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The Green
Political Thought

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Table of contents

Abstract

La crisi ecologica che il nostro pianeta sta vivendo, di cui il cambiamento climatico è probabilmente l'aspetto più visibile, è una delle sfide più impegnative del ventunesimo secolo e richiede complesse trasformazioni sociali, economiche e politiche per essere affrontata adeguatamente. In tal senso, a partire dagli anni Sessanta del Novecento, la crescente consapevolezza dell'esistenza di una crisi ecologica globale e dell'impatto ambientale delle attività umane ha portato allo sviluppo di una riflessione sul rapporto tra uomo e natura e alla nascita del movimento ambientalista. La tutela dell'ambiente ha fatto anche ingresso nella politica, tramite la formazione dei partiti verdi, portando ideologie politiche e partiti tradizionali a confrontarsi con le problematiche sollevate dall'ambientalismo e a modificare l'agenda politica di conseguenza. Oggi, temi quali la sostenibilità ambientale, lo sviluppo sostenibile, la transizione ecologica e la green economy sono al centro del dibattito pubblico. Tuttavia, la diversità di vedute riguardo questi argomenti evidenzia l'esistenza di molteplici prospettive, è possibile dunque individuare e definire un pensiero politico verde? La sensibilità ambientalista è sufficiente a strutturare chiaramente una visione completa della società?

Questa tesi quindi si propone di indagare il pensiero politico ambientalista e le sue articolazioni, esaminandone la storia, le caratteristiche, i principi di fondo e gli obiettivi. Vengono approfondite le radici storiche e culturali dell'ambientalismo, l'etica ambientale e le motivazioni filosofiche dell'ambientalismo, i concetti di sostenibilità e sviluppo sostenibile, il contrasto tra economia dell'ambiente ed economia ecologica, la compatibilità o incompatibilità dell'ambientalismo con altre scuole di pensiero politico, i partiti verdi e l'impatto dell'ambientalismo sul sistema politico. La ricerca si basa sull'analisi delle opere che hanno ispirato la formazione del movimento ambientalista e delle teorizzazioni del pensiero politico ecologista, nonché su un raffronto con la letteratura critica sul tema. A questo riguardo, viene evidenziato come un approccio molto diffuso nell'affrontare la molteplicità di posizioni ambientaliste e le reciproche tensioni sia di dividere il movimento in due categorie, l'una radicale e l'altra moderata, le quali offrono modelli socioeconomici e progetti politici profondamente differenti.

Introduction

Today, climate change and environmental degradation are well known issues that are part of our everyday life and, accordingly, are also matter of political discussion. In fact, environmental problems pose a complex socio-ecological challenge, requiring deep social, economic, and institutional changes to be answered effectively. It is thus legitimate to ask ourselves whether the environment is simply another policy area or it can provide a comprehensive view of human society. In other words, is there such a thing as environmental political thought?

First of all, it is challenging to provide an account of environmentalism because the very terms "ecologism", "environmentalism", and "green" are contested. Indeed, there is no universal and univocal definition of the meaning of these terms. Some scholars draw a distinction between "environmentalism" and "ecologism",[1] the former identifying concern for environmental issues and environmental protection from harmful human activities and not a precise political stance, the latter being instead a specific set of ideas that constitutes a political ideology on its own right. The term "ecologism" is preferred because of its politicized nature, as it denotes the interrelation between all the components of the ecosystem, human race included, thus implying a non-hierarchical relationship between humanity and the natural world. However, "ecologism" can create confusion with "ecology", the branch of biology that studies the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment. Thus, other scholars employ environmentalism, ecologism, and green as synonyms.[2] This thesis, in order to avoid unnecessary complexity and potential sources of misunderstanding, will follow such an approach: the terms ecologism, environmentalism, and green will share the same meaning.

Another issue, partially related to the terminological confusion, is the difficulty to define environmentalism and trace its boundaries with precision. In fact, there is no agreement on considering environmentalism a proper political theory. Some observers have argued that ecology cannot provide enough ground for the development of a complete political ideology. Others instead consider environmentalism to be an ideology on its own right, with the same standing as other schools of political thought such as conservativism, liberalism, or socialism. Thus, according to this latter perspective environmentalism does not refer just to general ideas of environmental conservation or protection, rather it represents a comprehensive set of ideas, values, and beliefs that establishes social and political goals.

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[1] A distinction introduced by Dobson, *Green Political Thought*. 4th edn. (London, Routledge, 2007).
[2] For instance, Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*. 3rd edn. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013).

However, considering environmentalism as a political ideology further complicates its analysis, because a number of political theorists and philosophers have attempted to define green political thought and its basic concepts, resulting in a variety of interpretations. Most of the accounts of green ideology share the view that its fundamental characteristic is being centrally focused on nature, in particular with the conditions for the very survival of Earth's ecosystem, and thus for the continued existence of humanity. This is believed to require a rethinking of the relationship between humanity and nature. Accordingly, the central objective of green ideology is to restructure society, politics, and the economy placing the uttermost importance on ecological balance. Hence, the focus on the relation between humankind and nature to define political, social, and economic principles is believed to be the key element that distinguishes green political thought and sets it apart from other ideologies.

Yet, besides this general characteristic, there is considerable disagreement about what actually makes up environmental political thought. In certain cases, ecologism has been characterized in an extensive way, identifying well-defined green principles that cover a range of topics. A consequence of this approach is that it provides a very narrow definition of what environmentalism is, delineating a single, precise green position. An opposite perspective instead considers environmentalism as a spectrum of positions rather than a single well-defined stance, allowing for multiple forms of ecologism.

Closely related to these theoretical discussions is the more practical issue of which policies and political parties can really be considered green. In this regard, green politics is not merely politics as usual with higher awareness about environmental issues, on the contrary the assumption that there is a distinctively unique ecological political theory implies that assimilating environmental concern within one's political position is not sufficient to turn it green. Yet, while narrow definitions of environmentalism inevitably limit the range of what can be labelled as green, less strict classifications allow for a broader array of environmental policies.

A vast literature has analysed environmental political thought,[3] covering also the history of environmental ideas,[4] and green politics and political parties,[5] not to mention related fields such as environmental philosophy, environmental history, political ecology, the sociology of environmental movements, human ecology, economics, and the analysis of environmental policymaking. However,

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[3] To mention but a few: Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics: Nature, Virtue and Progress* (London, SAGE, 1999); Dobson, *Green Political Thought*; Garner, *Environmental Political Thought: Interests, Values and Inclusion* (London, Red Globe Press, 2019); Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992).

[4] For example: Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1989); Marshall, *Nature's Web: Rethinking Our Place on Earth* (London, Routledge, 1992); Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

[5] Such as Burchell, *The Evolution of Green Politics: Development and Change Within European Green Parties* (London, Earthscan, 2002); Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties: From the Politics of Nature to Redefining the Nature of Politics* (Basingstoke and New York, NY, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2002).

despite the volume of knowledge produced, there is still considerable disagreement regarding the very definition of environmentalism, with multiple competing ideas about its characteristics and key tenets.

In light of such theoretical confusion, several questions, to which scholars have offered different answers, can be formulated. First of all, is environmentalism a form of political thought? If so, what are its characteristics? What are its foundations and when did it origin? Has it effectively had a concrete impact on politics? Has it inspired political movements or parties? This thesis engages with those questions, seeking to provide an account of the history of environmentalism, its conceptual background, its core themes, its political theory, its relationship with other political ideologies, and its impact on politics, with regards to both green and non-green political parties.

Accordingly, the purpose of this thesis is to shed light on the hypothesis that environmentalism should be understood as a spectrum of positions linked together by some common core principles rather than a single coherent view. In particular, the claim that environmentalism is articulated in a variety of positions, which differ between each other on several aspects and result in alternative visions of the sustainable society, is evaluated. Accordingly, this thesis examines how different understandings of environmentalism and sustainability have been conceptualized, shaping different approaches to environmental policies and sustainable development. As a consequence, it is argued that environmentalism is not necessarily a matter of ideological and political conflict, on the contrary a synthesis between ecologism and other traditions of political thought is possible and environmentalism can be embraced by mainstream political parties.

To achieve so, this thesis draws on seminal texts that are commonly regarded to have played a crucial role in the development of environmentalism, and on a review of the aforesaid extensive literature on the topic. These primary sources consist of both works by philosophers, poets, scientists, writers, and environmental activists that proved to be particularly relevant and inspirational for the formation of environmentalism, and foundational works devoted explicitly to the formulation of environmental political theories. Attention is focused primarily on concepts and principles, however discourse and rhetoric are considered as well. In particular, great awareness is placed on the role of historical contexts, cultural backgrounds, values, and philosophical views in the development of environmental ideas.

Chapter 1 looks at the history of environmentalism and its origins, with the aim of determining when it formed, the causes of its emergence, and its underlying theoretical foundations. Indeed, while nature has been a basic object of philosophical discussion for centuries, and green thought can accordingly be traced very far back in time, there are several diverging opinions about when concern for nature

turned into the basis for a political theory. Thus, this chapter attempts to trace the origin of environmentalism in the past and its evolution over human history, looking at the circumstances and events that have eventually caused environmental awareness to evolve into a political ideology.

Chapter 2 discusses two concepts that underpin environmentalism, namely environmental ethics and sustainability. In particular, this chapter analyses how both environmental ethics and sustainability are contested issues that have been defined and interpreted in a large number of competing ways. It is argued that such diversity lies at the ground of the difficulty to provide a univocal definition of environmentalism, given that different perspectives about ethics and sustainability can be equally regarded to be green. Particular attention is given to the existing literature on these topics, noting how it has often turned to binary frameworks of interpretation, distinguishing clear dichotomies within environmentalism. Moreover, sustainable development is analysed, seeking to provide a clear definition to this controversial topic.

Chapter 3 explores green political thought and its core principles. First, a review of the literature on the subject is carried out, looking at how environmentalism has been dealt with and characterized. In particular it is highlighted how green thought has generally been regarded as a full-fledged political ideology, but it has been described in different and often contrasting ways. Second, the question of whether ecology can provide sufficient ground for the construction of a comprehensive view of human society and its political arrangements is investigated. In this regard, it is shown how a great variety of environmental attitudes exists, troubling the identification of a common stance over fundamental political concepts such as justice, equality, the state, and democracy. Finally, the relation of environmentalism with other political traditions is explored, looking at differences and potential compatibilities.

Chapter 4 turns to party politics and the impact of environmentalism over the political system. In detail, Green parties, with a capital G to stress their connotation as a specific political family, are examined, looking at the potential explanations that have been advanced regarding their emergence, their political position, and the ideological and organizational transformations they underwent since their formation. In conclusion, the chapter turns to how other political parties have reacted to the challenge posed by environmentalism, noting that environmentalism may characterize also parties that do not belong to the Green family.

Chapter 1
The genealogy of environmentalism

1.1 The issue of defining the history of green political thought

The lack of definitional clarity about environmentalism has major implications for the identification of the historical roots of green political thought, as there are three main perspectives regarding the origin and the historical development of environmentalism.[6] Indeed, the source of such disagreement can be related the lack of a single shared understanding of what environmentalism means. As a matter of fact, tracing the roots of green ideology is not just an historical problem but also a theoretical and political issue, since it essentially implies embracing or leaning toward a certain definition of green politics.[7]

The first position about the history of environmentalism contends that the roots of ecological thought have to be found in the antiquity, if not even in the Palaeolithic or the Neolithic periods, arguing that Prehistoric humans already possessed a sort of ecological awareness that entailed respect for the environment. Thus, this view holds that an environmentalist tradition has been present through most of human history, emphasising how modern environmentalism is the product of a long intellectual tradition, the rediscovery of ancient wisdom.[8] The second perspective places the birth of ecologism in the late modern era, as the result of the interplay between an increased human impact on the environment on the one hand, and an improved knowledge of the functioning of nature on the other hand. Technological progress and Industrialization vastly improved human capability to modify the natural landscape, causing concern for the impact of human activities on the environment and raising calls for environmental conservation and preservation.[9] The third view instead considers environmentalism to be purely contemporary rather than modern, dating the formation of ecological thought to the 1960s and 1970s. This position considers the green movement the product of the tensions between an unprecedented economic growth, propelled by massive consumption of natural resources, and the emerging consciousness, grounded on scientific knowledge, of the tremendous environmental damage caused by such model of development.[10]

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[6] Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies*. 3rd edn. (Malden, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) p. 200; Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, pp. 22-23, Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, p. 16.

[7] Staravakis "Green ideology: A discursive reading", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol.2 no.3 (1997), pp. 260-261.

[8] Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (London and New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1991).

[9] Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*.

[10] Dobson, "Ecologism", in *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, edited by Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright (London, Printer Publishers, 1993), p. 218; Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, pp. 24-26; Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach* (London, UCL Press, 1992).

Narrow characterizations of ecologism, such as the one employed by Andrew Dobson, necessarily limits the temporal scope of green political thought, embracing the third perspective and considering environmentalism to be a product of the post-Second World War socio-economic transformations. In fact, they consider green ideology an innovative and disrupting discourse that emerged thanks to the combination of several historically-specific factors, for instance an understanding of environmental issues on a global scale, the debate about limits to growth, the debate surrounding nuclear power, or the formulation of ecocentric environmental philosophy. On the contrary, broader definitions permit to delineate phases of historical development of environmentalism, tracing green political thought back to ideas that precede the 1960s and 1970s. Some scholars consider the conservationist and preservationist movements of the late 19th century to signal the beginning of green political thought,[11] but whether these groups can be considered part of the environmentalist movement or just historical precursors is a major point of contention. In the opinion of some scholars, they effectively signal the emergence of an environmentalist political movement, building a whole vision of society in which nature and the human relation with its natural surroundings play crucial roles. Others instead argue that these early calls for conservations cannot really be considered green, especially because they did not hold a comprehensive ecological worldview, on the contrary, conservationists were motivated mainly by utilitarian arguments and their understanding of human impact on the ecosystem was still limited.

Nonetheless, in spite of the many different accounts about the origins and development of green thought and the related environmental movement, there is a general consensus regarding the fact that modern environmentalism is radically new in some respects and, at the same time, indebted to older concepts. In particular, modern ecologism is considered to be underpinned by two main processes that unfolded since at least the 19th century. One is scientific progress, which evidenced the interconnectedness between humankind and nature, in particular through the science of ecology, and provided evidence of the harmful environmental impact of human activities. As Oelschlaeger writes: "the idea of nature as the source of human existence, rather than a mere resource to fuel the economy is the outcome of the second industrial revolution".[12] Hence, modern green thought differs from earlier forms of environmental concern in being based on solid scientific awareness of the existence of a global anthropogenic ecological crisis that threatens the very survival of the human race.[13] The other process is the intellectual and philosophical development of an ecological consciousness, a debate about the human-natural relation which eventually came to redefine the understanding of the

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[11] Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (New York, NY, Longman, 2000).
[12] Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (London and New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1991), p. 1.
[13] Caradonna, *Sustainability: A History* (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 89-94.

value of nature and produce a new environmental ethics.[14] The combination of these two aspects posed the foundations for the emergence of demands for a transformation of values and structures of society and economy in an environmentally sustainable way, a view of human society centred around a respectful human-nature relation, which is the distinctive aspect which mostly characterizes modern green theory.

1.2 The historical roots of environmentalism

Environmental history proves that humanity has always manipulated and influenced its environment.[15] Even before the Industrial Revolution, humans caused and faced ecological problems. Many societies had to deal with environmental damages such as desertification, soil erosion, deforestation, pollution, and silted rivers, accordingly over the course of history a variety of cultures from all around the world reflected on the relationship between humanity and nature, often developing forms of ecological awareness.[16]

1.2.1 The premodern era

Evidence suggests that already at the earliest stages of human civilization prehistorical hunter-gatherers altered the environment they lived in: archaeology and palaeontology prove that the expansion of human population from Africa and Eurasia into other continents caused local and even global extinctions.[17] Human impact over its natural surroundings scaled up with the shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture and permanent settlements. Agriculture meant food surplus, which allowed population growth and consequently the formation of cities. Technological advances, such as the animal-driven plough and the wheel, further improved the capacity of early civilizations to modify their natural environment. As a consequence, ecological consciousness has often been present in religious and cultural systems ever since antiquity.

Ancient epic poems, mythology, and literature of many cultures show that anthropogenic environmental changes were acknowledged and often denounced. For instance, in the *Epic of Glilgamesh* (c.2700 BC), the hero disobeys the gods cutting down sacred trees, causing the deities to plague Sumeria with drought and fire as punishment. This is believed to be a reference to the effects of deforestation, namely desertification and salinification of the soil.[18] The ancient Hindu Vedas

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[14] Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (London, Routledge, 1996).
[15] Caradonna, *Sustainability*, pp. 22-23; Hughes *An Environmental History of the World: humankind's changing role in the community of life* (London, Routledge, 2001); Ponting, *A New Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (New York, NY, Penguin Books, 2007); Simmons, *Global Environmental History: 10,000 BC to AD 2000* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008).
[16] Simmons, *Global Environmental History*, pp. 35-38.
[17] Simmons, *Global Environmental History,* p. 54.
[18] Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World*, pp. 33-38; Simmons, *Global Environmental History,* p. 55.

include the *Aranyaka*, "Forest Book" in Sanskrit, which commands respect for the diversity of life in nature.[19] Similarly, the epic *Mahabharata* condemns burning forests to make space for herding and recommends avoiding excessive hunting as to give time to wildlife to recover.[20]

Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism preached a respectful attitude towards nature, while in Ancient Greece several philosophers held conceptions of the universe as a complex system, in which all parts are related to each other. Indeed, Ancient Greeks produced works on human-natural interactions that can be considered forerunners of modern ecology. An example of such proto-ecological understanding of life is Plato, who in the *Timaeus* writes that "this world of ours was made in truth by god as a living being, endowed thanks to his providence with soul and intelligence. [...] the god made the world a single, visible, living being, containing within itself all living beings that are naturally akin to it."[21] Aristotle too considered the universe to be an organic unit, while Hippocrates' *De aere, aquis et locis* discusses how a city can harmonize with its surroundings, reflecting on the impact of natural amenities, such as water supply, soil, marshes, or wind on citizens' health.[22]

Ancient Greece is also one of the first cases of observers who record instances of environmental degradation produced by human activity. In this regard, Theophrastus wrote that wood in Attica had been depleted and it had to be sourced from other regions.[23] The failure of Athens to maintain balance with its natural endowment of resources has been deemed by some historians as the cause of its colonial expansion first and of its decline eventually.[24] Widespread deforestation and ensued soil erosion are described by Plato in *Critias*. Describing the current state of Greek lands, he writes: "Just as on the small islands, what remains now is, compared with those days, like the skeleton of a body wasted by disease: the soil, or at any rate as much of it as is rich and soft, has rolled away, and only the spare body of the land remains."[25] But: "In those days, however, the land was intact, our mountains were just high mounds, what we now call the Stony Plains were filled with rich soil, and the highlands were covered with dense forests (of which there are traces even now)."[26]

Awareness of the consequences of human activity on the environment prompted the development of conservation practices, such as efforts to protect particular lands, ensure agricultural productivity, maintain animal populations, and preserve forests. In particular, the struggle for an effective

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[19] Simmons, *Global Environmental History,* p. 96.

[20] Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World,* p. 53.

[21] Plato, "Timaeus" in *Timaeus and Critias*. Translated by Robin Waterfield (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 19.

[22] Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World,* pp. 60-61.

[23] Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World,* p. 64.

[24] Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World,* p. 66.

[25] Plato, "Critias" in *Timaeus and Critias*. p. 108.

[26] Plato, "Critias", p. 109.

management of wood and forests has been a constant element in human history, as testified also by Plato's quote. Indeed, wood has been of vital importance for humanity for thousands of years, being the main source of fuel besides being also the basic material for shipbuilding, housing, construction, smelting, and machines.[27] As a consequence, deforestation and poor timber resources management have been issues common to many societies over centuries, from the Roman Empire to the Mayas. In medieval Europe in particular, reliance on wood meant a noticeable transformation of landscape because of the drastic reduction in forests. This led several European monarchs to establish protected royal reserves, enacting laws to regulate hunting and use of the forests, while the Republic of Venice developed a centralized management of its forests and prohibited the export of wood.[28] Besides this, the burning of coal and charcoal meant air pollution, which in 13th century London was already such a serious problem to require royal legislation to be curbed.

1.2.2 The modern era

A deep turning point in environmental history is marked by the early modern era, during which human activities reached a scale able to impact the global environment, transforming the world to an unprecedented extent. European explorations and conquests caused the end of ecosystems isolation, as animals and plants brought from Europe spread in other biotas and vice versa. For instance, tobacco, tomato, potatoes, and other plants were introduced in Europe. European demand often meant the replacement of indigenous biodiversity with monocultures of coffee, tea, sugar cane, or cotton. The introduction of invasive animals such as dogs, cats, pigs, rabbits, and rats in lands without natural predators caused the extinction of many species, also aided by excessive hunting. An example is the infamous case of the dodo. Furthermore, European colonialism led to the emergence of a global trade economy centred around European production and needs. Indeed, Europe developed mass scale consumption of imported products, importing raw materials and food and exporting manufactured goods to the rest of the world. This effectively meant that Europe developed using resources (and slave labour) of other ecosystems, overcoming the limits posed by its natural endowment.

The Industrial Revolution meant the mechanization of industrial production, agriculture, and transportation. The expansion of market economies and the development of machine tools greatly increased production outputs, but implied an escalation in energy consumption and an unprecedented need for natural resources. The advent of new technologies and new economic necessities resulted in the replacement of traditional resource management practices and land tenure systems with economies of scale. These factors meant a drastic change in human environmental impact, causing

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[27] Blewitt, *Understanding Sustainable Development*. 3rd edition (London, Routledge, 2018), p. 7.
[28] Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World*, pp. 88-91; Grober, *Sustainability: A Cultural History*. Translated by Ray Cunningham (Totnes, Green Books, 2012), pp. 60-63.

an intensive exploitation of forests, fertile lands, rivers, fisheries, animals etc. that took place worldwide, no longer limited to local or regional scale. The historian Alfred Crosby called this process of expansion at the expenses of natural balance "ecological imperialism".[29] Moreover, technological improvement, scientific discoveries, and the use of new sources of energy also meant the capability to drastically modify the environment to adapt it to human needs, as in the case of the Netherlands, where the Dutch reclaimed vast lands from the sea thanks to dikes and pumps.

One of the most important processes that took place in the modern age was the increase in human population. Improvements in agricultural supply allowed for an exponential population growth, which caused an increase in world population from around 600 million in 1700 to almost 1000 million in 1800, reaching 1,65 billion in 1900. This trend was accompanied by urbanization, as the percentage of world population living in cities rose from 2% in 1800 to 10% by 1900, which worsened pollution and diseases.[30] Additionally, population growth meant constant increase in demand of natural resources, thus accelerating the pace and scale of human environmental impact. Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) observed and reflected upon such growth trend in the 1798 *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Malthus argued that humans use abundance of food for population growth rather than for the improvement of living standards. But while population grows at geometric ratio, food production is bound by material constraints to increase arithmetically. Therefore, population growth will eventually inevitably exceed the possibility of agriculture to sustain it.[31]

Although Malthus' concern for the limits to growth posed by natural endowment did not materialize on the global scale, he was not alone in reflecting on the changing socio-economic scenario and the environment. Indeed, the foundations for modern environmentalist thought were laid in the 18th an 19th century, developing along two parallel paths that modified human perception and knowledge of the natural world: one scientific and practical, the other philosophical and theoretical.

On the one hand, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and European colonialism sparked interest in the natural world. Exploration of the planet and a changed mindset led to objective and rational systematic analysis of the world. The formation of the modern natural sciences and progress in physics, chemistry, geology, botany, and zoology significantly improved our understanding of the functioning of nature. The sciences of biology and ecology developed and were codified. Carl Linnaeus systematic taxonomy, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon natural history, and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck theory of evolution were followed (among the others) by the works of Alexander von

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[29] Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[30] Simmons, *Global Environmental History*.
[31] Caradonna, *Sustainability*, pp. 71-72.

Humboldt, Karl Möbius, Charles Darwin, Eugenius Warming, and Ernst Haeckel, who is considered to have invented the term "ecology" in 1866.

The historian Richard Gove argues that inspiration for naturalistic studies came in particular from the ecological disruption of tropical islands brought by European colonial penetration. In such isolated and small-sized places, human impact on ecological balance was so evident that it stimulated more general reflections on the consequences of human activities on nature, leading to the development of both practical conservationist policies and theoretical arguments for environmental safeguard. Environmental degradation was beginning to be recognized as a serious problem that needs to be avoided and managed. However, the need for ecological balance was still framed in purely anthropocentric terms, relating environmental issues to negative consequences for human well-being and economic interest. Indeed, Gove points out the most common rationale for environmental awareness in colonial territories was mainly national interest: issues such as deforestation, extinctions, and resource depletion entailed desiccation of the climate, crop failures, decline in environmental production, famine, and diseases, thus provoking economic losses and harming the local population.[32]

On the other hand, the rapid environmental changes caused by modernity and industrialization inspired reflection on the value of nature. While the Enlightenment thinkers held a mechanistic conception of the natural order, a variety of intellectuals and academics developed a different conception of nature as an organic unity. These thinkers analysed the consequences of environmental degradation not just for the material well-being of both individuals and society, but also for morality and psychological or spiritual health. The problems caused by rapid population growth, resource overconsumption, urbanization, and unbalanced economic development started to be framed in ethical terms rather than in a purely utilitarian mindset. The natural world became something to hold dear and respect not merely for its material contribution to human life but also for its positive intangible value. This implied a transformation in the concept of nature, which, besides being the external, non-human, tangible physical reality, became also an entity with its own moral status. Often, the appreciation of nature was a manifestation of discontent toward the Industrial Revolution. Nature was seen as original, simple, pure, not corrupted by progress and modernity, which instead were given negative qualities. As a consequence, life in close communion with the environment and within natural limits became a virtuous behaviour and, in certain visions, the symbol of the rejection of modernity, perceived as bringer of decadence, materialism, and consumerism.

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[32] Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

1.2.3 Rousseau, Romanticism, and Transcendentalism

The paradigmatic figure of this wave of philosophical reflection on nature is Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau, who achieved widespread notoriety by the 1760s and still remains a key figure in today's intellectual life, wrote on many subjects, yet he is relevant for the formation of environmentalist thought because of his comprehensive critique of civilization and his conception of nature. In fact, Rousseau can be considered a proto-environmentalist thinker because of the preeminent role played by nature in his philosophical system.[33] Rousseau claimed that human beings are good by nature, but they have been corrupted by society; civilization does not bring progress, instead it is a destructive and negative force which is responsible for the alienation of humanity from nature as well as for alienating individuals from one another. Civilization has caused humankind to become "his own and nature's tyrant".[34]

Rousseau contended that civilization did not make humanity happier nor more virtuous, on the contrary it caused social inequality and vice, disrupting the perfect conditions that once existed in an uncontaminated natural environment. Civilized living separated humans from nature, causing them to lose their innate moral capacities. Nature becomes the ultimate source of moral virtue, hence wilderness and the wonders of nature are not merely sources of happiness or aesthetic pleasure, they are also the manifestation of a moral condition: to be virtuous means to live in harmony with the natural world.[35] For this reason, Rousseau is concerned with finding a way to restore and preserve the primitive natural status of humanity in a modern world that is instead dominated by the negative material and moral effects of progress and society. To this end, the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* (1751), the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Mankind* (1755), and the *Emile, or On Education* (1762) are particularly relevant.

In the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, Rousseau argues that, although science and arts have advanced over the course of human history, advancements in knowledge and technology have not improved humanity nor increased its well-being, on the contrary they have actually had a destructive influence on human morality. Rousseau contends that, as civilization became more complex, the so called "progress" has worsened human condition. Humankind has become more corrupt, prone to sophistication, greed, and luxury while it lost the transparency, simplicity, virtue, and ease of communication it possessed in a more primitive state. As Rousseau writes: "We cannot reflect on morality without fondly looking back on that picture of simplicity of long ago."[36]

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[33] LaFreniere, *The Decline of Nature: Environmental History and the Western Worldview* (Bethesda, MD, Academica Press, 2008), pp. 185-191.

[34] Rousseau, "Discourse on inequality" in *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*. Translated and edited by Susan Dunn (London and New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2002), p. 96.

[35] LaFreniere *The Decline of Nature*, p. 187.

[36] Rousseau, ""Discourse on sciences and arts" in *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses,* p. 60.

The *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Mankind* continues Rousseau's argument against civilization, yet it does so through a fictional reconstruction of human evolution from the primitive condition to the modern advanced society. By this way, Rousseau explains the apparent contradiction that improvement of living conditions could lead to decadence and moral corruption, arguing that humans are naturally equal and that inequality is a product of society. Indeed, Rousseau imagines an original "state of nature" in which pre-civilized humankind lived in harmony with nature and was still free of violence and evil. Primitive men were able to live off the products of nature and were fully independent, since they did not need one another to provide for their needs: "The earth, left to its own natural fertility, and covered with immense woods that no hatchet ever disfigured, offers at every step food and shelter to every species of animals. Men, dispersed among them, observe and imitate their industry [...]".[37] Rousseau speculates that the state of nature ceased to exist with the creation of property, which meant the formation of society and the beginning of inequality, introducing violence within humanity. Henceforth, humans became increasingly severed from nature and dependent on each another for the satisfaction of their needs, thus the origin of social inequality lies in the unequal ability to control and transform nature and its resources.[38]

However, the outcome of this critique of progress it is not the demand to return to a primitive lifestyle, but an emphasis on moral rather than material advancement, so to restore the original natural goodness of humanity. In fact, Rousseau imagined utopian alternative models of politics, society, spirituality, and education that could remedy the consequences of civilization while ensuring respect for nature. Nature is central to this aspect because Rousseau gives it a moral value besides practical and aesthetic qualities, hence wilderness and uncontaminated nature become source of spiritual uplifting. This idea is articulated in detail in the *Emile*, in which Rousseau defends his thesis of natural goodness and builds upon this assumption a system of education that aims to preserve such original moral purity, identifying in a rural setting the most appropriate location for raising children as to provide them personal and spiritual formation that could transform them into good citizens.

Rousseau is one of the foremost instances of the changing attitude towards nature that developed between the 18th and 19th century, a new worldview that valued nature for its qualities, not solely for sustaining human life. Another example is the Romantic movement, which was, at least to some extent, a reaction against the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution.[39] Romanticism opposed objectification and commodification of nature and people, condemned the alienation from nature caused by rationalism and materialism, upholding instead the individual and the irrational, stressing

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[37] Rousseau, "Discourse on inequality", p. 90.
[38] Caradonna, *Sustainability*, pp. 50-51.
[39] Caradonna, *Sustainability,* p. 67.

on the importance of feelings and emotions. But it was also a reaction against the material changes caused by growing industrialization and urbanisation: industrial production meant intensive exploitation of natural forces while the expansion of cities caused widespread pollution and poverty. To this regard, the Romantics placed a great deal of importance on nature, which was held as a source of spiritual relief and renewal. The sublime, the awe and terror caused by the beauty of nature, the aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of natural landscapes, and harmony with the wild were all fundamental elements of Romantic literature, poetry, music, and art.

In the North American setting, Romantic ideas became the inspiration for Transcendentalism, an intellectual movement that developed in the 1830s best known for the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The theological and philosophical foundations of the Transcendentalist movement were posed by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), especially in *Nature* (1836). Emerson understood the world as an organic whole, believing that there is an all-pervading divine spirit in nature and living beings. Humans can gain consciousness of such totality by transcending sensorial experience and embracing instead spirituality and emotions.

Indeed, Transcendentalists, inspired by Kant's idealism, believed in the superiority of intuitive or spiritual knowledge over materiality. Therefore, only through an inward reflection into one's own self the individual becomes aware of being part of a much broader "over-soul". Such spiritual renewal comes from a personal and intimate realization, hence the need for what Emerson calls "self-reliance": individuals need to avoid conformity and follow instead their own conscience. Society hinders individual expression by imposing conformism and dogmatism, those who have the courage to be themselves and trust their intuitions unlock the true potentialities of human freedom, otherwise limited by society, for instance by politics and organized religion. Nature plays a central role in spiritual awareness, being the intermediary through which the individual can realize the existence of the all-encompassing divine. The individual who behaves like a "transparent eyeball" understands through appreciation of nature the continuity between himself, the world, and the divine. Emerson says:

> In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, — no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, —my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, —all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.[40]

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[40] Emerson, "Nature", in *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Brooks Atkinson (New York, NY, The Modern Library, 1950), p. 6.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) further elaborated on individualism and the benefits of living in close contact with nature. Yet, unlike Emerson, Thoreau believed in the importance of empirical experience. Thus, he saw philosophy as a practical way of life, not just theoretical reflection, arguing that the ideal has to be found not merely beyond the natural world, rather within it, through contact with nature. Accordingly, he experimented living in the woods, spending over two years, between 1845 and 1847, in a cabin near Walden Pond, Massachusetts. His life in the hut, placed on the shores of a lake in the middle of woodland owned by Emerson, was narrated in *Walden* (1854). Thoreau was concerned primarily with demonstrating that living in nature is a spiritual enlightening experience, that through immediate contact with the natural world the individual can find a meaning in life. This concept is summarised by a famous aphorism: "in wildness is the preservation of the world".[41] Indeed, in Thoreau's view, nature possesses a moral force that enables those who fully immerge into the wild to discover their true self, otherwise obscured by society and conventions. From this idea stems another key idea of Thoreau, that of civil disobedience. In fact, Thoreau believed that there are universal moral principles higher than the laws imposed by the state, thus he argued in defence of individual conscience against unjust authorities. Non-violent civil disobedience will also become a staple of the green movement.

1.2.4 The conservation movement

The combination of these two advancements, the systematic scientific study of the functioning of the natural world and the spiritual and philosophical reflection on nature, led to the emergence of calls for environmental conservation. Environmental awareness developed especially in the USA toward the end of the 19th century, giving rise to the conservation movement, which condemned environmental degradation and advocated public protection of wildlife and scenery. North America presented to European settlers an abundance of natural resources and virgin landscapes, this led to extensive exploitation which produced tremendous results on ecosystems. As settlements expanded from the East Cost to the interior, forests and prairies were converted to agriculture, leading to the depletion of the white pine forests, which previously covered the Great Lakes area. Overhunting and overfishing became widespread, causing the extinction of various species, among which the Carolina parakeet and the passenger pigeon, whose population size was estimated in several billion. Mass hunting caused the near extinction of the bison, reducing its numbers from millions to less than a thousand in the span of few decades.

The tremendous level of unregulated resource extraction and the speed of environmental changes sparked concern for the protection of economically and aesthetically important areas, concern that

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[41] Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*, p. 197.

was voiced by the conservation movement. Conservationism based his requests on both moral arguments and scientific evidence, demanded an informed management of natural resources. Accordingly, a major source of inspiration for the movement was George Perkins Marsh (1801-1882), who provided a solid and structured ecological critique of human destructive action.[42] Marsh was an academic (a literature scholar, able to speak many languages) and a politician, US congressman and then ambassador to Turkey first and later to Italy. He had a variety of interests, including geography, ecology, and silviculture, for this reason he was also one of the founders of the Smithsonian Institute. During his diplomatic career in the Mediterranean, Marsh observed how humanity had altered the environment over time, collecting his remarks in *Man and Nature*, *or Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* (1864). The book became an international best seller and was republished in 1874 as *The Earth as Modified by Human Action*.

In *Man and Nature*, Marsh provides a comprehensive description of human impact on the environment, observing that humankind's destructive influence on nature is such to cause extensive geological and biological changes. Such environmental degradation is harmful for humanity itself and in the long-time it can even lead to the collapse of entire civilizations. Indeed, Marsh partially attributes the fall of the Roman Empire to excessive and careless use of natural resources. Marsh believes that humanity does not know the consequences of its behaviour on ecological balance, thus he advocates a cautious and far-sighted management of nature. Through this way, we can prevent further environmental degradation and at the same time let nature recover from the depletion caused by past poor behaviours. In particular, Marsh insists on the role of forests in providing fundamental ecological functions, such as water management and prevention of soil erosion. Deforestation of hillsides causes slopes to lose their ability to retain water, leading to agricultural failures in valleys because of erosion, flooding, and drought. Therefore, the development and promotion of forestry is crucial for a balanced human-nature relation.

Unlike Transcendentalists, Marsh did not hold a spiritual conception of nature, nevertheless he advanced an ethical argument for environmental conservation: "Man has forgotten that the earth was given to him for usufruct alone, not for consumption, still less for profligate waste."[43] Actually, Marsh argued that humanity has the potential to be a destructive agent, whose disturbing capacity had even been amplified by new technologies and population growth, but it can also be an efficient steward; humans have the duty to care properly for their surroundings, not just because it is in their interest, but because it would be morally wrong to do otherwise. In fact, Marsh's goal was to warn people of the terrible consequences of anthropogenic environmental degradation, stimulating the formation of

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[42] Caradonna, *Sustainability* pp. 83-84.
[43] Marsh, *Man and Nature, or Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*. (London, W. Clowes and Son, 1864) p. 55.

ecological awareness within the public so to prevent the same mistakes of the past from happening again.

The American conservation movement gained widespread popularity during the last decades of the 19th century and achieved substantial results at the beginning of the 20th century, during the so called Progressive era. In 1872, the first national park in the world was established: the Yellowstone National Park. Following Marsh's suggestion on watershed management, in 1885 the State of New York created a forest preserve in the Adirondack Mountains. In 1887, the future US President Theodore Roosevelt founded the Boone and Crockett Club, a non-governmental organization that campaigned for wildlife conservation and regulation of market hunting. Its sensibilization efforts led to the Lacey Act of 1900, which established a legal framework of protection for plants and wildlife. The campaign for the protection of forests resulted in the Forest Reserve Act of 1891, which allowed the US federal government to establish forest reserves. When Theodore Roosevelt became US President in 1901, environmental conservation became a national priority. Indeed, during his presidency Roosevelt increased the total acreage of national forest reserves to over 200 million acres and created the Forest Service to administer those lands, established wildlife refuges, constituted new national parks, and preserved large natural areas by declaring them natural monuments, including part of the Grand Canyon.

The success of the conservation movement and the institutionalization of environmental protection meant the development of public awareness for environmental concerns (wildlife conservation, deforestation, watershed degradation, erosion, pollution, etc.) and the recognition of the existence of a wrongful attitude toward nature. However, as mentioned in the subchapter 1.1, among scholars there is no consensus on whether the conservation movement can be really considered an early form of environmentalism, a true predecessor of modern green politics. A key issue is that within the movement there were different underlying motivations for conservation. In truth, as public environmental awareness grew, tensions arose within the movement regarding the reasons for conservation, a rift that is evident in the divergent views of two of the protagonists of the movement in the late 19th and early 20th century: John Muir and Gifford Pinchot.

John Muir (1838-1914) was a Scottish-American naturalist writer who successfully campaigned for the creation of the Yosemite National Park and the Sequoia National Park, California. In 1892, Muir founded the Sierra Club, an association (still active to this day, with over 3,8 million members) for the defence of rural wilderness that gained significant support and lobbied for the adoption of

conservation policies. Muir, drawing on Transcendentalism, held an organicist and egalitarian view of nature, believing that every part of the natural world is equally important.[44]

As he wrote: "why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation?"[45] Hence, Muir argued that humanity is not superior to the rest of the world and it ought to respect any other element in nature as its peer: "How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! How blind to the rights of all the rest of creation!"[46] Therefore, Muir advocated conservation not just for fear of the negative economic or spiritual consequences of environmental degradation, nor for the sole benefit of people, as a source of recreation and nourishment, but also for the benefit of nature itself.

Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946) held an understanding of the reasons for conservation almost at odds with that of Muir. Pinchot was a professional forester and conservation activist who was appointed head of the US Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry in 1898, the federal body in charge for the protection and management of the newly established national forests. When in 1905 Roosevelt decided to transfer that task to an independent agency, the Forest Service, he appointed Pinchot as its first chief, a position he kept until 1910. Pinchot held a practical and scientific understanding of conservation, rooted in utilitarian philosophy. He saw ecological issues in terms of resource management, believing that the meaning of conservation was to secure sustainable resource consumption sufficient to allow development in the present while also preserving such resources for the future. Accordingly, Pinchot argued that conservation is grounded in three principles: development, preservation, and the common good. He writes:

> "The first principle of conservation is development, the use of the natural resources now existing on this continent for the benefit of the people who live here now. There may be just as much waste in neglecting the development and use of certain natural resources as there is in their destruction. We have a limited supply of coal, and only a limited supply. [...] But coal is in a sense the vital essence of our civilization. If it can be preserved, if the life of the mines can be extended, if by preventing waste there can be more coal left in this country after we of this generation have made every needed use of this source of power, then we shall have deserved well of our descendants.[47]

Furthermore, Pinchot was strongly influenced by utilitarianism and argued that nature was to be used in an efficient way, to guarantee the greatest good to the greatest number of people for the longest

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[44] Caradonna, *Sustainability*, p. 84.
[45] Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*. Edited by William Bade (Boston, MA, Houghton Mifflin, 1916), p. 139.
[46] Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, p. 98.
[47] Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation* (New York, NY, Doubleday, Page & Co. 1910), p. 43.

time, stating that "the natural resources must be developed and preserved for the benefit of the many, and not merely for the profit of a few"[48] and that "Conservation means the greatest good to the greatest number for the longest time."[49]

Pinchot's utilitarian conception of conservation starkly clashes with Muir's idea of nature's intrinsic worth, this has led some scholars to distinguish between Pinchot's *Conservationism* and Muir's *Preservationism*.[50] Indeed, the two views advocated divergent strategies: Preservationism asked to set aside natural reserves, stressing their leisure and recreation purpose and prohibiting commercial exploitation; Conservationism instead argued for a careful management and regulation of natural areas to guarantee a wise and efficient use of natural resources. Such conflict of opinions is epitomized by the dispute over the proposal to build a dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley, a long battle that saw Muir and Pinchot on opposite sides. Being located within the Yosemite National Park, the construction required a special authorization from the Congress. Pinchot supported the demands of the city of San Francisco, which needed water supply, and stressed the potential of the dam to provide hydroelectric energy. Muir opposed the project, which implied the loss of an impressive scenery and the invasion of a protected area, arguing that there were other, less significant locations where to place the dam and that the Hetch Hetchy valley could be exploited as a tourist site instead.[51]

The dispute is believed by some scholars to mark the beginning of environmental grassroot activism. Indeed, Muir and the Sierra Club managed to mobilize a large national constituency, raising significant national opposition to the project, in defence of the preservation of wilderness and of the right to enjoy natural beauty. Eventually, Congress authorized the construction of the dam, but the conflict over Hetch Hetchy attested that environmental issues had become part of the public debate and that there were multiple positions within conservation supporters. In truth, disagreement between Muir and Pinchot proved the existence of two distinct strands within the conservation movement, setting the stage for a recurrent fundamental division within green thought: the rift between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism.

Although the inner tension between Conservationism and Preservationism remained unresolved, Pinchot's view proved to be the most successful, as the US government favoured the economic and utilitarian approach to environmental preservation over the ethical preservationist argument. In fact, conservation policies in the early 20th century were grounded mainly in economic concerns and consisted mainly of resource management programs. Nevertheless, conservation remained a guideline

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[48] Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation*, p. 46.
[49] Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation*, p. 48.
[50] Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, p. 41; Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*, pp. 219-220; Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory,* p. 39; Norton, *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991) p. 6.
[51] Caradonna, *Sustainability*, p. 87; Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World*, p. 147.

for US institutions, also because of pressure from the domestic public opinion. For instance, the National Park Service was established in 1916 to manage the increasing number of national parks. Another example of conservationist policy-making was included within Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal: the Civilian Conservation Corps, a public unemployment relief program that provided work related to natural resources conservation and development in public-owned lands, an initiative that proved to be very popular and effective.[52]

A major event in the environmental history of North America was the Dust Bowl disaster of the mid-1930s in the Great Plains, the consequence of excessive soil degradation because of wrong farming practices. The Dust Bowl has been labelled the "most destructive episode in America's environmental history"[53] and stimulated in-depth reflection over the importance of ecology, contributing to the formation of a new interpretation of environmental protection. On the one hand, it sparked reflection on the social and economic consequences of indiscriminate environmental exploitation (over 300.000 migrated from Oklahoma and other impoverished states to California),[54] recognizing the existence of unsustainable ways of life not necessarily linked to resource overconsumption. On the other hand, it showed how developments in ecology and other sciences had drastically improved understanding of the functioning of ecosystems.

Scientific progress led to a new outlook, which no longer saw the various environmental issues as disaggregated, each with its cause and solution, developing instead a broader ecological perspective that cared for the healthy functioning of the whole ecosystem.[55] Nature was not anymore just the collection of unrelated natural resources, but a complex system where all parts interact and cooperate. An example of this improvement in environmental understanding was the institution of the Soil Conservation Service in 1935 to restore the area hit by the Dust Bowl, which promoted the implementation of a variety of coordinated solutions in the attempt to bring back balance to the disrupted local ecosystem.

The preeminent representative of this new scientific-informed approach was Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), an ecologist and forester who worked for the Forest Service before becoming professor at the University of Wisconsin, where he developed and codified wildlife management as a science. Leopold pioneered projects of restoration of depleted biodiversity, advocating an evidence-based idea of conservation that rested on modern knowledge provided by ecology. This view was detailed in his 1933 book *Game Management*, in which Leopold argued for a comprehensive management of the ecosystem and not merely of its single parts, to ensure an increase in productivity while avoiding

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[52] Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World* p. 147.
[53] Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 226.
[54] Worster, *Nature's Economy,* p. 223.
[55] Worster, *Nature's Economy,* p. 232.

harmful alterations of the natural order. This vision of conservation, although still framed in an economic vision and centred around the utilitarian idea of efficient resource management, shifted the focus from the satisfaction of human interest to the protection of ecological integrity. For instance, Leopold argued that hunting of predators had to be allowed in the interest of animals useful for human needs, such as cattle, which should be regarded as crops, thus cultivated and harvested at proper times to avoid losses in productivity.

1.2.5 The age of ecology

The post-World War 2 period witnessed vigorous economic and demographic growth, with crucial implications for the global environment. Population expansion and industrialization took place worldwide, causing an increased demand of natural resources. Concern about Earth's capacity to withstand rising demands generated a revival of Malthusian concerns, expressed by popular books such as *Our Plundered Planet*, by Fairfield Osborn, and *The Road to Survival*, by William Vogt, both published in 1948. The quest for more efficient production systems boosted technological research, leading to important developments in agricultural pesticides and industrial chemicals. The need for energy sparked interest in alternative methods of energy generation, which resulted the development of nuclear power. The first experimental nuclear reactor was realized in 1951 in the USA, followed in 1954 by the world's first nuclear power station to generate electricity for a power grid (Obninsk, Soviet Union), and in 1956 by the world's first commercial nuclear power plant (Cadder Hall, UK). Nuclear power popularity rose rapidly, since by 1973 there were 400 plants worldwide.

Environmental problems such as air and water pollution, acid rains, or fisheries overexploitation proved to be issues diffused at global level. In 1952, the Great Smog of London killed over 4000 people, leading the British government to implement measures to reduce air pollution, including the Clean Air Act of 1956. Similar pollution problems in the US caused Congress to pass the Air Pollution Control Act of 1955, which recognized air pollution as a national problem and a danger to public health. In 1956, the Japanese city of Minamata was hit by an epidemic of a neurologic disease of unknown origin; investigations discovered the disease to be mercury poisoning, caused by waste dumping by a chemical factory that contaminated waters and fish.

As in the years following World War 2 environmental degradation emerged as a worldwide issue, environmental conservation efforts changed accordingly. The changes in the international relations system that followed the war allowed the establishment of global institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, for the coordination of environmental conservation. The foremost example is the United Nations, and especially the UNESCO, yet also other international organizations were created. For instance, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN)

was formed in 1948 with the objective of coordinating global efforts to preserve nature. Furthermore, decolonization meant an increase in the number of states, thus increasing the importance of international agencies and nongovernmental organizations in developing and managing conservation policies at global level.

As urban expansion, industrialization, dams, motorization, and infrastructures altered the landscape, the conservation movement gained support. In a repetition of the Hetch Hetchy controversy, a proposal to build a dam in the Echo Park, within the Dinosaur National Monument, Colorado, was fiercely opposed and ultimately withdrawn in 1955. Moreover, scientific progress in fields such as genetics, biology, chemistry, and geology improved knowledge of the biosphere and the human place within it, enhancing understanding of the interrelation between ecosystems' components. Furthermore, the acknowledgement that humans are just a component of ecosystems had deep implications for the evolution of environmental philosophy. Once again, the protagonist of this progress was Aldo Leopold. Indeed, Leopold is remembered not just for being a representative of the transition period between the early vision of environmental management and an integrated and informed approach to conservation, he is also regarded as one of the seminal thinkers of modern environmentalism.[56]

Leopold's idea of conservation changed considerably from the 1930s to the 1940s, as he moved away from the traditional utilitarian vision of conservation that he detailed in *Game Management* to develop a new approach.[57] Leopold brought together a scientific approach to nature with a philosophical reflection on the implications of the interconnectedness of all forms of life, developing an ethical system to justify a new conception of the human-natural relationship, what he called "land ethic".[58] Leopold's thought was presented in *A Sand County Almanac*, published posthumously in 1949 as a collection of earlier essays. In the book's final chapter, *The Land Ethic*, Leopold expresses an organic vision of nature that sees the whole ecosystem as a community. On the grounds of this assumption, he argues for an extension of human moral concern to the natural environment:

> All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community; but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there be a place to compete for). The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.[59]

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[56] Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, p. 63, Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p. 284.
[57] Marshall, *Nature's Web*, pp. 352-353.
[58] Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*, p. 221.
[59] Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 204.

Understanding nature as a community implies that all parts share equal rights. Non-human forms of life have a "biotic right" to life, which is independent of their contribution to humanity but granted solely for their status as community members. Thus, humanity's posture toward its natural surroundings cannot be purely economic and opportunistic, there is the need for balance between human interests and those of the other members of the community: "there are obligations to land over and above those dictated by self-interest".[60] Humans have to be guided by the principle that "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."[61] Therefore, the adoption of land ethics means altering the role of human beings "from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it".[62] Indeed, Leopold acknowledges that human technological capacity sets them apart from the rest of the natural community, hence such destructive power has to be constrained by self-imposed ethical limits, motivated by the recognition of the deep interdependency between all the components of the ecological community.[63] Leopold wites: "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."[64]

Leopold's environmental ethics not only drastically altered the basic meaning of conservation, but also its practical implementation, refusing the resource-management approach and demanding an integrated approach that considers the complexity of the ecosystem as a whole, instead of its single components. As an example, in stark contrast with what he wrote in *Game Management*, Leopold came to the conclusion that even predators are necessary for a healthy ecosystem, in spite of their lack of use for humanity. Moreover, Leopold merged many pre-existing concepts in a single framework. Ideas such as nature's spiritual significance, the aesthetic value of uncontaminated landscapes, the importance of life in harmony with our surroundings, and the need to balance human interests with nature's needs were all combined within a holistic vision of the world. For this reason, *A Sand County Almanac* is regarded as one of the foremost inspirations for environmentalism and biocentric environmental philosophy, a ground-breaking book that embodied a change of attitude toward nature and the coming of the "Age of Ecology".[65] It has even been said that "more than any other piece of writing, this work signalled the arrival of the Age of Ecology".[66]

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[60] Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac,* p. 209.
[61] Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac,* p. 224-225.
[62] Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac,* p. 204.
[63] Nash, *The Rights of Nature,* p. 69.
[64] Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac,* p. 211.
[65] Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, p. 205.
[66] Worster, *Nature's Economy,* p. 284.

1.3 Modern environmentalism

As mentioned in subchapter 1.1, modern environmentalism is widely recognized to differ from previous forms of environmental concern, to the extent that some scholars date the formation of green thought to the 1960s or 1970s, considering earlier movements (such as conservationism) just as precursors. It has been contested that ruling out historical precedents and placing the birth of environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s is in truth an ideologically motivated choice,[67] as the (allegedly) deliberate exclusion of earlier movements is due to the political views associated with those positions, namely conservative and nationalist stances. Instead, 1970s political ecologism was mainly left-leaning and internationalist, closer to the positions of today's Green parties.[68] In particular, Romantic pastoralism and its link between the land and the nation influenced movements such as the German Völkisch and, later, the Nazis, while progress in biology and natural science inspired social Darwinism. Thus, it has been argued that in the 19th and early 20th century ecologism was a distinctive feature of right-wing politics, including reactionary forces that opposed modernity and advocated a return to a natural life.[69] The link between conservativism, or even authoritarianism, and environmentalism will be deepened in Chapter 3 of this thesis. However, as Dobson points out, "quite how much there is in this political reason for making ecologism very contemporary rather than merely modern is hard to determine."[70]

Independently of the alleged political influence on determining the historical roots of green political thought, all accounts agree on the point that some of the key aspects of modern environmentalism formed only in the post-Second World War period. Even if it is generally acknowledged that the preconditions for a change of attitude toward nature were posed in earlier periods, during the 18th, 19th, and early 20th century, the environmental discourse evolved considerably during the 1960s and 1970s. Vincent argues that "the attitudes we associate with ecology are not new. They did not suddenly spring upon us in the 1970s with pure radical credentials. Rather, they relate to a subtle and immensely potent conjunction of attitudes to nature",[71] but "it is the accidental conjunction of circumstances, individuals and events in the 1970s (to the present day) which provided a dynamic refocus for the ecological vocabulary."[72]

As a matter of fact, in the 1960s an increased ecological consciousness of both the extent of environmental degradation and the effects of environmental issues on human life, disseminated to the wider public through popular books and the mass media, enlarged the social base of the

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[67] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 23.
[68] Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies*, p. 203.
[69] Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century.*
[70] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 24.
[71] Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies*, p. 204.
[72] Ibid.

environmentalist movement. Ecologism became widespread and went through an intense and hectic phase of evolution. Environmental philosophy and green political ideology were developed and turned ecologism into a comprehensive worldview. Key features of modern environmentalism were the incorporation of social issues in the ecological discourse and the challenge to conventional models of societal organization and economic development. Green thought came to criticise the structural relationship between the ecosystem on the one side and society, economics, and politics on the other, a system believed to be unbalanced and inherently destructive for nature. This ideological elaboration provided the foundations for the formation of green social movements first and of Green political parties later, during 1970s.

1.3.1 The 1960s

It has been argued that the 1960s proved a fertile ground for the emergence of the environmental movement because of the conjunction of cultural phenomena and events that unfolded during the decade.[73] First, scientific progress, which improved knowledge about the effects of smog, pollution, chemicals, nuclear fallout etc. on the ecosystem. This led to a vision of issues such as overpopulation, pollution, and resource depletion as joint causes of a single environmental crisis. Deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the origins and effects of environmental degradation caused concern among some scientists and intellectuals about the possibility of our planet to withstand prolonged abuse by human activities. Accordingly, Peter Hay argues that "insofar as thinkers from the past have been noted as having relevance to today's concerns — Muir, Thoreau [...] even a figure as recent as Leopold — they have been discovered post facto by people seeking a theory for a scientifically inspired movement born."[74]

As mentioned previously, the period following the Second World War saw growing concern about the diffusion of environmental degradation on the global scale and development in ecological thinking. Yet, at first this progress in humanity's understanding of its ecological role was limited to a small community of scientists, activists, and academics. Instead, in the 1960s an increasing share of the public gained consciousness of the existence of an environmental crisis thanks to the commitment of responsible scientists and academics, who successfully managed to bring environmental issues at the heart of the public debate.[75] Such awareness was nurtured by a body of literature that drew on scientific evidence to demonstrate the noxious effects of man-made environmental degradation on both human health and the welfare of the global ecosystem. Rachel

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[73] Caradonna, *Sustainability*, p. 91.
[74] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* (Sidney, UNSW Press, 2002), p. 16.
[75] Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 94.

Carson's *Silent Spring*, which will be discussed later, is generally considered to be the foremost example of this effort to spread the environmentalist message and educate the general public.

Among the issues that attracted attention there were hazards that had been known for a long time, such as air and water pollution, loss of wilderness, or the depletion of natural resources, but also new problems such as overpopulation, chemicals, pesticides, radioactivity, the safety of nuclear energy, the availability of fossil fuels. This message reached a population better educated on average, also thanks to new communications technologies that allowed information to be shared more widely and efficiently. Easier access to knowledge allowed many to grasp the shift in the scale of focus of environmental problems, which was not merely national, but international if not even global. This new ecological awareness became widespread in developed countries, fuelling social movements and pressure groups that demanded governments to enact environmental legislation. As an example, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) was founded in 1961.

Another key aspect of the 1960s was the Cold War and the associated proliferation of nuclear weapons. The arms race between the US and Soviet Union generated concern about the capacity of human technology to have a catastrophic impact on the environment, if not to end life on Earth altogether. The possibility of a nuclear war potentially able to cause a mass extinction generated awareness about the fragility of our planet.[76] In 1961, after the start of the construction of the Berlin Wall, President Kennedy addressed the UN General Assembly asking for de-escalation, warning that "today, every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when this planet may no longer be habitable." On top of the danger posed by nuclear weapons, conventional conflicts contributed as well to raise concern about the destructive potential of humanity. Indeed, the intensification of the Vietnam War during the 1960s, besides generating a fierce popular opposition and reinforcing the pacifist movement, involved also deliberate environmental destruction on a massive scale.

The US armed forces were hindered by the Vietnamese environment, as the jungle hid North Vietnamese supply lines and allowed undetected long-range infiltration within South Vietnamese territory, in particular through the Ho Chi Minh trail. Therefore, the US military opted to employ chemical defoliants to destroy the jungle and obtain a more favourable environment. From 1961 to 1970, approximately 10% of South Vietnam territory was sprayed from the air, resulting in the destruction of about 15% of South Vietnamese timber.[77] The defoliant most widely employed was the infamous Agent Orange, which contained poisonous by-products, such as dioxins, that proved to last in the environment for decades, causing chromosomal damage resulting in birth defects and foetus

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[76] Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 92.
[77] Simmons, *Global Environmental History,* p. 184.

deformation.[78] Moreover, herbicides were deliberately sprayed on crops to hinder harvests and starve Vietnamese insurgents. In addition to defoliants, the US military in Vietnam employed another chemical agent: Napalm, an incendiary weapon which was so extensively used to become a symbol of the war itself. Conventional tools, such as bulldozers (the "Rome Plow"), were widely fielded as well in the attempt to alter the Vietnamese environment. The intentional ecological destruction of Vietnam and the resort to chemical warfare generated heated controversy, intensifying popular backlash against the war.

A third aspect of the 1960s was the counterculture, as the environment became part of the challenge to the status quo moved by the new movements. Environmentalism became an aspect of a wider demand for democratic participation and distributive justice. Accordingly, Robyn Eckersley attributes the origin of ecologism to a "crisis of participation", in which environmental activists sought "more grassroots democratic participation in societal decision making, in this case, land and resource usage."[79] The 1960s saw anti-capitalist demonstrations, especially from students and young people, yet also contestation of traditional socialist, social-democratic, or labour politics. The outcome of such revision of socialist theory, combined with philosophical novelties, was the raise of the New Left. Concern for the environmental became part of the New Left's agenda, fitting into its demands for a new power structure in society to achieve greater emancipation and democracy.

An example of the interaction between the New Left and environmental issues is *Our Synthetic Environment*, wrote by Murray Bookchin under the pseudonym Lewis Herber and published in 1962, a few months before Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. In *Our Synthetic Environment*, Bookchin tries to bridge calls for social change with scientific evidence of the danger posed by environmental degradation to human health,[80] denouncing a large variety of environmental hazards, including pesticides contamination, harmful chemicals contained in food, smog, overpopulation, and noise pollution. Yet, Bookchin argues that these problems have social origins, in other words they can be explained by looking at values and institutions that shape society. Hostility toward the environment is fundamentally rooted in an increasingly "synthetic" society, which relies extensively on technology and is shaped to satisfy solely human needs, detaching human from nature. Thus, the hierarchical structure of society, which has been centred upon profit and economic growth without caring for the health of the planet, is responsible for both social problems and the disruption of ecological balance, effectively linking the New Left political demands to the green concern for nature.

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[78] Zierler, *The Invention of Ecocide: Agent Orange, Vietnam and the Scientists Who Changed the Way We Think About the Environment* (London and Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2011).
[79] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, p. 9.
[80] Nash, *The Rights of Nature,* p. 164.

The foremost example of the new environmentalist discourse of the 1960s is Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, which is conventionally considered to be a fundamental inspiration for the formation of modern environmentalism. It has been argued that it "marked the beginning of what became known as Earth politics and the modern environmental movement"[81] and that it is "a landmark in the development of an ecological perspective. It did much to accelerate the new environmentalism and generated the most widespread public consideration of environmental ethics to that date."[82] It is so important that Hay believes that "the modern environment movement can be quite precisely dated: to the publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring."[83]

Rachel Carson (1907-1964) was a biologist and an ecologist who focused on the impact of chemicals on the environment. In particular, she examined the biological consequences of widespread and unrestricted use of pesticides, mainly DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane). Carson wrote *Silent Spring* to inform the public about her findings, namely the toxic effects of the accumulation of synthetic pesticides in the biosphere. The book consists of a collection of evidence of cases of damage caused by pesticides, scientifically rigorous yet at the same time accessible and meant to shock the reader.[84]

To reach the widest audience possible, Carson begins the book with a fictional scenario, a *Fable for Tomorrow* as she calls it. Carson imagines an ordinary American town in which a series of unusual events occurs: animals start to feel sick, all the fish in rivers dies, there are no more bees to pollinate flowers, even people suffer mysterious diseases. With the arrival of spring, the absence of birds causes an eerie silence, it is a silent spring. The cause of these tragic events lies in the indiscriminate use of chemicals, for instance the aerial spraying of DDT, without being aware of their harmful consequences. Although the case depicted by Carson is imaginary, she believes it to be plausible given that each of the events she writes about had really happened. Carson then proceeds to illustrate the danger posed by pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, what she calls "biocides", killers of life.

Carson presents toxicological, epidemiological, and biological evidence that documents the physiological and environmental effects of chemicals. She points out that chemicals are not isolated on their intended targets, but they are dispersed throughout the environment, thus traces of pesticides can be found in almost every form of life. Therefore, we eat, drink, and breath such chemicals without a full understanding of the risks they pose to our health. Moreover, Carson argues that biocides have delayed effects with a devastating impact on the ecosystem. In fact, toxic substances accumulate over

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[81] Blewitt, *Understanding Sustainable Development,* p. 8.
[82] Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, p. 78.
[83] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* p. 16.
[84] Nash, *The Rights of Nature,* p. 79.

the food chain, because of the natural resistance of small species, such as insects, who are able to adapt to adapt to toxins, contrarily to more complex animals. Thus, chemicals concentrations increase moving up on the food chain, eventually reaching unwanted objects, including birds, fish, mammals, and even ourselves.

In particular, DDT is harshly criticised by Carson, since it enters the human body through meat of animals that feed on contaminated food and its accumulation has been linked to cancer. Yet DDT is not alone, because the build-up of chemicals is made even more lethal by the interaction between the different substances employed. Incidentally, one of the species most affected by the detrimental effects of DDT was the bald eagle, the national emblem of the US, where the bird was a protected by legislation since 1940. By the publication of *Silent Spring*, bald eagles were almost extinct, since they fed on DDT-contaminated plants, insects, and fish, causing birds to become sterile and altering their metabolism, leading to thinner egg shells, making impossible for eggs to mature and hatch.

Silent Spring quickly became a bestseller but it became highly controversial as well, setting off a heated debate about synthetic chemicals. Cason was attacked by the chemical and agriculture industries, which vilified her to undermine the credibility of her claims, accusing her of exaggerating the implications of DDT and pesticides.[85] Yet, in spite of the harsh opposition it faced, Carson's message reached the general public and stimulated citizens to take environmental hazards seriously. *Silent Spring* raised such attention and support that President Kennedy's Science Advisory Committee investigated Carson's research, eventually confirming her concerns over chemicals and advising the implementation of stricter regulations. DDT was finally banned in the USA in 1972 and by the mid-1970s all the chemicals mentioned by Carson had been banned in the US and in most of the Western world.[86]

However, the influence of *Silent Spring* extended far beyond the campaign to ban pesticides. Indeed, the book acquainted the general public with the ecological perspective of interdependence between all the components of the biosphere.[87] It pointed out that an increased ability to control nature entails great dangers and needs to be informed by accurate scientific knowledge of its consequences. It also raised significant ethical questions, as it questioned the goodness of technological advancement and industrial growth, which had brought progress at the price of a devastating impact on the environment, eventually harming humanity itself.

Silent Spring brought to the public attention the existence of a global environmental crisis and signalled the emergence of a new movement. Distinct from the conservationist tradition, the new

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[85] Nash, *The Rights of Nature* p. 81.
[86] Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 97.
[87] Nash, *The Rights of Nature,* p. 82.

environmentalists no longer focused just on the necessity to protect nature, but relied on a solid scientific basis to question the attitudes, believes, and behaviours that had led to the ecological crisis. Environmentalist started to dispute the foundations of society. The paradigm of economic growth, the role of science and technology, the value of nature, and the ecological limits posed by the ecosystem to human development began to be challenged. Accordingly, environmentalism posed major questions that stimulated the intellectual debate.

In 1967, the journal *Science* published an article by medieval historian Lynn White (1907-1987), titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", that attempted to historicize the contemporary ecological crisis and trace its root causes. The article became a seminal work of environmentalist thought and it had an enormous influence on the development of environmental philosophy, becoming the focus of the modern discussion about environmental ethics and religion.[88] Indeed, White identified in the Judeo-Christian tradition the basic reason for exploitation of nature, believing that the present ecological crisis is the historical product of a certain attitude towards nature, which originated in medieval Western Europe because of Christianity and has ever since shaped our vision of the world.

In the article, White contends that the root cause of environmental degradation lies in our fundamental philosophical and ideological conception of nature, of ourselves, and of our interaction with the non-human. Our basic values, which White believes to be shaped mainly by religion, influence our perception of nature and how we employ technology. Thus, White believes that we should first recognize the real deep causes of the environmental crisis in order to conceive possible remedies, looking beyond the mere use of technology and science, reflecting instead on the fundamental presuppositions at the heart of our behaviour. As White observes: "What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them."[89] Hence, White argues that the origins of our hostile attitude towards nature must precede the 18th century, the period when technology and science reached a stage of development advanced enough to provide humanity with the means to impact the global ecological balance.

Carrying out an historical analysis of the impact of human race on the environment, White argues that "ever since man became a numerous species he has affected his environment notably"[90] and that "quite unintentionally, changes in human ways often affect nonhuman nature".[91] However, in the modern era the unity between scientific intent and technological means has given humanity the ability to modify the environment to an unprecedented scale. Yet, White observes that the 17th century

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[88] Nash, *The Rights of Nature,* p. 88.
[89] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science,* vol.155, no. 3767 (1967), p. 1205.
[90] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", p. 1203.
[91] Ibid.

Scientific Revolution and the 18ᵗʰ century Industrial Revolution are actually much longer processes that originated already in medieval Europe. White highlights how during the Middle Ages Western Europe developed a certain culture and attitude towards nature that allowed both technological and scientific progress, ultimately leading to European technological and scientific superiority over the rest of the world.

Therefore, since our technological and scientific capabilities are the outcome of a process which originated in Europe in the Middle Ages, the roots of the present ecological crisis must be found in European medieval culture. White believes that medieval Europe developed an exploitative attitude towards nature, a new culture that understands humanity and the rest of the world as two separate entities in an unequal relationship, in which men is the master. This intellectual pattern, which according to White still shapes the present worldview, is believed to be the product of Christianity. Indeed, White considers the Judeo-Christian theology inherently anthropocentric. God created the world to serve man's needs and purposes, yet Adam is not just part of it, he is made in God's image, since God is transcendent and supernatural, man too is other from nature. The environment exists solely to serve humanity, which is hierarchically superior to everything else on earth, thus human dominance over nature is rightful and justified.

As a consequence of this line of reasoning, White doubts that a solution to our environmental problems can be found just through science and technology, because they are still guided by Christian anthropocentric assumptions. The issue lies in the dominant conception of human-nature relationship, any ecological improvement is bound to come from a spiritual or religious rethinking of nature. Nonetheless, White holds that cultural and religious beliefs are both the cause and the solution to environmental issues, alternative views are possible, even within Christian thought. As an example, Saint Francis of Assisi proposed an entirely different understanding of the role of humanity, advocating equality between all God's creatures. Accordingly, we should follow the example set by Saint Francis and develop an alternative way of seeing the environment, as White remarks: "we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man."[92] The application of more advanced technology without changes in values and beliefs will fail in addressing the real causes that originated the problem in the first place. However, as White writes "no new set of basic values has been accepted in our society to displace those of Christianity."[93]

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[92] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", p. 1207.
[93] Ibid.

White's writing has had a profound impact on the perception of environmental issues and reached a wide audience, sparking an intense debate in the academy, in the press, and in the general public. White's article generated controversy, as it was perceived by some as a direct attack on Christianity, while others argued that religion and ethics alone cannot explain our environmental attitude, thus other factors have to be considered as well.[94] However, notwithstanding criticism, White's article left a long-lasting legacy: the idea that environmental issues are primarily caused by philosophical, ethical, and cultural factors, not merely by an incorrect use of technology or by poor resource management.[95] Therefore, since the economic, political, social, and technological dimensions are subordinate to our understanding of nature, which created and perpetuates an anthropocentric and destructive vision of the world, any attempt to move towards a more ecological society needs as a prerequisite the development of a whole new environmental philosophy that treats humanity and nature as equals.

1.3.2 A crisis of survival

In the late 1960s, the perceived severity of the global environmental crisis was such that it gave rise to the widespread belief that the very ability of Earth to sustain life was threatened. This survivalist discourse claimed that concern about the environment was not merely wise and desirable, but a necessity. Eckersley has argued that this phase of development of environmentalism was dominated by the "crisis of survival" theme.[96] More and more people come to realize the global scale of environmental issues and the ecological interconnectedness of our planet. For instance, in 1966 the famous economist Kenneth Boulding published the essay *The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth*, in which he argued that the world had shifted from being an open economy, with new areas available and the related natural resources to extract, to a closed one, with a finite amount of resources. This change, Boulding said, forces humanity to rethink its relation with nature, raising the need for a different consumption model akin to the one of a spaceship, where recycling and circular economy are necessary for survival.

The image of the "spaceship Earth" proved to be very successful, reinforced by pictures of our planet taken from space as the space race unfolded. Indeed, an influential photograph in the formation of the environmental movement was *Earthrise*, the first colour image of Earth from the Moon, taken during the Apollo 8 mission in 1968, which showed that there is only one, fragile Earth.[97] The fragility of our environment was further fuelled by media coverage of environmental disasters, such as oil spills

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[94] For instance: Lewis Moncrief in "The Cultural Basis for Our Environmental Crisis", or Elspeth Whitney in "Lynn White, ecotheology, and history".
[95] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* pp. 26-7.
[96] Eckersley *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, p. 11.
[97] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 12.

in the Torrey Canyon shipwreck in Cornwall (1967) and in the Santa Barbara coast (1969), which were broadcasted live on television. A wave of alarmed and pessimistic, even apocalyptic, works by scientists, economists, and experts contributed to the popularity of environmentalist concerns and spread the idea that business as usual was not an option, corrective measures had to be taken quickly, otherwise the damage to our planet would be such to threaten human existence.

In particular, the rapid population increase of the 1950s and 1960s caused concern about the ability of our planet to withstand demographic growth and the related increase in resource consumption. As mentioned in subchapter 1.2, population has always been a fundamental element in humanity's environmental relations, for instance causing Malthus to worry about overpopulation already in the 18th century. Yet, from an estimated number of 610 million people in 1750, world population grew to 2,5 billion in 1950, 3 billion in 1960, and 3,7 billion in 1970. In 1950, the annual global population growth rate was 1,5%, while during the 1960s it remained firmly above 2%. World average life expectancy rose from 45 in 1950 to 52 in 1960 and 58 by 1970.[98] The perceived urgency of the environmental crisis and the alleged dire consequences of overpopulation on the ecosystem caused neo-Malthusian arguments to gain popularity.

Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, first published in 1968, identified the main cause of environmental problems in overpopulation. Furthermore, it argued that exponential population growth was stretching Earth's finite capacity to sustain life, forecasting a dire future made of worldwide famine, instability, inequality, and ecological destruction, unless population control measures were implemented quickly. Ehrlich predicted shortages of food already as soon as the 1970s and urged the immediate adoption of policies that would gradually reduce birth rates and eventually lead to a decline in global population size toward numbers sustainable in the long run. Indeed, he believed that technological solutions aimed at improving agricultural output could not solve the problem alone, besides this they often have side-effects that entail ecological disruption (as an example, the case of DDT), further worsening the environment's capacity to sustain human life. Turning to the "spaceship Earth" metaphor, cargo space is given and it cannot be expanded, the "carrying capacity" of the spaceship is limited.

Science published in 1968 Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons", which, similarly to Ehrlich's book, considered overpopulation the origin of the ecological crisis. Hardin stated that a finite world can support only a limited population, thus there is no technical solution to the overpopulation problem, the only remedy is to lower population growth. Hardin explained his argument through a straightforward example: the commons, a pasture that in rural villages everybody is entitled to use. Each herdsman will act rationally and try to keep as many cows as possible on the

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[98] Figures from Livi Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population*. 6th edn (Malden, MA, Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).

commons. Indeed, facing the individual decision whether to let more cattle on the commons, every peasant will act in his self-interest and add another animal. This because he retains all the benefits of the animals, while the costs are shared between the whole community, hence adding more cattle will maximise his gains. Yet, everyone will come to the same conclusion, eventually resulting in overgrazing and the destruction of the commons. Through this example, Hardin wanted to demonstrate that in the case of shared and unregulated resources the pursue of personal interest is actually contrary to the common good. This situation applies to all natural resources, in particular to air and water, which cannot be protected through property rights from issues such as pollution. Given that all environmental problems are fundamentally attributable to overpopulation, Hardin argued that we should think of the whole world as the commons, in which each human being in excess of Earth's finite resources increases stress on the planet and thus is contrary to social interest.

The idea of impending ecological catastrophe was further popularized by three seminal books, all published in 1972: the Club of Rome report *The Limits to Growth,* the volume *A Blueprint for Survival* of the journal *The Ecologist*, and the unofficial UN report *Only One Earth*. These books presented in a sensational way the depletion of the global environment, exposing to the general public a vigorous case for the necessity of politics and economics to focus on environmental issues. Pursue of endless economic growth, blind faith in the power of technology, and the industrialist utopian promise of mass well-being were challenged on the ground of solid scientific evidence, which proved that their environmental costs are so high to impair the functioning of the global ecosystem, potentially leading to the collapse of human civilization. The debate that these books generated was intensified and dramatized by the 1973-74 oil crisis, as the embargo organized by the Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries made evident the heavy dependence on fossil fuels of Western industrialized economies.

Only One Earth is a report about the effects of human activity on the environment co-authored by René Dubos and Angela Ward, two important experts of environmental issues. It was commissioned by Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the UN Conference on the Human Environment that was held in June 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden, in preparation for the conference to summarise the status of the planet according to a committee of world leading scientists and experts. However, the report was not an official publication of the UN, thus it was not meant to provide precise guidance to policy-makers, rather it sought to mobilize domestic public opinions in support of the conference. The key concept at the heart of the report is that humanity has only one world, accordingly nations are interdependent and it does not matter who pollutes, ecological destruction harms everybody. Moreover, the report argued that the causes of environmental degradation in industrialized countries

differ from those of developing countries. While rich economies suffer from ecological problems caused by overproduction and overconsumption, in the third world environmental issues are mainly the result of poverty and underdevelopment. Therefore, in light of the global environmental interconnectedness, it is in the interest of developed countries to support an ecologically sustainable development of poorer countries. On the other hand, underdeveloped countries should accept to integrate economic development with environmental policies, because unsustainable economic growth is actually counterproductive for the nation, leading to the depletion of local natural resources. The connection between international development and environmental quality was highlighted also by another UN report prepared for the Stockholm Conference, the *Founex Report*.

Realized by a team of experts of global environmental problems, *A Blueprint for Survival* first appeared as a special issue of the journal *The Ecologist* and was later published as a book, which achieved commercial success. The aim of the Edward Goldsmith, editor of *The Ecologist*, and the other authors of the report was to stimulate the public opinion and to give rise to a "movement for survival" that could encourage the implementation of the measures detailed in the *Blueprint* and avoid the collapse of the global ecosystem. Indeed, *A Blueprint* presented in depth evidence of the excessive pressure exerted by the industrial society on the global ecosystem, forecasting the irreversible destruction of the life-support capacity of the planet in the near future. The authors argued that industrial society is inherently not sustainable ecologically because of its foundational values, in particular the unconditional pursue of economic growth. Thus, *A Blueprint for Survival* offered a sustainable alternative, called "the stable society", since it can theoretically be sustained indefinitely by the global ecosystem. The stable society model is grounded on four principles: minimum disruption of the environment; maximum conservation of resources; zero net population growth; and a social system that considers the first three conditions as benefits and not as restrictions.[99] The *Blueprint* proposed a detailed plan for the transition from an industrial society to a stable society, with a precise list of policies and measures to implement. Therefore, the book acted as a sort of manifesto, providing a theoretical platform for the foundation of Green parties.[100]

Yet, the book that had the most disruptive impact on the public opinion and eventually came to define the entire green movement is *The Limits to Growth*.[101] The report was commissioned by the Club of Rome (an international think tank founded in 1968 by the Italian manager Aurelio Peccei with the objective of developing comprehensive solutions to the complex problems that afflict humanity) and published in 1972 as *The Limits to Growth: a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament*

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[99] Goldsmith et al, *A Blueprint for Survival* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972), p. 22.
[100] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory,* p. 12.
[101] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 11.

of mankind. Authored by a team of several researchers, the report was based on a study carried out by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that analysed the impact of human systems on the planet. The MIT team used systems theory and formal modelling to run a computer simulation that analysed various global scenarios, predicting outcomes up to the year 2100. The model was based on five key variables: industrial output, non-renewable resource depletion, pollution, agricultural production, and population growth. The computer simulation projected that, if each variable continued growing at the existing rates, Earth's limits would be exceeded within a hundred years. However, the authors did not forecast the inevitable collapse of human civilization. Since the five basic elements of the simulation are deeply connected to each other, they argued, altering some of their growth trends could drastically change the projections, guaranteeing both economic and ecological sustainability. This suggestion was tested through computer simulation, which provided interesting outcomes. In certain cases (such as in the event of technological improvement of the agricultural output, or discoveries that increase resource availability) overshoot of natural limits was only delayed, because the interconnectedness of the variables meant that addressing a single field simply worsened problems in the other areas (for instance, increased food production boosted population growth; more resources caused higher production and consequently worsened pollution). Instead, tackling all factors together proved successful in keeping humanity within ecological boundaries. Projections also indicated that the sooner changes were adopted, the more likely a positive outcome would be.

Therefore, the report argued that advanced economies needed to urgently adopt policies that could decrease pollution levels, stabilize the population, slow down the rate of resource consumption, and adopt renewable sources of energy, if they wanted to preserve their affluence. In other words, *The Limits to Growth* challenged the conventional, mainstream economic wisdom of unlimited economic growth and warned instead that our planet poses ecological limits to economic expansion, which constraint production and consumption. Any attempt to break such boundaries and pursue unfettered economic growth is actually counterproductive, since it is inevitably doomed to bring ecological collapse rather than well-being. Thus, a self-imposed limitation to growth is necessary to prevent humanity from reaching the ecological limits of our planet.

The arguments raised by *The Limits to Growth* inspired the economic view of the green movement, popularizing the concept of sustainability and defining a green stance in political economy.[102] Indeed, the belief that there are natural limits to economic growth, and consequently that a trade-off between development and environmental protection is needed, has become a central element of green thought. The finite resource inputs of the planet and its limited capacity to assimilate pollution mean that

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[102] Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism,* p. 65.

unrestricted economic growth is not viable path for humankind, an alternative economic paradigm respectful of ecological limits is needed. Inevitably, such vision has been contested by those who argue that human ingenuity and technological progress enable humanity to overcome natural constraints, as it has always happened in human history. Accordingly, *The Limits to Growth* provoked heated critiques from mainstream economists. The validity and the methodology of the MIT study were questioned, arguing for instance that key variables such as prices or technology had been ignored and that the study relied on pessimistic assumptions.[103]

1.3.3 Radical ecologism

The apocalyptic message that inspired a large part of the ecologist discourse was contested from within the green movement itself, as other voices raised and proposed alternative accounts. Indeed, critics of the survivalist message identified the root causes of the ecological crisis in the very basic worldview of Western society, rather than in technological, economic, political, or demographic issues. As Eckersley suggests, the vision of the environmental crisis as a "crisis of survival" was contested by those who perceived it as a "crisis of culture", focusing on the ethical and social costs of environmental degradation rather than to the alleged immediacy of ecological collapse.[104]

As an example, Murray Bookchin, briefly mentioned before, was a pioneer in the development of radical green thought already in the early 1960s, linking environmental issues to social causes and arguing that ecological destruction is inherent in capitalism. Over time, he formed his own ecological political theory, called social ecology (which will be dealt with in chapter 3), grounded in anarchist thought and critical of capitalism. Yet Bookchin was not the only one to develop radical eco-political claims. Radical ecologism did not contest just the capitalist economic paradigm, but extended their critique to the whole social structure, believing in the need for an ecological alternative to the industrial society and its culture of environmental and human exploitation.

Theodore Roszack's *The Making of a Counter Culture*, published in 1969 with the eloquent subtitle *Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition*, argued that the 1960s youth protest movement was grounded on the rejection of a society dominated by corporate and industrial interest. Roszack contended that the advanced industrial society was actually a technocracy, built around technology and designed to impose over every human activity the control of trained experts. The primacy of efficiency, control, and rationality advanced by consumer society extended to the natural world too, drawing a rift between the ordered technological society and the unregulated environment. Roszack endorsed the contestation moved by the counterculture, expressing the need

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[103] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory,* p. 12, Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth,* pp. 30-34.
[104] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* pp. 17-21.

for a rediscovery of individual experience and irrationality. Technology must serve humanity, not be its tyrant, and a way to achieve this could be through a different perception of nature, embracing an holistic perspective and renouncing to subjugate the natural world to human control.

The Greening of America, wrote by Charles Reich in 1970, similarly called for a social transformation from the corporate state that "dominates, exploits, and ultimately destroys both nature and man"[105] to a new consciousness that could restore the damages of capitalism. Reich envisioned a new society that is fundamentally a new way of life which allows individuals to be radically and authentically free. To achieve so, humanity should give up the logic of organization and control and embrace instead the non-material elements of existence, such as the individual self, spirituality, and also the natural environment. This new attitude would allow to get rid of the authoritarian and alienating domination of economic material value and let technology and the means of production be guided by a different vision, as Reich notes: "the self and its sources in nature are real; machines alone cannot create real values [...] Protection of nature and man from the machine is logical because of the power of the machine to dominate nature."[106]

In 1971 Barry Commoner, biologist and eminent researcher on radioactive fallout and the consequences of nuclear weapons, debated the social implications of environmental degradation in *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology*, seeking to transform the environmental issue from a chiefly scientific topic into a critique of modern society and its values.[107] The key argument advanced by Commoner in *The Closing Circle* is that the "ecosphere" has been seriously hit by our economic model, which needs to be radically transformed in accordance with ecological principles. Indeed, Commoner identifies four "laws of ecology". First, "everything is connected to everything else", that means the ecosystem consists of multiple interconnected parts, what happens to one of them has consequences for all the others. Second, "everything must go somewhere": "in nature there is no such thing as 'waste' [...] Nothing 'goes away'; it is simply transferred from place to place, converted from one molecular form to another."[108] Third, "nature knows best", which means that nature has arranged itself over billions of years, "any major man-made change in a natural system is likely to be detrimental to that system."[109] Fourth, "there is no such thing as a free lunch", every gain comes at a certain cost "Because the global ecosystem is a connected whole, in which nothing can be gained or lost and which is not subject to over-all improvement, anything extracted from it by human

[105] Reich, *The Greening of America* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1970), p. 12.
[106] Reich, *The Greening of America*, p. 294.
[107] Egan, "The social significance of the environmental crisis: Barry Commoner's the Closing Circle", *Organization & Environment*, vol.15 no. 4 (2002).
[108] Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man and Technology* (New York, NY, Alfred Knopf, 1971), p. 36.
[109] Commoner, *The Closing Circle,* p. 37.

effort must be replaced."[110] Commoner's laws have since then shaped the idea of sustainability,[111] providing scientific guidance to environmental policy-makers.

Yet, Commoner employed the four laws to criticise the capitalist American socio-economic structure, drawing a connection between social injustice, poverty, and exploitation on the one hand and the ecological crisis on the other. He writes: "the nation's social system is grossly incapable of supporting the people who created it in their present and expected numbers; they are, therefore, suffering poverty, unemployment, environmental pollution, inadequate schooling, injustice, and the tyranny of war."[112] Thus, Commoner argued that the environmental crisis is first and foremost a political and social crisis, which needs a radical systemic reform to be reversed. Human values have to be completely reassessed to stop the irresponsible use of technology and overconsumption of material resources, science alone cannot reverse environmental destruction without the development of a new attitude, built around respect for the laws of ecology. This view caused a fierce quarrel between Commoner and neo-Malthusian supporters such as Ehrich. Commoner believed that pointing at overpopulation actually meant looking away from the real systemic causes of environmental problems; because the problem does not lie in population figures, rather in a wrong distribution and use of scarce resources.

Critical environmentalist views of the capitalist society were soon accompanied by the emergence of ecological economics, an alternative economic theory which attacked the very basic assumptions of conventional economics. Values such as growth, material well-being, profit, and consumerism were criticised by ecological economists. To this regard, a very influential book is 1973 *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered*, by the economist Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, who argued that the industrialist economic model was inherently unsustainable for the environment and dehumanizing for people. Schumacher regarded conventional economic theories fundamentally flawed, since they treat natural resources as income, while in truth the natural endowment is not renewable and finite in quantity, thus it should be considered as capital. This theoretical mistake, Schumacher says, is evident in the case of energy, which is mainly produced through the consumption of fossil fuels, therefore limited and subject to depletion.

According to Schumacher, the mainstream economic thinking, characterized by materialism, industrialism, large-scale production, capital accumulation, and the obsession with growth, is leading "spaceship Earth" to destruction and is unable to change path because it does not encompass natural limits within its value system. In contrast, he advances an alternative model, named "Buddhist economics", which is grounded on qualitative rather than quantitative assessments, privileging quality of life over consumption. Such new economic understanding would scale down many human

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[110] Commoner, *The Closing Circle,* p. 42.
[111] Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 103.
[112] Commoner, *The Closing Circle,* p. 211.

activities to a smaller, local size, minimizing resource consumption and catering personal needs more precisely, thus reducing waste.

Nevertheless, the most radical environmentalists went beyond the demand for a whole new socio-economic system, holding the fundamental values of society responsible for the ecological crisis, raising the need for a whole new worldview that could challenge anthropocentrism. The traditional human-centred conception of the world and of human role within nature was believed to be the cause of environmental degradation. Accordingly, the power of science and technology to solve environmental problems was questioned, since the solution to ecological problems should rely first and foremost on a radical cultural transformation, a complete re-evaluation of the relationship between humanity and the natural environment. New environmental ethics that questioned the superiority of human beings over nature arose. Attempts to extend moral standing to the non-human nature multiplied, as the philosophical, political, and legal debates about the environment gained popularity, seeking to provide theoretical ground for environmentalist positions.

The aforementioned Lynn White argued in favour of bestowing the environment with moral value, placing it on pair with humanity, believing that Saint Francis' philosophy could serve as the foundation of a different attitude about nature. White elaborated on the issue in 1973 in the essay "Continuing the Conversation", in which he argues that only a complete change in value structure, not just a prudential ethic theory, can reverse environmental destruction. The question "do people have ethical obligations toward rocks?" ought to be considered seriously. Accordingly, he harshly criticizes the "spaceship Earth" metaphor, considered the epitome of the vision of Earth designed exclusively to sustain human life, holding no other purpose. He states that "the spaceship mentality is the final sophistication of this man-centered view of the nature of things and the things of nature."[113]

Yet, White was opposed by those who objected that there is no need for a new ethical system, since the Christian doctrine of stewardship already provides the potential for a respectful behaviour toward nature.

In 1972, Walt Disney Enterprise's plan to build a ski resort in the immaculate (but not protected) Mineral King Valley, California, and the attempt by the Sierra Club to stop it, inspired Christopher Stone, professor of legal philosophy at the University of Southern California, to propose in *Should Trees Have Standing?: Law, Morality, and the Environment* to confer rights to nature. Stone suggested that trees, and more in general all natural objects, should have legal standing and be treated as a "legal person", just as corporations do. Stone thought that granting legal rights to the environment was the next logical step in the historical process of extension of legal rights. He argued that nature

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[113] White, "Continuing the Conversation", pp. 63-64.

has needs, it is injured by human activity, hence it needs some degree of protection from unconditional human exploitation. Obviously, animals or trees cannot fill lawsuits on their own behalf, therefore humans would have to represent their interests, yet it is nature that suffers harm, not its legal guardians. Stone's argument proved to be influential and the Sierra Club legal action to prevent Walt Disney's construction plans reached the US Supreme Court. Although the case was eventually rejected, a dissenting minority opinion mentioned Stone's proposal as worth of consideration.[114] The issue intertwined with the debate over animal rights, a topic that became popular within environmentalism.

On this subject, Peter Singer published in 1975 *Animal Liberation*, in which he drew a parallel between the civil rights movement and the promotion of animal rights. Singer called for an expansion of moral horizons to recognize that animals do suffer and have legitimate interests in a way similar to humans. If it is morally wrong to cause pain to humans, Singer argued, it should be wrong to treat animals in the same way. Therefore, animals should not be killed for food or for laboratory experiments, things that are accepted merely because animals cannot protest. For Singer, "speciesism" is a prejudice not dissimilar to racism or sexism, accordingly animals should be "liberated" and granted rights exactly like it happened for women and minorities.

Calls for expansion of ethical boundaries did not limit to animals, as 1973 saw also the publication of another seminal essay, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary". Written by the Norwegian philosopher and environmental activist Arne Naess, the essay provided the most radical wing of the green movement a theoretical and ideological manifesto. Moreover, it coined a terminology that has since then shaped the discussion about environmental politics and philosophy. Naess called "shallow ecology" the fight against pollution and resource depletion with the objective of preserving "the health and affluence of people in the developed countries".[115] Yet Naess identified also a more radical form of commitment, named "deep ecology". Deep ecology holds the view that ecology entails philosophical questions that challenge the traditional understanding of the human-natural relationship, undermining conventional schools of thought and raising the need for a new paradigm that merges together ecological knowledge and philosophy.

Therefore, Naess articulated deep ecology into what he called an "ecosophy".[116] The core principle of deep ecology is "biospherical egalitarianism", the idea that all forms of life have value in themselves, possessing "the equal right to live and blossom".[117] On the basis of this ecocentric ethical perspective, Naess inferred a political platform that calls for the decentralization of society into

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[114] Nash, *The Rights of Nature,* p. 130.
[115] Naess, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary", *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, vol.16 (1973), p. 95.
[116] Naess, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary", p. 99.
[117] Naess "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary", p. 96.

egalitarian, classless autonomous communities. Deep ecology soon came to inspire the most radical part of the green movement, bringing together into a single label a variety of claims. As a result, Naess attempted to give the movement a structure, eventually developing deep ecology from an ethical theory into a more complete philosophy.

1.3.4 The birth of green politics

The 1970s saw the emergence of the first Green[118] parties and, more broadly, the affirmation of organized green political activism (for instance, Greenpeace was founded in 1971). Twenty million rallied in the United States at the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, almost 10% of the country's population, making the event one of the biggest organized demonstrations in the history of the United States.[119] The demonstration was organized by Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson and pacifist activist John McConnell as a day of rallies, marches, and educational events all across the national territory with the aim of boosting popular environmental awareness, root ecological issues into the political agenda, and providing unity to the greens, fragmented in a variety of movements. The event had worldwide resonance and has since then become an international event. The Earth Day proved that environmental awareness was widespread and inspired the diverse multitude of environmentalist movements to join forces and step into conventional politics.

The New Zealand Values Party was established in May 1972 and was the world's first environmentalist party to take part in a national election. The world's first party organized around an ecologist platform was the United Tasmania Group, formed in March 1972, which contested elections at state level party. The same year saw also the formation of the first national ecologist party in Europe, the British People Party, which in 1975 changed its name in Ecology Party. In the early 1970s, local or regional environmentalist political movements arose also in several Western countries, for instance in Swiss cantons. The first Green MP was elected in Switzerland in 1979. By the mid-1980s, many countries of the Western world had a national Green party.

However, the diversity of position within the environmental movement troubled the definition of a uniform Green political platform. Indeed, often Green parties developed as networks of pre-existent grassroots movements. These groups were focused on social and environmental issues that had been apparently neglected by governments or by established parties in general, often confined to the local level. Many of these ecologist movements were focused on limited issues, such as wildlife conservation, opposition to nuclear energy, pacifism and nuclear disarmament, or contestation of the planned building of infrastructures, such as highways or dams, in natural areas. Therefore, early

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[118] With capital G, to differentiate the specific political family from the more generic green politics.
[119] Clapp and Dauvergne, *Paths to a Green World: The Political Economy of the Global Environment*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2011), p. 52.

Green parties lacked a comprehensive program and an in-depth political view. As an example, the German Greens, Die Grünen, formed in 1980 as an alliance of many environmentalist movements. As a consequence, the party could not rely on a precise ideological ground and there were deep divisions between its components. Thus, the party's foundational congress had to produce a broad manifesto to reconcile the many contrasting factions. Four ideological pillars were set to guide the political action of the party: ecology, social responsibility, grassroots democracy, and non-violence. Because of the broadness of Green platforms, a binary classification of early Green parties has been proposed, distinguishing between "pure Green reformist parties" and "alternative Green radical parties".[120] Reformist Green parties do not reject capitalist economy altogether and accept collaborations with established political parties to achieve substantial results over environmental issues, acting substantially as ecology-oriented alternatives to mainstream social-democratic parties. Instead, radical Green parties seek fundamental changes in the socio-politic organization and political structures, rejecting cooperation with parties that work within the established paradigm. Thus, radical parties are more akin to the New Left and to the new social movements, although they often claim to escape the traditional left-right collocation.

Parallel to the raise of Green parties, conventional politics and institutions were considerably affected by the popularity of ecologism and started to implement measures for protecting the environment that went beyond the old idea of wise-use management and conservation. For instance, in the USA, where on the one hand wildlife conservation and preservation of uncontaminated areas remained staples of environmental policies, as proved by the 1964 Wilderness Act, while on the other hand a variety of federal environmental laws were enacted to cover a broad range of issues pointed out by environmentalists. Among the others, the 1963 Clean Air Act regulated air pollution; the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965; the Solid Waste Disposal Act of 1965; the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966.

The Nixon administration proved to be particularly sensible to ecological problems and promoted environmental policies. The National Environmental Policy Act (1970) was developed to include environmental costs within the factors considered in decision-making processes. The Environmental Protection Agency was established in 1970 to enforce environmental laws and supervise environmental protection measures. The same year saw also the institution of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, tasked with environmental protection of oceans, coasts, and air. During the 1970s, many environmental laws were created, including the Clean Air Act Amendment

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[120] Muller-Rommel, "The Greens in Western Europe: Similar but Different", *International Political Science Review*, 1985, vol.6 no. 4 (1985).

(1970), the Clean Water Act (1972), the Environmental Pesticide Control Act (1972), the Endangered Species Act (1973), the Safe Drinking Water Act (1974), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (1976). The US was not the only country that saw such quick improvement in environmental policy, many other Western nations implemented similar measures, reflecting the impact on politics and policy-making of the rising popular support for environmentalist themes. For instance, the UK established the Department of the Environment and the related cabinet position in 1970, in 1971 France created the Ministry of the Environment and Canada followed the same year.

The inherently global nature of many ecological issues invested international institutions, and the United Nations in particular, with great responsibilities. Direct UN involvement in environmental issues was decided with Resolution 2398 (XXIII), entitled *Problems of the human environment*, proposed by Sweden and adopted by the UN General Assembly on 3 December 1968.[121] The resolution recognized that "the relationship between man and his environment is undergoing profound changes in the wake of modern scientific and technological developments" and that these developments "while offering unprecedented opportunities to change and shape the environment of man to meet his needs and aspirations, also involve grave dangers if not properly controlled". Dangers coming from degrading environmental quality that are accelerated and accentuated by "rapidly increasing population and accelerating urbanization" and that raise concern "about the consequent effects on the condition of man, his physical, mental and social well-being, his dignity and his enjoyment of basic human rights, in developing as well as developed countries". Thus, believing that "increased attention to the problems of the human environment is essential for sound economic and social development", the UN decided to convene in 1972 a Conference on the Human Environment.[122]

The UN Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, was the first international political discussion of global environmental problems and it attempted to establish a global environmental policies governance, attesting the entrance of the environmental discourse in international politics.[123] The Stockholm Conference managed to establish the principle that environmental problems should be addressed through multilateral collaboration, an idea that has driven environmental international relations and law ever since.[124] Accordingly, the conference produced a Declaration made of 7 proclamations and 26 principles, which resulted in the creation of the UN Environment Programme to coordinate international environmental policies. However, the

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[121] Grober, *Sustainability,* p. 161.
[122] UN General Assembly, Resolution 2398 A/RES/2398(XXIII).
[123] Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*. 6th edn. (London, Palgrave, 2017), p. 247.
[124] Caradonna*, Sustainability* p. 108.

Stockholm Conference was afflicted by deep disagreement between developed and developing nations. Poorer countries believed that environmental issues were not a priority in the international agenda and the imposition of regulations would have limited their economic development. Moreover, the Communist Bloc boycotted the conference. As a consequence of such divisions within the international community, a follow-up UN conference on the environment could be hosted only in 1992 in a drastically muted international scenario.

As environmental issues became better understood, climate change and related phenomena such as global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, and greenhouse effect became the biggest global environmental concerns, overtaking fears of overpopulation and resource scarcity.[125] Moreover, new topics such as genetic modifications and biodiversity loss emerged. Yet, since Stockholm the troubled relationship between environmental safeguard and economic growth has shaped the international debate. The need to reconcile development with ecological sustainability resulted in the creation of synergies between environmental considerations and mainstream political and economic attitudes, in order to build the widest international consensus possible.

The paramount example is the concept of sustainable development, the idea of a new development process that harmonizes economic growth and environmental protection, addressing in an integrated manner issues of global ecological balance and human and economic development. Sustainable development has guided the environmental action of the international community since the 1980s, consequently defining the framework of discussion of ecological issues also at national level. Given the fundamental importance of the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development in today's green politics, Chapter 2 will be devoted also to the discussion of these themes.

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[125] Simmons, *Global Environmental History,* p. 172.

Chapter 2
The core green principles

2.1 Binary distinctions of green positions

Most of the accounts of green political thought and green politics tend to highlight the diversity of beliefs and positions within the movement, a characteristic has inspired a large number of scholars to draw classifications of the many green strands. Many of such categorizations identify a binary distinction between alternative green approaches, drawn on the basis of ideas about nature, philosophical standpoints, political or economic views, or a mix of elements. Distinctions between two competing stances have been coined not just in the field of green political thought but also in the study of Green political parties, in environmental philosophy, in environmental history, in economics, and in other areas related to environmentalism.

While the two discourses have been described by many authors in pretty similar ways, the terminology employed is diverse and confusing. Just to mention some of the typologies proposed, Naess divides between deep and shallow ecology,[126] O'Riordan distinguishes ecocentric and technocentric approaches,[127] Worster speaks of Arcadianism and Imperialism,[128] Dobson refers to environmentalism and ecologism,[129] Porritt identifies light and dark greens,[130] Young recognizes radical deep ecologists and reformist environmentalists,[131] and Garner observes radical and reformist approaches to environmentalism.[132]

In certain instances, as in the case of Naess and his theorization of deep ecology, the divide is carried out writing from one side of the rift, with the intention of arguing that only such an approach can be truly considered green, whereas milder stances are not authentically environmentalist. This kind of "purist" categorizations is meant to be normative, its scope is to define a single theory that represents the true green position and to defend its uniqueness and validity.[133] An example of a similar line of argument is Dobson's distinction between ecologism, a full-fledged ideology that demands a radical transformation of society, and environmentalism, which is not an ideology but rather an approach that seeks to solve environmental problems through reforms.[134] Dobson carries out this sharp division to

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[126] Naess, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary".
[127] O'Riordan, *Environmentalism*. 2nd edn. (London, Pion, 1981); O'Riordan, "Environmental Ideologies", *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, vol.9 no.1 (1977).
[128] Worster, *Nature's Economy*.
[129] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*.
[130] Porritt, *Seeing Green: The Politics of Ecology Explained* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1984).
[131] Young, "The different dimensions of green politics", *Environmental Politics*, vol.1 no.1 (1992).
[132] Garner, *Environmental Political Thought*.
[133] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics*, p. 4 referring to works such as Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*.
[134] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, pp. 2-3.

reinforce the novelty of ecologism and defend its autonomy from other political ideologies, qualities granted by its unique characteristics, namely an ethical foundation (ecocentrism), an economic theory (the existence of limits to growth), and a political strategy to pursue the ideal of a sustainable society (radical transformation instead of gradual reform).

The divide between shallow and deep ecology described by Naess is perhaps the most famous instance of dual classification of environmentalism and it has inspired many similar analyses. As mentioned in the first chapter, Naess argues that there are actually two forms of environmentalism, one focused on fighting against pollution and resource depletion and concerned with preserving the welfare and lifestyle of citizens of affluent developed countries, the other that poses deeper questions, challenging the basic principles of our society. This deeper attitude is characterized by an ecocentric axiology: an understanding of humanity as part of a bigger natural whole in which all components live in symbiosis and are equally important. From this ecocentric view follows a political vision that aims to establish a classless society made of decentralized autonomous communities in harmony with the environment.

Other binary typologies of environmentalism aim to be more descriptive than normative, exploring the plurality of ecologist views without attempting to pick one of them as representative. These classifications observe the existence of a major difference in attitudes within the green movement that is not limited to a single element of distinction but encompasses environmental philosophy, political thought, and politics, thus providing comprehensive accounts of green approaches. An example of such an approach is the typology defined by Timothy O'Riordan, who claims that environmentalism is actually composed by two distinct philosophies that first emerged in the American conservation movement, "one nature-orientated, the other centred on technique and mode of organisation."[135] He labels these two viewpoints respectively ecocentric and technocentric. The ecocentric school of thought, O'Riordan argues, is rooted in Transcendentalism, Muir, and Leopold's ideas, and "believes that nature is not only essential to man's livelihood, but is the fundamental medium through which people understand their own personalities, their social functions, and the pattern of human relationships."[136] Thus, ecocentrist see environmental degradation posing an existential threat to humanity since it harms the very meaning of human life, it follows that environmental safeguard is an absolute necessity regardless of its economic or social consequences. Moreover, ecocentrism understands humanity as part of the natural community, therefore it advocates a life within natural limits and the downscaling of human activities to a small-scale and self-sufficient dimension.

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[135] O'Riordan, "Environmental Ideologies" p. 3.
[136] O'Riordan, "Environmental Ideologies", p. 4.

Technocentrism instead relies on a utilitarian morality and "is associated with professional and managerial elitism, scientific rationality, and optimism."[137] Technocentric thought sees environmental issues in terms of inefficient resource management and unrestricted consumption, considers environmental policies to be a matter for professional experts, and asks for control over the nature of economic development. According to O'Riordan, technocentrism is rational and objective, focused on the development of ecologically-efficient scales and modes of production, believing in the capability of scientific and technological progress to remedy environmental degradation, while holding no moral obligation to nature. Technocentrics trust the "power of human intellect and its drive for self-preservation to overcome all obstacles limiting the perpetuation of economic growth and the achievement of widespread human happiness."[138]

A similar characterisation is developed by Donald Worster in his work on history of ecological thought, in which he identifies an essential distinction between two attitudes toward nature, called Arcadian and Imperial.[139] Arcadianism understands humanity as part of, rather than superior to, nature, thus it advocates a simple life in harmony with nature, without troubling the ecological order. Imperialism on the contrary considers nature as other from humanity, a mechanistic element that humanity can control through the power of science and technology. Worster traces back the origin of both stances to the development of natural science in the late 18th century, noting how certain observers stressed the vitalist and organic character of nature, developing a spiritual vision that opposed the rationality of industrial society, which sought to subject the functioning of the environment to human reason (just like empires attempt to conquer more lands, hence the term Imperialist). This mechanistic perspective, which Worster similarly to Lynn White roots in Christian thought, strips nature of the spiritual and moral qualities that Arcadians attribute it and embraces a pragmatic utilitarian or managerial ethic instead.

Besides the aforementioned division between ecologism and environmentalism pictured by Dobson, another example of twofold categorization of green political thought is Young's "great divide" between radical deep ecology and environmental reformism.[140] Young notices that there is a basilar cleavage between green mindsets which determines different discourses and courses of action. On the one side, the "dark green" deep ecology described by Naess, which holds that the only way to tackle the environmental crisis is through radical reforms of the way society is organized. On the other side, "light green" environmental reformism, which claims that it is possible to balance

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[137] O'Riordan, "Environmental Ideologies", p. 6.
[138] O'Riordan, "Environmental Ideologies", p. 11.
[139] Worster, *Nature's Economy*.
[140] Young, "The different dimensions of green politics".

environmental needs with the current economic model by mitigating the effects of industrialism and incessant growth.

According to Young, differently from what Naess and Dobson argue, deep ecology and shallow reformism are both "valid" green stances, since they share common basic principles besides the obvious environmental concern, such as criticism of industrialism and the belief in the existence of natural limits which prevent limitless growth, leading to criticism of conventional economics and the pursue of a sustainable society. Deep ecologists envision a decentralized society, organized on a smaller scale to reduce resource consumption and alienation from nature, where technology is employed for socially useful ends and not for commercial aims, ruled by participatory systems of democracy, and based on egalitarian principles of social justice and equality of opportunity.

Reformists on the other hand think that it is possible to reduce the environmental impact of our economic model and make it sustainable, hence there is no need to demand a radical systemic change. Reformists' believe, also thanks to solid support from the scientific community, that technology can provide solutions that reduce human impact on the environment while guaranteeing economic growth and preserving our lifestyle. Therefore, the priority of environmental reformists is to raise awareness about green issues, stimulating change in the public opinion that can push environmental issues higher on the political agenda and impact the behaviour of the private sector as well. This moderate reformist approach lacks the strong ideological connotation of deep ecology, as a result Young claims that it can be adopted also by governments and non-Green parties.

Young observes how Green parties themselves are torn between the ideologically purist radical approach and the realist reformist position. In fact, Green parties wish to change the system theoretically, but in practice they have to work within the existing system. While radicals pursue their principles uncompromisingly, reformists claim that such radical approach "is idealistic, that greens have to operate in the real world, and there is no option but to try to improve existing government policies" through pragmatic and realistic proposals.[141] This dilemma has major implications for Green political parties. Which strategy adopt to bring about change? Should it come in a top-down way through parliamentary initiatives or should instead be a bottom-up process? Should Greens refuse compromise and collaboration and contest elections just to challenge the system from the inside, or should they work within established institutions, influencing decision-makers or even getting government position?

The internal decision-making processes within the party is problematic as well. A radical approach prefers non-hierarchical party organisation and grassroot democracy, for instance rejecting professional career politicians, electing representatives for fixed-terms, setting the party line though

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[141] Young, "The different dimensions of green politics", pp. 28-29.

direct democracy, and refusing centralized party structures. Such fundamental ambiguity has caused in many Green parties internal conflict between "realist" and "fundamentalist" factions.[142] The "fundi-realo" controversy and its outcome for green politics will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Yet, it has been argued that clear-cut dual distinctions risk to be simplistic and reduce the vast array of green positions to a neat theoretical dichotomy which does not exist concretely. In fact, there is a broad variety of green positions and it is rare to find groups, parties, or movements that adhere completely to one of the two views, whereas there are many gradations between opposite poles. Andrew Vincent argues that twofold typologies "do not cover the at times quite intricate diversity of approaches that are taken within the ecological perspective, particularly those that I shall call the 'intermediate' categories. Secondly, such typologies sidestep the difficult issue of the relation between eco-philosophy and ecological ideology."[143] In this regard, several scholars have noticed that the three spheres of environmental philosophy, political theory, and politics do not always coincide, further complicating attempts to draw clear-cut taxonomies. For instance, Dobson warns that "the politics of ecology do not follow the same ground rules as the radical forms of its philosophy."[144] In fact, green politics often diverges from ideological tenets. In turn, green political theory builds on philosophical assumptions, but its multidimensional character extends beyond the dispute between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. As Barry observes: "green political theory is not committed to a particular 'party line' and can thus engage in theoretical explorations without having to worry about adhering to certain fixed or a priori principles or values."[145]

Therefore, rigorous characterizations of green attitudes that bound political positions to determinate philosophical perspectives risk to be unable to depict the real complexity of the green galaxy and overemphasize instead a black-and-white artificial account of green thought. As a result, there have been attempts to avoid reductionist dualistic readings either by providing a cohesive interpretation that avoids internal distinctions,[146] or by drawing extensive typologies of green positions, which seek to depict in detail the actual variety of green stances.[147] Examples of this latter approach are the taxonomies developed by Vincent and Wissenburg. In both cases, the authors opted to separate the philosophical and political aspects, given the lack of perfect overlap between the two dimensions, proceeding then to link political positions to philosophical foundations.

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[142] Doherty, "The fundi-realo controversy: An analysis of four European green parties", *Environmental Politics*, vol.1 no.1 (1992).

[143] Vincent, "The Character of Ecology", *Environmental Politics*, vol.2 no.2 (1993), p. 254.

[144] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 45.

[145] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics*, p. 4.

[146] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics;* Goodin, *Green Political Theory.*

[147] Vincent, "The Character of Ecology", Wissenburg, "A taxonomy of green ideas", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol.2 no.1 (1997).

Nevertheless, binary divisions should not be regarded as abstract theoretical frameworks, on the contrary there are clearly identifiable cleavages that split environmentalism over a variety of issues, resulting in different discourses, attitudes, and practices within ecologism. While in the public debate and in politics the boundaries between the two stances are often not as clear as in theory, they can still be recognized in many instances of debate about environmental issues. In particular, two core green themes that are of utmost importance for environmentalists can be approached from radically alternative perspectives: environmental ethics and sustainability.

2.2 Environmental ethics: the anthropocentric-ecocentric divide

A fundamental element that underpins dual categorizations of environmentalism, including most of the aforementioned ones, is the opposition between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism existent in environmental philosophy. Eckersley points out that "although some of these distinctions bear different nuances, they all contrast a human-centered orientation toward the nonhuman world with an ecology-centered orientation."[148] Indeed, at the root of all these distinctions lies a fundamental duality between opposite understandings of the relation between humanity and nature, that between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. In this regard, Eckersley also notes:

> [green political thought] is best understood as representing a spectrum of thought rather than a single ecopolitical theory or an internally coherent bundle of ideas—a situation that reflects the current state of day-to-day Green politics. Although there are many different areas of disagreement, the most fundamental division from an ecophilosophical point of view is between those who adopt an anthropocentric ecological perspective and those who adopt a nonanthropocentric ecological (or ecocentric) perspective.[149]

The centrality of environmental philosophy becomes apparent if we consider the basic question about why humanity should protect the natural environment. As a matter of fact, environmental issues, besides having scientific, economic, political, and legal ramifications, also raise a broad range of philosophical questions. Accordingly, environmental ethics deals with concepts and assumptions about the relation between humanity and the non-human, reflecting on human responsibility to the environment, studying values and normative principles that guide human interaction with nature. It is evident how environmental philosophy has relevant practical implications for the development of green views. Indeed, being green thought centrally concerned with human-nature relations, a theory of the relationship between humanity and the natural world is the key element upon which every environmentalist perspective is built.

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[148] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* p. 26.
[149] Ibid.

As covered in Chapter 1, some of the relevant issues of environmental philosophy were formulated and debated during most of history. However, environmental philosophy emerged as an organized field of study of these concepts only during the 1970s, parallel to the development of green political thought and green politics. In fact, the same factors that stimulated the formation of environmentalism as a movement also concurred to the attempt to apply philosophy to ecological problems.

Alarms from the scientific community about the existence of a growing ecological crisis of global dimension; a better understanding of ecology and of the impact of humanity on the health of our planet; evidence of the destructive environmental effect of human actions popularized by Rachel Carson and other responsible scientists; the systematic destruction of the natural environment carried out in the Vietnam War; the extinction-threatening potential of nuclear weapons and nuclear power; the first images of Earth seen from space that reinforced the Spaceship Earth metaphor... elements such as these contributed to the development of a conscious philosophical reflection on environmental issues. In particular, calls for the recognition to nature of a value independent of human interest arose, suggesting that the non-human, either living or inanimate, possesses a moral standing that implies human obligation toward it.

Yet, before dwelling further into normative ethics it is necessary to discuss some basic concepts of meta-ethics. Fi1rst of all, the very idea of nature can be understood in various ways. John Stuart Mill in the essay *Nature*, part of the *Three Essays on Religion*, argues that nature can refer to either everything actually existent, in other words the non-supernatural, or to everything that does not owe its existence to humanity. Even though other concepts of nature exist, Mill's distinction is useful as it leads straightforwardly to another essential metaphysical issue, whether human beings are part of nature or not. Setting humankind apart from nature, regarding it as other from the natural world, has a decisive impact over ethics because it can justify a hierarchical understanding of the human-nature relation that grants humanity complete dominion over the natural world.

The concept of environment is debated as well. One view considers the environment to be only what surrounds an individual, thus necessarily local and relative to someone's (or something's) perspective. Others instead believe that the environment is unrelated to circumstances and conditions, so it is possible to refer to environments other than one's own immediate surroundings. Further, it has been argued that the environment does not need to be limited to a small-scale, there can be a large-scale environment, if not even a global environment.

However, the most relevant issue for environmental ethics is value. In this regard, it is helpful to draw a broad distinction between intrinsic value and instrumental value. Extrinsic value is value attributed to a thing for the sake of something else. In particular, instrumental value is attributed to things

because of their being means to some other ends. Intrinsic value is the value that something possesses in itself (other terminologies are used, such as "in its own right", or "for its own sake") objectively, independently from the observer. In other words, it is value that things possess as ends in themselves, exclusively in the virtue of their non-relational properties, unrelated to their instrumental value to something else. Recognizing the non-human intrinsic value means attributing it a moral standing independent of human valuation, thus generating moral duties toward it from the human part.

Consequently, an anthropocentric perspective, that is to say human-centred, believes that the value of the non-human is purely instrumental to human purposes. A division can be traced between strong and weak anthropocentrism.[150] Strong anthropocentrism believes that human beings alone possess intrinsic value, the non-human can have instrumental value only. So, concern for the non-human is contingent upon human interest on it, for instance because it is instrumental to human survival or because it enhances human well-being. If no such interest exists, then there is no reason for restraining human behaviour, even if it damages the non-human.

Instead, weak anthropocentrism (also enlightened or moderate anthropocentrism) recognizes that the non-human may have value for humans yet not as a means to a further end, a kind of value that is instrumental but not directly dependent on human use or exploitation (in some literature such value is referred to as inherent value, while others call it weak instrumental value). As an example, the non-human may be valued for aesthetic, recreational, or spiritual reasons, although still within a human-centred perspective, since human interests always outvalues the non-human and prevails over other considerations.

On the contrary, a non-anthropocentric perspective denies that humans are the only things that have intrinsic value, it acknowledges the possibility that the non-human may possess intrinsic value as well, regardless of its usefulness to pursue human ends. Yet, there are different opinions regarding precisely which parts of the non-human world have value, ranging through sentient animals, living beings, all species, inanimate objects, the entire ecosystems, to the whole planet. Some philosophers have argued for an extension of the moral community to animals, granting them moral standing on the grounds of their capacities, including the ability to reason, feel emotions, and suffer.

Such perspective, that recognizes the inherent value of sentient animals in light of their individual properties, is called sentientism (or sentient-centrism). Some commentators have also employed the term zoocentrism, yet others use it to refer to theories that grant value to all animals, irrespective of sentience. Biocentrism goes further, extending moral consideration to all forms of life, so that each individual living thing has value, including plants and trees. Holistic perspectives embrace an even

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[150] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 42; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment: From theory to practice*. 2nd edn. (London, Routledge, 2003) p. 28.

broader frame, bestowing intrinsic value to entire categories, not just individual entities, holding an ecological understanding that sees nature as a whole in which everything is connected to everything else. Humanity is just one of many valuable collective entities, a part of the whole. Accordingly, ecocentrism believes that the whole ecosystem in all of its living and non-living parts (including mountains, rivers, the air etc.) has intrinsic value. However, in many cases ecocentrism (sometimes biocentrism too) is used to refer generically to non-anthropocentric holistic perspectives, not to a specific normative theory.[151]

Environmental ethics emerged as a discipline during the early 1970s, when several philosophers started to challenge anthropocentrism and formulate ecocentric theories. In 1973, at a World Congress of Philosophy in Bulgaria the Australian philosopher Richard Routley (later Sylvan) posed the issue "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?", a question to which he answered affirmatively. Routley regarded the traditional Western ethic tradition to be anthropocentric, grounded on a chauvinist principle, under which humans come first and can act as they please with respect to the non-human. He rejected this view on the basis of some examples, thought-experiments that demonstrate how there is an environmental ethic at odds with anthropocentrism.

As an example, the "last man" argument, a hypothetical situation in which the last person alive on Earth (for instance, the sole human survival of nuclear extermination) acts to eliminate, at the best of his capabilities, every other form of life. Routley noted how such a behaviour is generally perceived to be wrong, yet from an anthropocentric perspective it would be morally sound, because the destructive rampage of the last man would not harm any human being nor human interest. It follows that the non-human holds some kind of value independently of its contribution to humanity. Routley argued in favour of an extension of traditional ethics to include the non-human world, explicitly referring to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethics, the idea that the environment as a whole has a moral standing and thus moral agents have obligations toward it, as an example of alternative non-anthropocentric ethic.

Routley was not alone in questioning the validity of anthropocentrism. Peter Singer and his calls for "animal liberation" sponsored extension of moral consideration to other living beings. From another perspective, Lynn White had explored in his seminal paper "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" the historical causes of the predominance of anthropocentric attitudes toward nature in Western thought. He identified in the Judeo-Christian tradition the reasons for the detachment of humankind from the natural world and the consequent hierarchical superiority of humanity, yet he

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[151] Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness,* pp. 292-294.

also noted in Christianity, namely in Saint Francis of Assisi, the potential for an alternative holistic vision to strong anthropocentrism that poses humanity and the non-human on the same level.

The American philosopher and theologian Holmes Rolston III in the 1975 essay "Is There an Ecological Ethic?" built on Leopold's Land Ethics and advanced a holistic understanding of nature, rejecting antagonism between human and the non-human. He argued that value should not be defined exclusively from the human perspective, it is also located in the well-being of all living beings. Therefore, the whole biotic community possesses an intrinsic value that humans ought to respect. In fact, Rolston proposed nature as the primary source of value, including our own.

Arne Naess' deep ecology went further biocentrism and developed a fully ecocentric theory, what he called "biospherical egalitarianism." Naess believed that deep ecology is an "ecosophy", not just an ethical theory. Moving beyond the appeal to intrinsic value as guidance for human action, Naess developed an ecologically-based metaphysical claim about nature structured around a holistic and comprehensive idea of the relationship between humanity and nature, rejecting "the man in the environment image in favour of the relational, total-field image."[152] The consequence of such claim that humankind is only an element within ecological systems is that there no divide between human and the non-human. Hence, Naess challenged the whole foundations of industrial society, which he regarded to be built on the wrongful assumption that human's priority confers the right to impact ecological balance.

A perhaps even more radical theory was advanced by James Lovelock, a British scientist, who during the 1970s formulated the Gaia hypothesis, from the ancient Greek goddess that personified Earth. Lovelock, building on scientific evidence, proposed that the Earth is a self-regulating system that gradually created the conditions for life and maintains them through the cooperation of living organisms with the inorganic components of the environment. Through this complex interaction, the single components of the system perpetuate their existence. Therefore, human being and, more in general, entire species are just parts of an indivisible whole.[153] As a consequence, when it comes to environmental ethics only the entire system, that is the whole Earth, can have value. Moreover, the planet is a sort of super-being whose interest has priority over that of its single parts. Thus, humans, who are morally conscious, have the duty to behave in a way that conforms to ecological criteria, that is to say the rules of the system they belong to.

However, critical voices objected against the need for non-anthropocentric ethics raised by Routley, Rolston, Naess, and others, arguing that environmentalism can be human-centred. As an example, John Passmore in *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (1974) shared White's idea that the Western

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[152] Naess, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary", p. 95.
[153] Worster, *Nature's Economy,* pp. 379-386.

philosophical tradition is predominantly Christian and anthropocentric. Passamore agreed with White's suggestion that there is an urgent need to change human attitude to the environment, however he rejected the view that we need to abandon our established ethic tradition and that environmentalism must involve a non-anthropocentric ethical framework. Passamore believed that rights are not applicable to the non-human, only humans form a moral community where mutual obligations are recognized. However, the fact that nature has only instrumental value does not imply that humankind has no moral obligations towards the environment.

On the contrary, Passamore identified within the anthropocentric Christian tradition two minority schools of thought that consider the protection of nature a moral duty for humanity. One is the doctrine of stewardship, which regards humans as custodians of God's creation, making them responsible for the conservation and care of the natural environment. The other is the tradition of perfection, which believes that human's duty is to co-operate with nature to develop and improve it, for instance through the use of technology. Both traditions do not confer rights to nature, still they command a proper attitude toward the non-human. In other words, Passamore argued that anthropocentrism can be a valid foundation for environmental ethics, a green posture can be justified by anthropocentrism without having to build alternative ethics.

By the late 1970s, environmental ethics had grown into a complex field of discussion and a large number of philosophers and theorists have since focused their attention on this topic, developing both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric theories. It is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss the broad topic of environmental ethics, yet it should be noted that there are actually many environmental ethics perspectives, the dualism between anthropocentric and ecocentric is mostly a theoretical simplification to streamline such complexity by highlighting key conceptual differences. Indeed, not all observers agree with the opportunity to draw a twofold distinction, some prefer to establish a third, intermediate area in between anthropocentric and ecocentric ethics,[154] while other commentators consider anthropocentrism and ecocentrism to be the two extreme poles of a continuum.[155] Nonetheless, independently of categorizations, what is recognized unanimously is that the ethical dimension poses the foundation for the variety of beliefs and approaches existent within the green spectrum. In fact, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism and their diverse views of moral obligations offer distinct motivations for caring about the environment. In practice, such basilar difference outlines fundamental divergences in discourses and practices.

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[154] Vincent, "The Character of Ecology".
[155] Norton, *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists*; Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*.

On the one hand, anthropocentrism does not consider environmental problems as the product of a crisis of values, rather as the outcome of an ecologically unsustainable model of development. Yet, as mentioned before, many observers distinguish between strong and weak (often also called enlightened) anthropocentric postures. Strong anthropocentrism refers to the environment in purely instrumental terms, in the sense that the value of the natural world comes only from the direct use that humans make of it. Consequently, human duties toward the environment are exclusively a matter of human survival or well-being, in light of the harmful and potentially extinction-threatening consequences of environmental problems such as pollution, resource depletion, or climate change. Yet, even in the acceptance of the existence of natural limits to growth, a strong anthropocentric view sees human interests, such as economic growth, as paramount over ecological concern. Therefore, it understands environmentalism as wise resource management and conservation, usually accompanied by technological optimism, placing a great deal of importance on the development of more efficient and less resource-intensive technology.

Instead, weak anthropocentrism concedes a certain degree of value to nature, although still within a human-centred perspective. Hence, this perspective goes beyond the mere preoccupation for human survival, it encompasses also concern for the quality of life of human beings, which is influenced by the well-being of the natural environment. As a consequence, it grounds environmentalism on the responsibility of humans toward other humans, including future generations, to provide them a safe and healthy environment, able not just to materially sustain human welfare but also to satisfy aesthetic or spiritual needs that go beyond quantitative, tangible considerations. It follows that enlightened anthropocentrism can extend further than the acceptance of limits to growth and include criticism of ecologically unsustainable economic models. However, it still frames environmentalism in terms of human exclusivity, justifying ecological measures on the grounds that they are good for humans' own sake.

On the other hand, ecocentrism regards anthropocentrism as the main cause of ecological problems, seeing the ecological crisis as first and foremost the outcome of a wrong understanding of humanity's place in nature. This implies the quest for a whole new paradigm to guide human life, a rethinking of the values at the basis of human conduct. In practice, ecocentrism demands radical economic, political, institutional, and social transformations. Laws and policies must adapt according to the moral obligations toward the non-human that the new conception of human role within nature carries. Thus, for ecocentrists environmentalism is more than just an attitude, it is a new lifestyle with deep implications for both individuals and society that inevitably involves changes in social and political arrangements. Only through a different perspective that acknowledges the existence of non-human interests as worth as human ones it is possible to solve environmental problems.

2.2.1 Green ethics and political theory

In view of the substantial differences between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, it could be argued that the choice of a certain set of ethical principles to provide a framework for green political theory has far-reaching implications. While anthropocentric environmentalism can be accommodated within conventional political ideologies, ecocentrism is intrinsically a radical political position. As a consequence, not all theorist of green political thought agree with the inclusion of both anthropocentric and ecocentric positions within the green universe. Given the radical character of ecocentrism, for many green theorists and activists the acceptance of non-anthropocentrism is necessary for being green and ecocentrism is a key characteristic of green political thought.

For instance, Eckersley states in her analysis that, although anthropocentrism may provide a "penetrating diagnosis of environmental problems" and a "creative synthesis of the themes of participation and survival",[156] ecocentrism is the distinguishing element of green ideology. She believes that "the newness or distinctiveness of Green political thought is not primarily to be found in the various social and political institutions defended by its theorists", [157] rather the principal feature of green thought lies in its philosophical ecocentric perspective, which applies to existing concepts a new form of critique. Existing social and political institutions are judged from a different viewpoint, and innovative, more encompassing ethical and political justifications are advanced for proposals of social and political transformation.

Other scholars reckon that anthropocentrism, at least in its weak form, is inevitable in any form of environmental concern. Given that every value presupposes a valuer, humans cannot but be separated from nature, because only human beings possess a sufficiently sophisticated consciousness that makes them able to recognize or attribute values.[158] Consequently, even in the case of ecocentrism the recognition of intrinsic value in nature is necessarily carried out by humans, since it is human consciousness that acknowledges the presence and relevance of such value. This does not imply that humans are the only source of value, but that values have meaning only in relation to humanity. The inescapability of anthropocentrism, or in better terms of anthropogenic value, is noted also by Dobson, who nonetheless holds a narrow interpretation of ecologism and considers ecocentrism a staple of the green movement. He points out that "If there were no human beings there would be no such conceptualized thing as intrinsic value, and it is an open question whether there would be any such thing as intrinsic value at all. In this sense, any human undertaking will be (weakly) anthropocentric, including the green movement itself."[159] Furthermore, it has also been noted that, in

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[156] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* p. 29.
[157] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* p. 31.
[158] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 44.
[159] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 43.

terms of moral responsibility, humans stand apart from any other being in being reflective moral agents, conscious of their unique role and of the potential consequences of their actions. In particular, they are aware of their capability to modify the rest of the world at will and can intentionally choose to behave in a responsible or irresponsible way. Hence, any ethical code of conduct, whether anthropocentric or not, will acknowledge the exclusivity of humanity in this regard.

As a consequence, some theorists of green thought have set anthropocentrism rather than ecocentrism as the foundation for environmentalism. For instance, Robert Goodin argues that green political thought is based on a particular theory of value, which differs from the capitalist and the Marxist theories of value. The capitalist, or "neoclassical welfare economic", theory of value "traces the value of things to values which people derive in the course of partaking of them",[160] being essentially a is a consumer-based theory. The Marxist, or "Ricardian", theory of value "traces the value of things to values that people impart to them in the course of producing those things",[161] being a producer-based labour theory of value. Instead, the green theory of value believes that "value-imparting properties are natural, rather than being somehow artefacts of human activities" and that "value-imparting qualities somehow inhere in the objects themselves, rather than in any mental states (actual or hypothetical, now or later) of those who partake of those objects."[162] Therefore, in Goodin's view, greens believe that natural objects have value because of their naturalness, the characteristic of being the product of a natural process which cannot be replicated artificially. Respect for nature is driven by the appreciation of naturalness, from which follows the willingness to preserve it.

Goodin acknowledges that his theory "seems to come down decisively on the 'shallow' side of the 'deep ecology' debate" given that "it traces the value of nature to its value to human beings and the place it occupies in their lives." [163] However, he also notes: "saying that things can have value only in relation to us is very different from saying that the value of nature reduces to purely human interests",[164] an observation that Dobson too advances, distinguishing between being "human-centred" and "human-instrumental".[165] In fact, Goodin believes that humans are crucial to impart values, but natural objects have characteristics that give value which are "separate from and independent of humanity".[166]

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[160] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 23.
[161] Goodin, *Green Political Theory*, p. 24.
[162] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 25.
[163] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* pp. 42-43.
[164] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 43.
[165] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 42.
[166] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 45.

In particular, a distinctive property of naturalness, which causes humans to value it, is the capacity to inspire the feeling of "being part of something larger than/outside of ourselves", which by definition is a value-imparting property that exists independently of humanity. Said property and the concept of naturalness arise the fundamental issue of whether humans are part of nature, to which Goodin replies that humans are part of nature, but "not everything that human beings do – not all forms of human society, not all forms of human activity – are equally natural."[167] Thus, Goodin's green theory of value does not translate into the belief that nature should be completely untouched, it rather commands a responsible attitude that preserves naturalness as much as possible.

In a similar manner, John Barry, in his account of green political thought, establishes the connection between moral and political theory through an anthropocentric value theory, defending anthropocentrism as "the strongest and most appropriate ethical foundation for green politics."[168] Indeed, Barry believes that the respectful treatment of the environment prescribed by deep ecology can be based on different grounds, without having to build a new ethic. Weak (Barry also calls it "reflexive") anthropocentrism provides an "ethics of use", a relational view of morality which does not necessarily lead to environmental degradation, on the contrary it advocates harmony human and non-human interests. In particular, Barry notes that ecocentric and anthropocentric arguments lead to similar conclusions with regards to the duties that present humans owe toward future generations, since both perspectives share the view that the continued prosperity of our species depends on the quality of its natural environment.[169]

The philosopher Bryan Norton reaches an analogous conclusion, developing a "convergence hypothesis" which argues that there is a consensus amongst environmentalists about desirable environmental policies. In other words, while the reasons for being concerned with natural welfare that ecocentrism and anthropocentrism advance are very different, in practice these differences are more cosmetic than real given that the two perspectives lead to comparable solutions. Indeed, Norton points out that recognizing intrinsic value in nature does not really make any sensible difference, given that it reaches more or less the same outcome as a long-sighted anthropocentric view, concerned with the interest of future generations. He notes: "introducing the idea that other species have intrinsic value, that humans should be 'fair' to all other species, provides no operationally recognizable constraints on human behavior that are not already implicit in the generalized, cross-temporal obligations to protect a healthy, complex, and autonomously functioning system for the benefit of future generations of humans."[170]

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[167] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 48.
[168] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics* p. 47.
[169] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics* pp. 71-72.
[170] Norton, *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists*, pp. 226-227.

In light of Norton's hypothesis, it could be noted that environmentalists, both anthropocentrists and ecocentrists, share a common ultimate objective: to achieve an ecologically sustainable society. However, this does not mean that the differences in ethical principles that underpin green positions have no real consequences. In fact, two major question arise from the concept of sustainability. The first is whether sustainability has a universal meaning shared between all green perspectives. The general view regarding this issue is that there are different understandings of sustainability. The second is how sustainability ought to be achieved. This question too has no unanimous answer. For instance, the concept of sustainable development has proved to be particularly successful, but the contested and undetermined nature of the idea has led to many different interpretations of its meaning. Thus, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism share the same goal, but their views about its extent and the path to reach it vary considerably.

2.3 Sustainability

One of the most important principles of environmentalism, if not even the most important, and possibly the most successful outside of the green movement, is the concept of sustainability.[171] Sustainability and the related idea of sustainable development have managed to be accepted and endorsed also outside the sphere of the environmental movement, being embraced by a wide range of actors that include the near totality of world governments and policy-makers. However, sustainability is an undetermined concept which can be understood and defined in different ways from different perspectives and approaches, accommodating a diversity of worldviews and discourses.[172] This may be surprising, given the worldwide extensive use of the concept, yet the very meaning of sustainability is contested and has been the subject of intense debate also between environmentalists.

In fact, the discussion about sustainability can be regarded as the most relevant example of internal divisions within environmentalism, epitomizing how the green label actually encompasses a variety of positions which hold very different views. Paralleling the cleavage between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism that runs in environmental philosophy, a likewise duality between alternative understandings of sustainability has been observed, that between strong and weak sustainability. Since sustainability represents the fundamental objective of green political action, different interpretations of sustainability mean different views of society and also alternative ways to achieve

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[171] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* pp. 5-6.
[172] Purvis et al. "Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins" *Sustainability Science*, vol.14 no.3 (2019); Dobson, "Environment sustainabilities: An analysis and a typology", *Environmental Politics*, vol.5 no.3 (1996); Davidson, "A Typology to Categorize the Ideologies of Actors in the Sustainable Development Debate", *Sustainable Development*, vol.22 no.1 (2014); Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability*. 2nd edn. (London, Earthscan, 2008); Jacobs, "Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept" in *Fairness and Futurity: Essays on Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice*, edited by Andrew Dobson (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).

such ideal green sustainable society. While the rift between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism represents a clash between opposite theoretical conceptions of the human-nature relations, the cleavage that runs over the interpretation of sustainability highlights different ideas regarding economic and social relations, representing a more operational divergence between green schools of thought.

Different interpretations of sustainability also reveal another fault line in environmentalism, that of economics. Indeed, there is a binary distinction in the interpretation of interactions between human economy and the natural environment that follows the lines of similar dualities existent in green philosophical and political perspectives, distinguishing between environmental economics and ecological economics.[173] The two perspectives represent alternative views of progress and human activity, determining drastically different courses of action, reflecting once again the plurality of positions that coexist within green thought.

2.3.1 The meaning of sustainability

Sustainability today is employed in multiple contexts in different ways, yet it is a concept with a long history that predates its adoption by environmentalism, accordingly its meaning has evolved and changed over time. At least three distinct uses of it have been identified, signalling the historical evolution of the concept.[174] First, as a purely physical concept, in relation to the finiteness of a single resource. In this basic meaning, which originated in the field of forestry and was employed already in the 17th century, sustainability refers to a management of natural resources respectful of ecological constraints, in order to maintain such resources in the future.[175]

Second, sustainability can be an ecological concept, with respect to the carrying capacity of an ecosystem. This meaning of sustainability emerged in the context of the early environmental movement, which put forward the idea of global ecological crisis, the concept of limits to economic growth, and criticism of the capitalist-industrialist socio-economic model. Sustainability was adapted by environmentalists to describe the need for a global human society that does not harm the natural conditions that sustain its existence.[176]

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[173] While elsewhere in this thesis the terms "ecological" and "environmental" are used as synonyms, in this case they have distinct meanings as they are conventionally employed to distinguish opposite economic schools.

[174] Dixon and Fallon, "The concept of sustainability: Origins, extensions, and usefulness for policy", *Society & Natural Resources: An International Journal*, vol.2 no.1 (1989), p. 74.

[175] Du Pisani, "Sustainable development: historical roots of the concept", *Environmental Sciences*, vol.3 no.2 (2006), pp. 85-6; Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 7.

[176] Kidd, "The evolution of sustainability", *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 5 (1992); Du Pisani, "Sustainable development: historical roots of the concept"; Purvis et al. "Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins".

Third, sustainability can be a complex social-economic-ecological concept, defining the relationship between physical limits of the ecosystem, human welfare, and social issues. This broader meaning of sustainability, which originated in the green literature starting from the early 1970s, but it was fully developed only in the 1980s in the context of the United Nations, does not simply entail physical equilibrium between natural life-support capabilities and human activity, it also encompasses considerations about the economic and ethical implications of an ecologically-safe society. In this use, sustainability describes a vision of society, it entails normative values besides ecological concern.[177]

It is in this third, most elaborate sense that sustainability gained widespread popularity also outside the environmental movement after it was employed and institutionalized by the United Nations. In fact, probably the most popular and quoted definition of sustainability is the one issued in the 1987 UN Brundtland Report,[178] which gave the concept worldwide recognition and success. It states: "humanity has the ability to make development sustainable —to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[179] It also adds that "even the narrow notion of physical sustainability implies a concern for social equity between generations, a concern that must logically be extended to equity within each generation."[180] Since then, sustainability has been adopted by the UN as guiding paradigm to define the global agenda for development, "sustainable development" indeed, first in 1992, then in the Millennium Development Goals, and again restated in the Agenda 2030, grounded on the Sustainable Development Goals. Following the endorsement of sustainability by the UN, sustainability expanded beyond the context of the green movement in which it had been confined before, and has become widespread. Today, besides being a core part of political agendas, sustainability is a cornerstone of every form of long-term planning, used in a variety of context and situations. The term "sustainable" is so widespread, so extensively used in the most disparate fields, that it has become a sort of buzzword.

The popularity and the success of sustainability can be explained in light of its lack of a precise definition and meaning. For instance, turning to the 1987 Brundtland Report, the document does not define sustainability precisely, leaving the concept rather undefined, besides the broad concern for intergenerational and intragenerational equity. The definition is very general and vague, saying

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[177] Dixon and Fallon, "The concept of sustainability: Origins, extensions, and usefulness for policy".
[178] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* p. 147; Mitlin, Sustainable Development: A Guide to the Literature", *Environment and Urbanization*, vol.4 no.1 (1992), p. 112.
[179] WCED, *Our Common Future: The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 8.
[180] WCED, *Our Common Future*, p. 43.

relatively little about what sustainable does actually mean and what precisely should be sustained, leaving scope for different interpretations. Yet, a multitude of alternative definitions of sustainability exist. Already in 1992, the World Bank counted several dozens of definitions of sustainability in the economic literature alone, besides the Brundtland one.[181] Some estimates identify over 300 different definitions.[182]

This proliferation of understandings has been possible because sustainability is an open and contested concept that can be interpreted in multiple ways. Different disciplines and perspectives have embraced the sustainability discourse to explain the interrelation between the environment and humanity, yet each retaining its own viewpoint, thus generating many different interpretations. As a result, a myriad of interpretations of sustainability exist, at times even significantly dissimilar, since different approaches, contexts, and perspectives give it a different sense. It is then evident how, besides a general shared meaning, countless possible understandings of sustainability are possible.

Accordingly, the term "sustainable" is ubiquitous, even if in many cases it is used just to refer to eco-friendly practices or merely to denote durability. In fact, the conceptual openness of sustainability has made it vulnerable to misuse, given that anyone can interpret it in a way that suits his own interest, leading to a rather careless and inflated use of the term. Such an extensive use of sustainability has caused fear about the potential arbitrariness of the concept, to the extent that some environmentalists have started to question the opportunity of continuing to use the term, deemed to be too vague and vulnerable to interpretation to be really useful for the green cause.[183]

However, the conceptual indeterminacy of sustainability is at the same time a strength and a disadvantage. In fact, the absence of a shared understanding and the lack of a single definition have created some confusion, since there is no agreement of what it exactly means being sustainable. However, on the one hand this loose structure has allowed sustainability to overcome cultural and ideological differences and become almost universally accepted. The widespread use of sustainability is possible because of its capacity to accommodate a plurality of worldviews and backgrounds, without the limitations imposed by a strict definition.

In spite of criticism regarding its lack of univocal meaning, sustainability is not meaningless. In this regard, some scholars consider sustainability to be a discourse rather than a well-defined fixed concept,[184] that is to say, borrowing the term from Foucault, a system of thought that enables to know and interpret reality.[185] Through this approach, it is possible to explain the evolution that sustainability

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[181] Pezzey, *Sustainable Development Concepts: An Economic Analysis* (Washington, DC, World Bank, 1992).

[182] Ramsey, "On Not Defining Sustainability", *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 28 (2015), p. 1075.

[183] Ramsey, "On Not Defining Sustainability".

[184] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*; Kidd, "The evolution of sustainability"; Purvis et al. "Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins".

[185] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*, p. 9.

has undergone over time, from a basic physical meaning to the modern multidimensional one. Others have argued that the scope of sustainability is so complex that no definition could possibly clarify it, embracing Wittgenstein's idea that meaning is "meaning-as-use", thus sustainability is defined on the grounds of already existing examples of sustainable structures, practices, or circumstances.[186]

The general view of sustainability considers it as a multidimensional and multidisciplinary concept composed by three interconnected dimensions (often also called pillars, or components): the ecological, the economic, and the social one.[187] These three spheres have been called the three Es (economy, environment, and social equity) or the three Ps (people, planet, and prosperity) of sustainability. In fact, sustainability combines social, economic, and environmental issues and values within a single framework, requiring the establishment of a society that is equitable, can maintain living standards, and does not harm the resource base that maintains it. In this regard, sustainability represents a paradigm shift that questions many aspects of our organizational models. Consequently, given the deep and far-reaching implications of sustainability, some observers have advanced the idea of a "sustainability revolution", a major transformation of many aspects of our society comparable to that brought about by the Industrial Revolution.[188]

Although the model of sustainability as composed of three pillars is the most common one, also because it is the conceptualization of sustainability employed by the UN, it only provides a general framework open to interpretation. In particular, how the three aspects of sustainability, the ecological, the economic, and the social one, relate to one another is a much contested issue. Some consider them from a system approach, others see them as distinct perspectives. Thus, sustainability is often interpreted in a context-specific way, talking of environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability. For instance, from a strictly economic viewpoint sustainability translates into maintaining the capacity of nature to provide non-declining utility over time;[189] whereas an ecological perspective would refer to the preservation of biological diversity or ecological functions as the fundamental condition for sustainability.

Thus, it has been argued that sustainability provides a general orientation to policies and practices rather than offering precise operational guidance, acting as a flexible concept that can be adapted depending on the context. Sustainability is a goal, an end point which can be achieved in a variety of ways. Yet, the lack of an overall shared vision of how to transition toward sustainability has caused scepticism about its usefulness as an operational concept. In order to remedy to such indeterminacy

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[186] Ramsey, "On Not Defining Sustainability".
[187] Purvis at al., "Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins", p. 681.
[188] Edwards, *The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait of a Paradigm Shift* (New Society Publishers, 2005).
[189] Neumayer, *Weak Versus Strong Sustainability: Exploring the Limits of Two Opposing Paradigms*. 4th edn. (Celthenham and Northampton, MA, Edward Elgar, 2013), p. 8.

and provide a framework for the practical implementation of sustainability, the concept of "sustainable development" has been formulated by the UN.

An important clarification has to be made: some scholars employ sustainability and sustainable development interchangeably, others instead see sustainability as a normative goal and sustainable development as a process aimed at achieving it.[190] In this thesis, the latter approach is employed, following that literature which considers sustainable development composed of two parts: the conditions for sustainability, and the process aimed at achieving them.[191] However, since sustainable development depends on the underlying meaning attributed to sustainability, the two terms are strictly related and it is hard to differentiate clearly between the two concepts.

2.3.2 The history of sustainability

As mentioned earlier, the concept of sustainability has undergone an evolution over history, gradually moving from the context of maintaining a single natural resource, to the relationship between human society and the ecosystem, to eventually define increases in socio-economic welfare which do not irreparably damage the environment.[192] In its most basic physical sense, sustainability is an intuitive and straightforward concept, a form of precautionary thinking that has been known for much of human history.[193] Indeed, sustainable practices aimed at avoiding overexploitation and preserving the capacity of renewable natural resources, such as forests, animals, or fisheries, to regenerate themselves have been a reality for centuries. In this context, sustainability merely means to prolong the integrity of resource reserves, defining limits to their exploitation.

This simple meaning of sustainability as long-sighted maintenance of key natural resources is a form of basic human instinct for survival, yet it was forestry that developed it into a codified practice during the 17th century and first employed the term "sustainable" in the early 18th century. In fact, renewable resources, such as forests, pose finite physical limits to their exploitation, set by their capacity to regenerate themselves. Accordingly, the concept of "sustainable yield" is the practice of limiting annual harvest from forests to prevent depletion and ensure sufficient regeneration, so that comparable harvests can be taken the following years.[194] The German word "nachhaltig", sustainable, was first used in this sense to define sustainable yield in 1713 by Hanns Carl von Carlowitz (1645-

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[190] McManus, "Contested terrains: Politics, stories and discourses of sustainability", *Environmental Politics*, vol.5 no.1 (1996), p. 53; Purvis et al. "Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins"; Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability,* pp. 70-72; Blewitt, *Understanding Sustainable Development.*
[191] Mitlin, "Sustainable Development: A Guide to the Literature".
[192] Dixon and Fallon, "The concept of sustainability: Origins, extensions, and usefulness for policy".
[193] Du Pisani, "Sustainable development: historical roots of the concept"; Grober, *Sustainability,* p. 16.
[194] Grober, *Sustainability,* p. 82.

1714) in the *Sylvicultura Oeconomica*, describing the practices to be adopted to harvest timber continuously from the same forest without damaging it.[195]

Von Carlowitz was the head of a royal mining bureau in a district of the Kingdom of Saxony, one of the most active mining areas of Europe. As the mining industry relied heavily on the supply of wood, Von Carlowitz recognized the interrelation between the economy and the health of local natural resources. Worried by rapid deforestation, and thus by the consequent collapse of Saxon economy, in the *Sylvicultura* Von Carlowitz develops a comprehensive strategy for a sustainable management of forests, criticizing short-sighted strategies that seek quick profits without caring about the health of forests. Besides suggesting more careful cutting practices, he advances many other practical proposals aimed at tackling the root causes of overconsumption and scarcity, for instance: adopting energy-saving innovations in metallurgy and better stoves, improving housing heat-insulation, exploring alternatives to wood, planting new forests etc. The continuous use of forests can be ensured only through balance between consumption and the natural renewal capacity.[196]

Von Carlowitz was the first to speak of sustained yield, but the concept was already known to previous foresters, although it lacked a word that could express it. Already during the 15th century, the Republic of Venice regulated in a very precise manner the use of mainland forests, as scarcity of wood would have had catastrophic consequences for the city, built on piles, and for the source of its power, the Arsenale shipyard.[197] England, another sea power, shared similar fears and by the 1660s it had lost much of its original woodlands, leading the Royal Navy to fear an imminent timber shortage. The Royal Society, the British national academy of sciences, was charged with finding a solution to the wood problem. In particular, John Evelyn (1620-1706), one of the founding members of the Royal Society, which had been established in 1660, was tasked with presenting the outcome of the discussion within the academy. The result was *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees and the Propagation of Timber in His Majesty's Dominions*, published in 1664. *Sylva* went beyond the original scope of finding solutions to preserve British wood resources, ensuring naval power and energy independence. In fact, it presents an analysis of the causes of wood shortage, an encyclopaedic description of many tree species with instructions on how to plant and care after them, and a plea to landowners to repopulate forests and restore lost woodlands.[198]

Another call for a responsible management of natural resources came from Jean Baptiste Colbert's *Ordonnance sur le fait des Eaux et Forêts* of 1669. Colbert (1619-1683), who was King Louis XIV's

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[195] Du Pisani, "Sustainable development: historical roots of the concept", pp. 85-6; Grober, *Sustainability*, pp. 81-83.
[196] Grober, *Sustainability,* pp. 80-85, Caradonna, *Sustainability,* pp. 35-37.
[197] Grober, *Sustainability,* pp. 59-61.
[198] Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 33, Grober, *Sustainability,* pp. 63-70.

minister of finances, was deeply worried about the quick rate of deforestation in France, which endangered French plans to build an efficient mercantile navy able to rival British and Dutch fleets. Colbert carried out a deep reform of laws that governed woodlands, substituting all of them with a new comprehensive ordinance, which introduced strict rules and established a governmental apparatus to manage and supervise forests. The *Ordonnance* had multiple goals: increasing tax revenues, ensuring stronger statal control over natural resources, and promoting a better management of timber.[199]

Colbert and Evelyn pursued two different strategies, the first seeking a centralized administration of forests, the latter providing landowners with instructions for a wise forest management. Nevertheless, they both recognized that over-exploitation of natural resources is a serious problem, which has direct consequences for the economy and thus for people's welfare. Von Carlowitz's *Sylvicultura Oeconomica* builds on these assumptions and develops the idea of "nachhaltigkeit", sustainability, to describe a proper management that allows forests to remain productive for years by guaranteeing their autonomous regenerative capacity, while still collecting enough harvest to satisfy demands, ensuring productivity, profit, and economic growth. As *Sylva* first and the *Sylvicultura Oeconomica* later became popular books, the concept of sustained yield became a key doctrine of forestry, evolving into a codified practice that ruled the use of woodlands and caused the emergence of a specialized profession, the forest manager.

Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946), chief exponent of American conservationism, studied forestry in Europe and shaped his direction of the Forest Service according to the idea of sustainable yield. The "wise use" of natural resources became Pinchot's guiding objective in the management of American forests, an idea shaped in strongly utilitarian terms, aiming to provide the largest commercial revenue possible, supporting the maximum number of people, without degrading long-term productivity of forests. In 1905, Pinchot published *The Use of the National Forest Reserves*, a manual that merged together resource management and economics, applying economic concepts, such as the model of supply and demand, to forest management. He saw natural resources in terms of national security and economic growth, an anthropocentric instrumental view of nature that prompted his demands for environmental conservation.

However, the Western world was not the only place where sustainable yield was theorized and applied: the concept was developed almost simultaneously in other areas. During the late 17th centuries, silvicultural projects of reafforestation were diffused in the Indian subcontinent.[200] In the early 18th century, Japan developed a centralized management of national forests. At the beginning

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[199] Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 34, Grober, *Sustainability,* pp. 71-74.
[200] Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 42.

of the Tokugawa era (1603–1867), Japan had already experienced severe deforestation. Now unified under a strong central government that could implement nation-wide policies, concerns about shrinking domestic wood supply led the Japanese authorities to implement top-down solutions not too different from those elaborated by Colbert and Von Carlowitz, enforcing the protection of certain forests, regulating the use of others, and carrying out projects of reforestation.[201]

Over time, the concept of sustainability, although not explicitly called as such, started shifted from the context of a single renewable resource to that of the whole ensemble of natural resources usage, the ecosystem.[202] In fact, improved knowledge of the natural world and the new economic system brought about by the Industrial Revolution caused an increased awareness about the dependency of human society on the capacity of the environment to sustain it. A major example of such emerging concern is Thomas Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), which draw a connection between population growth and resource consumption. John Stuart Mill included in the fourth book of *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) some predictions about future economic outcomes, including considerations about natural resources and even the possibility of a "stationary state", a condition of stagnation in which the economy has reached the physical limits to growth. George Perkins Marsh's *Man and Nature* (1864) linked the decline of certain historical societies to the consequences of environmental degradation.

By the mid-20th century, scientists started to openly discuss the idea that the natural resource base could not be adequate to support continuing economic expansion, population growth, and the related increased consumption, leading to the possible depletion of both renewable and non-renewable resources critical for human welfare. For instance, William Vogt's *Road to Survival* (1948) and Henry Fairfield Osborn's *Our Plundered Planet* (1948) covered the issue. Charles Kidd identifies six different strains of thought about human-environment interrelationship (ecological concern for the planet's carrying capacity, economic concern over finite resources and environmental services, the view of Earth as a closed biological system, the critique of careless application of technology, criticism of economic growth, and the idea of "ecodevelopment") which developed since the 1950s and eventually merged into sustainability, when the formation of the environmental movement provided the right context for the integration of all these theories in a single concept.[203]

Indeed, the formation of modern environmentalism in the 1960s boosted awareness in the public about the close interrelationship between human society and the ecosystem: humanity is dependent

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[201] Caradonna, *Sustainability* pp. 40-42.
[202] Caradonna, *Sustainability*; Dixon and Fallon, "The concept of sustainability"; Du Pisani, "Sustainable development: historical roots of the concept"; Grober, *Sustainability.*
[203] Kidd, "The evolution of sustainability".

on its environment. As environmental degradation, climate changes, exhaustion of natural resources, pollution, loss of biodiversity and so on were all deemed to be the cumulative effect of human activity, the viability of our model of economic and social organization started to be questioned, deemed to be too rapid and intensive for the limited capacity of natural ecosystems to sustain it. Scientists and environmentalists argued that an unsustainable society was threatening Earth's capacity to support human life, advocating an ecologically-safe use of nature to ensure the prolonged existence of humanity.

It was in this context that sustainability expanded from sustainable yield to a broader scale and became a crucial part of the environmentalist discourse. Sustainability was no longer applied to just one field (forestry), a single resource (wood), and a precise practice (sustainable yield), but it was employed with a more general scope, referring to the functional integrity of the whole ecosystem. Since the environment provides goods and services crucial to humanity, including the capacity to act as sink for waste and pollution, human life is dependent on the conservation of the ecological conditions necessary for its continuation, what economists started calling the "natural capital". This concept is embedded in basic economic notions, such as that maintaining a stable income requires the maintenance of capital stock, or that investments in a savings account should be maintained in order to keep earning interests.

Accordingly, in the environmentalist literature of the 1970s and 1980s sustainability was used mainly to refer to new economic theories that criticized conventional economic models, regarded unsustainable because of their focus on growth as the only way to achieve development, regardless of the environmental costs. Green criticism of conventional models of development, grounded on their alleged unsustainability, involved the necessity to propose an alternative that could improve human condition while staying within global ecological limits. Therefore, alternative economic paradigms, such as steady-state economics or degrowth theories, attacked the idea that development could consist only of material growth, separating the concept of development from that of growth and advocating the possibility to improve human welfare observing and respecting natural limits.

Moreover, starting from the 1970s, the emerging green movement further developed sustainability, moving beyond the purely physical sense of balancing human activity with natural capacity to sustain it, and enlarging its scope incorporating within it also normative values. The idea of limits to growth, criticism of established economic theories, the view of the Earth as a closed system, the global extent of the ecological crisis, demands for social justice, concern for global development, and intergenerational equity were all combined with the fundamental problem of ensuring the capacity of

the ecosystem to maintain human life. Therefore, sustainability started involving also considerations about the interrelatedness of the socio-economic dimension with the ecological sphere.

Indeed, sustainability could not be limited to the management of the ecosystem without caring about the well-being of humanity, even more so in light of the fact that most of humanity lived in underdeveloped countries that suffered from widespread poverty and deprivation. Consequently, the scope of sustainability was adapted to the challenge of improving human welfare, coming to include social, political, and ethical issues, besides ecological and economic concern. Hence, sustainability did not encompass anymore the sole physical dimension, but started to entail considerations about society. Green commitments to achieve social justice, human and environmental rights, democracy, peace, and intergenerational and intragenerational equity, not only locally but on the world scale, were merged with concern about the physical-biological capacity of the ecosystem to withstand human life.

According to some scholars, the first use of the term sustainable in this complex sense occurs in the famous 1972 report on *The Limits to Growth*,[204] which states: "we are searching for a model output that represents a world system that is: 1. sustainable without sudden and uncontrollable collapse; and 2. capable of satisfying the basic material requirements of all of its people."[205] Others instead locate the first instance of sustainability in *A Blueprint for Survival*,[206] also published in 1972 and informed by the unpublished preliminary edition of the *Limits to Growth* report. *The Blueprint* called for the establishment of a "sustainable society" which could be "sustained indefinitely while giving optimum satisfaction to its members".[207]

It is evident how sustainability is employed in both cases as an antonym of collapse, to describe a global system that is able to withstand the existence of humanity. For instance, one of the goals of *The Limits to Growth* is to design a global model that allows "to establish a condition of ecological and economic stability that is sustainable far into the future."[208] Yet, sustainability is not limited to an endurable condition, it encompasses also distributional concerns, as the report says: "the state of global equilibrium could be designed so that the basic material needs of each person on earth are satisfied and each person has an equal opportunity to realize his individual human potential."[209]

This view of sustainability soon expanded beyond the environmentalist movement. For instance, the 1975 assembly of the World Council of Churches (an association of many Christian churches founded

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[204] Grober, *Sustainability,* p. 155.
[205] Meadows et al, *The Limits to Growth: A Report to the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York, NY, Universe Books, 1972), p. 158.
[206] Kidd, "The evolution of sustainability".
[207] Goldsmith et al, *A Blueprint for Survival,* p. 23.
[208] Meadows et al. *The Limits to Growth,* p. 24.
[209] Meadows et al, *The Limits to Growth,* p. 24.

in 1948 with the aim of promoting closer relationships between different Christian denominations) set the achievement of a "just, participatory and sustainable" society as the objective of the organization.[210] This decision came as a result of the previous world council, held in 1968, which was characterized by widespread critiques to the various churches of being detached from social reality. The attacks came mainly from exponents of the theology of liberation and other grassroot Christian movements of developing countries. As a consequence, the Council set up a commission with the task of elaborating a Christian response to social issues. The commission met in Bucharest in 1974 and it produced a closing declaration that detailed the characteristics of a "sustainable society": a society which is equitable, stays within environmental boundaries, and is not adversely influenced by ecological problems, such as climate change.[211] The following year, the general assembly of the Council acknowledged the results of the commission.[212]

Sustainability poses a complex and deep challenge especially to governments and policy-makers, since it implies the reconsideration of the whole of human society. This aspect, together with the inherently global nature of the sustainability discourse, soon proved to be very relevant for the United Nations. Ssustainability contested the validity of capitalism and industrialism, questioning the validity of conventional models of growth and international development grounded on the increase of material throughput, an aspect that attracted the interest of underdeveloped and non-aligned countries that were critical of the established international economic order. Moreover, the discussion about sustainability raised a number of global issues of crucial importance for developing countries, such as equity on the world scale and environmental justice. Furthermore, the global nature of the ecological crisis highlighted the need for an international governance of environmental policies. Accordingly, many UN bodies involved with environmental issues, such as the UNESCO, the FAO, the WHO, the IAEA, and the WMO, together with other non-governmental international organizations, since the late 1960s began to design a cohesive framework for international cooperation on environmental governance which eventually came to be centred around the concept of sustainability.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference played a central role in the development of the international environmental agenda around sustainability, although it did not officially discuss it.[213] Indeed, two opposing perspectives clashed at the conference. On the one side, developed nations were concerned with the environmental consequences of increasing global development. On the opposing side,

[210] Grober *Sustainability* p. 168.
[211] Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability*, p. 32.
[212] Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability*, pp. 32-33.
[213] Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 140.

developing nations expressed their need for economic growth. The global nature of environmental problems imposed the necessity to achieve a balance between contrasting needs, heightening the urgency of a compromise solution between the developed global North demands for environmental protection and the developing global South desire for material improvement. In fact, the conference synthesized economic and development considerations with ecological thinking, providing the foundations for what will later be called "sustainable development". A major result of the conference was the general acceptance of the principle that the prevention of environmental damage is a key aspect of development: developmental needs have to be realized without irreversibly depleting the ecosystem's capacity to sustain life.[214] Thus, in national and international policies environmental protection has to be integrated with alleviation of poverty and economic development, the socio-economic and the ecological aspects are not mutually exclusive and can be achieved together. Consequently, the UN Environmental Program (UNEP) was established to promote such vision of environmentally-sound development.

It is this vision of sustainability, which encompasses social, economic, and ecological aspects, that was embraced by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). The Commission, chaired by the then Prime Minister of Norway Gro Harlem Brundtland (and thus also known as the Brundtland Commission), was established in 1983 with the task of formulating a strategy of global development that could address both ecological and development issues, reconciling environmental protection and economic improvement. The WCED concluded its work in 1987 publishing the report *Our Common Future* (also known as The Brundtland Report), which formulated the concept of sustainable development. Sustainable development was adopted at the so called Rio the Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 (the UN Conference on Environment and Development, UNCED), by the UN as the organizational principle for the 21st century, signalling the complete acceptance of sustainability in the international agenda and its success outside the green movement.

2.3.3 Interpretations of sustainability: weak and strong sustainability

The complex and multidimensional nature of sustainability troubles analytic approaches to draw typologies of the many different understandings of it. While the basic, physical meaning of sustainability, as maintenance of the ecological conditions that support human existence and allow its flourishing, is a sort of self-evident truth, supported by scientific knowledge, the modern multifaceted meaning is much more contested. In fact, sustainability is not just an ecological condition, it is a heterogeneous concept composed of different strains and that poses both normative

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[214] Grober, *Sustainability* p. 165.

and practical problems, this means that a purely scientific methodology is not enough to define it, leaving space for a multitude of different understandings.

As mentioned earlier, sustainability lacks a precise definition and is understood by some observers to be a discourse, a sort of shared term that can be interpreted in various ways depending on the perspective.[215] For instance, Kidd identifies at least six different, although related, schools of thought and areas of concern that led to the emergence of the concept of sustainability.[216] Furthermore, there is no common theoretical foundation shared by the many understandings of sustainability, as they are underpinned by a plurality of considerations. Philosophy, ethics, political views, economic theories, ecology, and many other cultural and scientific aspects concur to the formation of different perspectives. Another element of complexity is the scope of sustainability, which is extremely broad, basically encompassing the whole of human activities. In fact, sustainability challenges the viability of our model of economic and social organization, demanding to transition toward a system able to satisfy certain ecological, economic, and social conditions. Thus, sustainability poses a set of multi-faceted and interrelated issues, generating interpretations that are specific to a particular context as well as comprehensive ones.

Moreover, sustainability often overlaps with sustainable development, further complicating the study of interpretations of sustainability. In many cases, the two terms are used interchangeably. However, usually a theoretical distinction between the two concepts is advanced, as sustainable development is usually understood as a process, whereas sustainability is a condition which sustainable development seeks to reach. Nevertheless, given their strict interrelatedness, it is hard to draw a clear distinction between sustainability and sustainable development, accordingly most of the literature devoted to sustainability also deals with sustainable development.[217] It should be noted though that sustainable development is subject to criticism and even rejection, while sustainability, although in a variety of different interpretations, is universally accepted as a valid concept, even more so in the physical sense of environmental sustainability. In this regard, nobody would advocate unsustainability, while sustainable development is often met with resistance, especially from radical environmentalists.

In light of this complexity, different approaches to the study of sustainability and sustainable development have been proposed. One method is to consider sustainability the object of a new

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[215] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth.*

[216] Kidd, "The evolution of sustainability".

[217] McManus, "Contested Terrains: Politics, stories and discourses of sustainability"; Davidson, "A Typology to Categorize the Ideologies of Actors in the Sustainable Development Debate"; Pezzey, *Sustainable Development Concepts*; Purvis et al. "Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins"; Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability*; Dobson, "Environment sustainabilities: An analysis and a typology"; Mitlin, "Sustainable Development: A Guide to the Literature".

scientific discipline, "sustainability science", which "seeks to understand the fundamental character of interactions between nature and society."[218] This integrated and interdisciplinary approach attempts to overcome the broadness and openness of sustainability through the adoption of an analytic scientific framework that combines different research areas, aiming to develop theories about the interaction between natural and social systems that can provide practical solutions to the problems posed by sustainability. Thus, sustainability science unifies within a single field the many interpretations of sustainability with a use-inspired logic, that is to say with the scope of providing a unified body of knowledge that can address applied sustainability problems.

Another approach, similarly focused on the operational implementation of sustainability, is to consider the various context-specific uses of sustainability on their own, such as sustainable energy, sustainable finance, sustainable transportation, sustainable urban development and so on. According to this view, sustainability acts as an underlying basic principle, a scheme that frames various interpretations but does not determine their content, which can thus be adopted to various sectors, problems, and contexts. It is then not necessary to hold a substantial definition of sustainability, rather it is important to set some basic shared principles that define what is a sustainable condition. An example of such approach is the "framework for strategic sustainable development", which sets basic principles and requirements of sustainability and then seeks ways to achieve them.[219]

A different conception of sustainability is the one grounded on the three pillars, which holds that sustainability is composed of the social, economic, and environmental dimensions. This view (also known as the "triple bottom line", or the "Three Es") lacks a precise theoretical foundation and remains open to interpretation, thus accommodating within it the possibility for further interpretation and adaptation. For example, the three pillars can be understood as distinct dimensions which have to be pursued separately, even if in a coordinated manner, or as an integrated socio-ecological system, avoiding compartmentalization. Some observers have added one or more dimensions, such as cultural, institutional, or technical, while remaining within the same framework.[220]

It is within this latter context, that of the three pillars view, that most of the systematic reviews or analysis of interpretations of sustainability operate, given that it lacks an in depth conceptualization of sustainability and allows multiple interpretations, whereas more analytical use-oriented views of sustainability are less flexible. Indeed, several attempts to draw analytical typologies, categorizations, or mappings of understandings of sustainability and sustainable development have been advanced.

[218] Kates et al. "Sustainability science", *Science*, vol.292 no.5517 (2001).
[219] Robèrt et al. "Strategic sustainable development: selection, design and synergies of applied tools", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, vol.10 no.3 (2002).
[220] Purvis et al. "Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins", p. 685.

Some of them approach the issue from a comprehensive viewpoint, others instead frame it around a central issue, usually the fundamental question of what precisely is to be sustained.[221]

Given the plethora of interpretations and definitions of sustainability, a comparative analysis would be overwhelming, hence many observers focus on research question that arise from issues that lie at the foundation of the concept of sustainability and are answered differently by different interpretations of it. As a matter of fact, interpretations of sustainability differ as to what is to be sustained (the integrity of nature? Human welfare?), for how long (the next generation? Centuries?), why (for our own survival? Because of human obligations toward nature? Or for sake of future generations?), in which way (does sustainability allow economic growth? Does it entail the acceptance of limits to growth?), and sustainable for whom precisely (human beings? The ecosystem?).

The dispute over sustainability is not purely semantical or theoretical, nor is a mere matter of assessment or measurements: the various perspectives differ theoretically in what they consider to be sustainable and practically in that they develop different strategies and policies to implement their objectives, which may even be contrasting. Thus, as Dryzek notes, "the proliferation of definitions is not just a matter of analysts trying to add conceptual precision; it is also an issue of different interests trying to stake their claims in the territory."[222] Indeed, choosing a certain understanding of sustainability involves providing different answers to the questions presented above, answers that rely on a variety of considerations. As an example, some see sustainability as a basic precautionary measure (we should not destroy the ecosystem which provides the basis for our own existence), others believe it is grounded on moral obligations towards future generations, yet it can also be motivated on ecocentric ethics.

The "three Es" framework allows to integrate ethical, economic, social, and ecological concern in a single condition, sustainability. The key issue that differentiates the various understandings is how they define such condition, what are the criteria that make a certain situation sustainable. Thus, through this approach it is possible to examine the various interpretations of sustainability as a function of what they consider to be their objective, what precisely has to be sustained. Since the three pillars imply that sustainability cannot be limited just to environmental sustainability or to a single, narrow context, but must address ecological, social, and economic considerations, the scope of sustainability must be a comprehensive condition.

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[221] McManus, "Contested Terrains: Politics, stories and discourses of sustainability"; Dobson, "Environment sustainabilities: An analysis and a typology"; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment*; Hopwood et al. "Sustainable Development: Mapping Different Approaches", *Sustainable Development* 13 (2005); Davidson, "A Typology to Categorize the Ideologies of Actors in the Sustainable Development Debate".
[222] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth,* p. 148.

The logical consequence of this approach to the analysis of sustainability is the need for a way to measure the achievement of the desired sustainable status. That is to say, how to quantify or assess the criteria that have been set to define sustainability. For instance, if the objective of a certain interpretation of sustainability is to ensure the well-being of future generations, such well-being must be measured in order to operationalize sustainability through actions, policies, and strategies and evaluate the success of such measures, judging whether a sustainable condition has been achieved or not. It follows from this necessity of quantifiable results that most of the discussion about interpretations of sustainability takes place in economic literature.

The common view about understandings of sustainability is to identify a duality between two broad perspectives: a "weak" and a "strong" sustainability.[223] Basically, the weak-strong typology depicts a clash between different ideas about what should be sustained, which are grounded in opposite economic theories, ecological economics and environmental economics. On the one hand, weak sustainability believes that it is human well-being that must be sustained, thus sustainability consists of maintaining a non-declining welfare. On the other hand, strong sustainability focuses on ecological integrity and argues that it is Earth's life support capacity that has to be sustained, thus sustainability consists of maintaining the ecosystem's functions.[224]

A popular way to depict the difference between weak and strong sustainability is by referring at their views of the relationship between the three pillars of sustainability.[225] Weak sustainability considers the economic, ecological, and social spheres to be distinct, although interrelated [Figure 1]. Each has its own issues and priorities, which have to be pursued simultaneously to achieve sustainability. Strong sustainability instead considers the environmental dimension to be paramount: society, of which economy is just a part, is completely dependent on the environment [Figure 2], thus the environment is the foundation of sustainability and it takes absolute priority over social or economic considerations.

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[223] Neumayer, *Weak Versus Strong Sustainability,* pp. 1-2.

[224] Dobson, "Environment sustainabilities: An analysis and a typology", p. 406; Harris and Roach, *Environmental and Natural Resource Economics* 4th edn. (London and New York, NY, Routledge, 2018) p. 252.

[225] Caradonna, *Sustainability* pp. 8-9, Scott Cato, *Green Economics: An Introduction to Theory, Policy and Practice* (London and Sterling, VA, Earthscan, 2009), pp. 36-38.
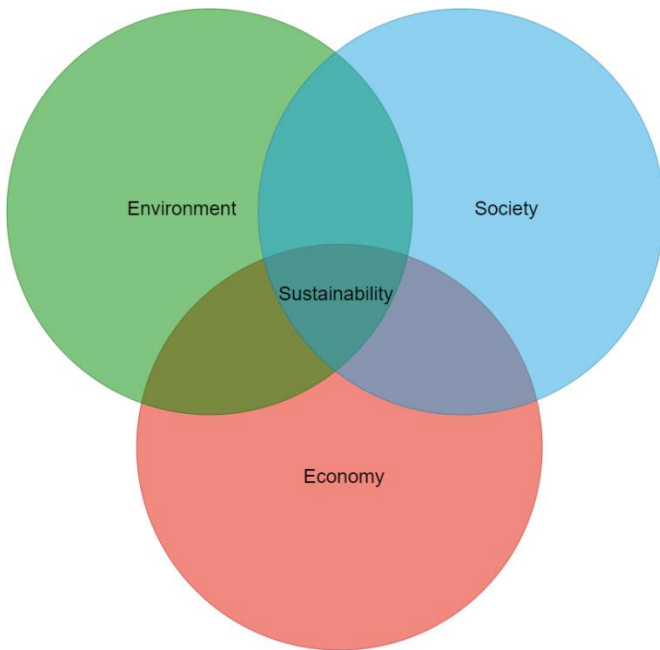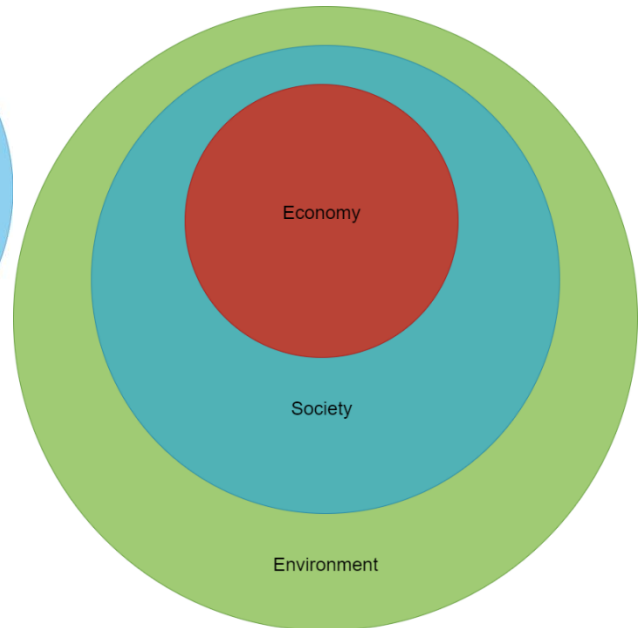
Figure 1   *Figure 2*

The two views could be linked to the ecocentric-anthropocentric cleavage in environmental ethics, even if they do not perfectly.[226] In fact, weak sustainability is concerned with human welfare and regards nature as purely instrumental for such end, whereas strong sustainability considers primarily the good of the ecosystem. However, although it is true that ethical considerations are involved in the weak-strong divide, each perspective is not necessarily linked to a certain ethical framework. While weak sustainability can be held almost exclusively from an anthropocentric perspective, strong sustainability could be justified on the grounds of both ecocentrism and weak anthropocentrism.

In truth, the weak-strong distinction does not always follow ethical boundaries because it was originally formulated as a clash between the interpretations of sustainability provided by ecological economics and conventional environmental economics. Both schools of economic thought measure sustainability in terms of capital, but differ regarding the type of capital to preserve because of theoretical divergencies about the capability of man-made capital to substitute natural capital. Hence, ecological economics focuses on maintenance of the natural endowment of resources and services, whereas environmental economics prioritizes improving the overall capital stock.

2.3.4 Ecological economics and environmental economics

In the 1960s, when it became apparent that the increased capacity of human technological and economic power to dramatically alter the natural environment was leading to serious ecological and social consequences, economics started to be concerned with environmental issues. Parallel to the

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[226] Dobson, "Environment sustainabilities: An analysis and a typology", pp. 417-419.

formation of modern environmentalism and the formulation of sustainability, two competing perspectives about how to explain economics-environment interactions arose.[227] Some economists believed that existing economic theories, namely neoclassical economics, could be extended to incorporate environmental issues. This school of thought is known as environmental economics. Other economists instead believed that conventional theories were simply not adequate or even conceptually erroneous, being themselves a cause of ecologically destructive activities. Thus, they developed alternative approaches that incorporate the development of biological and ecological knowledge within economics, forming the theory known as ecological economics.

The conventional neoclassical view considers the economy as a closed system, assuming that environmental issues are just part of economic issues. Indeed, the fundamental question of neoclassical economics is how to allocate scarce resources between competing agents and uses, a framework that seems to perfectly describe the issue of scarce natural resources. The idea of including environmental issues within neoclassical economics was elaborated already during the 1920s by Pigou, who developed the concept of negative externalities, costs imposed by production or consumption over third parties for which no compensation is paid.[228] Pigou argued that negative externalities are market failures, since they cause costs that are not accounted for in prices, resulting in an inefficient allocation of resources. Environmental issues are a case of negative externality. For instance, a factory that causes pollution, damaging the health of people in its proximity and diminishing the value of nearby properties, or plastic waste dumped in the ocean, which poisons fish stocks.

Environmental economics embraces this neoclassical framework, considering environmental issues as negative externalities. Considering natural resources and services as free, or more properly as "public services", leads agents in the market to overexploit them (the scenario depicted by Hardin in The Tragedy of the Commons) without realizing that such behaviour entails losses. As a consequence, environmental economics aims at developing policy solutions that correct this kind of market failures and price correctly the environment, in order to reach an optimal allocation of resources, for instance placing costs on environmental depletion or placing incentives to reduce resource consumptions.

Yet, as green issues became popular and climbed up the political agenda, the approach of environmental economics started to be questioned by those who believed that a mere extension of mainstream economics was inadequate to fully explain the interaction between the economy and the ecosystem. In particular, some economists argued that only through an integration of ecology and

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[227] Harris and Roach, *Environmental and Natural Resource Economics,* p. 5.
[228] Costanza et al. *An Introduction to Ecological Economics*. 2nd ed. (Boca Raton, FL, CRC Press, 2015), pp. 48-51.

economic theory there can be a truly comprehensive understanding of environmental problems. Although such critical voices raised already in the 1960s, only during the 1980s this perspective became an established and organized academic field: ecological economics.

Ecological economics is a pluralist, multidisciplinary approach which brings together viewpoints and findings from different disciplines, analysing economic activity in the context of the broader ecological system and employing a variety of methods, including but not limiting to those of neoclassical environmental economics. A major difference from environmental economics is that ecological economics sees the economy as an open system, embedded in the global ecosystem. Consequently, ecological economics recognizes the interdependency between the economy and the environment.

Given that the economy is a subset of the ecological system, its expansion is constrained by absolute limits, posed by the capacity of the global ecosystem to support it, such as the scarce availability of natural resources and by the finite absorption capacity of the environment. As the size of the economy relative to the overall ecological system increases, its impact becomes more and more disrupting. In fact, economic expansion entails not only environmental degradation, but also a growing amount of natural goods and services required to maintain society. In other words, there are limits to growth that prevent the economy from increasing its scale over a certain size. Thus, ecological economics, unlike environmental economics, focuses not just on efficiency, allocation, and distribution, but it also covers the issue of scale, arguing that the overall size of the economy must be proportionate to the capacity of the environment to sustain it.

Albeit both environmental and ecological economics share the normative goal of achieving sustainability, their theoretical and methodological differences eventually result in distinct understandings of the meaning of sustainability. Accordingly, the division between weak and strong sustainability is grounded mainly on the divergence between ecological and environmental economics about the issue of substitutability of production inputs. The fundamental aim of economic sustainability is the maintenance of well-being into the future, therefore economists consider sustainability as the transmission of non-declining capital stocks to future generations. It is thus possible to measure whether a certain activity or path of development is sustainable by measuring changes in the amount and composition of capital.[229] The two perspectives differ regarding the ideal composition of capital stock, in particular about the ability of human-made capital to substitute natural capital.

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[229] Karp, *Natural Resources as Capital* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2017), p. 337.

Historically, classical economic theory, such as the works of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, or Karl Marx, identified three factors of production: capital, labour, and land. Land refers not just to a physical area, but also to anything that comes from it. Thus, land as factor of production includes the natural resources that can be extracted from the land and be used as inputs to produce goods and services, for example oil, coal, air, water, metals, crops, wood etc. With the rise of industrial economy, modern economic theories tended to downplay the importance of land.[230] Neoclassical theory in particular considers land to be a fixed factor, free of charge, and abundant. Since technological progress can raise the productivity of land, any limit posed by land can be overcome by technological advance, which will remedy resource scarcity in the long-run.

In light of the improvement of ecological knowledge and evidence of environmental degradation, both environmental and ecological economics elaborated on the classic concept of land, developing the concept of natural capital, which extends the notion of capital also to natural goods and services. Acknowledging the relevance of natural resources and systems for economic growth, natural capital refers to "the available endowment of land and resources, including air, water, soil, forests, fisheries, minerals, and ecological life-support systems."[231] Yet, while environmental economics incorporates this change with the neoclassical assumptions, ecological economics employs it to advance an alternative framework.

Indeed, a tenet of neoclassical economics is that that the various forms of capital are near-perfect substitutes, for example fertilizers have the same function of fertile soil. Therefore, natural capital can be substituted by man-made capital, human capital, or technological innovation. On the contrary, the ecological perspective holds that natural capital is only very limitedly substitutable by other forms of capital: natural resources and services are irreplaceable. Rather than substitutes, natural capital and human-made capital are complementary, they are both needed for production or consumption. For instance, oil is needed to power cars, sawmills need trees, fishing boats require fishes and so on.

Given that substitutability defines the composition of the capital stock that has to be passed onto future generations, in other words what has to be sustained, the opposite theories about natural capital substitutability have shaped distinct views about sustainability. The two perspectives have been labelled "weak" and "strong" sustainability, referring to the respective assumptions about natural capital conservation, that is to say the strength of the limits to economic growth set by natural capital that each perspective assumes. Weak sustainability is based on the environmental economics assumption of capital substitutability, hence any kind of development that prevents a decline in

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[230] Costanza and Daly, "Natural Capital and Sustainable Development", *Conservation Biology*, vol.6 no. 1 (March 1992) pp. 39-40.
[231] Harris and Roach, *Environmental and Natural Resource Economics,* p. 19.

aggregate capital, independently of its composition, is sustainable. Indeed, what matters is the value of the total stock of capital, the proportion between human-made and natural is not relevant, as long as the total value does not diminish. Levels of consumption can be kept constant by accumulating manufactured capital at a rate rapid enough to compensate for the consumption of finite natural resources. Weak sustainability does not see major limits to growth, because it is believed that increases in human capital and technological progress will overcome environmental limits.

By building up the stock of man-made capital, society will gradually decrease use of finite resources, preventing their complete exhaustion.[232] This justifies natural capital depletion, as long as it is compensated for by equal increases in other forms of capital.[233] For example, it is weakly sustainable to cut down a forest and use the wood for housing and tools and the area for agriculture, or industry, or infrastructure, if the value of the newly created capital is equal or exceeds that of the cleared forest. In an intergenerational perspective, earlier generations are entitled to a full use of the natural endowment of resources so long as they build enough man-made capital in exchange.[234] In fact, neoclassical theory assumes that that economic development enhances technological progress, consequently economic growth is actually beneficial for the environment because it will eventually provide solutions for environmental problems, such as pollution.[235] Thus, weak sustainability is an optimistic perspective, which believes that it is possible to stay within a sustainable path and have economic growth too.

On the other hand, strong sustainability is based on the assumptions of non-substitutability and complementarity between types of capital, thus is concerned with the maintenance of natural capital, rather than with levels of total capital stock.[236] Non-substitutability implies that the functions covered by natural capital cannot be performed by other forms of capital, thus increases in total capital cannot compensate for environmental degradation. The loss of natural capital is often irreversible and our knowledge about ecological systems is limited, we are ignorant about the consequences of depleting natural capital.[237] For these reasons, strong sustainability requires that the physical stock of natural capital should be maintained.[238]

A fundamental concept for strong sustainability is that of "critical natural capital", the idea that certain forms of natural capital provide crucial functions, including basic life-support ones, which cannot be

[232] Karp, *Natural Resources as Capital*, pp. 340-341.
[233] Harris and Roach, *Environmental and Natural Resource Economics,* p. 221.
[234] Neumayer, *Weak Versus Strong Sustainability* p. 23.
[235] Neumayer, *Weak Versus Strong Sustainability* p. 24.
[236] Costanza et al., *An Introduction to Ecological Economics,* p. 78.
[237] Neumayer, *Weak Versus Strong Sustainability* p. 27.
[238] Harris and Roach, *Environmental and Natural Resource Economics,* p. 220.

performed by anything else, not even by different kinds of natural capital or critical natural capital.[239] Unlike weak sustainability, strong sustainability holds that increased material welfare cannot compensate for the loss of natural capital, especially in light of intergenerational equity, given that future generations would inherit irreversible environmental damage.[240]

However, maintaining natural capital does not mean keeping nature as it is, rather to ensure that environmental functions remain intact and do not deteriorate over time. In practical terms, this translates into harvesting renewable resources in a way that does not exceed their sustainable yield, pollute only to the extent that the absorption capacity of the environment is able to assimilate, and exploit non-renewable resources "at a rate equal to the creation of renewable substitutes."[241] Indeed, supposing that the economy is embedded within the ecological system, ecological economics implies the existence of natural limits to growth, given that natural resources are scarce and environmental sink functions are limited. Therefore, there are strong limits to what is really sustainable.

In this regard, while weak sustainability is an optimistic perspective, strong sustainability is quite pessimistic, as it believes that most of present economic activity is unsustainable because of its depletion of natural capital, such as the overconsumption of non-renewable resources.[242] Accordingly, strong sustainability raises doubts about whether it is possible to have sustainable economic growth.[243] In fact, operationally the implementation of strong sustainability is more complex than achieving weak sustainability, since it requires a major change in the nature of economic activity as to prevent irremediable environmental damage. Moreover, progress towards strong sustainability is complex to measure since it needs to be assessed in terms that are not purely monetary but also ecological.[244]

2.4 Sustainable development

The concept of sustainability was originally framed by environmentalists essentially a critique of modern socio-economic system grounded on two parallel arguments: on the one hand, concern for ecological integrity, on the other hand, concern for the negative social consequences of industrialism and consumerism. These two strains questioned the goodness of the model of industrial society in general, in light of both its negative environmental and social consequences. Instead, ecologism pursues the vision of a sustainable society, an organizational model for human civilization that does

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[239] Neumayer, *Weak Versus Strong Sustainability* p. 26.
[240] Harris and Roach, *Environmental and Natural Resource Economics,* p. 221, Neumayer, *Weak Versus Strong Sustainability* pp. 27-28.
[241] Costanza and Daly, "Natural Capital and Sustainable Development", p. 44.
[242] Neumayer, *Weak Versus Strong Sustainability* p. 26.
[243] Costanza and Daly, "Natural Capital and Sustainable Development", p. 43.
[244] Harris and Roach, *Environmental and Natural Resource Economics,* p. 253.

not damage the ecosystem, but lives harmoniously with it. Yet, transitioning from the present unsustainable status to a sustainable one and achieving a sustainable society involves a process of change: sustainable development.

Sustainable development, like sustainability, is an essentially contested concept.[245] It acts as normative concept that carries within it both a vision of the ideal sustainable society (the sustainability component) and the methods to achieve it (the development component), gathering fundamental environmental principles in a single carrier, acting as an umbrella concept.[246] These concepts are:[247]

- Environment-economy integration: the idea that economic development and environmental protection must be integrated and coexist.
- Futurity: concern with the well-being of future generations.
- Environmental protection.
- Equity, both intergenerational and intergenerational.
- Quality of life: the recognition that human well-being cannot be reduced to mere material welfare or income growth.
- Participation: sustainable development requires the involvement of the whole of society.

These related concepts are themselves subject to interpretations, hence sustainable development can be understood in multiple ways, depending on the way in which its components are conceived and weighted against each other. While sustainable development stands as a fundamental element of ecologism, it remains prone to different interpretations from the many strands of green thought, testifying the plurality of views existing within environmentalism. Yet, the flexibility of sustainable development also shows the capacity of environmental ideas to influence and shape the mainstream public opinion. In fact, the concept of sustainable development has been embraced and popularized by actors external to the green movement, especially within the context of international institutions. Accordingly, it has achieved a great degree of acceptance outside of environmentalism. This has caused considerable criticism from parts of ecologism that have rejected the concept in light of its perceived shortcomings.

2.4.1 The origins of sustainable development

The emergence of the environmental movement and its criticism of industrial growth-based economic models posed a major challenge to the mainstream paradigm of development. Indeed, in the 1970s most of the world population lived in underdeveloped countries and the strategy employed at

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[245] Jacobs, "Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept"; Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth.*
[246] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* p. 6.
[247] Jacobs, "Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept", p. 26.

international level for relieving such nations from poverty was to have them pursue economic growth. The greens' critique challenged such effort, contesting the foundations of both the liberal modernization theory of development and the socialist dependency theory. To many environmentalists, economic growth understood as improvement of material well-being through increases in production and consumption is incompatible with ecological integrity. The capitalist-industrialist economic model is deemed inherently destructive for the environment and the possibility of having an environmentally sustainable economic growth is denied altogether. This conflict between economic growth and ecological well-being questions the very opportunity of framing development as material improvement, even more so on a global perspective.

This fundamental issue at the core of early environmental claims manifested itself evidently at the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, where developed countries were concerned with environmental degradation, pollution, overconsumption of finite resources such as oil, uncontrolled population growth, and other ecological problems, whereas developing countries pointed at global inequality, improvement of the quality of life, the right to develop, relief from poverty, hunger, diseases, and other socio-economic issues. The necessity to resolve this tension was the major challenge of the Conference, which, also through its preparatory documents, the Founex Report and *Only One Earth*, highlighted the importance of reconciling economic and human development with environmental integrity.

Furthermore, environmentalists questioned the capacity of economic growth-based models of development to bring concrete improvements in the quality of life. The lack of environmental considerations caused ecological problems that actually worsened living standards but were not accounted for. Moreover, the system itself was considered to be a cause of social inequality rather than a solution to it. It was contested that focusing on means rather than on ends and real needs caused economic growth to fail in addressing social issues. Alternative economic theories were advanced, such as the rejection of progress defined only in terms of consumption and material improvement, the idea of measuring quality of life rather than wealth, calls for a reduction in the scale of the economy, the decoupling of the terms growth and development, or even zero-growth steady-state economics.

By the late 1970s, the green twin social and ecological criticism of the conventional model of development had evolved into a call for a paradigm shift. It was clear that developing countries could not follow the path of industrialization and high consumption set by the developed world: the extension of such model to the entire world would be unsustainable. Even if it was acknowledged that development is a necessity, it had to be of a different kind, no longer focused solely on increase in material well-being, but aimed at satisfying people's basic needs and respectful of environmental

quality. A new concept of development that could solve the conflict between economic growth and ecological integrity was needed, drawing a distinction between development, understood as qualitative change, and growth, mere quantitative increase.[248]

At first, the term "ecodevelopment", coined by the economist Ignacy Sachs, was employed to define a new model of development that could harmonize social and economic objectives with ecological considerations.[249] Sachs' ideas influenced the UNEP, which in 1978 published a document to detail the characteristics of ecodevelopment. A word used in this report to describe the long-term aims of ecodevelopment was "sustainable", marking the first time that the term appeared in an official UN document.[250] In fact, in the late 1970s the concept of sustainability had expanded out of the environmentalist lexicon and started to spread into NGOs, governmental organizations, and national agencies. Consequently, sustainability started to be employed also to refer to alternative paradigms of development and the term "sustainable development" came to replace ecodevelopment.

In 1980, the IUCN, in collaboration with the UNEP and the WWF, published the *World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development*, which first introduced the concept of sustainable development.[251] The main concern of the IUCN was environmental conservation, yet the organization felt the need to refine the traditional understanding of conservation as wise management of natural resources to keep up with the challenges of modernity. Hence, conservation was linked to social and economic welfare, embracing the green concept of sustainability to describe the interplay between the ecosystem and human well-being.[252]

The *World Conservation Strategy* defines development from a systemic approach as modification of the biosphere to improve the quality of human life, and notes that "for development to be sustainable it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones".[253] Thus, development must be integrated with environmental conservation, which is defined as "the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations."[254]

The *World Conservation Strategy* signalled the acceptance of sustainability in the international agenda and the centrality of the concept in devising alternative forms of development. It reaffirmed the importance of including environmental considerations in developmental programs and it also

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[248] Blewitt, *Understanding Sustainable Development* pp. 10-11; Du Pisani, "Sustainable development: historical roots of the concept" p. 92.
[249] McManus, "Contested Terrains: Politics, stories and discourses of sustainability" p. 50; Kidd, "The evolution of sustainability", p. 18; Purvis et al. "Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins", p. 684.
[250] Kidd, "The evolution of sustainability", p. 18.
[251] Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability,* pp. 33-34; Blewitt, *Understanding Sustainable Development* pp. 9-10; Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 141.
[252] Grober, *Sustainability,* pp. 175-176.
[253] IUCN, *World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development* (1980), section 1.3.
[254] IUCN, *World Conservation Strategy,* section 1.4.

linked social issues, such as poverty, inequality, diseases, or population pressure, to ecological degradation. However, the Strategy was fundamentally concerned with conservation, thus with environmental sustainability, and only marginally touched broader economic or social issues linked to unsustainable models of development, lacking indications for a practical implementation of sustainable development.

Nevertheless, the paradigm shift brought about by the emergence of sustainability on development, from an understanding of development as economic growth essentially incompatible with environmental conservation to a view of dynamic transformation mindful of the interrelation between the ecosystem, the economy, and human well-being, was recognized by the UN in the 1980 Brandt Report *North-South: A Program for Survival*.[255] This led the UN Secretary General Pérez de Cuéllar to establish in 1983 the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) to devise a new, shared framework for international sustainable development. The Commission was chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, leader of the Norwegian Labour Party and former (and future) prime minister of the country, and composed of a balanced representation between developed and developing countries, ensuring that ecological concern and global development would be equally considered. In 1987, the Commission concluded its works and published the final report *Our Common Future*, commonly known as the Brundtland Report.

The Brundtland Report provided what is still today the most popular definition of sustainable development: "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[256] The concept, very similar to that already present in the *World Conservation Strategy*, was deliberately broad in order to bridge conflicting interests and achieve the largest possible consensus. In fact, the context in which the Brundtland Commission operated was quite different from that of earlier international debates about sustainability and development, such as the Stockholm Conference.[257]

Awareness about the severity of environmental problems had grown and was globally acknowledged, even accentuated by new concerns about climate change, depletion of the ozone layer, or biodiversity loss, and by the recent Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe. Yet, the divergence between the global North and South agendas had deepened. Poor countries had been severely hit by the debt crisis, economic stagnation, and collapse in commodity prices; while in rich countries neoliberalism had become the dominant economic paradigm, following the political success of Ronald Reagan and Margaret

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[255] Grober, *Sustainability,* pp. 177-180.
[256] WCED, *Our Common Future*, p. 43.
[257] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment*. 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 209; McManus, "Contested Terrains: Politics, stories and discourses of sustainability" p. 51; Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability,* p. 39.

Thatcher, denying the limits to growth argument and restating the centrality of economic growth, believing that it could be achieved in an environmentally and social benign way. Besides this, the Cold War arms race had increased East-West tensions. Therefore, there was the need for a bridging concept that could accommodate very diverse positions.

The Brundtland Report recognized such divergence of interests and sought to solve the tension between environmental concern and development needs by incorporating both in a single framework. Indeed, the report states that sustainable development contains within it two key concepts: "the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs."[258] Thus, sustainable development on the one hand aims at satisfying basic needs and address global inequalities, on the other hand it acknowledges that the environment's limited carrying capacity defines the boundaries of development. In other words, the Report identifies a mutual interlinkage between the economy and the environment: economic growth is essential, but it must be ecologically sound, for a healthy environment cannot exist in conditions of extreme poverty.

In this sense, the WCED embraced a three-dimensional view of sustainability, stressing that "it is impossible to separate economic development issues from environment issues; many forms of development erode the environmental resources upon which they must be based, and environmental degradation can undermine economic development."[259] The environment and human welfare are mutually dependent, hence environmental issues and socio-economic problems are directly related. As the report says: "poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems. It is therefore futile to attempt to deal with environmental problems without a broader perspective that encompasses the factors underlying world poverty and international inequality."[260] Development must be aimed at achieving sustainability, not solely economic growth. In this regard, the WCED embraced an understanding of sustainability composed of economic growth, social equity, and ecological integrity, to be achieved simultaneously, a conceptualization that has since been known as the three Es, or triple bottom line.

The Brundtland Report proved to be extremely successful in popularizing sustainable development, moving the concept at the top of the political agenda and legitimizing environmental concern in international institutional settings. While the early forms of environmentalism were essentially confined to affluent Western countries, the concept of sustainable development, through its emphasis

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[258] WCED, *Our Common Future* p. 43.
[259] WCED, *Our Common Future* p. 3.
[260] WCED, *Our Common Future* p. 3.

on the deep connection between the environment and well-being, forced all governments and international agencies to face environmental matters seriously, firmly placing the environment as a major issue in international politics.[261] In fact, the Report formulated sustainable development as a global guiding principle valid for the entirety of humanity, a framework to orient policies and set goals common for all governments and states. Such vision effectively turned into reality in the years following the publication of *Our Common Future*, as sustainable development has been set by the UN as the global organizing framework for governance and policies.

In particular, sustainable development was officially endorsed in the 1992 Rio de Janeiro UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, attended by over 180 nations and hundreds of NGOs. The Conference produced several policy documents, among which the Agenda 21, a detailed comprehensive global plan for implementing sustainable development in the 21st century. UN support for sustainable development has been reaffirmed in several following conferences and agreements, for instance the 2000 Millennium Development Goals. The most recent and perhaps most important restatement of sustainable development as global guiding framework is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, established in 2015, which sets 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to be reached by 2030, each operationalized by specific targets and indicators.

Today, sustainable development is extremely popular, covering a central role in politics, policy-making, business, and in discussions about the environment in general. It has come to be the mainstream way to frame the relationship between human society and the natural environment, acting as a guiding principle for humanity.[262] The authority of sustainable development is such that some countries have inserted it in their constitution, for instance Switzerland in Articles 2 and 73 of its Federal Constitution. The promotion of sustainable development, its objectives, and its goals has become an objective of many international institutions and agencies, besides governments and authorities as well as corporations and other economic actors.

However, in order to reach such a widespread consensus, sustainable development is bound to be a broad concept. In fact, it was originally deliberately formulated in vague terms as to appeal to a wide array of positions and actors. This ambition succeeded in making sustainable development popular and accepted, yet it also made the concept highly contestable: many definitions and interpretations have been advanced, and divergences about how to implement sustainable development and measure progress towards it have emerged as well. The UN has attempted to solve this ambiguity through the SDGs and the related indicators, nevertheless sustainable development remains an open concept that

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[261] Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability,* p. 39.
[262] Baker, Susan. *Sustainable Development* (London, Routledge 2006), pp. 5-6.

does not promote a specific course of action nor it envisions a precise ideal end state of things, leaving space to interpretation.

2.4.2 Perspectives on sustainable development

It has been argued that sustainable development is akin to other concepts such as democracy or justice in being almost unanimously accepted and widely recognized as a positive element, yet lacking a shared interpretation besides a broad general meaning.[263] On a first, basic level of interpretation, there is a wide consensus about what sustainable development is about: it consists of a new model of development that sets sustainability, in its multidimensional conceptualization, as the objective of human progress.[264] Such fundamental conception, usually visually depicted through the three pillars model,[265] allows for many different interpretations. Accordingly, there is considerable disagreement about the exact meaning of sustainable development, an ambiguity that has caused the formulation of hundreds of definitions. For this reason, sustainable development is commonly regarded as a contested concept, of which a wide variety of competing meanings have been advanced.[266]

While clearly any understanding of the concept depends on the underlying view of sustainability that is embraced, sustainability is just one aspect of sustainable development. Sustainability represents a condition, whereas sustainable development is a dynamic process of transformation of the whole of human society, hence besides a vision of sustainability it also includes the means for achieving it. Therefore, the wide scope and the composite nature of sustainable development make it even more complicated and debatable than the already complex concept of sustainability. This ambiguity is further fuelled by the comprehensive cross-cutting nature of sustainable development, which covers a variety of issues and areas, thus making the choice of a particular meaning not solely a semantical and conceptual matter, but a political choice.[267]

A significantly large academic literature has accordingly explored the many understandings of sustainable development, attempting to build typologies and classifications to reduce the complexity of the debate to theoretically distinctive positions, each with its motivations and operational implications.[268] Similarly to what happens in the case of sustainability, different analytical approaches

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[263] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth,* p. 147; Baker, *Sustainable Development*, p. 27.

[264] Giddings et al. "Environment, Economy, and Society: Fitting Them Together into Sustainable Development", *Sustainable Development* 10 (2002).

[265] Purvis et al. "Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins"; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* pp. 263-5.

[266] Giddings et al., "Environment, Economy, and Society: Fitting Them Together into Sustainable Development".

[267] Baker, *Sustainable Development*, p. 27.

[268] For Instance: McManus, "Contested Terrains: Politics, stories and discourses of sustainability"; Dobson, "Environment sustainabilities: An analysis and a typology"; Davidson, "A Typology to Categorize the Ideologies of Actors in the Sustainable Development Debate"; Hopwood et al. "Sustainable Development: Mapping Different Approaches"; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment.*

exist. Certain observers focus on the plethora of existing definitions, attempting to come to a synthesis or pointing out elements of controversy.[269] Yet, the most common approach to the analysis of understandings of sustainable development identifies two main perspectives, grounded on opposing social, economic, and environmental views.[270] This interpretative framework is linear: the two positions form the poles of an axis, a continuum in which intermediate positions can be found. Other observers, rather than focusing on definitions, theoretical divergences, and normative indications, look instead at the motivations and the beliefs underlying the different approaches.[271] This approach offers a broader categorization, which has sometimes been visually represented in two-dimensional[272] or three-dimensional diagram.[273]

Linear approaches to the plethora of perspectives on sustainable development tend to identify two contrasting positions, usually called "weak" and "strong", following the respective foundational understandings of sustainability. The two stances have also been called "technocentric" and "ecocentric", "economist" and "ecologist", "equity-based" and "market-based", or "radical" and "conservative", depending on the focus of the analysis.[274] Regardless of the precise terminology employed, this kind of typology examines certain tensions inherent in the concept of sustainable development which result in opposing opinions in a variety of concerns, such as philosophical foundations, normative principles, economic theory, spatial focus, policy and tools of implementation, the extent of environmental protection, social equity, the definition of development, views about public involvement, and many others.

These cleavages determine sets of opposing positions that, although conceptually independent between each other, can be used to identify theoretically opposite viewpoints. It is then possible to look at existing understandings of sustainable development and see how they place with respect to these ideal stances. In practice, as Jacobs says, these alternative sets of positions are "frequently held at the same time by the same people."[275] Of course there could be views that do not conform exactly to such division, therefore this kind of frameworks usually acknowledge the existence of multiple intermediate positions, placing the two antithetical stances at the ends of a continuum.

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[269] Pezzey, *Sustainable Development Concepts*; Mitlin, "Sustainable Development: A Guide to the Literature".
[270] Jacobs, "Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept", p. 31.
[271] Davidson, "A Typology to Categorize the Ideologies of Actors in the Sustainable Development Debate"; McManus, "Contested Terrains: Politics, stories and discourses of sustainability".
[272] Hopwood et al. "Sustainable Development: Mapping Different Approaches".
[273] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment.*
[274] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* p. 214; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment* p. 265.
[275] Jacobs, "Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept", p. 38.

The fundamental criterion that lies at the core of most dual typologies of sustainable development is the adoption of a weak or strong understanding of sustainability, thus adopting an economics-based approach. Therefore, weak sustainable development believes in the possibility to maintain or even improve current trends of economic growth thanks to the capacity of technological progress to address ecological problems, for instance through recycling and decoupling, and adjusting accounting as to include environmental externalities. Instead, strong sustainable development acknowledges the primary importance of the ecosystem and advocates major changes in patterns of growth, focusing on the respect of environmental limits by shifting focus from quantitative material growth to qualitative improvements.

However, to the economical aspect are linked other considerations. Weak sustainable development is associated with top-down models of implementation and governance, focus on wealth-creation rather than equitable distribution, and anthropocentric concern for future human generations. On the contrary, strong sustainable development is related to decentralization, multi-level governance, bottom-up initiatives, emphasis on social equity even including redistribution, and ecocentric motivations. In this regard, the *Our Common Future* definition of sustainable development is considered to be an example of the weak perspective, whereas a case of the strong interpretation is usually located in the 1991 *Caring for the Earth* document, a joint IUCN-UNEP-WWF strategy for global environmental protection redacted in preparation for the 1992 Earth Summit.[276]

Indeed, the Brundtland definition does not explicitly acknowledge the existence of absolute limits to growth, rather referring to "limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities."[277] Accordingly, the Commission argued that growth was not simply needed, it was itself the key for achieving development, hence providing indications for policies aimed at achieving a sustainable growth. On the other hand, *Caring for the Earth* defines sustainable development as "improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems",[278] thus recognizing limits to growth and stating the centrality of the environment.

Other typologies reject linear frameworks and the dichotomy they outline, deemed to be too simplistic and overwhelming influenced by economic views over other considerations. On the contrary, more extensive categorizations frame the different perspectives on sustainable development in a comprehensive way, including their views over a variety of aspects without reducing them to a single position. In fact, a common criticism moved to dual typologies is that the theoretical claim of

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[276] Jacobs, "Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept", pp. 25-26; Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* p. 214.
[277] WCED, *Our Common Future* p. 8.
[278] IUCN, *Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living* (1990), p. 10.

correspondence between a complex range of positions over different topics is essentially a generalization which is not always true in practice.[279] In other terms, a strong view of sustainability does not necessarily coincide with concern with equality and participatory democracy, nor it has to be motivated solely by an ecocentic ethical perspective. All facets have to be analysed without considering them as a bundle.

Scholars differ in the choice of the attributes that distinguish the various typologies, including for instance ideological and political backgrounds, views about capital substitutability, the recognition of limits to economic growth, methods of operationalization, the role of technology, ethics, acceptance of globalization, and others. Given the variety of factors considered and the diversity of possible positions, the various implementations of this analytical approach tend to differ considerably in the number and characterization of the perspectives on sustainable development they identify. For instance, McManus distinguishes nine stances: the institutional Brundtland approach; neoliberal free market environmentalism; environmental economics market interventionism; ecological economics strong sustainability; steady-state economics; smaller-scale advocacy; eco-feminism; eco-Marxism; ad deep ecology.[280] Davidson recognizes four main approaches, the neoliberal, the liberal, the social-democratic, and the radical, of which several variants exist.[281] Other interpretative frameworks have been formulated, yet taking into account exclusively positions from within the green movement, as an example Clapp and Dauvergne fourfold distinction between market liberals, institutionalists, bioenvironmentalists, and social greens.[282]

Regardless of labels and precise definitions, methodological approaches that see interpretations of sustainable development as a spectrum rather than a linear continuum are useful to depict the broad consensus that the concept has gained over time, coming to be embraced by a wide range of actors of any sort of background. In this sense, the ill-defined nature of sustainable development and its capacity to appeal to a universal public have been crucial for its success. However, such ambiguity and adaptability have also been the source of fierce criticism, leading to claims that sustainable development is essentially a hollow concept that should be discarded altogether.[283]

2.4.3 Criticism of sustainable development

The debate about sustainable development is remarkably lively and often harsh, leading not solely to a plethora of definitions and diverse implementations, but also to significant controversies regarding

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[279] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment* p. 266.
[280] McManus, "Contested Terrains: Politics, stories and discourses of sustainability".
[281] Davidson, "A Typology to Categorize the Ideologies of Actors in the Sustainable Development Debate".
[282] Clapp and Dauvergne, *Paths to a Green World,* pp. 4-14.
[283] Redclift, "Sustainable Development (1987-2005): An Oxymoron Comes of Age", *Sustainable Development*, vol.13 no.4 (2005).

the concept itself. In certain cases, the flexibility of the sustainable development discourse has allowed some critics to propose their own interpretation of it, without refusing the whole concept. This is the case for instance of Amartya Sen's idea of development as freedom, which has redefined development encompassing also human rights and individual freedom besides economic welfare; Herman Daly's steady state economy theory, which has influenced ecological economics and the formulation of strong sustainability; or Ronald Inglehart, who suggested, through the empiric evidence of the World Value Survey, that economic development is a precondition for development, not its objective, including in the notion also the improvement of liberties, rights, and personal opportunities.[284]

However, in other cases critics have questioned the validity of sustainable development. Criticism has come from a variety of position and has been aimed at several aspects of the concept: it has been argued that sustainable development is too elusive to be an effective guidance, that it is fundamentally incompatible with ecological sustainability, that it is just an instrument of entrenched interests to co-opt the environmentalist critique, that it is not enough in light of worsening environmental problems, that it is too anthropocentric, even that it is completely meaningless.[285] In this sense, while sustainability is generally accepted and criticism towards it is generally motivated not by its meaning but rather by its excessive use, sustainable development differs in being subject to criticism aimed at its soundness.

The vagueness and ambiguity of sustainable development have been attributed to the way the concept was originally formulated. As it is semantically evident, sustainable development was conceived as a way to provide an effective answer to two challenges that were often perceived as conflicting: environmental degradation and calls for environmental sustainability on the one hand, widespread poverty and the need for development on the other. Sustainable development was framed to harmonize these two problems, compromising between environmental and development necessities by integrating both in a single framework. Such compromise solution has inevitably been rejected by those who believe ecological protection and economic growth are completely incompatible. In particular, the more radical positions on both sides of the debate, such as the total refusal of economic growth and or the denial of ecological limits to growth, see in sustainable development a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron.[286]

In fact, sustainable development effectively acts as an alternative to no-growth or degrowth theories and other radical criticisms of economic growth whilst answering to environmental concern. This has

[284] Sneddon et al. "Sustainable development in a post-Brundtland world", *Ecological Economics*, vol.57 no.2 (2006).
[285] Denbach and Chever, "Sustainable Development and Its Discontents", *Transnational Environmental Law*, vol.4 no.2 (2015); Sneddon et al. "Sustainable development in a post-Brundtland world".
[286] Blewitt, *Understanding Sustainable Development,* p. 33, Redclift, "Sustainable Development (1987-2005): An Oxymoron Comes of Age".

caused some commentators to see sustainable development as an institutional response to criticism moved by the environmental movement and the *Limits to Growth*,[287] attempting to neutralize it by co-opting part of its arguments within a new framework acceptable by conventional liberal economics.[288] At the same time, it is seen as a reaction to the neoliberal imperative of economic growth, an alternative model of development respectful of social equity and environmental limits in opposition to deregulation and trickle-down economics.[289] Therefore, the concept has been attacked from both radical green and conservative sides.

A key issue lies in the ill-defined nature of sustainable development, which leads to problematic ambiguity regarding the meaning of core components of the concept, such as sustainability, development, and needs. As Lélé noted, the lack of clarity of institutional formulations of sustainable development leads to a lack of consistency in its many interpretations, undermining its capacity to act as a guiding framework for policy making.[290] This inhibits sustainable development's potential for a real paradigmatic change, effectively disempowering the concept and reducing it to an empty vessel.

A major problem that has been the source of considerable disagreement lies in the lack of a shared definition of development: if development is understood as economic growth, or even if economic growth constitutes an integral part of it, as it is the case in the Brundtland definition of sustainable development, then the concept is prone to be considered an oxymoron.[291] Indeed, those who deem economic growth inconsistent with environmental sustainability, or even inherently anti-ecological, see in sustainable growth a contradiction in terms. In certain cases, this line of argument merged with systematic criticism of capitalist economy, leading to the rejection of sustainable development as fundamentally flawed in not rejecting capitalism.[292] Similarly, in less-developed sustainable development has been met with suspect, believed to be an imposition of wealthy industrialized countries, the product of an unbalanced power relation.[293]

A similar problem arises with the definition of sustainability. Some radical critics of sustainable development have argued that the lack of a specific criteria for sustainability, as it could be the adoption of a strong perspective on sustainability, allows sustainable development to be hijacked by adherents to weak sustainability, thus weakening the efficacy of sustainable development in providing

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[287] Caradonna, *Sustainability* p. 138; Blewitt, *Understanding Sustainable Development.*
[288] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*; Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth.*
[289] Caradonna, *Sustainability.*
[290] Lélé, "Sustainable development: A critical review", *World Development*, vol.19 no.6 (1991).
[291] Redclift, "Sustainable Development (1987-2005): An Oxymoron Comes of Age".
[292] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment* p. 216.
[293] Du Pisani, "Sustainable development: historical roots of the concept" p. 93.

a real alternative to conventional frameworks, being just a watered down form of business as usual. This claim is often related to the issue of "greenwashing", the adoption of an eco-friendly façade without any substantial change in practices.[294]

On the opposite side of the spectrum, specular criticism has been advanced by advocates of weak sustainability, who argue that the lack of an explicit choice of paradigm permits the adoption of strong sustainability, whose belief in environmental primacy jeopardizes chances of achieving real development. A noteworthy critique in this sense is that advanced by Wilfred Beckerman, who rejects strong sustainability on the grounds of its alleged impracticality and moral repugnance, given that it would prevent investments and growth by placing a greater importance on the natural world than on humans. Yet, Beckerman refuses weak sustainability too, arguing that it does not diverge from conventional utility-maximizing economics, hence there is no need for sustainable development as welfare maximization is already the guiding principle of human activity.[295]

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[294] Dernbach and Chever, "Sustainable Development and Its Discontents", pp. 274-278.
[295] Beckerman, "Sustainable Development: Is it a Useful Concept?", *Environmental Values*, vol.3 no.3 (1994).

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Chapter 3

Green political thought

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3.1 The green political ideology

It is difficult to define green political thought with precision and trace its boundaries, accordingly a large body of literature has sought to fulfil the task. In fact, large number of political theorists and philosophers have attempt to define green political thought and its basic characteristics, often coming to different, if not even contrasting, conclusions. The difficulty stems from the diversity of views and approaches coexistent within the environmental movement, as covered in the previous chapter, which troubles the identification of a single stance. Such complexity is immediately evident in the terminological confusion that surrounds environmentalism: environmentalism, ecologism, and green, terms that in the present work share the same meaning, are employed by many observers with different connotations.

First and foremost, it is important to establish whether there is such a thing as an environmentalist normative political theory, a green ideology. In this regard, some observers have argued that, even if ecology and the environmental movement have deep implications for political thought, "the capacity for ecology to support a political theory can be exaggerated."[296] Ecology is open to a variety of social and political arrangements, it cannot provide sufficient ground for a political theory. Despite this objection, many scholars contend that environmentalism constitutes a distinctive form of political thought, possessing a comprehensive set of values, beliefs, arguments, and ideas that, stemming from ecological imperatives, does not refer just to general ideas of environmental conservation, but determines a whole worldview. Accordingly, green thought is usually included in the literature devoted to the study of political ideologies.[297]

As a matter of fact, there is a general consensus on considering environmentalism a political ideology on its own right.[298] This is true independently of the precise definition of ideology employed, whether conceived as a set of political beliefs without normative value,[299] as a structured coherent system of political concepts that provides an interpretative framework for reality,[300] as a body of concepts and values that holds both descriptive and prescriptive claims,[301] as synonym of political philosophy, or in other ways. It should be noted that in the study of political thought oftentimes a distinction between

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[296] Martell, *Ecology and Society* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994), p. 139.
[297] For instance: Baradat and Phillips, *Political Ideologies*; Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies*; Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*; Geoghegan and Wilford, *Political Ideologies*; Heywood, *Political Ideologies*; Sargent, *Contemporary Political Ideologies.*
[298] Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* p. 148.
[299] Sargent, *Contemporary Political Ideologies: A Comparative Analysis*. 14th edn. (Belmont, CA, Wadsworth, 2009).
[300] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996).
[301] Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies,* p. 18.

political ideology (a system of beliefs), political theory (an analytical understanding of how politics work, or ought to work), and political philosophy (philosophical investigation of the political sphere) is made, however such partition is unclear, if not overtly ambiguous, thus it is eschewed by other scholars.

However, while the existence of green ideology is generally reckoned, there is considerable disagreement about what precisely it consists of and how it relates to other families of political thought. On these issues, there are two main perspectives: borrowing Michael Freeden's terminology, one view is to consider environmentalism a "thick" ideology, that is to say an ideology grounded on an extensive set of core principles and arguments which defines an exhaustive political view, able to stand on its own and with little possibility for hybridization with other political theories. Another perspective is to regard green thought as a "thin" ideology, or a cross-cutting ideology: an ideology composed of just few core tenets which "are insufficient on their own to conjure up a vision or interpretation of human and social interaction or purpose",[302] thus relying on principles and concepts of other political families to formulate views about certain topics not defined by its core tenets.

As a consequence, if green political thought is believed to be a thin ideology, it is consistent with the goals and arguments of other political traditions. This can lead to both the co-optation of green themes by other political theories and, vice versa, the integration of external elements within the green framework. Therefore, the existence of hybrids such as green conservativism, eco-feminism, eco-fascism, or eco-anarchism and the belonging of these positions to the green ideological family are accepted within this perspective.

Most of the accounts of green ideology share the view that its fundamental characteristic, which determines its uniqueness, is that it introduces a new dimension in political thinking: the environment. In fact, ecologism is centrally focused on nature: green views about social, political, and economic arrangements are shaped in terms of human relations with the natural environment. In particular, the key concern of environmentalism is with the conditions for the very survival of Earth's ecosystem, and thus for the continued existence of humanity, which are believed to require a rethinking of the relationship between humankind and nature.[303] Hence, the central objective of green ideology is to restructure society, politics, and the economy placing the uttermost importance on ecological sustainability.[304] The major problem in defining green ideology is whether from such ecological concern derive precise socio-political arrangements.

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[302] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory,* p. 527.
[303] Vincent, "Green political theory" in *Political Concepts,* edited by Richard Bellamy and Andrew Mason (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 182.
[304] Heywood, *Political Ideologies*; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment.*

An element that should be considered in the analysis of green political thought is the relative novelty of such ideology. As highlighted in Chapter 1, the origins of environmentalism are contested and the topic itself is effectively a matter of ideological contention between adherents to different strands of ecologism. Nevertheless, it is undisputable that, while liberalism, socialism, conservatism, or anarchism are centuries-old traditions, green though in its modern form appeared only since the 1960s and Green parties started forming the following decade. Accordingly, it has been argued that green thought has not been crystallized in a codified form ever since its emergence, rather it has undergone an evolution over time, a process of development that is still ongoing nowadays.[305]

In fact, some scholars have noticed how the focus of both green theorists and external observers has changed during the years, undergoing several phases.[306] The "first wave" of theorization, which began in the late 1970s following the emergence of the first Green parties, was concerned with establishing environmentalism as a political ideology in its own right, distinct from any other existent school of thought. Thus, in this phase, the focus was placed on explaining what precisely environmentalism is and on articulating its distinctiveness.[307] The "second wave" took place in the 1990s, when ecologism became an established political reality and the need to defend its uniqueness was superseded. Hence, theorists elaborated on environmental thought, expanding it by developing green perspectives on concepts such as democracy, justice, citizenship, and the state, exploring the interaction between ecologism and other ideologies.[308]

The "third wave", started in the 2000s, has had to face a better understanding of the climate change phenomena and of human environmental impact, which caused arguments and themes once exclusive to environmentalists to become mainstream, such as the concept of sustainability. As environmental themes moved closer to the centre of the political debate, green theorists embraced a multidisciplinary approach, combining environmental political thought with a range of other disciplines, such as economics, in order to provide to provide a practical and viable green approach to complex issues such as global warming and sustainable development.[309]

As a consequence of this trajectory, many approaches to the study of green political thought have been taken over time, resulting in different characterizations and descriptions depending on the temporal context and the relative priorities. Accordingly, some scholars have adjusted their positions

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[305] Barry, "Green Political Theory" in *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, edited by Vincent Geoghegan and Rick Wilford (London, Routledge, 2014), p. 157.

[306] Barry, "Green Political Theory", pp. 157-8.

[307] Examples of works part of this wave are: Pepper, *The Roots of Modern Environmentalism*; Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*; Goodin, *Green Political Theory*.

[308] Books that form part of the second wave are: Doherty and De Geus, *Democracy and Green Political Thought*; Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics*.

[309] As an example, Barry and Eckersley, *The State and the Global Ecological Crisis*.

over time.[310] In a first moment, the necessity was mainly to provide a theoretical background to Green parties of recent formation. As a consequence, the approach to green ideology was mainly normative or prescriptive. As ecologism grew in popularity and expanded to wider parts of the electorate, its identification with the Greens started to fade and the need to develop a definition that could include all the various forms of environmentalism arose, meaning a shift from normative to descriptive intentions.[311] The mainstreaming of environmental concern and the adoption of green arguments by institutions and other political forces have made the problem of defining environmentalism even more important, given the need to distinguish true green positions from appropriation of environmental topics by other political families or from mere greenwashing.

3.1.1 Key characteristics

A major point of contention between scholars is defining what are the characteristics of green ideology. On this issue, scholars are divided and drastically alternative approaches to the issue are possible. On the one hand, some observers delineate a comprehensive set of philosophical, social, political, and economic views and values that flows from a fundamental concern with the human-nature relationship. Positions that do not conform to the determined description are then ruled out altogether from the green category, independently of their degree of environmental concern. Often, the principles chosen are inspired by Green parties' platforms, such as the Global Greens, providing a straightforward link between green political thought and Green politics.[312]

On the other hand, another approach is to opt for identifying a small set of broad principles shared by all kinds of environmentalism. In this case, the elements that distinguish green ideology are found in abstract themes or positions that link together the multitude of environmental approaches, rather than in concrete proposals or claims, which may be source of disagreement. These core components often do not cover certain key themes, such as the state, freedom, or equality, hence leaving space for multiple interpretations. In a certain sense, green thought is seen more as a peculiar paradigm that challenges conventional political theories and less as a well-structured set of positions that supports determinate socio-economic and political arrangements.

Andrew Dobson has labelled the two approaches respectively "maximalist" and "minimalist".[313] A maximalist perspective characterizes green political theory narrowly, providing a definite green

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[310] For instance, Dobson has repeatedly adjourned his *Green Political Thought*, see also Dobson et al. "Trajectories of green political theory", *Contemporary Political Theory* 8 (2009).
[311] Humprey, "Green Ideology", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, edited by Michael Freeden et al. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 432.
[312] As an example: Baradat and Phillips, *Political Ideologies: Their Origins and Impact*. 12th edn. (New York, NY, Routledge, 2017).
[313] Dobson, "Ecologism", p. 220.

ideological position which sets ecologism firmly apart from any other ideology. Thus, maximalist perspectives consider green ideology to be characterized by certain exclusive traits, such as an ecocentric perspective and calls for decentralization, which unambiguously determine what constitutes a green position, ruling out any view that falls short of the necessary requirements.[314]

Maximalist approaches often contribute to the terminological confusion that surrounds environmentalism and to the proliferation of dual accounts of green positions. Indeed, as mentioned previously in Chapter 2, a common interpretative framework for environmental thought consists of identifying binary distinctions within it. These are often drawn with normative intents, such as Naess' divide between shallow and deep ecology, seeking to distinguish a true green position from other, lesser forms of environmental concern. However, dichotomies are present also in more descriptive accounts. As an example, Dobson distinguishes between environmentalism and ecologism. Environmentalism is a simple concern limited to "the belief that environmental issues can be solved without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production and consumption",[315] a policy orientation which can be adopted by a range of political ideologies and parties. Instead, ecologism is a full-fledged ideology which implies "radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life".[316]

On the contrary, a minimalist approach does not seek to distinguish an authentic green position, believing that environmentalism is compatible with many political concepts. Thus, minimalist approaches consider green ideology as a spectrum of positions linked by some fundamental common distinctive elements rather than a single, narrowly-defined stance. Reckoning the plurality of positions existing within environmentalism, minimalists set less stringent definitions of green thought in order to include a variety of different approaches within the label.

The multiplicity of green positions is a problematic obstacle for theorists since it troubles the identification of unitary elements common to all environmentalists. As it has been shown in the previous chapter, green thought presents a great diversity of stances within in, hence adherents to a minimalist approach believe that maximalist, restrictive interpretations risk to exclude a large part of what constitutes the actual environmental movement. In particular, polarized typologies that identify clear-cut binary divides may actually hinder the analysis of environmental political thought, as claimed for instance by John Barry, who argues that "binary, ideological accounts of green politics are unnecessarily restrictive".[317]

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[314] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 11.
[315] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 2.
[316] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 3.
[317] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics,* p. 4.

A way to explain the different positions that co-exist within green thought has been advanced by Gayil Talshir, who considers green ideology to fall outside of any traditional understanding of political ideology and be instead an example of "modular ideology".[318] A modular ideology is characterized by a "double-layered" structure: a framework which provides basic principles accepted by all of the adherents but leaves enough autonomy for the existence of "sub-ideologies" that co-exist within it.[319] Therefore, a modular ideology can be embraced by a compound collective political actor that presents a variety of positions within it but nonetheless still share common foundational principles.

Yet, it is worth noting that thick or thin conceptions of green ideology may stem from similar understandings of what are the key principles at its basis. As a matter of fact, many analyses converge on placing certain basic tenets at the heart of green thought, diverging instead on assessing the constraints that arise from such ideological core themes.[320] As an example, most theoretical studies of green political theory set in criticism of modern industrial society one of the commitments proper of environmentalism; the difference between thick or thin understandings of environmentalism lies in the strength of such contestation. Barry states:

> Often, in practice, the difference between 'radicals', 'ecocentrics' and so-called 'shallow ecologists' or 'reformists' is one of degree rather than kind. This is particularly the case with policy proposals concerning environmental protection and preservation. [...] there is a large area of practical agreement between different conceptualizations of green ideology.[321]

A popular model for analysing ideologies is Freeden's morphological interpretation, which understands ideologies as conceptual maps for the interpretation of the political realm, distinguishing between core and peripheral concepts. The core concepts are non-negotiable, they are provided a fixed definition and determine the key characteristics of an ideology. It is then possible to spot adjacent concepts, whose interpretation flows directly from the meaning attributed to core concepts, and finally peripheral concepts, which are given lesser priority and can have various interpretations. Therefore, a thick ideology possesses a core strong enough to "decontest", as Freeden says, a broad range of adjacent and peripheral concepts, forming a comprehensive vision of the world. Instead, a thin ideology has a core composed of few concepts which does not provide adequate ground for a complete interpretation of society and politics, requiring to draw on other ideologies to form a view about certain themes.

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[318] Talshir, "Modular ideology: The implications of Green theory for a reconceptualization of ideology", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol.3 no.2 (1998).
[319] Talshir, "Modular ideology: The implications of Green theory for a reconceptualization of ideology", pp. 187-188.
[320] Humprey "Green Ideology".
[321] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics,* p. 7.

Freeden leans toward a thin interpretation of green ideology, which is characterized by just few core concepts, namely:

- the centrality in human conduct of the relationship between human beings and nature, which "adopts crucial ontological as well as prescriptive status."[322]

- the value attributed to the preservation of the integrity of nature and life, which involves acknowledging the finiteness of natural resources and the irreversibility of certain interventions on the natural environment.

- a holistic vision, which recognizes the interdependence of all forms of life and promotes their harmony.

- the "emphasis on the concrete and immediate implementation of qualitative human lifestyles."[323] In other words, action is central to green ideology, which believes that the status quo poses a severe threat to its core concepts.

These four principles, Freeden argues, are not sufficient in themselves to determine a complete socio-political position. They do limit possible choices, but do not include elements such as liberty, rights, modes of political action, social organization, or political economy which are instead present in most ideologies. Therefore, the green ideology must rely on other ideological platforms in order to formulate complete political agendas. This generates interactions between the green core principles and adjacent concepts imported from other ideologies, leading to "an inevitable adaptation of those borrowed ideological structures."[324]

Freeden notes how the multiplicity of green positions stems from the indeterminacy of the environmental ideological core. Indeed, the looseness of the green core does not establish a precise hierarchy of priorities, allowing the existence of multiple green paths, depending on the choice of the concepts believed to be closer to the core and the meaning that is attributed to them. Adjacent concepts include, but are not limited to, "biodiversity, community, control, decentralization, democracy, development, emancipation, equality, harmony, organicism, participation, and self-sufficiency [...] equilibrium, the state, bioregionalism, rationality, and planning".[325]

Another interpretation of environmentalism is that advanced by Andrew Vincent. Albeit Vincent regards green thought as an ideology on its own right, he points out some major problems in the study of the ecologism as an ideology which effectively obstacle finding core themes that describe the whole movement. One problem is that many ecologists do not believe that green thought is an

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[322] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory,* p. 527.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 526.
[325] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 529.

ideology: "ecology is seen to transcend ideology altogether and with it the traditional terms of political debate."[326] Environmentalism is often regarded as a whole new paradigm that breaks with the previous, ecologically destructive, conception of politics. In this regard, a claim made by some greens is that environmentalism is "neither left nor right", a disruption of conventional politics.[327]

Another issue is the "troublesome relationship between contemporary eco-philosophy and the political ideology and practical movement of ecology."[328] That is to say that the theoretical preoccupations of environmental philosophy are often detached from the real activity of the green movement, leading to a lack of correlation between green philosophy and the green political practice. Finally, another obstacle is the great diversity of positions within the movement, resulting in many green schools of thought that present a kaleidoscope of beliefs. The plurality of environmental approaches raises the need for an in-depth classification of the many strands, Vincent argues, that considers both the political and the philosophical aspects of green thought and establishes a connection between the two elements.

As a result, Vincent observes that there are very few themes shared by all the green ideological family. These are:

- asserting "the interdependence or intermeshing of the human species with nature."[329] The focus of green political thought is not on inter-human relations, but on the human-natural relation.

- thinking "in terms of greater wholes, such as nature, of which we are, in some manner, a part or co-dependent."[330]

- an awareness of nature and concern for its conditions.

- the belief that industrial growth is problematic, an "anxiety about what industrial civilisation is actually doing to nature."[331]

These four themes do not include the inter-human sphere, they only refer to the human-natural interaction, hence they leave room for multiple interpretations of the desired arrangements for social, economic, and political life, permitting a wide diversity of green positions. Moreover, cleavages commonly spotted in environmentalism run along the four basic themes. First, the rift between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism reflects different conceptions of the human-nature relationship: anthropocentrism still holds human moral superiority and refers to the crucial instrumental value of nature, whereas non-anthropocentrism assumes that humankind and the non-human world, or at least

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[326] Vincent, "The Character of Ecology", p. 249.
[327] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 18.
[328] Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies* p. 205.
[329] Vincent, "Green political theory" p. 184.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Ibid.

part of it, share the same standing. Second, the extent of the holistic vision is contested; as an example, deep ecologists embrace an ontological perspective which considers human beings just one of the many components of nature, inseparable from the whole of the natural ensemble. Third, concern with environmental well-being can materialize in different modes of action, through conventional politics as well as through radical approaches. Finally, criticism of industrialism may imply its absolute refusal or seek its reform.

Other scholars, while still reckoning the multiplicity of green positions, have offered less general and more detailed accounts of the principles that distinguish green ideology. For instance, Andrew Heywood argues that the central themes of green ideology are:[332]

- ecology: environmentalism relies on a solid scientific base provided by developments in our knowledge of the natural world, which has demonstrated how the survival of human community depends on the preservation of the ecosystem's delicate balance. This ecological vision denies human centrality in nature, stressing instead the interrelation between all the components of nature.

- holism: the natural world can only be understood as a whole and cannot be reduced to the sum of its individual parts, "each part only has meaning in relation to other parts, and ultimately in relation to the whole."[333]

- sustainability: human actions must be guided by the principle of ecological sustainability, preserving nature's capacity to support human life. This inevitably implies limits on human material exploitation of the natural world.

- environmental ethics: environmentalism is characterized by an extension of moral thinking towards both future human generations and non-human entities.

- "from having to being":[334] green ideology seeks to reshape conventional understandings of happiness and well-being, criticizing materialism and consumerism while highlighting the importance of quality of life and non-material incommensurable values.

Once again, these core themes are sufficient in themselves to distinguish environmentalism as an ideology on its own right, yet they are broad enough to leave space for interpretation, justifying the existence of many types of greens. Furthermore, they allow crossovers with other political traditions capable of accommodating environmentalist values and doctrines within their own frameworks.[335] In fact, Heywood points out how environmentalists are divided into many sub-groups that, in spite of

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[332] Heywood, *Political Ideologies* p. 248.
[333] Heywood, *Political Ideologies* p. 252.
[334] Heywood, *Political Ideologies* p. 258.
[335] Heywood, *Political Ideologies* p. 260.

sharing some basic coherent characteristics, have radically different goals. This happens also because of the mutual interaction of ecologism with other ideologies, leading to currents such as eco-anarchism, eco-feminism, or eco-socialism.

A tighter description of green ideology is provided by Mathew Humprey,[336] who identifies the core commitments of green ideology in:

- ecological restructuring: "the idea that the relationship between humanity and nature has to be placed upon a radically different basis from that which currently exists."[337] This translates into a holistic conception of the world, which often is linked to ethical holism, the extension of moral concern to the natural world.

- radical democratization: commitment to decentralization and participatory forms of democracy.

- ecology laws: the belief that the functioning of nature sits outside of human control and constitutes a moral law that must guide human behaviour. The consequence for not abiding to such ecological laws (as those postulated by Barry Commoner for instance) is inevitably ecological collapse.

- non-violence: the ends of green thought have to be put forward through non-violent means. Democracy and participation are in themselves key parts of the green ideal.

This set of principles is clearly inspired by the practice of Green parties, which have held non-violence, participatory democracy, and ecology as central themes ever since their formation.[338] It includes precise social and political arrangements and a determined mode of political action, hence it is far more restrictive than the outlines provided by Freeden, Vincent, and Heywood, even though it still does not comprise ecocentrism or the refusal of industrialist economy, hence leaving a limited degree of freedom of interpretation.

An even tighter description of green political thought and its key themes is the one advanced by Andrew Dobson, who firmly relies on a maximalist approach. Dobson, thanks to his preliminary distinction between environmentalism and ecologism, provides an interpretation of green thought that falls within Freeden's thick category, arguing that green ideology is characterized by a unique philosophical foundation, a precise view of socio-political organization, and a political strategy to implement its vision. On a general level, Dobson believes that green ideology is centred around the belief that our relationship with the natural world is the cause, at least in part, of social, political, and

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[336] Humprey, "Green Ideology", pp. 423-429.
[337] Humprey, "Green Ideology", p. 423.
[338] Doherty, *Ideas and Actions in the Green Movement* (London, Routledge, 2002).

economic problems. Hence, ecologism is concerned with defining, establishing, and defending a proper relation between humanity and the non-human world.

More in detail, on the philosophical side Dobson argues that greens are moved by what Robert Goodin has defined "green theory of value", which has been presented in the previous chapter, that is basically the appreciation of the property of being of natural origin and not artificial.[339] Consequently, a fundamental characteristic of ecologism is the bestowal of value on natural entities independent of their instrumental value for humans. Greens seek to preserve the "natural value" of the environment, their political action is based upon such ethical and intellectual ground. This does not necessarily entail the adoption of a non-anthropocentric ethics, as a matter of fact Dobson highlights a discrepancy between eco-philosophy, which often embraces ecocentrism, and the actual practice of green politics, which usually justifies its positions through weak anthropocentric arguments.[340]

In terms of social, political, and economic arrangements, the green vision is that of a sustainable society which lives in harmony with nature, respectful of limits to growth. In this regard, the acceptance of the limits to growth argument is regarded by Dobson as a non-negotiable part of green ideology. Yet, an ecologically sustainable society is believed to involve a restructuring of current economic, social, and political practices. In fact, in Dobson's opinion a key green notion is that the complexity of the environment and the deep interconnection between environmental issues is such to require comprehensive solutions, a system-thinking approach instead of reasoning in terms of single problems. Consequently, greens argue that technological solutions alone cannot "provide a way out of the impasse of the impossibility of aspiring to infinite growth in a finite system."[341] Furthermore, greens believe that the rate of industrial growth is far too quick for the ability of our planet to withstand it, posing the risk of sudden irreversible catastrophic environmental damage. As a result, aspirations of perpetual growth and consumption have to be discarded in light of the insurmountable limits to growth posed by nature.

However, a sustainable society does not limit to the rejection of industrialism, it also involves social and ethical practices as well as a political-institutional reorganization. Accordingly, the green critique of the conventional organizational framework requires the pursue of a structure able to measure with such radial claim, it cannot consist of the simple inclusion of environmental themes in the political agenda. Although Dobson reckons that a range of solutions aimed at the establishment of a sustainable society have been proposed, varying from global governance to an authoritarian centralized state to decentralized non-hierarchical communes, he notes that "some ways of life are more sustainable than others, and [...] some institutional forms are more likely to deal effectively with environmental

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[339] Dobson, *Green Political Thought,*, p. 29; Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* pp. 24-28.
[340] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 45.
[341] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 56.

problems than others."[342] As an example, a common stance in green political theory is to demand an institutional restructuring to a smaller scale. Yet, a downsized and decentralized model of society is just instrumental to green claims and contingent to the view of sustainable human activity, it is not an integral part of green ideology nor its exclusive, as in fact it is common also to other political ideologies, for instance anarchism.

3.1.2 Typologies

The great diversity of green positions, besides being an hinderance to efforts to provide a description of the whole movement, often results in competing claims if not even radically alternative stances over certain themes. Thus, before dwelling into the analysis of the many forms of green thought, it is useful to see how the secondary literature has dealt with the issue. Indeed, several approaches to the interpretation of environmentalism and its political dimension have been taken, resulting in multiple descriptions and classifications. Accordingly, a number of typologies of green positions exist, grounded on different theoretical approaches and methodologies.

A widely diffused analytical approach employed by scholars is to divide the environmental movement into two opposite perspectives, as mentioned in the second chapter, which reflect sets of opposing positions over polarizing fault lines. In fact, the dualities between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, weak and strong understandings of sustainability (and, in turn, between environmental and ecological economics), faith or distrust in technology, and radical or reformist approaches to industrial society, among the others, all delineate polarizing cleavages that split the green movement.[343] Dual interpretations of environmentalism aggregate the different rifts into a single framework that outlines bundles of opposing positions.

The two positions have been called with various terms (environmentalism and ecologism, deep and shallow, ecocentric and anthropocentric, ecocentric and technocentric, light and dark greens, radical and reformist, etc.), but despite the terminological confusion all those binary distinctions concur to define approaches to green thought that diverge over philosophical, political, and economic matters.[344] On the one side, an anthropocentric attitude primarily concerned with human well-being, which believes that the political and economic structures of industrial society can accommodate environmental protection, integrating economic growth with ecological sustainability. On the opposite side, a position that holds the current socio-political and economic organization anti-ecological on the grounds of ecocentric beliefs, seeking a complete change of paradigm.

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[342] Dobson et al. "Trajectories of green political theory", p. 66.
[343] Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism,* pp. 34-46.
[344] Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* p. 10.

However, despite the popularity of such interpretative framework, some scholars pointed out some weaknesses. First of all, the variety of strands of green thought is such that reducing it to a dichotomy between just two opposing positions may be over-simplistic.[345] In fact, the contested issues are many and range over a vast array of topics, generating a wide number of possible stances, hence making any dual typology inaccurate given that it is possible to hold beliefs collocated in both camps. As an example, a strong understanding of sustainability is not necessarily linked to an anthropocentric view. Second, the many green positions diverge over both philosophical-theoretic and practical-political themes, therefore a one-dimensional duality will inevitably result inadequate, given its need to define broad shared stances, whereas a more extensive categorization that includes a range of issues may be more effective.[346] Third, a polarized account of green thought, often grounded on philosophical basis rather than concrete political divergences, hampers the development of green political praxis, such as a green approach to government or a green political economy.[347]

As a result, other typologies of the green ideological family have been advanced. For instance, John Dryzek sees green perspectives as "discourses", focusing on the importance of language. Understanding discourse as "a shared way of apprehending the world"[348] embedded in language that relies on a set of assumptions which provides a basic meaning to terms and principles, Dryzek believes that it "conditions the way we define, interpret, and address environmental affairs."[349] Hence, "environmentalism is composed of a variety of discourses, sometimes complementing one another, but often competing."[350] Green discourses exist within the broader sphere of the discourse about the environment, which is broader than green ideology and extends to "those who do not consider themselves environmentalists, but either choose or find themselves in positions where they are handling environmental issues",[351] thus including also voices hostile to environmentalism.

Dryzek classifies green discourses combining the usual distinction between radicals and moderates with another divergence, that between prosaic and imaginative narrations. Prosaic discourses "take the political-economic chessboard set by industrial society as pretty much given."[352] Environmental issues are seen in terms of the problems they cause to the established socio-economic order, their solution does not involve a whole new paradigm, it is believed to exist within the existing framework.

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[345] Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* p. 12.
[346] Vincent, "The Character of Ecology".
[347] Barry "The limits of the shallow and the deep: Green politics, philosophy, and praxis", *Environmental Politics*, 3 no.3 (1994); Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics.*
[348] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* p. 9.
[349] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* p. 12.
[350] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* p. 22.
[351] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* p. 11.
[352] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* p. 14.

This does not exclude the possibility for radical claims, for instance the demand to curb economic growth or even its complete refusal, as long as such proposals do not question the foundations of society. On the contrary, imaginative discourses challenge the very structure of our world, bringing the environment "into the heart of society and its cultural, moral, and economic systems, rather than being seen as a source of difficulties standing outside these systems."[353] The degree of change sought by imaginative discourses can vary from limited reforms to the complete redefinition of society.

The result of the interaction between the radical-moderate and the prosaic-imaginative dimensions is a two-dimensional typology which identifies four environmental discourses: "environmental problem solving", "sustainability", "limits and survival", and "green radicalism".[354] They are characterized as follows:

- Problem solving is moderate and prosaic, it believes that their present industrial society needs adjustments to deal with environmental problems, adjustments that may involve public policies, new technologies, interventions in markets, or other solutions which do not imply major changes to the current political-economic status-quo. Within the problem solving discourse it is possible to further distinguish between different approaches, for instance between proponents of strong state intervention and free-market environmentalism, which instead holds that the market has the capability to remedy environmental issues given the right inputs and conditions.

- The sustainability discourse is moderate and imaginative, it attempts to solve the tension between environmental, economic, and social problems and values by seeing them as complementary rather than in opposition, incorporating them within a single framework. The goal of the sustainability discourse is to realize a sustainable society, which will be able to remedy to the environmental problems caused by industrialism and at the same time improve human conditions. Within the sustainability discourse too exist different perspectives, such as the weak and strong ones.

- The limits and survival discourse is radical and prosaic, it frames environmental issues as fundamentally in opposition to economic growth and population increases. It holds that the limits to growth posed by the constrained carrying capacity of the global ecosystem place clear boundaries which will be inevitably overcome by current paths of development, thus drastic solutions able to modify the trend are urgently needed. These solutions may be particularly radical, such as demographic control or curbing economic growth, and possibly require an authoritarian state.

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[353] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* p. 15.
[354] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* pp. 14-16.

- Green radicalism is radical and imaginative, it sees the basic structure of industrial society as anti-ecological and seeks to replace it with an alternative ecocentric paradigm. Green radicals hold that the industrial mindset is inherently wrong, there is the need for a change in consciousness towards a deeper perception and appreciation of nature. Besides, social, economic, and political structures must be transformed. Multiple forms of green radicalism can be outlined and there are considerable divergences between them, even if less than those between radicalism and the other environmental discourses.

A more extensive categorization has been developed by Vincent,[355] who argues that twofold categorizations of green thought have two main problems: they fail to cover the complexity of green perspectives, and cannot explain the relationship between environmental philosophy and the environmentalist political ideology. To address the first issue, Vincent identifies many intermediate categories in between the most radical forms of environmentalism and the moderate ones. To solve the second problem, he separates the political and the philosophical aspects, which do relate but lack a straightforward one-to-one correspondence.

The outcome of such an approach consists of two typologies, one of "eco-philosophy" and one of "eco-politics". Vincent understands as eco-politics the environmental political ideology and not the actual political involvement of environmentalists, which could take different forms (as movements, pressure groups, proper political parties etc.) and is regarded as a separate dimension. Eco-philosophy provides a basis for eco-politics, but Vincent argues that there is no clear overlap between philosophical positions and political views, unlike common binary distinctions. In fact, although there is a symbiotic relationship between environmental philosophy and environmental political thought, from a common philosophical foundation can stem multiple political stances.

Vincent's typology of environmental philosophy follows similar endeavours in distinguishing a basic dichotomy between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism, yet it expands the framework by including an intermediate area. Indeed, in Vincent's opinion there are strong and moderate interpretations of both anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. Strong anthropocentrism considers environmental conservation only in terms of its usefulness for human ends (an approach that Vincent calls "resource conservationism"), whereas on the opposite end of the spectrum strong non-anthropocentrism sees humans just as one component of the whole of nature, as in the case of ecocentrism. However, there is a large area in between the strong versions of anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism, which are the ones usually considered by dual analytical frameworks,

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[355] Vincent, "The Character of Ecology".

composed by moderate perspectives, which reject both claims that humans are the sole bearers of value and that the whole of the natural world possesses intrinsic value akin to humans.

The typology of environmental ideology developed by Vincent follows a comparable scheme, identifying a "light" environmentalist wing, a deep ecologist position, and a vast intermediate area that hosts numerous green views. The most moderate stance includes traditional forms of environmentalism, concerned mainly with conservation or preservation, which work within existing institutional orders and are moved mainly by utilitarian arguments. In contrast, deep ecologists (among whom Vincent further distinguishes between bioregionalists, eco-feminists, eco-fascists, and eco-terrorists) seek a total value change in society and are ready to employ radical means to achieve it. In between the two extremes lie many other intermediate environmental positions, such as eco-capitalism, anarchist social ecology, and eco-socialism.

An even more detailed typology of green thought is that built by Marcel Wissenburg,[356] a "taxonomy of green ideas" that attempts to provide a comprehensive account of environmental views over four levels: metaphysics, ethics, politics, and policies. In each of these levels, Wissenburg points out certain issues or concepts, called "dimensions", over which different green positions exist. As a result, several distinct green schools of thought are identified in every level, each one relying on a set of positions that include some or all of the dimensions of that level. Through this complex yet detailed and in depth analysis, Wissenburg seeks to overcome the problems common to binary typologies.

Indeed, Wissenburg argues that this separation between philosophical beliefs, political thought, and practical politics provides a complete and flexible map of green positions that, being grounded on general concepts rather than specific authors, escapes the limitations of conventional classifications. An important note is that a position in one dimension does not automatically commit to a certain position on another dimension, nor it must pose constraints on other levels. As an example, Wissenburg notes that green political views "are not committed to one particular view of environmental ethics or metaphysics, nor does one particular view of environmental ethics or metaphysics commit one to one particular view of green politics."[357] However, some political positions rely on a precise philosophical background, otherwise they would be untenable. Hence, there is a degree of overlap between the four levels that is more or less extensive, varying case by case.

In the metaphysical level, which involves questions concerning the way nature should be conceived,

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[356] Wissenburg, "A taxonomy of green ideas".
[357] Wissenburg, "A taxonomy of green ideas", p. 37.

Wissenburg outlines seven dimensions that cover a range of issues, from the perception of nature to its composition, encompassing also beliefs about the functioning of nature and reasons for environmental concern. Each dimension allows different positions, often mutually exclusive. This results in many possible sets of positions, although only few are internally coherent, allowing to trace clear distinctions between green approaches to nature and the world in general. Thus, Wissenburg identifies a plurality of green schools of thought, such as deep ecology, the Gaia hypothesis, shallow ecology, or technocentrism.

In ethics, Wissenburg distinguishes five dimensions: who or what is valued (hence anthropocentrism and the various non-anthropocentric theories), what kind of value is given (intrinsic or instrumental), how value is attributed (equally without distinctions or in different degrees to different subjects), what theory of value is adopted (i.e. if the source of value is human reason, intuition, religious, or just a convention), and finally what theory of moral action is subscribed (for instance, deontological or consequentialist). The outcome is a typology that extends beyond the conventional division between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism and recognizes several green ethical theories,.

In politics, there are two major questions that shape distinct visions. The first is the conventional political debate about the form of human society. The second, which is unique to green thought, is how humans should administer nature. Therefore, Wissenburg delineates seven dimensions related to the relationship between society and the environment. The result of the many possible sets of positions is a large number of green political theories. Finally, in practical policies the divergencies are much less intricate and limit to just four fundamental dimensions, which regard the opportunity, type, scale, and mode of action. Yet, despite the relatively small number of variables, Wissenburg outlines many types of green action (namely: utopianism, ecological modernization, ecoterrorism, reformism, consumerism, and passivism), superseding the conventional reformist-radical dichotomy.

3.2 Green themes

The diversity of green arguments, beliefs, positions, and proposals depicted by scholars and analysts becomes evident looking at the actual sources of green thought, either from authors who proclaim themselves environmentalists or those generally considered as such. Indeed, there is an impressive variety of stances and opinions in the green literature, both in early texts usually regarded to be inspirational for the development of modern environmentalism (as detailed in Chapter 1) and in later works explicitly devoted to the theorization and development of ecological thought, be it ethics, economics, or political theory.

Connelly and Smith write:

there is a wide variety of political institutions and strategies for change endorsed as the way forward to a sustainable future. From democratic to authoritarian regimes, centralised states to decentralised communities, planned to free-market economies, party politics to grassroots activism – all have found support at some time or another.[358]

These differences range over a variety of issues and eventually result not just in manifold forms of environmental theory but also in many practical understandings of what it means to be green and behave as such. Nevertheless, there are some central recurrent themes in environmentalism that, although admitting multiple stances, are unique to green ideology.

3.2.1 Nature

Undisputedly, the key characteristic of green thought is its concern for the environment, which is grounded on the idea that there are duties and obligations that humans, both as individuals and as a species, owe to nature. In fact, ethical considerations are at the core of the green commitment to a positive human-nature relationship: it is from moral values that follows human responsibility to an ecologically-friendly behaviour. However, environmental ethics has proved to be a major source of disagreement for greens, since many theories have been advanced. In the first place, the very fundamental issue of defining nature is itself contested. In fact, while it is generally assumed that nature is real, that it has a tangible and corporeal existence, some green thinkers have denied the objective existence of nature, considering it a social construct.

The denial of the reality of nature has been advanced mainly from Marxist-inspired greens, who rely on the distinction between a prior "first nature", which originated humankind, and a "second nature", the product of human work on the original first nature, which includes human institutions and values.[359] This process of human-driven change has modified nature and the way we think of it, linking it to modes of production. Under capitalism, it is argued, the first nature does not exist anymore and every perception of nature occurs only in terms of use and exchange value, thus making nature socially produced. A similar but slightly different argument is that, considering nature as what is independent of human intervention, the extent of human modifications on the planet is such that there is almost nothing left able to fit into such description, thus making nature a mere concept with no real-world application. For instance, Anthony Giddens states: "the paradox is that nature has been embraced only at the point of its disappearance. We live today in a remoulded nature devoid of nature and this has to be our starting point for a consideration of green political theory."[360]

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[358] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* p. 52.
[359] Pepper, *Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (London, Routledge, 1993), pp. 107-109.
[360] Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994), p. 206.

Another basic issue related to the existence of nature is of epistemological kind and concerns how humans have knowledge of nature. As highlighted in the first chapter, modern environmentalism was born also thanks to the seminal contribution of scientists who, through the knowledge about the natural world provided by their professions and the related findings, contributed to the development of public awareness about the impact of human actions on the proper functioning of the environment. Accordingly, it has been argued that the strength of ecologism derives from its scientific support, not directly from its moral or political stance.[361] In this sense, many environmentalists ground their positions over the rational and verifiable basis provided by science.

However, there are also green schools of thought that rely on irrational basis, believing in the existence of a mystic connection between humanity and nature. This is the case for instance of Naess' deep ecology, which refuses ontological dualistic views that see humanity as other from nature and holds instead a holistic understanding of the world, a "relational, total-field image"[362] which sees "organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things."[363] Naess explicitly states that the scientific knowledge provided by ecology is different from the "ecosophy" of deep ecology, which is "like a system of the kind constructed by Aristotle or Spinoza",[364] a normative form of wisdom that relies not just on empirical wisdom but also on individual feelings and perceptions.

Yet, the most debated problem in environmental ethics is about the source of human duty to a responsible attitude toward the environment. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the general tendency is to draw a basic conceptual rift between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. However, actually the field is more complex and diverse than what a simple dichotomy may imply. Indeed, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are themselves divided between contrasting perspectives and can be articulated in many ways and on different grounds.

Anthropocentrism justifies environmental concern in terms of the negative consequences that environmental degradation poses to humanity, without bestowing moral value onto nature. It can take a strong form, considering nature exclusively in terms of its usefulness to reach human ends, or a weak one, recognizing the existence of a value in nature that goes beyond the immediate fulfilment of human necessities. Both forms ground environmental concern on moral obligations that humans owe to other humans, in particular to future generations, and not directly to nature as a moral entity.

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[361] Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies* p. 199.
[362] Naess, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary".
[363] Naess, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary", p. 95.
[364] Naess, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary", p. 99.

In a sense, anthropocentrism is about the ethical use of the environment rather than regulating the whole of the human-nature relation. As a consequence, anthropocentrism does not challenge traditional Western thought and can easily be accepted by large parts of society. In fact, it appeals also to non-environmentalists, as it is evident from the popularity of sustainability, which in its Brundtland formulation is clearly anthropocentric. Accordingly, several thinkers, among whom John Passamore and Bryan Norton, have argued that anthropocentrism, at least in its weak version, can provide a solid basis for environmentalism, hence there is no need to widen ethical concern to include the non-human. This is reflected in the theorizations of green political thought offered by scholars such as Robert Goodin and John Barry,[365] who have argued that anthropocentrism is the most defensible, practical, and effective way to develop a green political theory.

On the other hand, non-anthropocentrism differs in that it moves away from an exclusively human standpoint and holds parts, or even the entirety, of the non-human world as valuable in themselves, independently of their usefulness or relation to humanity. Non-anthropocentrism considers the anthropocentric worldview the root cause of environmental damage, therefore it builds an alternative ethical system to replace it. It is thus more radical than anthropocentrism, as it involves the rejection of the conventional cultural paradigm. For this reason, some scholars believe that non anthropocentrism is essential for an authentically green political theory that does not simply include environmental concern within pre-existent traditions.[366] However, not all forms of non-anthropocentrism are equally extreme: various degrees of moral extension have been proposed.

The most limited form of non-anthropocentrism is sentientism or zoocentrism, which champions the moral value of sentient animals. This is the case for instance of Peter Singer's animal liberation and Tom Regan's argument for animal rights. Zoocentrism has inspired many animal-rights movements, which are arguably one of the most visible and popular forms of environmental activism. A broader form of non-anthropocentrism is biocentrism, the expansion of moral consideration to all forms of life. Paul Taylor's egalitarian biocentrism and Robin Attfield's hierarchical biocentrism are two examples of different interpretations of life-based value theories. An even larger extension is ecocentrism, which values the whole of nature, not just living beings. Ecocentrism actually sees different formulations, axiologically based (such as Aldo Leopold Land Ethic, later expanded by J. Baird Callicott) as well as grounded on metaphysical or experiential claims (for instance Arne Naess deep ecology, or Warwick Fox transpersonal ecology).

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[365] Goodin, *Green Political Theory*; Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics.*
[366] For example, Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory.*

Some scholars have denounced the apparent separation between environmental philosophy and green political thought and practice,[367] pointing at how the abstract discussion about nature and value that compose most of environmental ethics seem to be completely detached from concrete issues such as institutional arrangements or social forms. Although it is clear that ethical considerations underpin green commitment, the issue is whether green politics can directly derive from such beliefs. That is to say, do environmental ethics provide guidance on political issues?

A possible answer is to establish a direct link between ecological and political concepts, in other words to take nature as an organizational model for society, for example linking biodiversity to democracy and freedom. Deriving normative political commitments from descriptive ecological considerations is a popular approach within ecocentric theories that link an ethical code of conduct to an ontological connection between human and nature.[368] However, considerable criticism has been moved to such an approach, for instance Barry objects that "appealing to 'naturalness' of particular social practices and norms does not obviate justifying these practices in terms of (human) intersubjective moral and political discourse" and that "the authority of nature is not the final or most appropriate arbiter in determining how we ought to live and organise our common life [...] non-human nature gives us no determinate prescriptions about how we ought to live".[369]

Another problem lies in the diversity of environmental ethical theories. Almost all of the aforementioned philosophical theories contain a critique of the others, this troubles the possibility of grounding political action explicitly on a determined position (either anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric). Moreover, as evidenced by Bryan Norton in his convergence hypothesis,[370] often different philosophical perspectives eventually result in support for the same actions and policies. It follows that, in practical terms, there may actually be no incompatibility between caring primarily for human well-being and extending moral consideration to the non-human.

It is thus possible to argue that, although there may be no direct connection between environmental ethics and environmental political thought, ethical reflections provide foundations to green thought by developing a critical framework through which environmentalists can assess political concepts, actions, and arrangements.[371] In fact, the questions whether humans have direct or indirect duties towards the non-human and what is the source of such responsibility entail also considerations about social and environmental justice, which in turn produce obligations that individuals, companies, institutions, and states owe to society. By the way, the multiplicity of environmental ethics theories

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[367] Vincent, "The Character of Ecology"; Barry "The limits of the shallow and the deep".
[368] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, pp. 37-40.
[369] Barry, "The limits of the shallow and the deep: Green politics, philosophy, and praxis", p. 383.
[370] Norton, *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists.*
[371] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* p. 49.

contributes, at least partially, to explain the variety of green positions, since they are often grounded in different ethical frameworks of the human-nature relation.

3.2.2 Society

The ethical commitment to the natural world implies that human society should be arranged as to protect the natural environment and thus forms of social organization must be evaluated also in terms of ecological balance. Accordingly, a core theme of environmentalism is criticism of industrial society and, as a result, the pursue of a different, sustainable society. Indeed, greens believe that the present patterns of consumption and production are inherently anti-ecological and the direct cause of the current ecological crisis. Therefore, there is the urgent need to change paradigm and establish a sustainable human society, one able to live in harmony with nature and not damage it. Moreover, greens see problems of different nature as all produced by industrial society: economic, political, and ecological crises are different facets of a single broader problem, that is a model of organization and development built around the idea of continuous and unlimited material expansion.

This comprehensive worldview has come to be summed up into the concept of sustainability, which over time has expanded its meaning from the sole ecological context to include also issues of social equality and justice. Hence, the quest for a sustainable society involves critical reflections over multiple issues, including consumption and production patterns, the use of technology, individual and social lifestyle, demographic patterns, and the scale of society. In fact, in light of the evidence provided by the seminal environmental literature of the 1960s and 1970s, *The Limits to Growth* in particular, greens argue that the interaction of problems caused by industrialism and the interdependency of all components of the ecosystem, humans included, require a system approach. That is to say, problems of different nature are actually interrelated and cannot be dealt with in isolation, there is the need for a comprehensive approach that tackles the economic, social, and political dimensions.[372] Therefore, there can be no single solution, as it could be for example technological progress. Instead, there is the need for a reorientation of the whole of society.

As environmentalism is focused on establishing a balanced human-natural relationship, a central notion in green thought is that the present conventional model of human activity is ecologically destructive and untenable because it does not respect the environmental capacity to sustain it. Greens believe that industrial society is underpinned by a mentality that sees nature as an endless deposit of resources, freely and unconditionally exploitable, thus allowing for perpetual and unrestricted growth, both economic and demographic. The origins of this destructive worldview are debated (just to mention a key contribution to the debate, Lynn White traces them to Christian thought), yet

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[372] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, pp. 52-3; Martell, *Ecology and Society*.

environmentalists are unanimous in condemning it. As a consequence, the transition towards a sustainable society must involve first and foremost a change of mindset.

Yet, it has been already shown how varied the field of environmental ethics is, it is thus clear that multiple opinions about the kind of value change needed to achieve a more responsible attitude towards nature exist. In the most radical green visions, this change has necessarily to be towards a non-anthropocentric ethics. Others believe that more sensible anthropocentrism can equally lead to better social-environmental relations. Another view locates the ethical cause of ecological destruction in social relations, this is the case for instance of ecofeminism and social ecology, perspectives inspired respectively by critical theory and anarchist and Marxist thought which merge environmental concern with theories of power.

Indeed, ecofeminists argue that that the destruction of nature is a consequence of "androcentrism" rather than anthropocentrism, and that the subordination of women is directly linked to the subordination of the natural world to human will.[373] Patriarchy, the gender-privileging system of power relations embedded in society, hast established a dualistic conceptual framework which divides between male and female, holding the former superior to the latter. Within this hierarchical structure, the natural world has been traditionally associated to the feminine, thus allowing the exploitation nature. Therefore, ecofeminists believe that patriarchal structure that underpins present society is the fundamental problem that must be addressed, only a total value change can end the exploitation of the environment. In this regard, ecofeminists also argue that women and nature have a special, intimate relationship (justified either in light of women's natural reproductive role, or arising from a long history of cultural hierarchy, there is a debate internal to ecofeminism on the matter), hence they possess a unique ecological sensibility, making the emancipation of women an essential step in the establishment of an ecologically sustainable society.

Social ecology, developed by Murray Bookchin combining anarchist thought with ecological concern, similarly places the origin of human exploitative attitude towards nature in the sphere of social relations. Bookchin believes that the hierarchical structure of capitalist industrial society, which establishes domination of humans over other humans, is itself the cause of human domination over nature.[374] The hierarchical logic of domination that underpins the capitalist social framework extends to all aspects of life, including the relation with nature. Therefore, the cause of the ecological crisis is not to be found in anthropocentrism, but in hierarchical social relations. Consequently, the

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[373] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* p. 75.
[374] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society* (Montreal, Black Rose Books, 1980); Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (Palo Alto, CA, Cheshire Books, 1982).

condition for a sustainable society is the replacement of hierarchy with egalitarianism, only from this reassessment of social relations will stem a new ecological sensibility.

The debate surrounding the sustainable society includes also issues of justice, in fact a key characteristic of green political thought is that it extends the scope of the concept of justice to include also the natural world. In fact, protecting the environment is considered not simply necessary, but also just.[375] This is true in both anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism, even if of course the two visions provide different justifications: in the former case it is a duty towards other humans, including future human beings among recipients of justice, in the latter also a duty towards nature, leading to the idea that even non-human beings are beneficiaries of justice.

The belief that environmental degradation is unjust, not simply for human beings but for future generations as well and possibly even for nature itself, has some major implications. First of all, the ecological crisis is inherently global and transnational. This raises an issue of international environmental justice, given that in a planetary perspective the consequences of unsustainable behaviours are suffered by the whole of human race, not simply by polluting actors. Moreover, on a more local scale, environmental problems impact differently on different social groups, in particular it has been noted that environmental hazards affect disproportionately poor and disadvantaged communities.[376] This aspect links environmental justice to social justice and equity, for instance to issues of poverty, race, and gender.

The international and the social inequality aspects of environmental justice are interconnected: less developed countries and communities are those more likely to suffer the most from ecological problems, especially from the consequences of climate change.[377] However, it is debatable whether reducing inequalities, both globally and locally, would promote ecological sustainability. Indeed, the relationship between global justice and the environment is actually more complex, given that it is affluence, not poverty, that contributes primarily to the environmental crisis.[378] In fact, high income countries have higher per capita emissions, resource expenditure, and energy consumption.[379] As detailed in the first chapter, the very origins of modern environmentalism can be summarized as a reaction to the destructive impact of rapid industrial development in the global North.

It follows that developing countries present a major threat to the global environment if they are to pursue the same path of industrial development that rich countries undertook, as the consequences of

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[375] Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* p. 117.
[376] Schlosberg, "Theorising environmental justice: the expanding sphere of a discourse", Environmental Politics, vol.22 no.1 (2013).
[377] Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* pp. 123-127.
[378] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* p. 63.
[379] UNEP, *Global Environmental Outlook 6* (2019).

such model of growth would further worsen environmental problems. Yet, at the same time developing countries have legitimate aspirations to reach the standards of living of affluent countries, negating them such possibility could be regarded as unjust. Therefore, the right to development may be considered to conflict with the right of future generations to inherit a healthy planet. In the attempt to reconcile intra-generational and inter-generational justice and defend the possibility of attaining both, the three-dimensional conception of sustainability and the related concept of sustainable development have been formulated. Nonetheless, the previous chapter has highlighted how multiple understandings of the concept sustainability are possible, thus leaving room for many visions of the sustainable society in which ecological justice and social justice are weighted differently.

3.2.3 The state

The idea that human society should be organized including nature's well-being besides that of humans also affects political life, which has to be arranged not just according to social desirability but also minding ecological concern. There are multiple visions of how to achieve this, and thus of how the sustainable society should look like. A number of divergences have emerged among greens regarding fundamental issues such as the right scale for human activity, the kind of political organization, the role of technology, and the desirability of economic growth, to mention a few. Among these contested issues, the political-institutional arrangement of the sustainable society is particularly debated. Indeed, it is questionable whether the sustainable society, besides a change of mentality, needs to differ from industrial society also in its actual organization and institutional structure.

One clear divide that emerged ever since the early contributions to modern environmentalism is that between calls for a coordinated governance, even to a global extent, and demands for decentralization.[380] On the one hand, there is a vision that condemns industrialism but does not ask for a radical change in the fundamental structure of society, it rather believes that present arrangements can be adjusted and made greener without dramatic alterations. On the other hand, other greens argue that the sustainable society requires a radical break with the past, a restructuring of social and political structures that will dismantle almost every aspect of industrial society.

This conflict is rooted in a fundamental tension that lies within environmentalism, that between its global and individual aspects, which is evident in one of the most famous environmentalists mottos, "think globally, act locally", attributed to René Dubos. In fact, environmental concern is inherently global: the extent of the ecological crisis is planetary, problems such as pollution or climate change know no national boundaries, and environmental problems are shared across the whole of humanity. Since global problems require global solutions, many environmentalists argued that the establishment

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[380] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* p. 52.

of a sustainable society inevitably requires the involvement of those actors, such as states, governments, and international organizations, that already possess the capacity and the instruments to undertake effective actions and policies. This view, which originated in *The Population Bomb*, *Only One Earth*, and *The Limits to Growth*, sees concerted action within the existent political-institutional framework as the best response to the ecological crisis.

But environmentalism also has a deeply personal dimension, both in terms of individual responsibility for the global ecological crisis and in establishing a direct connection between one's quality of life and the health of the surrounding environment. Accordingly, many ecologists stress the importance of adopting personal sustainable behaviours even within a more complex global perspective, for instance recycling, buying local products, using alternative means of transportations instead of driving, and so on. This view is reflected politically into the belief that the way present society is organized is inherently anti-ecological, sustainability must pass also through a change in its structure. This stance, which originated with *The Closing Circle*, *A Blueprint for Survival*, and *Small Is Beautiful*, argues that the solution to environmental problems lies in a radical reorganization of society, in particular through decentralization and downscaling into small autonomous and self-governing communities.

In this regard, a highly relevant theory is that of bioregionalism, a which identifies basic geographical units known as "bioregions", areas defined by common natural characteristics (for instance a certain soil, hydrogeological origin, flora and fauna, etc.) and not by artificial human-imposed boundaries.[381] Bioregions possess a fixed carrying capacity which would make them self-reliant if inhabited by a population of the proper scale. Hence, bioregionalism advocates the refusal of states as political entities in favour of the adoption of bioregions in order to build autonomous, fully self-sufficient communities. Bioregionalists such as Kirkpatrick Sale argue that the adoption of bioregions as socio-political organizational units would make humans conscious of the limits and carrying capacity of their immediate natural environment, developing a more respectful and harmonious relationship with nature.

Many greens have argued against the centralized state and in favour of small-scale autonomous political units,[382] to the extent that in the early 1990s many observers included radical decentralization as one of the key features of green political thought.[383] As an example, Goodin in 1992 observed that "if there is anything truly distinctive about green politics, most commentators would concur, it must

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[381] Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (London and Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2000).

[382] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society;* Goldsmith et al. *A Blueprint for Survival*; Sale, *Dwellers in the Land*; Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as If People Mattered* (London, Blond & Briggs, 1973); Porritt, *Seeing Green.*

[383] Dobson et al. "Trajectories of green political theory", p. 321.

surely be its emphasis on decentralisation."[384] In fact, many green theorists considered decentralization and self-government as key principles of the sustainable society, among them Edward Goldsmith in *A Blueprint for Survival*, Ernst Friedrich Schumacher in *Small Is Beautiful*, Kirkpatrick Sale's theorization of bioregionalism, and Murray Bookchin "libertarian municipalism" within social ecology theory. Accordingly, green activists built a case for decentralism and Green parties included the principle in their programs.

Decentralization is rooted in the belief that a smaller scale of social organization brings both ecological and social advantages. From an ecological standpoint, smaller communities can live off the land, minimizing resource consumption by abandoning large-scale production, thus reducing environmental damage. Furthermore, small-sized communities would bring humans and nature closer, providing a better understanding of the consequences of industrialism on the ecosystem. Smaller communities would also have social benefits, promoting shared, communal responsibility and recognizing each person's contribution and value. This empowerment of individuals contrasts the atomism and individualism of industrial society. For this reason, small-scale communities are also more prone to be egalitarian and just, since everyone is entitled to be a member of the community independently of his wealth or capacity.[385] Moreover, decentralized communities are sufficiently small to allow for direct democracy and active participation of the whole of society to decision making.

However, in more recent years decentralization has come to be questioned by a number of green thinkers.[386] Criticism arises in light of the complexity of global environmental problems, bringing about a reconsideration of the conventional nation state as the key political-institutional organizational model for the sustainable society. As Dobson notes, "the decentralist impulse survives, but it has been drastically tempered by a realism that has brought the state as a key social and political formation and instrument of sustainability back into environmental political theory".[387] Indeed, the global character of the ecological crisis requires coordinated supranational solutions and actors capable of enforcing such measures, needs that seems to be at odds with the dismantling of the centralized state model.

Instead, green theorists have turned their attention to the role of the state and the possibility of transforming statehood rather than abolishing it.[388] It has been argued that the state is still, even in a

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[384] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 147.
[385] Martell, *Ecology and Society* pp. 52-3.
[386] Among whom Goodin, *Green Political Theory*; Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*; Martell, *Ecology and Society*; Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics.*
[387] Dobson et al. "Trajectories of green political theory", p. 321.
[388] De Geus, "The ecological restructuring of the state" in *Democracy and Green Political Thought*, edited by Brian Doherty and Marius De Geus (London, Routledge, 1996); Eckersley, *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* (London and Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 2004); Barry and Eckersley, *The State and the Global*

globalized scenario, the most important form of political organization, maybe the only institution with the power and the legitimacy to enact the changes that environmentalists seek.[389] Hence, greens should aim at establishing a "Green state" (various labels have been used, including ecostate or environmental state),[390] that is a state whose structure of institutions is dedicated to the management of proper societal–environmental interactions in accordance with green theory, not simply to the management of national environmental resources. The state has to be the key driver of the transformation of society into a sustainable one, leading the process of "ecological restructuring".[391]

3.2.4 Democracy

With regards to the political organization of the sustainable society, Terence Ball notes that "there is no logically or conceptually necessary connection between democracy and environmentalism; indeed the latter can take, and in several significant instances has taken, authoritarian and anti-democratic forms."[392] As a matter of fact, there is a problematic relationship between environmental goals and agency. Given that the primary concern of environmentalism is to protect nature, what are the appropriate means to reach such ends? Some green theorists adopt a consequentialist stance, arguing that green theory should not necessarily point to democracy.

As an example, Goodin says that no theory of agency can be directly derived from the green theory of value, any way to bring green values about is effective. He writes: "it is more important that the right things be done than that they be done in any particular way or through any particular agency."[393]

It follows that "to advocate democracy is to advocate procedures, to advocate environmentalism is to advocate substantive outcomes: what guarantee can we have that the former procedures will yield the latter sorts of outcomes?"[394] In fact, the extent to which democracy is compatible with environmentalism has been subject of intense debate. Barry points out:

> there is a potential tension between green politics and democracy if there is a constitutive relationship between democracy and material affluence or if the ecological crisis is viewed primarily as a matter of either 'survival' or 'salvation'. In both cases democratic forms of decision-making are superfluous, counter-productive or in some way inappropriate to dealing with problems within the social-environmental metabolism.[395]

Ecological Crisis (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2005); Duit et al. "Greening Leviathan: the rise of the environmental state?", *Environmental Politics*, vol.25 no.1 (2016).
[389] Eckersley, *The Green State*, pp. 4-7.
[390] Duit et al., "Greening Leviathan: the rise of the environmental state?", p. 5.
[391] De Geus, "The ecological restructuring of the state", pp. 195-7.
[392] Ball, "Democracy" in Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge, edited by Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 131.
[393] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 120.
[394] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 168.
[395] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics,* pp. 201-2.

Accordingly, a variety of ecologists have rejected democratic solutions and argued that only authoritarianism can provide a solution to the environmental crisis. A against democracy is that it is unable to deal with ecological problems. This view was particularly common within the Malthusian survivalist strand of early modern environmentalism. Survivalists believed in an impending ecological catastrophe, caused primarily by rapid and unrestricted global demographic growth, believed to be so dire that could be averted only through swift drastic solutions that democratic governments could not undertake. The line of argument was that of the tragedy of the commons: nobody would voluntarily accept the strong measures needed to protect the environment unless forced to do so.

For example, *The Population Bomb* and "The Tragedy of the Commons" both openly advocated coercive population control, especially in underdeveloped countries with high rates of population growth.[396] William Ophuls similarly concluded that society faces the choice between oblivion or the adoption of a Hobbesian Leviathan, a state with absolute power charged with imposing the necessary measures to save the environment. He writes: "Hobbes shows why a spaceship earth must have a captain. Otherwise, the collective selfishness and irresponsibility produced by the tragedy of the commons will destroy the spaceship, and any sacrifice of freedom by the crew members is clearly the lesser of evils."[397]

A second argument against democracy is that democratic procedures do not guarantee ecologically sound policies, they may even encourage anti-ecological outcomes. Environmental problems require impartial expertise while environmental policies imply competing interests, as a consequence it is important that decision-makers are informed by independent experts and not conditioned by the pressure of influential interest groups, such as industry. Such impartiality cannot be ensured by democracy, as Michael Saward highlights: "if governments, to be democratic, must respond to the felt wishes of a majority of citizens, then greens have little comeback if a majority does not want green outcomes."[398]

Therefore, there is the need for a strong state willing and capable to adopt the necessary solutions and measures, even if they are unpopular or even harmful for large parts of the population. In fact, as Carter says: "every policy aimed at resolving an environmental problem will have a distributional impact."[399] For example, higher fuel taxes or stricter restrictions on car emissions will have a negative

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[396] Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York, NY, Ballantine Books, 1968); Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons", *Science*, vol. 162 no. 3859 (1968).

[397] Ophuls, "Leviathan or Oblivion?" in *Toward a Steady-State Economy,* edited by Daly (San Francisco, CA, Freeman, 1973), p. 224.

[398] Saward, "Must democrats be environmentalists?" in *Democracy and Green Political Thought*, edited by Doherty and De Geus, p. 90.

[399] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* pp. 63-4.

impact for those living in rural areas. Accordingly, Dobson points out that "it has been suggested that the political-ecological belief that there is a right way to live the green Good Life is incompatible with the value pluralism normally associated with (liberal) democracy."[400] Hence, only a technocratic rule which does not have to respond to democratic procedures will be able to fully undertake green decisions.

However, to recognize the troubled connection between democratic procedures and environmental goals does not necessarily lead to the rejection of democracy. On the contrary, many greens believe that democracy is an integral part of green thought and that the sustainable society must be democratic. For instance, Saward states that "rather than being something outside the purview of democratic theory, core environmental concerns are part of it."[401] Indeed, he establishes a link between democracy and environmentalism arguing that there is such a thing as a substantive democratic right to protection from environmental hazards and thus "democrats must be environmentalists."[402]

Yet, including democracy within green principles does not imply the unconditional acceptance of liberal democracy. On the contrary, a number of environmental theorists have contested the traditional liberal democratic model. As Barry says:

> if green politics is anti-democratic, it is only anti-democratic in the sense that it criticizes the prevailing liberal democratic conception of democracy. [...] Rather than being anti-democratic, green political theory likes to claim that it constitutes an alternative democratic theory and practice, one which, while critical of liberalism, also builds on some of its core insights and values.[403]

In particular, many greens have promoted participative, deliberative, and direct models of democracy in the attempt to build alternative conceptions of democracy more sensitive to environmental issues. In this regard, Barry notes: "green democratic theory is thereby concerned with the creation of a 'democratic society' and culture and not just a more democratic political system."[404]

A large number of environmentalists have turned to deliberative democracy to explain how democracy may be conducive to the development of an ecologically sensible society.[405] Deliberative democracy rests on the idea that democratic procedures are legitimate when the decision-making

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[400] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 105.
[401] Saward, "Must democrats be environmentalists?", p. 88.
[402] Saward "Must democrats be environmentalists?", p. 84.
[403] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics,* p. 198.
[404] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics,* p. 207.
[405] Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* pp. 104-109; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment* p. 72; Smith *Deliberative Democracy and the Environment* (London, Routledge, 2003).

process consists not just of voting (understood as aggregation of preferences), but of reasoned, detailed, and informed collective discussion which is then followed by deliberation. In this deliberative context, all citizens should be able to have a say, integrating a variety of perspectives and opinions, including also those of experts, thus increasing the information available to voters. Hence, inclusive deliberation allows to produce creative outcomes free of external influences and vested interests that can reasonably be accepted by the whole of the community. Furthermore, deliberative democracy allows the interests of those not present in the actual deliberation to be heard, thus including theoretically future generations or even the natural world.[406]

Besides procedural issues, participation is another key concern of green theorists, both in terms of active citizenship participation in governance as well as extension of membership to the political community to include a larger number of interests up to include also non-humans ones. In fact, some greens have argued that representative democracy is flawed by inequalities and hierarchies, hindering the development of a collective ecological consciousness.[407] On the contrary, active participation in politics and decision-making would result in more attention to popular demands, to the detriment of entrenched political interests.[408] Furthermore, participatory democracy creates the conditions for the development of individual ecological stewardship thanks to the increased degree of personal autonomy and responsibility granted on citizens.[409]

It is relevant to note that participatory and deliberative democracy is particularly suited for the small scale, decentralized, autonomous societal model envisioned by many greens. Indeed, small-sized communities focused mainly with local problems would allow a greater degree of participation and even forms of direct democracy. However, this does not need to imply that a decentralized community is a necessary condition for a green democracy, as many environmentalists have envisioned models of green democracy that work within the conventional state.[410] In fact, the preference for democracy is not related just to its decision-making capabilities, rather because it is believed to be the best instrument to develop an ecologically sensible citizenship which will bring about the sustainable society.

3.2.5 The economy

The relationship between economic activity and environmental protection is troubled and widely debated. The previous chapter has already detailed the split between ecological economics and environmental economics and the related divide between strong and weak understandings of

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[406] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* pp. 236-8.
[407] Porritt, *Seeing Green.*
[408] Goodin, *Green Political Theory,* p. 128.
[409] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics*; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment* p. 73.
[410] Eckersley, *The Green State*; Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics*; Dobson, *Green Political Thought.*

sustainability, highlighting how different conceptions of the interaction between human economy and the natural environment are possible and how the idea of sustainable development has been formulated in the attempt to solve the perceived tension between economic growth and the environment. Indeed, in the context of green political thought there are two main issues of political economy: whether it is possible to achieve economic growth without damaging the environment, and if economic growth is necessary for the well-being of the sustainable society.[411]

In fact, the ecological limits argument, introduced within the green discourse by Kenneth Boulding's metaphor of Earth as a spaceship, Edward Goldsmith's *A Blueprint for Survival*, the *Only One Earth* report, and, above all, *The Limits to Growth*, effectively challenged the wisdom of economic growth. Furthermore, Ezra J. Mishan, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, Herman Daly, and Ernst F. Schumacher, considered to be the pioneers of ecological economics,[412] openly argued against economic growth, paving the ground for degrowth theories and for steady-state (also known as stationary, a-growth, or zero growth) economics. Accordingly, a large number of greens are sceptic towards economic growth, believing that it is problematic for or even at odds with environmental safeguard.

Questioning economic growth also involves challenging its desirability in terms of social consequences, besides its ecological viability. In fact, many greens reject growth and industrialism to break from conventional economic thinking, arguing that material growth and GDP do not express properly well-being. Instead, focus should be placed on alternative indicators such as quality of life, real needs, capabilities, or happiness, which could properly express the social effects of economic policies, although not directly quantifiable in monetary terms.[413] Such emphasis on values in place of material prosperity easily combines with the green vision of a decentralized, autonomous society which is also supposed to be economically self-sufficient.

However, not all greens are sceptic towards economic growth and its ecological and social effects. On the contrary, the belief that economic growth and environmental protection can be integrated has produced the idea of sustainable development, as explained in the second chapter. The idea that environmental problems can be dealt with through a sustainable growth rather than giving up economic growth entirely, and thus that existing political, economic, and social institutions can become sustainable through adequate reforms, has come to be labelled "ecological modernization".[414] Ecological modernization decouples economic growth from environmental damage, believing that environmental protection does not imply hindering economic growth, on the contrary it can be itself a source of growth, while technological development will gradually reduce the ecological impact of

[411] Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* p. 30.
[412] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth,* p. 34; Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* p. 205.
[413] Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies* pp. 219-224.
[414] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics,* ch.6; Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* p. 228; Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* p. 227; Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth* pp. 165-183.

economic activity. This is considered to be the case especially with regards to climate change, for instance the *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, commissioned by the UK government in 2006, concluded that the economic benefits of investing now into sustainable solutions to environmental problems are far greater than the costs of the future potential consequences of unmitigated climate change.

3.3 Ideologies and the environmental challenge

Having assumed that environmental political thought is an ideology in its own right, it is necessary to examine its relationship with its competitors, the other political ideologies. It has been said that the emergence of green ideology has challenged traditional political ideologies, effectively introducing a new realm of political confrontation that had previously not been considered: the natural environment. Thus, to what extent are other ideologies compatible with green principles and claims? As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, this greatly depends on what is actually meant by environmentalism, whether it is conceived as a thick ideology defined narrowly or as a thin ideology with a minimalist definition.

In fact, considering environmentalism as "thick", full-fledged, stand-alone ideology, that is to say that it exists a distinct green worldview from which specific social and political arrangements can be derived, limits considerably the compatibility of green theory with other political positions. For instance, ecological views that call for radical social and political change, participatory democracy, decentralization, and limits to economic growth are inconsistent with most traditional ideologies. On the contrary, understanding environmentalism as a "thin" ideology with loose core principles implies making it dependent on concepts of other political ideologies to provide a comprehensive vision, thus attributing the utmost importance to the relationship between environmentalism and other families of political thought. For instance, Luke Martell states: "there are a wide range of problems -for example on justice, equality and liberty- which environmental criteria are not equipped to solve. On such issues older political theories are more helpful."[415]

In this regard, the second section of this chapter has pointed out how the ethical, social, political, and institutional green agenda is broad and susceptible to interpretation, presenting a high degree of compatibility with other political traditions. Accordingly, Connelly and Smith argue that "Ecological politics has developed from a critical relationship with many other streams of thought, and because of this it incorporates a number of diverse and contradictory tendencies."[416] However, it has also been noted that "political commitments such as justice, democracy and liberty cannot be developed from

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[415] Martell, *Ecology and Society* pp. 138-9.
[416] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* p. 54.

purely ecological considerations, although ecological ideas can have implications for their preferred form."[417] Accordingly, Martell says: "some principles and social and political arrangements (e.g. centralized co-ordination and selective growth) are more adequate on green grounds than others."[418] Therefore, not every ideology may be compatible with green theory, while some may present a higher degree of consistency with ecological principles.

Yet, the relationship between environmentalism and other political theories is not unidirectional: environmental thought is not simply compatible with other ideologies, it has also influenced them in turn. Indeed, the challenge posed by the ecological crisis has caused established ideologies to reconsider their frameworks in the attempt to include environmental protection and sustainability within them. Accordingly, Chapter 2 has shown how different interests and perspectives have offered their own interpretations of core green themes such as environmental ethics, sustainability, and sustainable development. The ecological insight brought by environmentalism into political thought has been so relevant that it raised the issue of how established ideologies can be adapted to meet ecological principles: "in some cases, critical reassessment has occurred in the light of green critiques."[419]

3.3.1 Conservativism

There are some similarities between green and conservative values that have been pointed out and which have led to attempts to develop forms of green conservativism.[420] It has been noted in Chapter 1 how the origins of environmentalism can be partially traced back to the Romantic movement, in this regard it has been suggested that modern environmentalism did not originate exclusively within left-wing politics, rather it incorporated concepts and ideas that are fundamentally conservative in nature.[421] Roger Scruton observes that "the appropriation of the environmental movement by the left is in fact a relatively new phenomenon."[422] Similarly, Anna Bramwell notes that environmentalism stems from an "intensely conservative moral and cultural ecological critique".[423] John Gray claims: "far from having a natural home on the Left, concern for the integrity of the common environment, human as well as ecological, is most in harmony with the outlook of traditional conservatism of the British and European varieties."[424]

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[417] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* p. 65.
[418] Martell, *Ecology and Society* p. 139.
[419] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* p. 53.
[420] Gray, *Beyond the New Right* (London, Routledge, 1993); Scruton, *How to Think Seriously About the Planet: The Case for an Environmental Conservativism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).
[421] Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies.*
[422] Scruton, "Conservativism" in *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*, edited by Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 7.
[423] Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century,* p. 4.
[424] Gray, *Beyond the New Right*, p. 124.

Regarding the compatibility of environmentalism and conservativism, Scruton writes:

> Conservatism and conservation are in fact two aspects of a single long-term policy, which is that of husbanding resources. These resources include the social capital embodied in laws, customs and institutions; they also include the material capital contained in the environment, and the economic capital contained in a free but law-governed economy. The purpose of politics, on this view, is not to rearrange society in the interests of some overarching vision or ideal, such as equality, liberty or fraternity. It is to maintain a vigilant resistance to the entropic forces that erode our social and ecological inheritance. The goal is to pass on to future generations, and if possible to enhance, the order and equilibrium of which we are the temporary trustees.[425]

This view echoes that of one of the main inspirations for conservative thought, the 18th century philosopher Edmund Burke, who remarked the importance of the link between generations.[426] In this perspective, current generations are just trustees of both the social and natural environment and have the responsibility to leave it intact for future generations.[427] This idea of stewardship, although deeply anthropocentric, is compatible with environmental thought.

Besides this, there are more contact points between conservativism and environmentalism. Both present the idea that the human community lasts over generations and is linked to its natural environment. The conservative rejection of the Enlightenment ideas of progress and rationality is often shared by ecologists and can lend itself readily to a parallel with the green principle of precaution.[428] Criticism of modernity and the appreciation for an idealized pre-industrial past are also themes present in both ideologies, the same can be said for emphasis on organicism, stability, and balance. Moreover, the conservative stress on the social importance of tradition, continuity, and natural change reflects similar ecological notions.[429]

However, despite the fact that many environmentalist themes are congruent with conservative thought, there are some considerable differences between the two ideologies that have made attempts to build green conservativism rather rare. First, while classical conservativism may present similarities with environmentalism, the compatibility with ecologism of more modern form of conservativism which have embraced the free-market or neoliberal positions is questionable, as some

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[425] Scruton, "Conservativism", p. 8.
[426] Scruton, "Conservativism", p. 9.
[427] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* p. 180.
[428] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 161; Pilbeam "Natural Allies? Mapping the Relationship between Conservatism and Environmentalism", *Political Studies*, vol.51 no.3 (2003), pp. 493-5; Martell, *Ecology and Society* p. 139.
[429] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment* p. 67; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* p. 55; Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* p. 179; Martell, *Ecology and Society,* pp. 139-140; Pilbeam, "Natural Allies? Mapping the Relationship between Conservatism and Environmentalism".

scholars believe them to be radically incompatible with green principles.[430] Second, as Scruton notes, "social equilibrium and ecological equilibrium are not the same idea, and not necessarily in harmony."[431] On this matter, Dobson states: "Conservatism is interested in the conserving and preserving of the past; ecologism is interested in conserving and preserving for the future."[432] While conservativism seeks to preserve an established social order, environmentalism attempts to build a new one, the sustainable society, which will inevitably require more or less extensive economic, political, and social transformations.

3.3.2 Authoritarianism and Fascism

It has been already mentioned how the perceived seriousness of the ecological crisis can lead to radical views that reject liberal and democratic values in favour of drastic authoritarian or even fascist solutions. In fact, individual freedom may need to be overridden by the necessity to protect the environment and a dictatorship, not committed to the respect of human rights nor accountable for its decisions, may be the most efficient way to deal with the severity of environmental problems. Martell observes that "in considerations of population, immigration and the third world and in the concepts and rhetoric of some green thinking there are racist and fascist potentialities."[433]

Besides ideological compatibility, there are also historical connections between fascism and environmental awareness. The Italian Fascist and the German Nazi regime effectively carried out measures that today would be considered to be environmental protection, such as setting up natural reserves, reforestation, organic farming, promoting vegetarianism, or developing alternative energy sources. Prominent Nazi leaders such as Rudolf Hess, Richard Walter Darré, and Otto Strasser were committed conservationists, while Alwin Seifert would become one of the founding fathers of German environmentalism after the war.[434]

However, an important clarification is that "fascism is possible in, rather than necessary to, environmentalism."[435] That is to say that authoritarian interpretations of green theory are possible, and accordingly there have been such claims, but this does not mean that environmentalism implies authoritarian solutions. On the contrary, many greens are absolutely at odds with similar positions.[436] Nonetheless, authoritarian views were common within the survivalist wave of early modern

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[430] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth*; Carter, *The Politics of the Environment* p. 67.

[431] Scruton, "Conservativism", p. 9.

[432] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 163.

[433] Martell, *Ecology and Society,* p. 146.

[434] Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's 'Green Party'* (London, The Kensal Press, 1985); Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*; Bruggemeier et al. *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens, OH, Ohio University Press, 2005).

[435] Martell, *Ecology and Society,* p. 148.

[436] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory.*

environmentalism, which located the main cause of the ecological crisis in uncontrolled demographic growth. As an example, Ehrlich wrote:

> a cancer is an uncontrolled multiplication of cells; the population explosion is an uncontrolled multiplication of people. Treating only the symptoms of cancer may make the victim more comfortable at first, but eventually he dies —often horribly. A similar fate awaits a world with a population explosion if only the symptoms are treated. We must shift our efforts from treatment of the symptoms to the cutting out of the cancer. The operation will demand many apparently brutal and heartless decisions. The pain may be intense. But the disease is so far advanced that only with radical surgery does the patient have a chance of survival.[437]

Ehrlich believed that demographic growth in the developing world would soon have jeopardized Earth's capacity to provide adequate resources for everyone, given that a limited global resource base means that rich and poor countries are mutually vulnerable to the risks posed by a massive world population increase. Hence, he strongly advocated population control measures, "hopefully through a system of incentives and penalties, but by compulsion if voluntary methods fail. We [the USA] must use our political power to push other countries into programs which combine agricultural development and population control."[438]

Although a characteristic of green thought is that human nature is transformable and that the sustainable society can arise from a change in preferences and attitudes, some environmentalists argue that the urgency of the ecological crisis is such that measures must be implemented immediately. Since green objectives require changes to individual preferences and restrictions on individual lifestyle, consumption, and habits, these may have to be enforced through coercion. Hardin combines Hobbesian thought and economics to argue that individuals are self-interested and unable to care about common goods: "freedom in the commons brings ruin to all."[439] Thus, a strong state is needed to enforce the right behaviour necessary to ensure survival. In particular, freedom to breed is unacceptable and must be negated by "mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon by the majority of people affected",[440] an agreement between the majority of society to impose limits to populations growth.

A similar argument is that the democratic process is inadequate to provide the urgently needed environmental policies, radical action is needed in the present to avoid greater environmental degradation in the future, which would then require worse draconian measures.[441] In this regard,

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[437] Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, pp. 165-166.
[438] Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, p. i.
[439] Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons", p. 1244.
[440] Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons", p. 1247.
[441] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* p. 43; Martell, *Ecology and Society,* p. 147.

Robert Heilbroner concludes that the ecological restructuring of society can be brought about only by an illiberal authoritarian state, whose government should combine religious orientation with military discipline, with absolute control on both political and economic life.[442] William Ophuls too argues that humanity faces the choice between "Leviathan and oblivion", advocating a technocratic government of expert "ecological mandarins" that could impose the necessary measures.[443]

Furthermore, the focus placed on the role of human population as cause of the ecological crisis by both the survivalist literature and deep ecologists has led to the creation of the term "ecofascism" to describe the chauvinist lack of value attributed to human life and the belief that not everybody is equally entitled to be part of the sustainable society. As an example, Hardin advocated the adoption of "lifeboat ethics" with regards to global population, suggesting that attempting to improve the material condition of the whole of an expanding humanity will inevitably cause an ecological catastrophe and is not viable. Instead, developed countries should act as lifeboats and save themselves from ecological destruction by cutting off development aids and forbidding immigration, preventing poor countries to improve their material conditions.[444]

On another note, it has also been noted that some strands of environmentalism present contact points with the far right thought, in particular with Nazism and the folkish tradition. Organicism, holism, stress over the mystic connection between the land and its inhabitants, distrust of rationality in favour of the spiritual, appeal to the perfection of the natural, and placing the whole over the individual, are just some of the similarities that exist between the far right ideology and some forms of environmentalism, in particular deep-ecology.[445]

3.3.3 Liberalism

The relationship between environmentalism and liberalism is troubled and the question of whether environmentalists can be liberals lends itself to two possible conclusions diametrically opposite. On the one hand, one view is that "there is a lot in liberal political theory that runs counter to radical ecology."[446] Indeed, the liberal focus on rights and liberties of individuals, also in the economic sphere, seems to be incompatible with green ideas. Greens believe in the existence of moral obligations toward nature that entail collective and individual responsibility for environmental protection, a principle that inevitably curtails freedom in a variety of areas, from individual action to

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[442] Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1974).
[443] Ophuls "Leviathan or Oblivion?".
[444] Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat", *BioScience*, vol.24 (1974).
[445] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* pp. 54-56; Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* p. 143.
[446] Martell, *Ecology and Society,* p. 141.

consumption to economic enterprise. Moreover, in the green perspective ecological necessities are bound to overrun individual preferences, effectively undermining liberal democracy.[447]

Furthermore, liberalism is bound to be anthropocentric, being strongly individualist. This places it at odds with holistic ecocentric positions. The pursuit of the private interest, the importance placed on property rights, and the neutrality of the liberal state contrast with ecological calls for centralized intervention in pursuit of a certain conception of the good. The free market is seen by some greens as incompatible with environmental protection, if not itself the cause of the ecological crisis. Additionally, many greens seek to replace liberal representative democracy, either with decentralized participatory democracy, direct democracy, or authoritarian solutions.[448]

On the other hand, an alternative view sees some core green principles as products of liberal thought. In this sense, the extension of the moral community to the natural world can be seen as a logical development of the liberal focus on rights and obligations.[449] As an example, Bentham's utilitarianism has been employed to justify animal rights and the moral standing attributed to future generations. Furthermore, the liberal focus on rights has led to the belief in the existence of a right to a healthy environment, which can be seen as a form of Rawlsian justice. It is also important to note that it was John Stuart Mill who first formulated the idea of stationary state economy.

Following this latter perspective, a number of attempts to demonstrate the compatibility between liberalism and environmentalism have been made, arguing that at least some green principles can be accommodated within liberal theory.[450] Besides theoretical reflections over political thought, liberal economists too have reacted to green criticism. One result has been the formulation of "free-market environmentalism", which identifies in the lack of clearly defined property rights and pricing mechanisms the economic source of ecological problems, thus turning to market-based mechanisms to protect the environment.[451] Another outcome has been the emergence of the environmental economics school, which has been detailed in the previous chapter.

It has also been argued that sustainable development and ecological modernization are actually liberal attempts to defuse environmental arguments by including them within a liberal framework.[452] However, this claim is debatable because, as argued in Chapter 2, sustainable development is an essentially contested concept that can be interpreted in multiple ways, not necessarily liberal in nature.

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[447] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 151.

[448] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* p. 68; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment,* pp. 56-7; Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, pp. 149-151; Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* pp. 136-8; Martell, *Ecology and Society,* pp. 140-1.

[449] Martell, *Ecology and Society,* p. 140.

[450] Wissenburg *Green Liberalism* (London, UCL Press, 1998); Barry and Wissenburg, *Sustaining Liberal Democracy: Ecological Challenges and Opportunities* (London and New York, NY, Palgrave, 2001).

[451] Anderson and Leal, *Free Market Environmentalism* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1991).

[452] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth,* pp. 145-185.

Ecological modernization too, while refusing fundamental restructuring of the market economy and the liberal institutions, does not fully comply to liberal theory, since it requires a strong governmental intervention in the market and the redefinition of consumers preferences.[453]

3.3.4 Anarchism

There is a strong affinity between anarchist thought and environmentalism, to the extent that some green theorists have acknowledged the deep influence of anarchist ideas on ecologism.[454] Eckersley notes that "anarchism is the political philosophy that is most compatible with an ecological perspective".[455] In fact, central features of anarchism such as decentralization, small-scale communitarianism, egalitarianism, abolition of hierarchical social structures, cooperative governance, participatory democracy, and social justice have contributed to the development of environmentalism.[456]

At the same time, modern anarchism itself has been inspired by ecological concern, leading to the formation of eco-anarchism. Some scholars identify two traditions within eco-anarchism: social ecology, developed by Murray Bookchin, and eco-communalism, a more general category that refers to ecocentric-leaning theories focused on the integration of human communities with their natural surroundings, including Kirkpatrick Sale's bioregionalism and Goldsmith's *Blueprint for Survival*.[457] Another anarchist school of thought that could also be considered part of eco-anarchism is anarcho-primitivism. All forms of eco-anarchism reject the centralized state, which is regarded at best unnecessary for the sustainable society, if not even intrinsically hostile to ecological principles, but social ecology and eco-communalism do so starting from different premises.

Social ecology argues that the ecological crisis has social causes: "the basic conception that humanity must dominate and exploit nature stems from the domination and exploitation of man by man."[458] Technology, population growth, industrialist economy, and consumerism are but the proximate causes of the ecological crisis, the root causes of environmental degradation are to be found in the underlying moral, spiritual, and institutional worldview built upon hierarchy and domination. In fact, Bookchin has a positive view of nature in itself (the "first nature"), which is regarded to be perfectly egalitarian: "ecology recognizes no hierarchy on the level of the ecosystem."[459]

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[453] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* pp. 227-237.
[454] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*; Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics.*
[455] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory,* p. 145.
[456] Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*, 1996.
[457] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory.*
[458] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, p. 40.
[459] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, p. 59.

It has been the development of human society that has brought hierarchy within humans and by extension, domination of humans over nature. Bookchin says: "The hierarchies, classes, propertied forms, and statist institutions that emerged with social domination were carried over conceptually into humanity's relationship with nature. Nature too became increasingly regarded as a mere resource, an object, a raw material to be exploited".[460] Hence, "as long as hierarchy persists, as long as domination organizes humanity around a system of elites, the project of dominating nature will continue and inevitably lead our planet to ecological extinction".[461] Only a new social order, freed of hierarchies and exploitation, can be really ecological.

Therefore, social ecology seeks to build a new, truly free and egalitarian society, based on ecological principles, that can reconcile humanity with nature. This involves the rescaling of institutions to a comprehensible human dimension, which Bookchin normatively identifies in the anarchist commune. Such mode of social organization entails "the need for direct democracy, for urban decentralization, for a high measure of self-sufficiency, for self-empowerment based on communal forms of social life".[462] Thus, Bookchin envisions the replacement of the state with what he labels "libertarian municipalism", a confederation of autonomous, self-sufficient, small-sized municipalities organized according to a bottom-up system of administration.

Eco-communalism similarly envisions the sustainable society as "human-scale, cooperative communities that enable the rounded and mutualistic development of humans while at the same time respecting the integrity of the nonhuman world."[463] However, whereas social ecology focuses on social hierarchies, eco-communalism merges anarchist theory with ecocentric ethics, grounding egalitarianism and distrust towards the centralized state in the idea that humans are part of a larger community: nature.[464] Hence, eco-communalist see the ecological crisis as the outcome of the demise of the human-nature community, it follows that eco-communalist socio-economic arrangements, such as bioregionalism, aim to reconstruct such sense of community by bringing humans closer to the natural environment.

However, despite the affinity between anarchism and environmentalism and the proven compatibility between the two ideologies, there are issues in eco-anarchism. First of all, as mentioned previously, the basic premise that the state is either unwanted or completely rejected is problematic in light of the global extent of the ecological crisis. Dismantling centralized institutions could cause more environmental harm than good and there is no guarantee that the decentralized communities proposed

[460] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, p. 40.
[461] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, p. 76.
[462] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 2.
[463] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* p. 160.
[464] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* p. 162.

by eco-anarchist will have a lesser environmental impact.[465] Moreover, anarchist distrust for institutions, emphasis on direct action, and refusal to work within parliamentary politics risk to confine eco-anarchism to the margins of the political scene, undermining its efficacy. This aspect has effectively turned into a major problem for green parties, which have been torn by divisions between moderates and ideological purists who argued against participation in parliament. In this regard, Eckersley argues that eco-anarchism "needs to be supplemented by political engagement with state institutions if it is not to remain an ephemeral and/or marginal political phenomena."[466]

3.3.5 Socialism

One crucial issue in the relationship between environmentalism and socialism is that greens do not necessarily criticize capitalism, they attack industrial society and the paradigm of economic growth instead. Industrialism is believed to be a "super-ideology" shared by different political positions, including socialism. Accordingly, many greens declare to be "neither left nor right",[467] given that both capitalism and socialism "are dedicated to industrial growth, to the expansion of the means of production, to the materialistic ethic as the best means of meeting people's needs, and to unimpeded technological development."[468] In truth, the record of environmental protection in socialist centrally-planned economies, especially in countries of the former Soviet bloc, turned out to be even worse than that of capitalist Western nations.[469] Furthermore, Marxist emphasis on the transformation of nature seems to be completely at odds with ecocentric ethics.

Conversely, socialists have criticized environmentalism for it does not explicitly set in capitalism the cause of the environmental crisis. As Dobson notes, "radical greens will probably accept that a fundamental break with capitalism is indeed a necessary condition for restoring environmental integrity, but they do not see it as a sufficient condition".[470] Moreover, green thought has also been attacked from the left because distributional issues and social justice, although shared by many environmentalists, are not core green principles. On the contrary, ecological needs for environmental protection may worsen poverty and inequality by preventing economic development. Furthermore, environmentalism has been seen by socialists as an expression of the bourgeois affluent middle-class interests, not concerned with basic social issues.[471]

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[465] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment* p. 61; Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* pp. 169-173.
[466] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory,* p. 163.
[467] Martell, *Ecology and Society,* p. 148; Dobson, *Green Political Thought,* p. 166.
[468] Porritt, *Seeing Green*, p. 44.
[469] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, pp. 166-8, Garner, *Environmental Political Thought*, pp. 139-140.
[470] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 167.
[471] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 2001.

However, in spite of such problems, several theorists have attempted to make socialism and environmentalism converge into eco-socialism (or eco-Marxism, in some cases) by focusing on the common ground between the two ideologies.[472] With regards to political economy, the green attack on industrialism has been considered sympathetic to the socialist critique of capitalism: "it is not necessary to adopt a Marxist perspective in order to acknowledge the many ways in which the profit motive and the dynamics of capital accumulation have contributed to our current environmental ills."[473] Thus, eco-socialists argue that capitalist dynamics and relations of production are inherently anti-ecological, whereas a socialist economy deprived of profit interests will be more sensible to ecological limits.[474]

Furthermore, environmental problems hit disproportionately the poor and environmental quality should be regarded as a social good. Hence, concern for redistribution, equality, and social justice is congruent with ecologism. A socialist society would also remedy to the inequal power relations that some greens, for instance eco-anarchists, believe to be the cause of environmental degradation.[475] Porritt observes:

> the poor have little time or inclination to worry about global environmental trends, and yet in many ways they are more affected by the ecological crisis than the affluent who can just drive away from it. Many Third World people are forced by circumstance to destroy the very resources on which they depend ... those who are working for a better environment must simultaneously devote themselves to working for social justice. There is not only the moral imperative that compels us to seek ways of sharing the world's wealth more effectively; there is the ecological imperative to remind us that the protection of the Earth's natural systems is something we all depend on.[476]

Additionally, socialism, both in its democratic and radical forms, implies a key role for the state, providing a framework for the establishment and the organization of the sustainable society. Indeed, it is the state that should bring about social change and enact the necessary ecological measure, hence establishing the sustainable society. However, some eco-socialists, Andre Gorz for example, have taken another perspective and turned to the theories of utopian socialists such as William Morris and Charles Fourier to justify from a socialist perspective the green vision of decentralized, self-sufficient communities.[477]

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[472] Pepper, *Eco-Socialism.*
[473] Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory,* pp. 76-7.
[474] Martell, *Ecology and Society* p. 150; Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, pp. 172-3.
[475] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* p. 268; Pepper, *Eco-Socialism*, p. 208.
[476] Porritt, *Seeing Green*, p. 98.
[477] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, p. 178; Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* pp. 272-277.

3.3.6 Feminism

Some scholars draw a parallel between green political thought and feminism on the grounds that both have introduced new dimensions into the political realm, respectively the non-human and gender. [478] Val Plumwood states that "Feminist thought and environmental thought, feminist and ecological movements, have both emerged in recent times to challenge dominant worldviews and to acknowledge major aspects of the world that have been ignored, excluded or denied."[479] Additionally, both feminism and environmentalism can be regarded as "thin" cross-cutting ideologies, which offer an interpretative framework but do not conjure up precise socio-political arrangements. In this regard, it could be argued that both patriarchy and industrialism are super-ideologies.[480]

Accordingly, the compatibility between ecologism and feminism has led to the development of ecofeminism, which looks at environmental problems through a feminist perspective. Ecofeminism identifies in patriarchy and androcentrism the causes of the environmental crisis and, akin to social ecology, emphasizes the similarities between hierarchical domination between humans and by humans over nature, linking the oppression suffered by women to the control imposed by patriarchal society over nature. Moreover, ecofeminists argue that "theories and concepts occupying the central ground in environmental theory have evolved without the input of women, or in ways hostile to or suppressive of their lives and agency",[481] thus a feminist insight may provide a better foundation to green political theory.

The connection between gendered oppression, of women in particular, and nature has been grounded on several arguments, leading to a variety of positions within ecofeminism.[482] There are essentialist approaches that justify feminine empathy with the natural world turning either to biological factors or to socially-constructed roles which brought a shared historical cultural experience of domination. Other perspectives look instead at capitalist power structures of control, arguing that it is the social role of women that brings them closer to nature: the lack of value placed upon nature despite its crucial role reflects the lack of value placed on women. Regardless of internal ideological conflicts, generally speaking ecofeminism stresses the need to incorporate gender issues within green theory, offering an egalitarian view of the sustainable society, its practices, and its institutions.

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[478] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*; Martell, *Ecology and Society*.

[479] Plumwood, "Feminism" in *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*, edited by Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 51.

[480] Porritt, *Seeing Green*.

[481] Plumwood, "Feminism", p. 52.

[482] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* pp. 73-4; Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment* pp. 62-3; Garner, *Environmental Political Thought,* pp. 145-7; Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* pp. 72-93.

Chapter 4
Environmentalism and party politics

4.1 The Green parties

The previous chapter has engaged with the key political ideas that characterize green political thought, highlighting the considerable disagreements and manifold tensions that run within environmentalism. One key characteristic of green political thought is the belief that society needs to transition to sustainability, but there is a large variety of ideas about what the sustainable society should be and how it ought to be achieved. A majoritarian view, eschewing authoritarian solutions, is to believe that awareness of the ecological crisis and its severity will gradually develop a public environmental consciousness and eventually lead to a transformation of society and the achievement of sustainability.[483] Environmentalism thus should seek a cultural transformation, a change in attitudes and behaviours which will restructure social and economic activities. This idea of bottom-up transition to sustainability which takes place in both the private and public sphere has been labelled by some green theorists as "ecological citizenship", "the duty of citizens to take responsibility for their actions and choices – the obligation to 'do one's bit' in the collective enterprise of achieving sustainability."[484]

However, how the ecological citizenship should form is itself subject to debate. Some environmentalists argue that it needs to rise spontaneously in civil society, outside of conventional political institutions, which are themselves to be reformed.[485] Others instead believe that change needs to be "nurtured at the level of the (reformed) state, through the deliberative processes engendered by democratisation, decentralisation and egalitarianism, but its effect would spill over from the political sphere into the realms of economic and social activity."[486] This dilemma regarding the role of legislative institutions and conventional forms of politics runs through environmentalism and effectively divides practical green politics. Indeed, translating this theoretical confusion into practical terms, environmentalists have turned to different strategies to achieve their goals.

There are environmental groups that act outside of parliamentary politics and seek direct action, Green parties that work within established institutions, ecologists who pursue individual lifestyle politics, and even some greens who turned to terrorism and violence (Earth First! being the most striking example). As a consequence of this variety, also in light of the great diversity of environmental position, it is reasonable to ask whether a single, clearly identifiable environmental

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[483] Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, pp. 134-5.
[484] Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics,* p. 231.
[485] Garner, *Environmental Political Thought*, p. 152.
[486] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* 2007 p. 65.

movement effectively exists. Indeed, it has been argued that there is no such a thing as a unified, harmonious movement that pursues the same ends through the same means; rather there are a variety of groups and organizations inspired by green thought and committed to environmental protection, which however have a range of aims and interests and employ different strategies.[487] Although denying the existence of an environmental movement is a rather extreme and questionable take, it is clear that the environmental galaxy include a wide number of actors.

Green parties are one of the many components of the environmental movement, yet they are possibly the most visible form of environmentalism and in fact they have come to identify environmentalism as a political movement.[488] Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 3, environmental political thought is broad and ridden with disagreement, Green parties represent just a particular interpretation of it, which however has often been employed to describe the whole of environmentalism. Yet, Green parties themselves are affected by the multitude of environmental position and have accordingly undergone an evolution over their history, shifting from radical positions towards a more reformist approach.

4.1.1 Explanations for the rise of Green parties

Chapter 1 briefly touched on the birth of Green parties, yet it is useful to remind that the world first Green parties were established in 1972, namely in Tasmania (Australia) and New Zealand. Switzerland elected the world first Green member of a national assembly in 1979, even if as part of a coalition, while the first Green parties to win representation were the Belgian Flemish and French Greens in 1981. By the mid-1980s, most of Western Europe had a national Green party. Since then, Greens have become an established presence in many parliaments, especially in Europe. Indeed, Green parties have become a stable electoral force in numerous countries, regularly contesting elections and being consistently represented in many national parliamentary assemblies, sub-national chambers, and in the European Parliament.

Moreover, Greens have often joined national coalition governments, the Finnish Green League being the first in 1995, and have held ministerial positions in several countries (including Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, and Italy). Even if Green parties' presence and success is higher in Europe, they are nonetheless present in countries all over the world, also outside of Western states and the global North. For instance, the Colombian greens' candidate came second in the 2010 presidential elections, while environmentalist Marina Silva came third in the Brazilian presidential elections of 2010 and 2014.

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[487] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment* p. 84.
[488] Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties.*

Amongst Green parties, the German Greens, Die Grünen, are widely regarded to be the most influential because of their electoral success, their history, and their ability to influence the national political scenario. Established in 1980 as an alliance of several environmentalist groups, they entered the federal Bundestag in 1983 with 5.6 percent of the national vote and since then have been a constant presence in German politics, achieving a record high of 10.7 percent of the vote in the 2009 national elections and 20.5 percent of votes cast in the 2019 European Parliament elections. Between 1998 and 2005 they have been part of a national governing coalition with the Social Democratic Party, while at regional level they are regularly partners in governing coalitions ever since the 1980s, being the senior coalition partner in the Baden-Württemberg state since 2011.

Green parties provide evidence of environmentalism's penetration and resonance in society and its appeal as political theory, but in a more general sense it has been suggested that their rise represents a macro-level change in societal values and in politics, besides being a sign of an increased and more widespread awareness for environmental problems. Indeed, scholars have linked the origin of green parties to socio-economic transformations in industrialized countries that took place since the 1960s and gradually led to major changes in the political sphere, challenging the traditional left-right cleavage and the relative established party system by introducing new issues and conflict lines that cut across conventional political boundaries, a process that has been labelled "new politics".[489]

Considering Green parties as a form of "new politics" that challenges traditional parties, several sociological, economic, and cultural arguments have been advanced to explain how concern for the environment rose in the first place and then found political expression. First, Green parties have been linked to changes in the structure of society.[490] In advanced capitalist countries, the contraction of the manufacturing sector and the expansion of the service sector has caused deep changes in the economic and occupational structure of society, reducing the blue-collar working class while enlarging the white-collar class. Additionally, the welfare state and improvements in literacy and standards of living have increased social mobility and blurred the traditional class divisions. This has also led to the emergence of a new middle class, educated, economically secure, not bound to traditional class identities or political allegiances.

Second, a cultural explanation has been advanced: changes in value have occurred, moving from material interests such as economic growth, unemployment, public order, and national security to

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[489] O'Neill, "Political Parties and the "meaning of greening" in European politics" in *Comparative Environmental Politics,* edited by Paul Steinberg and Stacy VanDeveer (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2012); Carter, *The Politics of the Environment.*
[490] Martell, *Ecology and Society* pp. 128-131.

post-material values such as political rights, identity, individual development, and quality of life.[491] The post-materialist argument, developed by Ronald Inglehart, says that in developed, post-industrial societies material issues have been increasingly satisfied by rising standards of living, making most of society affluent enough to give economic well-being for granted. Consequently, people have turned attention away from materialist and acquisitive needs, focusing instead on other kinds of needs. Inglehart has attempted to empirically validate this hypothesis through his World Values Survey, which has effectively evidenced an increased appreciation for post-materialist values over time.

Third, a political explanation has been provided, based on the perceived failure of traditional political institutions to mediate and incorporate the interests of parts of society. This led to the emergence of social movements that work outside such institutions and resort to collective action to foster their ends. In particular, since the 1960s a new kind of social movement arose, including the women's rights, civil rights, pacifist, anti-nuclear, and environmental groups. New social movements differ from old ones, such as labour movement or workers' unions, in a range of elements: they are located in the civil society rather than in politics, they aim at redefining culture and institutions instead of seeking legislative change through the state, are participatory and internally unstructured, and pursue direct action instead of change through conventional politics.[492]

Taken separately, each of these explanations has some weaknesses. For instance, regarding the new middle class hypothesis, one problem is that the environment is actually a shared interest, it may not be class-driven.[493] In truth, it is usually the poorest groups who suffer the most direct and worse consequences of environmental problems, not the affluent ones. Moreover, there are actors who legitimately perceive green demands, especially those more radical, as threatening their interests, thus it may be difficult to explain the rise of Green parties looking exclusively at class-based economic interest.

Concerning the cultural explanation, Inglehart's theory has been criticized, for instance material scarcity may be perceived rather than limited to basic needs, hence greater affluence may actually result in the creation of new material needs and an increased consumerism, not necessarily in a transfer to non-material interests. Moreover, from a methodological and comparative perspective, the rise of post-materialist values shown by the World Values Survey divided by country seem to be unrelated from the local electoral performances of Green parties.[494] Furthermore, one point of crucial importance is that the environment is not necessarily a postmaterialist value, on the contrary it poses

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[491] Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1977).

[492] Martell, *Ecology and Society* p. 111.

[493] Matell, *Ecology and Society* p. 130.

[494] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* pp. 97-9.

very concrete problems. Finally, with regards to the political explanation, although it is true that in some countries such as Austria, Germany, and France the formation of Green parties can be traced to the alliance between pacifist, leftist, anti-nuclear, and environmentalist social movements, but this is not the case for every Green party, for instance in the UK concern was predominantly for ecological issues.

However, if no single argument can explain adequately the development of Green parties, joined together they provide a macro-level contextual and historical explanation for the origin of Green parties and their path to become an established part of the political scene. Indeed, the formation of a particular social, economic, and cultural context conducive to the development of post-material values sparked environmental concern. The exclusion of the environment from the political sphere led to the development of environmental social movements, which signalled the politicization of the environment and provided the conditions for the formation of Green parties.

Several studies have observed that Green voters are usually young and well educated. In particular, they have been described as "young, highly educated, work as social-cultural specialists or are students, are predominantly urban, and less attached to Christian churches",[495] while compared to other electorates they are "younger, more educated, less religious and more urban; and women are still overrepresented."[496] Higher education, besides the indirect effect of enabling people to comprehend complex ecological issues, may also have a direct effect through the integration of environmental issues into school curriculum, ensuring that younger generations have a higher level of awareness about environmental problems. The hypothesis that younger people may be more sensible to environmental issues could be supported by the relevance that initiatives such as the Fridays for Future and the Extinction Rebellion movement, inspired by Greta Thunberg, which have obtained worldwide success and participation.

Could there be some fragility in the green constituency? For instance, an ageing population may be unfavourable to parties that rely on younger age groups. This perhaps could be the case especially if Green parties are perceived as single-issue parties. Maybe as a consequence of this concern, Green parties have minimized their radical claims over times and adopted more moderate stances, as it will be detailed later, in the attempt to appeal to a wider range of social groups. In particular, the adoption of positions closer to those of mainstream social-democratic parties may lead in the direction of attiring support from their traditional voters.

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[495] Dolezal, Exploring the Stabilization of a Political Force: The Social and Attitudinal Basis of Green Parties in the Age of Globalization", *West European Politics*, vol.33 no.3 (2010), p. 534.
[496] Close and Delwitt, "Green parties and elections" in *Green Parties in Europe,* edited by Emilie Van Haute (London, Routledge, 2016) p. 260.

Moreover, it has also been noticed that Green parties have performed comparatively better in European parliament elections than in national elections, perhaps because "the green message may be particularly apposite for elections to a supranational forum because environmental problems are widely regarded as requiring international solutions."[497] In other words, the primacy of the global dimension over the national one whit regards to the ecological crisis may cause constituents to consider environmentalism as a key factor only in international settings and only secondary in national elections.

4.1.2 Green parties principles

It is generally acknowledged that Greens form their own party family alongside, for instance, conservative, social democratic, and liberal parties.[498] In fact, Green parties, besides sharing a common party name (Green), they often have similar historical origins, usually rising as aggregations of environmental, pacifist, and anti-nuclear social movements. Additionally, they have common aims and principles that have allowed the formation of transnational links, such as the Global Greens network, that counts 91 affiliate parties, or the European Green Party, with 41 members.

It is thus possible to speak about Green policies and positions since Green parties present a common shared ground, which is obviously provided by green ideology. In fact, Green parties are not single-issue parties, focused just on environmental issues, on the contrary they provide a comprehensive view of the sustainable society. However, Green parties' ideological ground is not exclusively green, also in light of the possibilities for hybridization that green political thought itself allows, but it is heavily influenced by other political traditions. As Connelly and Smith note, Green parties "can perhaps best be understood as developing from a fluid, critical reflection on traditional areas of political thought, particularly areas of socialist, anarchist and feminist thinking, with ecological concerns as a necessary, but not complete, part of that reflection."[499]

It has been mentioned that, mainly thanks to their success, the German Greens have provided the standard model for Green parties. As a matter of fact, the four pillars that were established by the foundational congress of the Grünen to guide the action of the party have come to define the whole of Green politics, being usually set as the archetypical Green party's agenda. They are:

- Ecology: environmental protection, the critique of industrialism, and sustainability are clearly at the core of Green parties' concern. Green politics are first and foremost politics of the environment, aimed at implementing the policies and measure believed to be necessary to

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[497] Carter, *The Politics of the Environment,* p. 107.

[498] Van Haute, *Green Parties in Europe* (London, Routledge, 2016); Carter, "Greening the mainstream: party politics and the environment", *Environmental Politics*, vol.22 no.1 (2013).

[499] Connelly and Smith, *Politics and the Environment* p. 65.

safeguard the natural environment. However, as detailed in Chapter 3, it is debatable whether ecology alone is sufficient to develop a complete political position. Furthermore, focusing exclusively on the environment could make Green parties appear as single-issue parties. Therefore, other principles are included within Greens' core tenets.

- Social justice: environmental protection should not come at the expenses of equality, on the contrary sustainability requires an equitable distribution of social and natural resources that can guarantee all citizens, and more in general all human beings, the means to meet their basic needs and pursue their individual development. Hence, to Greens environmental justice is deeply connected to social justice: fighting poverty is not just an ethical imperative, it stems from ecological considerations as well. Moreover, the notion of ecological citizenship within a sustainable society must include all members of society without any discrimination, it follows that equal rights too are a Green principle.

- Grassroots democracy: the egalitarian and emancipatory scope of Green parties should pass through greater participation. Thus, Greens welcome participatory models of democracy or even direct democracy, in which all citizens have the right and the possibility to take part in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. This claim entails also calls for multi-level systems of governance that devolve power from central governments to local communities.

- Non-violence: the belief in the possibility for a bottom-up transformation of society leads to the commitment to a non-violent activity. This principle holds also at international level, promoting peace and cooperation to foster the harmonious development of the whole of humanity towards sustainability.

These four pillars are shared by all Green parties and define their understanding of environmental political theory. As an example, the Global Greens Charter includes all of them and also adds sustainability, understood in its three-dimensional meaning, and respect for diversity.[500]

It is clear that Green parties take on green political thought is quite specific and heavily influenced by socialist and anarchist principles, while authoritarian and non-egalitarian solutions are outrightly rejected. Accordingly, Greens are usually characterized as progressive and left-libertarian, if not clearly leftist, despite Greens own claims to be "neither left nor right". However, despite what may be implied from Green pillars, green political thought does not preclude the possibility for right-wing environmental parties. For instance, Latvian Greens support entrepreneurship and private property, foster national identity, and have been governing partners of conservative parties.[501] Yet, for their

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[500] Global Greens, *Charter of the Global Greens* (2017).
[501] Van Haute, *Green Parties in Europe*, p. 320.

diversity with respect to conventional Greens, some scholars exclude them from the Green category.[502]

4.1.3 Internal tensions in Green parties and transformation

Green parties are fairly recent if compared to some traditional parties they compete with and are motivated by a clear set of principles, yet they have an history of internal conflict and struggle that has led to considerable changes in agendas, structures, and strategies over time. Indeed, ideological tensions cut across most Green parties ever since their foundations and escalated between the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, what has been referred to as the conflict between fundamentalists and realists, in short respectively *fundis* and *realos*. The fundi-realo controversy took place in several European Green parties, including the British Green Party and the French Les Verts, but it was particularly fierce and relevant within the German Grünen, an element that has contributed to the setting of the German party as the archetypal Green party.[503]

The fundi-realo conflict, as the name suggests, consisted in a struggle between opposite factions for the control of the party that reflected a dispute over the role of Green parties in achieving the change needed for the transition to sustainability. On the one hand, fundamentalists embraced "deep green" positions, often grounded on ecocentric ethics and radical assumptions about industrial society, believing in the need for a fundamental change in socio-economic systems. Such radical critique extended to the political-institutional structure too, regarding the state as an agent of capitalism and industrialism and emphasizing the need for a spontaneous change in society that could be expressed through grassroot democratic participation, being sceptic about the possibility of achieving change through parliamentary means. Consequently, fundis rejected the conventional party organizational structure, based on hierarchical and centralized professional leadership, seeking instead an alternative organization based on grassroot democratic principles and direct participation of activists, more akin to a new social movement than to conventional parties. In accordance with these principles, the organizational structure of Die Grünen was designed to prevent oligarchical and bureaucratic tendencies, developing a model that the leading German Green activist Petra Kelly defined "anti-party party".

The anti-party party model required party officers to be elected among members and unpaid, with no possibility of re-election to the same position. Party posts were held incompatible with public offices. Members of the parliament were required to rotate, resigning halfway through their term to let unelected candidates step in. Furthermore, MPs had to donate part of their salary to environmental

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[502] Carter, "Greening the mainstream: party politics and the environment", p. 85.
[503] Doherty, "The fundi-realo controversy: An analysis of four European green parties".

causes and were bound to vote according to instructions of the party, the "imperative mandate" principle. To prevent personalization and focus on charismatic individuals, there was no party leader, instead a collective leadership and three elected speakers shared control of the party. All meetings were open to both members and non-members, while lists were composed with equal male and female representation.[504]

Moreover, fundis refused the possibility of working together with established parties, rejecting coalitions and pursuing instead a purist confrontational strategy. In fact, collaboration involves compromise, which may lead to abandon fundamental principles in favour of political gains or cabinet positions. Thus, fundis sought to commit the party to a perpetual opposition to parliamentary politics from within the system, refusing to work according to its rules. This stance in practice prevented Greens to achieve any substantial policy outcome, but it was aimed at developing a participatory political culture and boost environmental awareness, believing that in the long term this would have eventually led to a thorough rethinking of society in favour of a sustainable model.

On the other hand, realists embraced a more moderate, reformist stance, believing in the effectiveness of action through the parliamentary system. Consequently, they argued that some basic principles can be altered in order to become an effective political force, pursuing a strategy of compromise aimed at achieving effective returns in terms of policy change. This involved the willingness to build coalitions with other parties, in particular the German Social Democratic Party, in exchange for executive government offices. In short, realos believed that change can be achieved through public policy, not just by transformation of individual consciousness.

Starting from the mid-1980s, the fundi position, until then majoritarian within the party, started to be subject to contestation by the realos, led by the charismatic Joschka Fischer. Rudolf Bahro, eminent green theorists and one of the leading exponents of the fundi current, left the party in 1985. That same year, the Greens entered a regional coalition government with the SPD. The 1990 federal elections debacle of the Grünen led to a complete shift in the party's balance of power, which enabled the realos to win control of the party and impose their line, carrying out organizational and strategic reforms that effectively ended the anti-party party system. Indeed, the Greens entered a federal coalition government in 1998 obtaining three cabinet posts, including Joschka Fischer being appointed minister of foreign affairs. In 2002, the original four pillars program was amended, explicitly stating the abandonment of the anti-party party system.

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[504] Burchell, *The Evolution of Green Politics: Development and Change Within European Green Parties* (London, Earthscan, 2002).

Other Green parties underwent similar internal conflicts as the German Greens did, turning from protest parties that rejected cooperation and criticized established institutions into parties that represent an alternative within the system, setting aside radical claims and pursuing instead plans of gradual social reform, embracing ecological modernization and strong sustainability in place of anti-capitalist and anti-growth positions. This pragmatic turn has allowed Greens to enter into government at a national level in the late 1990s in Belgium, Finland, France, and Italy, besides Germany. However, many Green parties still retain some characteristics typic of their "amateur-activist party" early stage, such as collective leadership. The realist turn has also meant changes to the Green agenda, downplaying the importance of some of the original core Green themes in favour of arguments typical of social-democratic and left-wing parties, such as expansion of the welfare state and education.[505] For instance, emphasis on non-violence was greatly reduced by the German Greens, who voted in favour of NATO interventions in Kosovo and Afghanistan during their period in government. Similarly, calls for decentralization have been reduced too.

4.2 Established parties and environmentalism

Even if not all Green parties have managed to become successful political forces, often remaining confined to the status of minor actors in their national political landscapes, overall the Green movement has established itself as a respectable and influential political force. Most importantly, environmentalism, and specifically Green parties within the context of party politics, has set the environment as a subject of political competition. It may be argued that the extent to which environmentalism has contributed to the emergence of this new political cleavage and how much instead is attributable to an actual worsening of environmental hazards, leading to tangible effects on people's quality of life and thus the development of an interest in environmental protection, is debatable. Nonetheless, it is usually acknowledged that the green movement, also through the action of Green parties, has improved environmental awareness within the public opinion and brought issues of ecology, sustainability, and sustainable development into the political sphere, turning them into matters of political conflict.

Today, all political ideologies and parties have to face the challenge of dealing with environmental issues and produce environmental policy measures. In this regard, it has been mentioned earlier how environmental concern can be seen as part of the "new politics", a new line of conflict that cuts across conventional left-right alignments. This has led some scholars to argue that the environmental problem has opened a whole new dimension of political confrontation, separated from the

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[505] Carter, "Greening the mainstream: party politics and the environment", p. 85.

conventional left-right cleavages.[506] O'Riordan for instance has suggested that confrontation about the environment runs over a technocentric-ecocentric divide, and not over traditional lines of political conflict.[507] Chapter 3 has shown how traditional political ideologies present potential incompatibilities with environmental policies and even more so with some radical green understandings of the necessary measures. For instance, calling into question the desirability of economic growth and imposing restrictions on individual lifestyles may be unacceptable for many mainstream parties, both on the left and on the right. Accordingly, mainstream parties have often struggled to deal with the environmental challenge.

Others instead hold that the environmental cleavage has been incorporated within the left-right dimension as the party system has adapted to ecological demands. It is argued that the environment has undergone a process of party politicisation, that is to say that it has climbed the political agenda and become a subject of competition between parties, which have developed their own environmental programs. In this perspective, Green parties are usually placed on the left and progressive environmental agendas that prioritize environmental protection even at the cost of economic well-being are considered to be left-leaning, compared to a more lukewarm support if not even open hostility to environmental policies from the right.[508]

Green parties have posed a challenge to the political system as a whole, forcing it to face the ecological crisis. Indeed, although Green parties have been confined to the status of minor political actors in many countries and their policy impact when in government has been limited, they have exerted a great influence over the political debate, requiring other parties to confront with environmental concerns. However, the response of non-Green parties to the environmental challenge has been varied. Neil Carter distinguishes between three possible approaches:[509]

- a dismissive strategy: to ignore environmental issues, resisting attempts to turn it into a subject of competition. This is especially the case if environmental policies would challenge a party's existent position.
- an accommodative strategy: to move closer to ideas and rhetoric and include, at least partially, environmental protection within political programs. German Greens have referred to the appropriation of green ideas by other parties as "themenklau", stealing of ideas.

[506] Dalton, "Economics, environmentalism and party alignments: A note on partisan change in advanced industrial democracies", *European Journal of Political Research*, vol.48 no.2 (2009).
[507] O'Riordan, *Environmentalism.*
[508] Carter, "Greening the mainstream: party politics and the environment".
[509] Carter, "Greening the mainstream: party politics and the environment", p. 76.

- an adversarial strategy: to negate the significance of environmental concern, even opposing environmental protection policies. In some extreme cases, this approach entails negating the very existence of an ecological crisis.

An important issue is whether the environment should be considered as a valence issue or a positional partisan issue. A valence issue is a topic over which there is a broad consensus among the electorate over the desired policy outcome. Positional issues instead allow the existence of alternative views, thus determining opposing positions. It has been argued that the environment ought to be a valence issue, as it is evident that everybody is in favour of better environmental quality. Political competition over a valence issue is thus focused on means rather than outcomes and over the salience attributed to such issue, that is to say its perceived importance. In this regard, Green parties have clearly ownership over the environmental issue, presenting it as their foremost concern.

However, many observers note that, although a majority of the public seems to be supportive of environmental protection policies and concerned with environmental quality, in general the environment is not held amongst the most important issues, in other words it has low salience for voters. Hence, non-Green political parties have little interest in prioritizing it. Exceptions may be represented by left-wing parties subject to direct competition from electorally relevant Green parties, or countries in which the environment is held in great regard, providing incentives to non-Green parties to embrace ecological arguments to defuse the Green electoral threat.[510]

However, it has been suggested also that the environment is not necessarily a valence issue and may actually be a positional issue: although there is consensus over the desired outcome, there is strong disagreement over the measures that should be implemented. In fact, themes such as nuclear energy, wind turbines, green taxes such as the carbon, plastic, or fuel taxes, closure of polluting industries, and many other environmental policies are highly divisive. Furthermore, environmental concern is often perceived as an issue that belongs to the left, leading to polarization of voters' opinion about the environment.[511] This explains also why an adversarial strategy, which at a first glance would seem unattractive given that nobody would welcome a worsening of environmental quality, is feasible: parts of the electorate rank other interests above the environment.

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[510] Facchini et al. "Who cares about the environment? An empirical analysis of the evolution of political parties' environmental concern in European countries", *Land Use Policy* 64 (2017); Spoon et al. "Going green: Explaining issue competition on the environment", *European Journal of Political Research*, vol.53 no.2 (2014).

[511] Gemensis et al. *The politics of anti-environmentalism: positional issue framing by the European radical right*; Farstad, "What explains variation in parties' climate change salience?", *Party Politics*, vol.24 no.2 (2017); Dalton, "Economics, environmentalism and party alignments".

Broadly speaking, several studies have evidenced an increasing use of environmentalist rhetoric by non-Green parties.[512] In particular, sustainability and sustainable development have become common terms in the political debate.[513] Indeed, sustainable development, thanks to its openness as a concept, and ecological modernization, thanks to its integration of economic growth and environmental protection, have been embraced by a variety of political parties of different ideological background. Being more moderate and reformist in comparison to radical ecocentric green claims, these forms of environmentalism have proved to be attractive to mainstream parties and compatible with their programs, providing solid arguments for an accommodative strategy. Thus, some scholars have drawn a parallel between early socialist parties and Green parties: the demands for radical structural changes advanced by the Greens have prompted conventional parties to pursue moderate reforms in the attempt to defuse environmental demands for total transformation.[514] Accordingly, in recent years there have been calls by non-Green parties and leaders to amend constitutions or national laws to explicitly include environmental themes such as sustainable development or reductions in polluting emissions.

Analysis of political manifestos have shown that in Europe social-democratic and left-wing parties have always taken more positive stances towards environmental protection compared to conservative, Christian-democratic, and right-wing parties, but the difference between the two sides is little and none has placed great salience on the environment.[515] In particular, left-wing parties have been more keen to develop environmental programmes when they face strong competition in the progressive political area by Green parties, such as in Germany, to prevent Greens having full ownership over the environmental issue.[516] However, there has been a strong anti-environmental reaction by some right-wing parties, which have often adopted a sceptical stance towards climate change, questioning its very existence or the human role in its formation, opposing international environmental agreements such as the Kyoto or Paris agreements, and refusing environmental protection policies harmful to consumers and the economy.[517] Yet, this does not imply that right-wing parties are all anti-ecological. On the contrary, the previous chapter has highlighted how green thought is congruent with conservative or illiberal positions. Accordingly, many rightist parties have embraced environmental

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[512] Fleig and Tosun, "Political Parties' Rhetoric Signaling of Sustainable Development", *Sustainable Development*, vol.25 no.5 (2017); Carter, "Greening the mainstream: party politics and the environment"; Facchini et al. "Who cares about the environment?".

[513] Fleig and Tosun, "Political Parties' Rhetoric Signaling of Sustainable Development".

[514] Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth,* p. 222.

[515] Farstad 2017 "What explains variation in parties' climate change salience?"; Carter, "Greening the mainstream: party politics and the environment".

[516] Spoon et al. "Going green: Explaining issue competition on the environment".

[517] Lockwood, "Right-wing populism and the climate change agenda: exploring the linkages", *Environmental Politics*, vol.27 no. 4 (2018); Fortchner, *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication* (London and New York, NY, Routledge, 2020); Schaller and Carius, *Convenient Truths: Mapping Climate Agendas of Right-Wing Populist Parties in Europe* (Berlin, Adelphi, 2019).

positions. As an example, when David Cameron became leader of the British Conservative party he set environmental protection and fight to climate change among the party's top priorities, coining the slogan "vote blue, go green".[518]

4.2.1 The case of the Movimento 5 Stelle

A particular case is that of the Italian populist party Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S) founded in 2009 by the comedian Beppe Grillo and the entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio, which presents some striking similarities with Green parties, albeit not being usually characterized as such. Indeed, ecology is one of the foundational concerns for the party, as it evident by looking at the five stars of the Movement's name, which are water, the environment, sustainable transports, Internet access, and sustainable development. Accordingly, the Movement shares some typical green positions, such as criticism of economic growth and support for steady-state economics or degrowth, hostility to the construction of new infrastructures (such as the planned Italy-France high-speed rail), promotion of public transport and renewable energy, focus on quality of life and demands for social justice, including environmental justice, as evidenced for example by the support to public access to water.

Furthermore, the Movement shares similarities with the anti-party party model, being born as a protest party against the establishment, challenging traditional parties, professional politics, and representative democracy. The movement claims to be beyond conventional left-right classifications and refuses to be labelled as political party. It criticizes the traditional model of liberal democracy and promotes instead direct and deliberative democracy, advocating citizens' involvement in key political decisions through voting on the Internet. For instance, the Movement has held online consultations open to its members to pick candidates and to approve or reject significative decisions such as legislative proposals, political alliances, and participation to government. Additionally, it has campaigned for the introduction of an imperative mandate for MPs, set a maximum of two terms in office for its elected members, and required parliamentarians to forego part of their salary.

Some observers have pointed out how the Movement seems to be an expression of the same new politics that caused the emergence of Green parties,[519] providing responses to post-materialist values that had climbed the preferences of Italian electors but had not been adequately represented or

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[518] Carter, "Vote Blue, Go Green? Cameron's Conservatives and the Environment", *Political Quarterly*, vol.80 No.2 (2009).

[519] Biorcio, "The reasons for the success and transformations of the 5 Star Movement", *Contemporary Italian Politics*, vol.6 no.1 (2014); Pirro, "The polyvalent populism of the 5 Star Movement", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol.26 no.4 (2018).

answered by conventional parties.[520] In this sense, the Five Star Movement follows the steps of early Green parties, which not only advocated environmental policies but involved also radical criticism towards the established political system. Therefore, the Movement may be understood as the symptom of a high salience attributed to environmental issues by Italian voters that the party system failed to grasp.[521]

Similarly to what happened to Green parties, the Five Star Movement too has undergone significant organizational and ideological changes once inside political institutions. Following the success in the 2013 parliamentary elections, the Movement underwent an internal organizational restructuring and a body of five MPs was appointed to lead the party, followed in 2017 by the choice of a single political leader. While initially the Movement rejected any alliance with conventional parties, after the 2018 elections, in which it became the largest political force, it held talks with both the centre-left and the centre-right, eventually forming a coalition first with the right-wing League from 2018 to 2019, and then with the centre-left. Moreover, in office the Movement has had to change its stance on a number of issues, including its original opposition to infrastructural investments, including the TAP pipeline and the TAV rail link, and industrial pollution in the former Ilva steelworks in Taranto.

However, despite its strong environmental concern, the Five Star Movement is not properly a Green party, for instance it does not belong to the Green European Parliament group. Instead, it eludes attempts to categorization and has thus been labelled "eclectic"[522] or "polyvalent"[523] populism because of its ideological discordance, which merges ecologism, leftist social and economic policies, and rightist positions on other themes. Nonetheless, its experience shows how environmental issues may be placed at the top of the agenda also by non-Green parties.

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[520] Conti and Memoli, "The Emergence of a New Party in the Italian Party System: Rise and Fortunes of the Five Star Movement", *West European Politics*, vol.38 no.3 (2015); Mosca and Tronconi, "Beyond left and right: the eclectic populism of the Five Star Movement", *West European Politics*, vol.4 no.6 (2019).
[521] Conti and Memoli, The Emergence of a New Party in the Italian Party System: Rise and Fortunes of the Five Star Movement".
[522] Mosca and Tronconi, "Beyond left and right: the eclectic populism of the Five Star Movement".
[523] Pirro, "The polyvalent populism of the 5 Star Movement".

Conclusion

This thesis had the objective of providing an answer to a number of questions, namely: does environmental political thought exist in the first place? What are its characteristics? What is its history and its background? What impact has caused on politics? Has it inspired political movements or parties? Although it has been possible to draw some conclusions through an analysis of the primary sources that inspire and compose environmental thought and the academic literature on those subjects, it has also been repeatedly highlighted how there is wide disagreement between scholars regarding all these issues.

First of all, even though there is a general consensus over considering environmentalism a political ideology on its own right, this is not always the case, as the capacity of ecology to provide ground to a comprehensive worldview is questionable. Moreover, there is no agreement about the history of environmentalism and its origins, and a variety of potential historical sources of inspiration have been drawn. Above all, providing an exact definition of environmental thought and its characteristics is troublesome, given that there is a large number of opinions on the matter. This leads to a variety of possible conclusions over ecologism influence over the political system and its compatibility with other schools of political thought.

A popular interpretative framework often employed in the analysis of environmentalism is to divide it into a neat dichotomy, establishing a dualism between clearly distinguishable alternative approaches to environmental issues. Yet, it is unclear whether both perspectives should be considered part of environmentalism or not, as scholars diverge on the issue. The problem is even more intense with regards to environmental ethics and sustainability, areas in which a multitude of perspectives and definitions exist. Accordingly, some scholars have rejected binary interpretative frameworks and attempted to develop extensive typologies of environmental positions, be it over environmental ethics, sustainability, sustainable development, or environmental political thought in general. However, such proliferation of definitions and categories often adds to the terminological and conceptual confusion that surrounds the study of environmentalism.

In particular, a key research problem was to assess whether environmentalism is a well-defined, clearly delimited political ideology or not. In this regard, a valuable instrument is the approach to the morphology of ideologies proposed by Freeden. Indeed, by considering environmentalism as a thin ideology it is possible to delineate some broad core principles shared by the whole of the movement without imposing rigid constraints that limit possible environmental positions. Following such an approach, not only environmentalism can be understood as a large yet coherent spectrum of positions, at times very different, but it can also be merged with other ideological traditions. Turning to party

politics, this translates into an understanding of Green parties' ideology as just a particular take on environmentalism, acknowledging the fact that non-Green parties can present environmental ideas within their own agendas as well.

This conclusion inevitably clashes with part of the academic literature on the subject, for instance the relevant contributions to the debate offered by Eckersley and Dobson, but it is consistent with other perspectives, such as Vincent's typology or Dryzek's discourse analysis. One potential drawback of interpreting environmentalism as a broad range of positions may be its looseness as interpretative framework. That is to say that by pointing at just a few basic elements as characteristic of green ideology it would be possible to include within such definition positions and perspectives that are incompatible. For instance, a weak understanding of sustainability is clearly alternative to a strong one, so are anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Such fundamental divergences in theory and practical outcome may at first seem to be completely at odds and unrelated to each other, yet this thesis has attempted to show how they actually share a common history, background, and origin, and are different outcomes of the same intellectual process, stemming from a fundamental concern for the well-being of nature.

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