that my reading will inevitably be colored by my own perspectives. Let me begin by briefly sketching some of the basic concerns of each.

Deep ecology explains the ecological crisis as the outcome of the

anthropocentric humanism that is central to the leading ideologies of modernity, including liberal capitalism and Marxism. Hoping to free humankind from material deprivation by controlling nature, modern societies tend to overlook the fact that humans, too, are part of nature. Hence, attempts to gain control of nature have also led to attempts to control human behavior in ways that limit freedom and prevent “self-realization.” In general, deep ecologists call for a shift away from anthropocentric humanism toward an ecocentrism guided by the norm of self-realization for all beings.

Social ecology explains the ecological crisis as the outcome not of a generalized anthropocentrism, but rather as the result of authoritarian social structures, embodied most perniciously in capitalism but also present in state socialism. Wanton destruction of nature reflects the distorted social relations at work in hierarchical systems, in which elites subjugate other people while pillaging the natural world for prestige, profit, and control. Maintaining that humans *are* nature rendered self-conscious, social ecologists call for small-scale, egalitarian, anarchistic societies, which recognize that human well-being is inextricably bound up with the well-being of the natural world on which human life depends.

Finally, ecofeminists often explain the ecological crisis as the outcome of the patriarchy that follows the “logic of domination.” According to this logic, whatever is defined as superior to something else is entitled to use the “inferior” thing in any manner the superior so chooses. Under patriarchy, maleness, rationality, spirit, and culture have been regarded as superior, whereas femaleness, emotion, body, and nature have been regarded as inferior. Members of the allegedly “superior” gender, males, have traditionally felt justified not only in subjugating women, but also in abusing nature. The logic of domination also works by forcing the “other” to conform to the categories that define the masculine, patriarchal subject. Wild nature, then, like “headstrong” women, must be tamed, ordered, and otherwise rendered pliant to masculine will. According to ecofeminists, only dismantling patriarchy will free human relations and nature alike from the dark consequences of the logic of domination.

Despite a number of internal disputes, all radical ecologists attempt to distinguish themselves from “reform environmentalists,” who seek to curb industrial pollution and to use natural resources more wisely, but who do not call for basic alterations in modernity’s instrumentalist view of nature. Radical ecologists insist, however, that unless far-reaching changes *do* occur in this and related views, as well as in authoritarian political and socioeconomic arrangements associated with them, modernity’s attempt to gain wealth and security through technological control over nature could trigger off ecological catastrophes capable of destroying humankind and much of the rest of terrestrial life. Rejected twenty years ago by mainstream society, some of the claims of radical ecologists are being examined more carefully by a number of contemporary economists, scientists, and politicians, who concede that ecological problems cannot be solved simply by tinkering with the attitudes and practices that generated those problems.

The task of analyzing, comparing, and evaluating these three types of radical ecology has proved to be more complex than I thought it would several years ago, when I first envisioned writing a book on this topic. Let me explain by referring to my own personal and intellectual path to one branch of radical ecology, deep ecology. Like many students during the 1960s, I vilified industrialism and other aspects of the modernity that I held responsible both for ecological violence, and for personal alienation and social disintegration. At the same time that I admired the apparently simpler and more satisfying life of premodern peoples, however, I internalized many of modernity’s emancipatory goals, a fact that led me to support the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The counterculture of this period reflected my own ambiguous attitude toward modernity. On the one hand, counterculturalists condemned the dark consequences of modernity, including urban alienation, a control-obsessed technological culture, widespread social violence, and ecological destruction. On the other hand, counterculturalists often used their own version of modernity’s rhetoric of freedom, emancipation, and self-determination. Hence, despite their “back to nature” tendencies,

exemplified by experiments with countryside communes, and despite their critique of many features of modernity, many counterculturalists understood themselves far less as politically conservative than as progressive, in the sense that they envisioned the advent of a “new age,” characterized by dramatic improvements in personal, political, ecological, and spiritual conditions. Counterculturalists, however, believed that this new era could not arise in the context of modernity’s dualistic, control-oriented, hyperrational outlook, but instead would require insights and practices drawn from premodern tribal peoples, from the world’s wisdom traditions, from contemporary visionaries attuned to the complex relations between humankind and nature, and from the best of modernity’s democratic traditions. The radical ecological movement, in which I began taking part in the 1970s, is an offshoot of the counterculture; hence, radical ecologists criticize *some* aspects of modernity, while appropriating and transforming *other* elements of its emancipatory vision.

It was during the time that I was adopting the counterculture’s ambiguous attitude toward modernity that I encountered the writings of Martin Heidegger. Attracted to his critique of technological modernity’s diminishment of humankind and destruction of nature, I was also drawn to his idea of a “new beginning” that would renew human existence in a way that would also halt humanity’s baleful treatment of nature. In the mid-1970s, I began interpreting Heidegger as a forerunner of deep ecology.<sup>1</sup> Like his former student, Herbert Marcuse, I read Heidegger as a sophisticated counterculturalist whose views could somehow be reconciled with my own hopes for a politically and socially liberated, but ecologically sound society.<sup>2</sup> My original plans for a book on radical ecology, with special emphasis on a Heideggerian deep ecology, began to change in the late 1980s, however, when Victor Farias and Hugo Ott disclosed that Heidegger’s life and thought were far more involved with National Socialism than I had previously believed.<sup>3</sup> In 1933, Heidegger viewed Hitler’s revolution as constituting the “new dawn” that would make possible a “complete transformation” of human existence. What had long seemed apparent to the promodernity critics of Heidegger now

became clear to me. Because he used rhetoric consistent with the antimodernist, antidemocratic, antiegalitarian rhetoric of Nazism, Heidegger could not be understood, as I had thought, as a progressive thinker. In view of these disturbing revelations about the link between Heidegger's thought and his politics, I came to write two books, in which I reexamine in an interrelated way my attitude both toward modernity and toward movements, such as radical ecology, which sharply criticize aspects of modernity.

The first of these two books is *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*.<sup>4</sup> In this text and in the one that follows it, I define "modernity" as the socioeconomic arrangements legitimated by political ideologies arising from the European Enlightenment, including Marxism and liberal capitalism. Insofar as they criticize authoritarian social structures and promote egalitarian doctrines, Marxism and liberalism are both progressive ideologies, despite important differences. Heidegger's critique of such modernity and the technology accompanying it was, I came to see, one voice in a cultural conversation in which Spengler, Jünger, and other "conservative revolutionaries" took part. Rejecting the progressive interpretation of history offered by proponents of Enlightenment modernity, including Hegel and Marx, these Nietzsche-influenced authors maintained that history lacked any direction. Rather, history for them was simply a series of temporary power constellations that could best be appreciated as aesthetic phenomena with no hidden "meaning" or "purpose." Significant features of such Nietzscheanism, including a kind of "antihumanism," are discernible in Heidegger's radical critique of modern concepts of truth, subjectivity, freedom, and history.

Elements of this critique appear in the work of a group of contemporary French philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, whom I call "postmodern theorists."<sup>5</sup> Postmodern theorists reject the totalitarianism that they associate with modernity, while emphasizing political pluralism and cultural difference. Yet these theorists do not always seem to appreciate the extent to which adopting Heidegger's blanket critique of modernity can lead to dangerous political positions.<sup>6</sup> In *Heidegger's Confrontation with Mo-*

*dermity*, I thus had a double intention. Although acknowledging the importance of postmodern theory's critique of modernity's totalizing ideologies that cannot tolerate uncertainty, ambiguity, difference, and otherness, I also warn of the reactionary potential of a postmodern theory that completely rejects modernity, especially its positive emancipatory goals.

If the first book examines Heidegger's thought in terms of the complex promodernity versus antimodernity dispute, the present work—now before you—analyzes radical ecology in terms of that dispute. Having once read Heidegger's thought as partly compatible with deep ecology, I now ask whether deep ecology in particular and radical ecology *in general* are in fact compatible with a reactionary type of antimodernism. Defenders of the progressive project of modernity, including Marxists and liberal democrats, have answered this question affirmatively. They contend that the mood of radical ecologists and many other counterculturalists recalls the cultural despair and loss of nerve that helped to pave the way for the dismal "new age" of National Socialism. Progressive theorists suspect that radical ecology's critique of modernity's aim of conquering nature must go hand in hand with reactionary, antidemocratic views that propose to justify authoritarian measures to solve an allegedly universal ecological crisis. Because Nazi racism linked the "blood purity" of the *Volk* to a healthy natural environment, an entire generation had to pass after World War II before environmental movements could gain prominence in Western countries.

Denying such oppressive aims, many radical ecologists envision the emergence of nonauthoritarian, nonoppressive, nonhierarchical, "postmodern" societies in which free, playful, decentered, heterogeneous people live in small, bioregionally oriented, technically efficient, democratic, ecologically sound communities.<sup>7</sup> Realizing this vision, which is undeniably attractive to many contemporary people, would require an enormous shift in contemporary attitudes, practices, and institutions. My increased understanding of the link between Heidegger's thought and his politics, however, along with my study of postmodern theory after Heidegger, have led me to be more

skeptical of grand proposals for revolutionary change, including those based on fears of an ecological crisis. Many radical ecologists have charged that this crisis arises from modernity's obsession with control and power. But since they themselves were raised within and are thus inevitably influenced by modernity, questions arise as to whether they are sufficiently free from this control obsession, and whether—in attempting to save nature from further destruction—they will repeat the errors that undermined modernity's positive emancipatory aims and led to such ecological destruction.

Because “nature” and the “natural” are to such a large extent socially mediated, threats to nature can be (and, in fact, have been) interpreted by unscrupulous people to mean that “unnatural” outsiders are threatening cultural, political, and socioeconomic arrangements that are supposedly “natural,” but which in fact are historically constituted, and often authoritarian and exploitative. In stressful times, people are all too willing to surrender to leaders promising to end humanity's alienation from nature. Hence, one aim of this book is to encourage radical ecologists to take into account not only the political dangers facing every revolutionary movement, but also the specific dangers posed by movements seeking to improve humanity's relation to “nature.” A related aim is to examine the extent to which the views of radical ecologists are consistent with emancipatory political orientations, the definitions and even the possibility of which are themselves hotly contested questions.

Although taking seriously the political risks of radical ecology's critique of modernity and its attitude to nature, I nonetheless explore ways in which radical ecology's yearning for a “postmodern” ecological age can be read as being somehow in accord with an emancipatory, progressive vision. Denying that their aims are either totalitarian or reactionary, radical ecologists usefully reveal the social and ecological wrongs committed in the name of progressive modern worldviews. Many radical ecologists believe that the ecological crisis stems from the fact that modernity's proponents have simply assumed that human emancipation and well-being can be achieved only by somehow “mastering” the natural world. Here, I join radical

ecologists in arguing that this idea is both nonsensical and self-defeating, since humankind itself is not merely a historical being, but arises through, participates in, and depends on natural processes.

Though they agree with postmodern theory's critique of modernity's totalizing control obsession, many radical ecologists are also like progressive critics in suspecting that postmodern theory can be neoconservative, since it renounces the possibility of a general critique of the conditions generating social and ecological problems.<sup>8</sup> One progressive critic, for instance, asks whether it is any accident that, at the very moment in which capitalism is transforming the planet into a homogenized production unit, many postmodern theorists encourage students "to reject global and universal narratives in favor of fragmentary conceptions of the world as 'text'."<sup>9</sup> Postmodern theorists reply, however, that their work criticizes oppression and encourages freedom, even if the latter can be both construed and achieved only in limited ways and then under particular circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, postmodern theorists, along with some radical ecologists influenced by postmodern theory, remain skeptical of large-scale, radical ecological narratives that are reminiscent of the metaphysical foundationalism characteristic of modern ideologies and their countercultural cousins. According to these skeptics, yearning for a new age in which social antagonism and humanity-nature dualism will finally be overcome may in fact lead to new forms of social oppression that may also, paradoxically, *worsen* the ecological situation.

To facilitate my analysis of radical ecology in terms of the complex dispute between modernists and antimodernists, progressives and postmodernists, I focus on how deep ecology is contested, in different respects, by social ecology and by ecofeminism. In part because of my attempts to link Heidegger and deep ecology, many social ecologists have come to maintain that the latter's critique of anthropocentrism tends to promote an "ecofascism," that is, an authoritarian antihumanism wrapped in ecological garb. Hence, social ecologists maintain that deep ecology should be excluded from the ranks of radical ecology, especially if the latter term has anything



to do with human emancipation. Attempting now to mediate the dispute between deep ecology and social ecology, I want to explore whether the former's ideal of "self-realization" for all beings can be regarded as consistent with an expanded and transformed version of modernity's emancipatory aims.

If social ecologists consider deep ecology as dangerously anti-modernist, many ecofeminists believe that deep ecology remains promodernist, though in a way that fails to nurture true liberation. Since feminism has played such an important role in postmodern theory's critique of the *patriarchal* dimension of modernity, it should come as no surprise that ecofeminists have complained that male deep ecologists are blind to the masculine bias inscribed into their supposedly universal ideal of "self-realization." In 1984, ecofeminist Ariel Kay Salleh published a stinging critique of deep ecology.<sup>11</sup> According to Salleh, the sincere efforts of deep ecologists like Arne Naess, Bill Devall, and George Sessions were compromised by their masculinist blindness to the connection between patriarchy and the domination of nature. Convinced that ecofeminism's critique of deep ecology merited serious consideration, but hoping to avert a crippling factionalism within the ranks of radical ecology, I wrote essays seeking common ground in the dispute between deep ecology and ecofeminism.<sup>12</sup> In what follows, I explore this dispute in more detail.

Many ecofeminists agree with deep ecology's critique of modernity's oppression of many women and men, and its destructive treatment of nature, but they disagree with deep ecology's contention that humanity-nature dualism can be overcome by a process of "wider identification," which I read as a progressive dimension of deep ecology. Deep ecologists maintain that today nature is treated almost exclusively instrumentally because modern people often regard nature as radically other than or separate from themselves. People who allow their sense of "self" to expand, so as to include other people as well as animals, plants, and ecosystems, achieve a wider sense of identity. Such wider identification presumably allows people spontaneously to care for animals, plants, and

ecosystems, instead of treating them either indifferently or as mere commodities. Yet ecofeminists read “wider identification” not as a progressive concept, but rather as both the self-expansion of the modern masculinist ego, and as the echo of patriarchal modernity’s totalizing attitude that seeks to erase difference in order to attain a problematic unity. Although deep ecologists concede that patriarchy has justified vast social and ecological destruction, they reply that freeing society from patriarchy would not necessarily end attempts to dominate nature, for such attempts are manifestations of a general anthropocentric humanism.<sup>13</sup>

My attempt to interpret deep ecology’s ideal of self-realization in progressive terms will be met with skepticism not only by most social ecologists, who view deep ecology as a reactionary movement, and not only by many ecofeminists, who view deep ecology as unwitting patriarchal modernists, but also by some deep ecologists themselves, for whom the idea of “progress” is tainted with modernity’s Promethean ideals. To be sure, some radical ecologists offer a more nuanced critique of modernity, for they are cognizant of the perils of a wholesale condemnation of it. Others, however, seem to agree with those postmodern theorists who assert that modernity’s supposedly emancipatory, universally valid narratives turned out to be simply power motivated, Eurocentric stories that justified social horrors ranging from concentration camps to Third World colonization. For such theorists, as one critic notes, modernity is solely “the termination of a terrible mistake, a collective madness, a relentless compulsion, a deadly illusion.”<sup>14</sup>

As one might expect, many progressive theorists repudiate postmodern theory’s critical analysis of modernity. Indeed, some of them regard “postmodern theory,” “postmodernism,” and “postmodernity” as virtually meaningless terms, since such terms refer to a host of apparently conflicting phenomena. Other critics regard postmodernism as a concept that fails to understand how capitalism remains responsible for many of the cultural changes to which postmodern theorists often point as evidence of the end of modernity.<sup>15</sup> In spite of my appreciation for such objections, I nonetheless believe that

“modern” times *are* undergoing significant change, not least because the ecological crisis constitutes a potentially insurmountable obstacle to modernity’s dream of infinite material growth. The words “post-modern” and “postmodernity” are often used to refer to the complex social and cultural permutations that are now occurring. In this essay, I use “postmodernity” specifically to refer to the unstable contemporary situation in which many modern socioeconomic structures remain in place, but in which modernity’s progressive ideologies and many of its basic assumptions are being challenged from a number of different angles.<sup>16</sup>

For example, in addition to the fact that many people now question modernity’s assumptions that incessant economic growth is both possible and desirable, other significant events are taking place: Third World peoples are challenging Eurocentric historical teleology; the relentlessly self-critical character of modern theorizing is undermining assumptions about rational foundations and metaphysical foundationalism; those for whom truth is a perspectival, power-oriented affair are questioning assumptions about “objective” or “eternal” truth; and those who emphasize the relational, decentered, and heterogeneous character of human “identity” are questioning the primacy of the centered, self-controlled, patriarchal ego.<sup>17</sup> Concomitant with such challenges are the questions that postmodern theorists are raising about the relationship between representation and “reality.”<sup>18</sup> In describing modernity’s major ideologies as “grand narratives,” postmodern theorists such as Jean-François Lyotard have emphasized that those ideologies are not statements representing or corresponding to an absolute truth, but are rather akin to literary fictions or to artistic constructions, whose validity is measured by their efficacy and durability, not by their alleged “correspondence” to an independently existing “reality.”

Yet in spite of the trenchant critiques offered by postmodernists of various stripes, many radical ecologists refuse either to abandon their own broad narratives, or to concede that those narratives are simply useful fictions that express nothing “true” about humankind, nature, and their appropriate interrelationship. In these

respects, these radical ecologists often have more in common with what I am calling *counterculturalism* than with postmodern theory. I define “counterculturalism” broadly to include not only the New Age movement of the 1970s and the New Paradigm movement of the 1980s, but also the worldwide Green movement, of which radical ecology at the broadest level is a manifestation. Despite agreeing with postmodern theory’s critique of the dark consequences of modernity’s grand narratives, most counterculturalists still persist in exhibiting their own versions of modernity’s optimism. Hence, for example, many counterculturalists believe that humankind is evolving to a “higher” consciousness that will mitigate not only personal problems, but social and ecological problems as well. Some counterculturalists articulate their evolutionary narratives in terms drawn from sources that most modernists would regard as “irrational” and “mystical.” Yet other counterculturalists seek to ground their views just as proponents of modernity have so often done: by appealing to the findings of contemporary science, especially the increasingly popular view that, despite important regularities, natural events involve an inherently unpredictable dimension that makes possible novelty, spontaneity, and even “freedom.”

Although apparently offering a new way of explaining the possibility of freedom—an ideal defined somewhat differently by radical ecologists, counterculturalists, and modernists—such new scientific theories also pose challenges to radical ecology. For instance, a number of contemporary ecologists appeal to chaos theory in order to contest the once-established view, favored by a number of radical ecologists, that natural systems are “healthy” when “stable” and “ecologically balanced.” Rejecting the idea that individual organisms are temporary manifestations of enduring, overarching ecosystems, these new ecologists suggest that such “systems” are merely the unintended results of interactions among countless individual organisms. If natural “order” is best understood as a temporary stabilization of processes that are primarily chaotic and dynamic, what sense does it make to speak of an ecological balance? For radical ecology, the potential implications of this shift in ecological theory

are important. If in fact there is no such balance, and if natural processes are constantly in flux, why should anyone take seriously radical ecology's warning that the practices of advanced technological societies are throwing nature "out of balance"?

In some ways, chaos theory seems compatible with postmodern theory's critique of modernity's search for a univocal, stable structure that organizes all phenomena. Assuming that there is no such structure, postmodern theory asserts that truth claims are best understood as perspectival, heterogeneous, mutable, and differential. This idea of "truth" also poses certain problems for radical ecology. Of course, many radical ecologists agree that modernity's quest for "totalizing" truth has justified destructive social and ecological projects, and that recognizing the perspectival character of knowledge claims may promote a healthy skepticism regarding ideologies that promise freedom, but which often end up oppressing people and devastating ecosystems. But if truth is merely perspectival, there would seem to be no basis for the assumption made by some radical ecologists that their views involve higher, eternally valid truths about humankind, nature, and their "proper" relationship. If there are no privileged moral, epistemological, or metaphysical perspectives, radical ecologists have no choice but to enter into a *contest* to determine which of many competing views will shape the future of human society and the living Earth.

A number of ecofeminists take postmodern theory's perspectival view of truth more seriously than do either deep ecologists or social ecologists. Hence, as we noted earlier, many ecofeminists contend that deep ecologists and some social ecologists promote ideas that are supposedly universal, but which in fact reflect the attitudes of white, Western males. But other ecofeminists make a more general claim: that ecological destruction and social domination are manifestations of the power interests of patriarchal "man," who denies his mortality, finitude, and limitation.<sup>19</sup> The idea that man's rage against finitude leads to so many of modernity's problems, including ecological devastation, would appear to be part of a grand narrative claiming to be "true," in the sense of somehow disclosing or corresponding to major features of human history.

Still intrigued by the possibility that some such narratives may not only be useful, but also in some sense true, I explore by way of example the grand narrative offered by the deservedly noted “transpersonal” theorist, Ken Wilber. His narrative of the evolution of human consciousness from prehistoric times to the present is consistent with and can be read as harmonizing important elements of all three branches of radical ecology. Moreover, his narrative also offers a perceptive way of addressing the promodernity-antimodernity debate. According to Wilber, humankind is in the process of evolving beyond the constricted, dualistic mode of “mental-egoic” consciousness celebrated by many proponents of modernity. Denying that post-egoic consciousness involves psychological regression, Wilber defines such consciousness as an advance toward a less dualistic and more integrated, yet also highly differentiated awareness that would be compatible with nonauthoritarian, postpatriarchal, ecologically sane societies. In Wilber’s view, achieving such nondual, transpersonal awareness makes possible the affirmation of one’s mortality, and thus the cessation of resentment against finitude. Nondual awareness purportedly reveals that one already participates in an eternal domain that simultaneously embraces and transcends spatiotemporal phenomena.

As a progressive thinker, Wilber maintains that modernity is an important phase of human history, in that it represents the fullest development of what he calls mental-egoic subjectivity. Modernity’s political ideals and institutions, including the rights of persons, constitutional guarantees of liberty, democratic principles, and egalitarianism, are important achievements that need to be broadly consolidated. Wilber further asserts, however, that criticism of modernity is justified not only because it has helped to generate such social oppression and ecological destruction, but also because neither modern ideologies nor the modern ego subject are “final” stages in human evolution, but instead are temporary moments along the way toward nondualistic, “postmodern” consciousness. Despite their progressive aspirations, neither liberalism nor Marxism can avoid generating social and ecological problems, because both ideologies reflect

dualistic, anthropocentric consciousness. According to Wilber, modern humanity's socially violent and ecologically destructive behavior will only diminish when, in the process of evolving to "higher" stages, consciousness reintegrates what it had once dissociated from itself, including nature, corporeality, emotions, and the female.<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, any theory that attempts as much as Wilber's invites criticism. Postmodern theorists, for instance, object to Wilber's evolutionary theory because it is another grand narrative that pretends to say something true about the ultimate meaning of human history. Taking into account such objections, I nevertheless widen my search for conceivably progressive accounts of humanity's future by examining the work of certain theorists whom I call "critical postmodernists." Although they are neither radical ecologists nor transpersonal theorists, these critical postmodernists envision ecologically sustainable, ameliorative futures that may in fact have a greater chance of realization than the futures envisioned either by modernists or by radical ecologists and other counterculturalists. Critical postmodernists are concerned about the perils of naive utopian yearnings and totalizing truth, but retain countercultural hopes that new technological developments, especially when utilized by a less dualistic humankind, will make possible increased political freedom, material satisfaction, and ecological well-being. Unlike proponents of modernity, these theorists believe that it is possible to forego modernity's metaphysical foundationalism and historical teleology, without inevitably lapsing into reactionary politics.

One critical postmodernist, Gus diZerega, maintains that an "evolutionary liberalism," informed by chaos theory, could lead to a technologically advanced, though more harmonious humanity-nature relation. Another, Alexander Argyros, holds that the cybernetic future will bring greater human freedom, though perhaps at the cost of increased risk of ecological calamity. Finally, for Donna Haraway, overcoming humanity-nature dualism would involve adopting "monstrous" new identities, part human, part animal, part machine. Unwilling to concede that the mere "drift" of chaotic social interactions can lead to an ecologically sustainable future,

critical postmodernists urge progressive people actively to *contest* wantonly destructive social and ecological practices, while simultaneously avoiding naive primitivisms and antitechnological attitudes.

Supporting modernity's contention that freeing people from illegitimate authority should not be purchased at the cost of wrongfully subjugating other people, critical postmodernists nonetheless question modernity's willingness to "subjugate" nonhuman forms of life. It is because modernists deny to nonhumans the status of subjects that they protest against using terms like "domination" and "exploitation" to describe relations between humans and nonhumans. Presumably, such terms should only apply to practices that may obtain between conscious agents. If nature is in fact inert and insentient, this protest has validity. But if, as many radical ecologists and critical postmodernists suggest, nature is an active, creative, self-organizing process that generates life and self-conscious forms of life, then nonhuman beings (including organisms and perhaps ecosystems as well) *cannot* properly be regarded simply as passive stuff. In critical postmodernism, I discern an intriguing intersection of modernity's emancipatory goals, postmodern theory's decentered subject, and radical ecology's vision of an increasingly nondominating relationship between humans and nonhumans.

This book examines debates—"contests"—now occurring among a number of different approaches to today's ecological and social problems. The term "contest" often refers to a struggle in which one of the contending parties becomes the "winner," while the others become "losers." Although not pretending that hegemonic aims will soon disappear from political-ideological contests, I wish to highlight an important dimension of "contest" that is often overlooked in the winner-versus-loser, us-versus-them conception of contest. In my view, a contest is most successful if it encourages the best—whatever this may be—in all contenders. In the process of explaining and taking part in the contests among deep ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism, I have learned a great deal about the limitations and strengths of each of those positions. Likewise, in



examining how the dispute between defenders and critics of modernity sheds light on the contest within radical ecology, I have come to a more nuanced appreciation of modernity and postmodernity. In what follows, then, I have tried to avoid simply defending one viewpoint against all contenders; instead, I have sought to provide an adequate, even sympathetic voice for each of them. I do not end by claiming that one position is the overall winner, though the reader should be able to discern where my own (sometimes conflicting) sympathies lie. My analyses are inevitably colored by my own interests and limitations. Were I not concerned about what is happening to life on this planet, for example, I would not write a book on radical ecology. Moreover, were I not concerned about the political dangers of such radical movements, I would not contextualize my account of radical ecology in terms of the political issues raised by the broader modernity–postmodernity debate.

I do not conceive of this book as the product of a solitary intellect propounding “truth,” but rather as the tentative expression of ongoing conversations among many different people. Unfortunately, I have not always been able to discuss in detail and sometimes even to mention some of those conversations. But I am now more aware than ever of the extent to which “my” voice is not singular and fixed, but rather multiple, open-ended, and malleable. Although entertaining so many contending perspectives has the virtue of providing a more nuanced and critical understanding of complex affairs, such understanding can also persuade one indefinitely to defer taking action.<sup>21</sup> In these pressing times, however, I feel obliged to act politically, despite the fact that what I choose to do based on one viewpoint will often seem inconsistent with another viewpoint that I also admire. Tolerance for such ambiguity and uncertainty is a prerequisite for taking action in this promising and perilous era.

I invite the reader to enter into the conversation in which this book engages, to contest the claims made herein, and to help negotiate alternative ways of addressing the challenges facing the human and nonhuman world at the beginning of a new century.