One of the most urgent intellectual tasks of our time is to understand the implications of ecology for social and political theory. Given that environmental degradation is increasingly undermining the biological (and in some ways the psychological) basis of human social life, it is evident that no social theory can now proceed ignoring or abstracting from the natural conditions of its existence and reproduction. It is a fortiori the case that socialist theory and practice can ignore neither the relationship between ecological devastation and the deteriorating quality of human life, nor, more particularly, its incidence — how it hits hardest at those who already suffer the greatest economic exploitation. Now more than ever, the exploitation of nature goes hand in hand with the exploitation of humans.

These ineluctable facts of life (and death) have been appreciated for some time, but in much of the literature of social and political ecology more or less correct intuitions have not always been brought under adequate concepts, and resistance to ecological thinking has in consequence often been rendered too easy. Whereas those publications which first drew the attention of a wide public to the adverse environmental ‘side-effects’ of industrial production were based on well-researched evidence, the boom of non-scientific ecology works which followed in their wake, and accompanied the birth of the green movements, tended to jump too quickly from warnings of environmental crisis to political and philosophical conclusions, with the result that they ended up oscillating between catastrophism and utopianism.

It is not my purpose here either to criticise or to defend the whole spectrum of ‘green’ thinking, though it is high time (and time is pressing) that its proponents recognize that it does not suffice to proclaim its radical ‘newness’, or simply to state what they are ‘for’ and ‘against’, without subjecting the coherence of the whole to any test of logic or reality. The specific concern of this paper is to argue that if ‘ecological politics’ is to be taken seriously, its proponents, in turn, must take seriously the dominant alternatives (in particular, liberalism and Marxism) — to offer a determinate critique of what is opposed (which would also be to keep open the possibility of a self-reflexive learning process).

In order to show that ecological politics has at least a prima facie claim to be taken seriously, and to situate my argument, it may be useful to begin by referring to three basic lines of criticism directed against the introduction of ‘ecology’ into social and political thought. Firstly, that of ecological scientists who maintain that the extension of ecology into the social world is simply illegitimate. Secondly, the objection of those who, for economic, political or ideological reasons, seek to minimize the threat posed by industrial growth, and argue that the social world is immune to ecological constraints because for any ecological threat there is the possibility of a ‘technological fix’. Whilst the latter view is by no means confined to the Right, we may say, for simplicity’s sake, that the specific objection of the Left is different — namely, that ecologism is simply a middle-class ideology.

Now as regards the objection of the ecological scientists, insofar as they mean that the social world cannot be reduced to biochemical interchanges, energy flows, etc., I am sure they are right, and the point is work making against those who go in for ‘eco-systems theory’ — ecology as a Leitwissenschaft or ‘integrative science’ — and other kinds of rhetorical closure of the nature-society dualism. Nevertheless, given that energy flows and biological processes do constitute the material basis of any society, ecology does enter the social world. So, whilst the description of ecological and thermodynamic limits is a matter appropriately dealt with by natural scientists, nevertheless their significance as limits — limits to which humans must respond — can only be fully grasped when considered in relation to human ends. Insofar as the environment is not simply ‘nature out there’, but the environment of human society, a task for social thought is to grasp social practices (symbolic and productive) in relation to their conditions of production (‘natural nature’, ‘human nature’, and ‘humanized nature’).

The recognition that ecological limits are not even in principle simply a technical problem informs a reply to the second objection, that of the ‘technical fix’ advocates. Nature may, as they suppose, be almost infinitely malleable, but it nevertheless presents definitive limits to the extent it can be humanized.

So just as ecology conditions, but does not completely determine the social, so ecological social philosophy must be informed, but not determined, by physical and biological sciences.

This is a basic premise of a recent book by Keekok Lee (1989). The present article is in good part a critique of her book, but as regards her starting-point I am in agreement with her, and in the first section of this paper I review her argument that it makes sense to talk about ‘ecological scarcity’; and that this implies the need for a radical criticism of the assumption of political economists and liberal philosophers that scarcity is merely a relative problem.

Still, whilst granting that it is appropriate and necessary to talk about ecological scarcity, it would be a serious mistake to deny the problem of relative scarcity altogether. If it is true, as Commoner says, that ‘there’s no such thing as a free lunch in nature’, this does not alter the fact that there are some who are eating on cheap credit and others who are not eating at all.

Although Lee is aware of this problem, I find her account of ecological social justice unsatisfactory for a number of reasons
and, in section II, I focus on how her moral argument for the distributive value ‘to each according to their needs’ systemati-
cally fails to reflect on the social conditions required for its
actualisation. Despite her sweeping critique of the ‘premise of
abundance’ underlying liberal philosophy, she leaves unques-
tioned a host of its other assumptions. This brings us to the
question of ‘ecology as ideology’ in the sense of the third
objection noted above. When political ecology was still relatively
novel, many socialists saw it as an essentially middle-class
phenomenon, as indifferent or hostile to the interests of the
working class, and hence as a secondary issue. However, it now
seems to be widely recognised that to give exclusive attention to
the plight of the working class in the rich portion of the world is
no less at odds with the aim of an international socialism than with
that of environmentalism. From the side of the greens, on the other hand, I think it is also possible to identify a gradual abandonment of hostility or diffi-
dence towards socialism. This process is at different stages in
different countries, but looked at from a trans-national perspec-
tive the convergence between ecology and socialism seems to be a
concrete trend. In the West, at least, this convergence has so far
been very much oriented to the themes of utopian socialism. Whilst
this trend may be quite welcome inasmuch as it seeks to restore
socialism to its historical and ethical roots, unfortunately it also
frequently leads to an uncritical rejection of Marx. So without
denying the usefulness of utopia as a kind of ‘regulative idea’ in
the development of ecosocialist theory and practice — for it is
surely necessary as part of a politics whose aim is to bring our
human future under human control — it is nevertheless clearly
insufficient. In the third section I argue against this contempo-
rary tendency in ecosocialist thought that Marx and Engels’
critique of utopian socialism is still pertinent — a consideration
based on the view (to be developed elsewhere) that a theory of
politics and society which is both ecological and socialist can and
must benefit, on both counts, from certain non-renounceable
insights of the Marxist tradition.

Social Philosophy and Ecological Scarcity

Lee offers a clear and direct account of how ecological science
and the principles of thermodynamics have a bearing on the
sphere of practical philosophy; she seeks to meet mainstream
Anglo-Saxon social and moral philosophy on its own terms to
show why ecology, and ecological socialism, must be taken
seriously. (She also has some things to say about Marxism, but I
will consider these separately in section III below.)

Lee’s central message is that no society is sustainable in the
long term (and now perhaps not in a much shorter term either) if
it persists in practices inconsistent with the laws of thermodynam-
ics and the principles of ecology — that is, if it immune to the limits
they pose. For the same reason any social theory which abstracts
from these essential limits must be condemned and rejected as
‘fantastic’. In particular, she regards as ‘fantastic’ all those social
philosophies premised on a notion of progress which assumes the
possibility and desirability of unlimited economic growth. Such
philosophies embody ‘ecologically insensitive values’, and so
must forfeit any claim to enlighten us as to the nature of the good
life or social justice under existing conditions.

By contrast, ‘ecologically sensitive values’ — Lee’s organising
concept — can be comprehended in terms of a hierarchy of more
and less fundamental needs — needs both of humans and of the rest
of the natural world. Such values can be established rationally,
even if fallibly, without committing the ‘naturalistic fallacy’; for
if the logical derivation of an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’ constitutes a
fallacy, this does not mean that norms cannot be justified
(‘epistemically implied’) by reference to facts about the world. In
any case, observes Lee, if we look at real-life moral disputes rather
than the artificially constructed, counterfactual and counterintuitive
situations which typify so much of analytic moral philosophy,
then we see that disputants do very often crucially differ about
matters of fact. So, as she states in her preface:

Through our understanding of how living processes inter-
act with non-living (physical/chemical) processes in the
biosphere, we can begin to work out new conceptions of
what the good society and the good life amount to. In other
words, we will be able to answer afresh, hopefully, more
rationally and adequately, the perennial central questions
of social philosophy (p. x).

Her account of the basic concepts and philosophical implications
of the science of ecology is brief and to the point. This is in
keeping with her aim of ‘constructing the outline of a social
philosophy, which is in accordance with a proper understanding
of the biophysical foundation of life’ (p. xii, my emphasis). That
is to say, she is not seeking, as some authors do, to derive ethical
imperatives from ecological studies of nature in a quasi-natural
law manner; she is rather seeking an understanding of human
practices which is consistent with what we know about the eco-
logical constraints on them. In fact, the burden of her argument
depends more directly on the laws of thermodynamics than on
principles of ecology in the strict sense. It is the second law of
thermodynamics which shows why limits to growth and expa-
sion are not surmountable, even in principle, by any technological
devices:

work may be performed but only at a price, the price being
that the amount of available energy for further work in the
future has diminished.... the faster the rate of transformation
by human agents in their productive activities, the greater
the entropy, or the greater the rate at which available
energy for work decreases (pp. 74–75).

As (low entropy) resources are dissipated, the attempt to substi-
tute them involves a greater expenditure of energy and increase of
entropy. There is no technological solution to this, and interim
attempts to find them will simply add to existing problems, like

Radical Philosophy 56, Autumn 1990
global warming. Thus, she says, the second law of thermodynamics assures us that scarcity is absolute, not merely relative.

Ecological scarcity, then, is the key concept linking the principles of ecological science and the laws of thermodynamics with social and political theory. Once the premise of ecological scarcity is established, Lee argues, the fundamental presuppositions of liberal social and ethical thought are undermined. Her critique of liberalism centres on the fundamental presupposition that scarcity is merely a relative and not an absolute problem. It is this assumption which makes plausible some of the classic accounts of social justice - paradigmatically, those which appeal to the 'trickle-down effect' or the 'invisible hand'. Such theses are premised on the possibility of continuing growth and expansion; but in the light of twentieth-century knowledge and experience, Lee argues, the fundamental presuppositions are revealed to be not only ideological (because redistribution never works out like this), but 'fantastic' (because it couldn't even in principle).

Historically, Lee points out, especially in the process of industrialisation, the malign form of the Matthew Principle has played a major role: in England a striking case being the Enclosure Laws; on a global scale the role of slavery and colonialism of the past, which have been transformed into the economic imperialism of the present. She notes that, insofar as redistribution according to the benign form of the Matthew Principle can occur, it is only in conjunction with a specific form of politics committed to intervening in the free play of market forces - typically the welfare state of Western industrialised societies. Without this, the Matthew Principle cannot be benign.

Theorists, who advocate the trickle down theory, are really advocating a particular type of politics to go with the growth, which makes it possible to transfer some of the wealth generated to the worse off ... The trickle down theory is, in other words, not so much an empirical thesis about wealth distribution as envisaged by its proponents, but a normative theory which makes sense, and works only, when it is underpinned by a particular type of political prescription (pp. 285–86).

Given that nothing resembling such redistributive measures pertains in fourth-fifths of the world, it is evident that there the Matthew Principle cannot be benign. Moreover, even when formally benign, the principle can work out in practice to mean that those who have less may still receive too little, with an outcome therefore just as terminal as the malign form.15 From the premise of ecological scarcity follows the conclusion that we are ultimately faced with a stark choice between ecocentrism and ecofascism. For either society can be democratically self-disciplined to work within the limits of ecological scarcity; or else those limits will divide society from within, pushing to even further extremes the present relationships of inequality between those who gain economic benefit from the exploitation of human resources and those onto whom their costs are 'externalised' (both directly and indirectly through environmental degradation).

The 'limits to growth' cut not only through individual societies, but even more deeply into the international division between a rich North and a poor South. So, as Lee seems to recognise, the question of limits to growth ('absolute scarcity') and the question of distribution ('relative scarcity') are interdependent but distinct questions. The slogan 'no growth', says Lee, is too crude: in affluent countries 'there is room not merely for zero growth, but also for reduced growth ... The resources, thus saved, could be channelled into growth, which is needed in the poorer parts of the world' (p. 360). So, 'there must be redistribution away from the rich to the poor'.

Now whilst this is certainly a point worth making against those liberal theorists who abstract from the facts about the world which lead to this conclusion, nevertheless, to say that 'there must be redistribution' is merely to state the problem. And it is a problem which could be stated without the argument from 'ecological scarcity'. So it clearly does not suffice to criticise the liberals' 'premise of abundance'. Passing an 'ecologically sensitive' moral judgement on global inequality is one thing; formulating a critique which could provide a platform for concrete political proposals is something more. The development of ecocentrist politics and economics will presuppose not just a moral critique of market values, but also an immanent critique of the institutions which instantiate them.16 It is around this issue that I think the strengths and limitations of Lee's book can be identified.

The argument from ecological scarcity shows that the ecological and social costs of production, which in conventional economic theory and its socio-philosophical reflexes are dis-
counted as ‘externalities’, can no longer remain external to theories of social justice. The question is, how do they enter? As well as articulating criteria for identifying (or redefining) these ‘eco-social’ costs, there must be principles for (a) minimising and (b) distributing them. Now whereas environmental and ‘pure green’ political thought concentrates on (or at least strongly prioritises) the former, Lee recognises that this problem cannot be taken in isolation from that of distribution, and therefore that the objectives of ecology and socialism converge on the principle of equal distribution as fundamental for ecosocialist justice. Furthermore, she also recognises that the tension between the ‘cornocopian’ aspect of socialism (maximisation of productivity), on the one hand, and ecology’s emphasis on minimising destruction of conditions of production, on the other, is in principle resolvable via a redefinition of what constitutes wealth. However, as just observed, the redefinition of wealth (or good life) does not dispose of the problem of its distribution (justice). A question which therefore remains is to what extent the principle of equality before the law can be co-opted in the service of ecosocialist social justice.

Lee is one of the first to broach this problem explicitly and directly. However, I find her treatment of it unsatisfactory in important respects. So, while her attempt to span the divide between mainstream analytic and ecosocialist philosophy is to be welcomed, nevertheless both her critique of the former and her construction of the latter involve certain weaknesses which, as I seek to show in the following two sections, derive, first, from underestimating the coherence of liberal thought and its relative truth with respect to actual social relations; and secondly, as a consequence, from underestimating the real challenges facing ecosocialist theory and practice.

An Ecosocialist Perspective on Rights and Responsibilities

Ecological political theory is not a very well-developed field. The most notable contributions hitherto tended to recycle the ideas of anarchism and primitive communism. This may be largely because the ‘radical democracy’ of ecological politics is orientated to the values of concrete particularity, personal reliance, local autonomy, respect for differences, site-specificity and so on – in opposition to abstract universality. In this there is a strong anti-modernist tendency; and without entering into polemics as to whether this tendency should be described as pre-modern, post-modern or something else again, it suffices to note that the emphasis placed on defining the ‘good life’ in radical opposition to the universalist norms of ‘justice’ can imply a down-playing of the role of struggles to democratize the state. Nevertheless, it is evident that ecological politics cannot get by without some way of identifying and pursuing generalisable interests.

The specific problem I want to consider in this section is how a focus on concrete human needs which defy the logic of the market can provide the basis for a determinate critique of the formal freedom and equality of liberal democracy.

‘To each according to their needs; from each according to their abilities’: this is the implicit distributive value of Lee’s social and moral philosophy. However, as she emphasises, this value is not automatically satisfied, and indeed may be contradicted, by the principles embodied in universal rights and freedoms. To begin with, for freedom to be effective it must also involve access to certain physical things – things which can and must be specified by reference to substantive needs (e.g., as a minimum, means of subsistence). This leaves the problem of how need-satisfaction can become a socially instantiated principle, or, in other words, how needs can be translated into rights.

Lee points out that many of the rights regarded as especially important by ecosocialists – such as those of future generations, other natural beings, subsistence rights of the worst off, and so on – cannot easily be accommodated within the model of private legal rights. One of the problems which she correctly perceives is that an adequate conception of rights cannot be developed as a straightforward replication either of legal rights correlative to duties (‘claim-rights’ in Hohfeld’s terminology) or of legal liberties (Hohfeldian ‘privileges’). On the one hand, when a legal claim-right of A is correlative to a duty of B, the nature of the duty is determined by an express or tacit contractual relation between the two parties; and its only morality is the principle ‘give to each his own’ – where ‘his own’ is already settled, and does not admit of the possibility that justice might lie precisely in redefining what is his, or her, own. The form of the claim-right is determined and limited by the ‘content’ of ‘contractual morality’, and is completely indifferent to the question of what a human being might have a right to in virtue of being human – in Lee’s terms, substantive human freedoms. On the other hand, however, a moral or human right cannot be an extrapolation of a legal liberty, as usually understood, because in itself a liberty is correlative to no duty on the part of anyone else: a person has a legal liberty to do X when they have a duty not to. This is often called a ‘bare liberty’ in the literature because what it amounts to is a mere permission to do X if you can, but if for any reason you can’t, then tough luck. In a human rights context it would be like saying to the starving millions ‘You have the legal liberty to eat as much as you want.’

So given this stark difference between a formal legal liberty and a substantive human freedom, one might expect the task which follows to be an investigation of the conditions under which freedoms could be effective. However, Lee adopts a different approach. She argues that the poor do not have a legal liberty to eat if they do not have effective access to food. (With reference to the classic example of a ‘bare liberty’, she says that the penniless do not enjoy the legal freedom to dine at the Ritz.)

Radical Philosophy 56, Autumn 1990
This, it seems to me, involves an avoidable confusion between enjoying an effective freedom and being the subject of a legal liberty (even when it is not the source of much enjoyment): formal freedoms may not be genuine human freedoms, but they are genuine legal freedoms — which is precisely the problem. Failure to observe this distinction is bound to debilitate any socialist critique of formal freedoms, for they are precisely that — formal — and it needs to be recognised. Instead, Lee offers a moral criticism which involves a counterfactual redescription of their reality. By introducing a ‘neo-Benthamite’ concept of a right-cum-freedom, she basically defines the problem away, asserting liberty (even when it is not the source of much enjoyment): formal

Then, following a rather shaky chain of reasoning, B’s duty seems to be further transformed into a duty to enable, even provide material requirements (pp. 333–34). However, confining attention to the first link just quoted, as a statement about legal relations, as opposed to a moral evaluation, it is simply unwarranted. The bearing of a legal freedom does not necessarily imply any particular duty of ‘B’, and, as Hohfeld points out, this kind of argument involves a non sequitur.

Hart, who in other respects is closer to Bentham than to Hohfeld, recognises this: there is a clear difference, he says, between a liberty-right to do some kind of act protected by a strictly correlative obligation on others not to interfere in it, and a liberty-right protected only by a normally adequate perimeter of general obligations.

This is important because if the ‘protective perimeter’ (of duties not to interfere with individual freedoms) is not adequate, then there may be a moral case for arguing that certain ‘strictly correlative obligations’ should be introduced. Such is the situation, for example, where freedom from trespass or assault is not adequate to protect those whose physical security is not immediately threatened by others’ violence, but by a lack of physical necessities — precisely the kind of situation Lee is principally concerned with. But this would raise the question as to who bears the correlative duties (who ‘B’ is in Lee’s formula) and what they are.

The inadequacy of Lee’s abstract moral criticism can be seen from the reply she gives to these questions:

on my analysis of what it is to have the legal right to a social minimum, it is obvious which party has the right, and which parties the corresponding legal duties. Those who are said to have such a right, and those deemed in that particular society to earn less than a certain amount per month or per annum. The duties lie with B, the DHSS officials in the first instance, then with C, the Welfare Ombudsman (p. 381).

It follows with equal obviousness that for those who do not have the good fortune to reside in ‘that particular society’, but instead in one which does not have a DHSS office, there is no legal right. In fact, it is obvious even without Lee’s analysis that some four-fifths of the world do not have basic subsistence rights. What is not so obvious is what might be done about it. This, I would suggest, necessitates engagement with the problem of correlative duties, not describing it away.

Rights, and it is a virtue of Hohfeld’s account to make this crystal clear, are relations between persons. In considering them immediately as ‘capacities’ or ‘properties’ of the individual moral subject, Lee is precisely reproducing an element of classical liberal thought which needs to be disposed of. Rights exist when they are recognised as existing — when relevant obligations are enforced — and the problem with human rights like the right to basic means of subsistence is that they are not enforced duties. A minimum requirement for moral criticism of law is to show where these duties are supposed to fall.

In the real world human rights issues seldom involve isolated individuals: normally, deprivation of human rights, and struggles to secure them, occur in broader specific social contexts. Unless the basic point is taken into account, no amount of talk about the ‘concrete’ needs of individuals will save the corresponding account of rights from abstraction.

A similar point applies to the question of duties.

Now, if many human beings do not have access to the basic means of life, this is very often because they have been deprived of it; note also, that this deprivation is closely analogous to, and in the real world frequently identical with, environmental damage. When there is a case of deprivation it is possible in principle to say that someone is responsible for the deprivation; and where someone is responsible for an undesirable state of affairs, it is not difficult to make a moral case for saying they have a duty to remedy it. I take this moral proposition for granted; the problem is to identify who this someone is in terms which can be fairly and effectively translated into policy.

The concept of responsibility has assumed a central role in the development of ecologically-orientated ethics. The concept spans, in a potentially fruitful way, the factual, legal and moral spheres. For it may be argued that those who are de facto (‘causally’) responsible for ecologically (and also socially) damaging practices can be held responsible de jure, and that it is morally justifiable to insist that they are. On the other side of the same coin, each can claim the right to be responsible — the sense of Miindigkeit when not understood simply as abstract moral freedom. This is obviously not the place to work out the relevant theory of responsibility, but I do want to point out what I see as a missed opportunity in Lee.
As has become something of a tradition, at least in the Anglo-Saxon ecological literature, Lee discusses the problem of responsibility with reference to Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons'. This is a paradigm of a kind of situation where individually innocent actions, if taken in combination, have catastrophic undesired consequences. The problem then is that there is no single individual who can be held responsible for the harm. For this reason she says we need a theory of collective responsibility. However, she does not get very far towards such a theory for reasons which soon emerge.

Firstly, to get a grip on the problem she takes the tragedy of the commons as a case of a collective bad which can be seen in terms of the 'free rider' problem:

In our society which assumes that everyone, as a rational egoist, is trying to be a free rider, the logic of free riding leads to either (a) a failure to attain a collective good, or (b) production of a collective bad, that is, the tragedy of the common (p. 124).

Given that rational egoists cannot generally be relied on to act in the common interest when this conflicts with their private interests, Lee agrees with Olson (1965) that there is a need for coercion or incentives (sticks or carrots) in order to secure collective goods. Now, within his own terms of reference, Olson may be right.

Nevertheless, we then have the questions as to how specific sticks or carrots are to be justified and applied; and here I think Lee's account contains serious weaknesses.

As regards justification, she is sensitive to the libertarian counterargument that coercing people to be ecologically sensitive could involve an unacceptable cost against freedom because, for example,

the individual entrepreneur does not directly and deliberately intend any disastrous ecological outcome. Such outcome is simply the accumulation of the unintended consequences of individual acts of improving profits, of being competitive, trying to avoid bankruptcy, or not being squeezed out of business altogether, etc. (p. 137).

However, she says, this only appears to be the case within the framework of rational egoism. Coercion can be justified, she argues, because 'the free rider may be morally censured and criticised within a framework which is non-egoistic and non-individualistic' (p. 131). This framework, it turns out, is supplied by the neo-Kantian conception of 'justice as fairness' where 'To behave fairly is (a) to adhere to a rule, which all could assent to and which it would be rational to assent to...; (b) not to abrogate it by making an exception of oneself to the rule...' (ibid.). Thus, rather surprisingly, the key to a non-individualist concept of responsibility depends on the enlightened self-interest of the individual moral reasoner.

In the real world, however, it is not simply the assumption of rational egoism which makes the 'individual entrepreneur' seem not to be responsible for the harm he does. The abstractness of Lee's treatment of responsibility can be seen by considering how it could be used to justify coercion in a concrete situation of a 'collective bad'. A fitting example might be the ecologically and socially disastrous practice of cash-cropping. Here a whole chain of agents is involved — among whom are poor farm workers, relatively well-off farmers, company agents, domestic politicians, international lawyers, multinational companies and their individual shareholders, who, let us add for good measure, might be fund managers for old-age pensioners. At each and every link of the chain there are agents who can be attributed a 'causal power' which is necessary, though insufficient to bring about the undesired consequences. How if we simply apply Lee's principle of justice as fairness — i.e., 'those responsible for the production of the collective oads ought to choose an alternative course of action' — then it would be possible to conclude that the labourer, for instance, ought to choose to starve, or the company agent to become unemployed, and so on. This is not a conclusion Lee actually wants to draw; indeed, she has assumed that the entire responsibility must fall on capitalist enterprise. However, the problem is that such an assumption is not warranted in the terms of her own theory.

If we want to hold that the multinational company plays a determining role, then we need, as a minimum, 'criteria for distinguishing this role from the others. This possibility is systematically blocked off by Lee's insistence on discussing the problem in terms of human agency. If we look at the real relations involved in the cash-crop model, what this shows is that responsibility cannot be directly linked to human agency. The Kantian injunction which Lee revives will cut no ice morally or practically in such situations; and her criticism of rational egoism merely shifts attention from the real problem. For, as is particularly clear in the case of the labourer who is uprooting food crops to plant coffee, s/he does so not simply because s/he is a rational egoist, but because s/he literally has no choice.

To break such vicious circles means intervening structurally, and at critical points. This would certainly involve rethinking responsibility: in the first place recognising that, since responsibility positively correlates with power, unequal powers will entail unequal responsibilities.

This leads us to consider how responsibility attaches to the individuals concerned not qua agents, but qua role bearers. It is not by chance that responsibility is typically discussed in the literature by reference to 'holding an office'. Having an office, or more generally, occupying a specific place within a complex of social relations, entails particular responsibilities specific to that 'office'. Any individual office holder (agent) may carry out his or her responsibilities with greater or lesser assiduity, but the definition of what these responsibilities are is not decided by the agent.

Hence, using this kind of model, we would be led to develop a theory of social responsibility, focussing on concrete differentiated roles: roles which are characteristics of groups, classes or...
social strata rather than single individuals; of situated practices rather than isolated actions. In short, we would be led to pose the problem in terms of a division of social labour.

This is precisely what is missing from the tragedy of the commons model, and correspondingly, from so much social ecological theory which generalises from it. In truth, Lee’s philosophy is not at all ‘ecological’ in this respect for, despite her emphasis on the ecological principle of what she calls ‘loopish causality’, she retains the assumption that collective bads arise as the result of a straightforward aggregate of individual actions within one homogeneous group; she overlooks the distinction between collective goods of a collectivity narrowly understood, and common goods of a whole society which is composed of many different ‘collectivities’. It is this which makes her think it appropriate to discuss ecological scarcity as a free-rider problem. And here again she seems to have forgotten her own ecological principles, for Olson’s treatment of the free-rider problem precisely depends on assumptions about equality and autonomy of economic agents which Lee’s ‘ecological social philosophy, in restoring biology and biography to its agents, was supposed to have overcome.

Finally, if her confinement within the free-rider paradigm leads her to overestimate the force of moral imperatives, it also encourages her to underestimate the potential force of law. She says: ‘On the theory of individual responsibility extrapolated from the common law of murder, no individual contributing to the production of a collective bad could be held responsible.’ Yet this is not necessarily so, and only appears to be so if all the assumptions of the free-rider problem are held to apply. Whether any individual contribution to the bad can be identified and condemned as a cause of foreseeable adverse consequences, I would suggest, cannot be decided a priori and in the abstract: for it depends on concrete considerations, such as whether one or more causal agents is identifiable; whether the consequences are reasonably foreseeable (where ‘reasonable’ refers to the state of a society’s knowledge); and whether there is the political will that the provocation of a particular consequence be deemed an appropriate matter for coercion. When such criteria are satisfied then the principle of strict liability can be applied; and in fact sometimes already is, as in the field of environmental protection for instance. Hence it seems to me that an appropriate political focus would be on extending this to cover greater areas of environmental and human harm.

Success here would obviously depend on a democratization of political decision-making processes. If the aim of ecosocialist theory is to give content to the struggle for democracy, then it must be capable both of revealing the potentialities of a democratically-directed legal order, and of criticising the fundamental presuppositions of its specifically liberal form. Lee’s moral criticism of law, I have argued, achieves neither.

Ecological Scarcity and Social Relations: How Marx Might Reply to his Green Critics

A central task for the development of ecosocialist theory must be an ‘ecological’ interrogation of Marx - not, of course, to attribute to him an ecological perspective which he did not (and could not necessarily be expected to) have, nor to criticise him simply because he didn’t, but to rethink the relevance of his critique of political economy in the light of ecological developments. Yet in the ecological literature, the requisite critical interrogation is sometimes conducted in a manner more reminiscent of an inquisition: the evidence of Marx’s complicity in the domination of nature is almost ritually reeled off, and his criticisms of ‘true socialism’ are made to appear as unecological heresy. Unfortunately, Lee perpetuates this tradition.

Lee is ‘not concerned with Marxist scholarship’, she warns, but with ‘the general thrust of Marx’s thinking’. So since a scholarly defence would be to no avail, and I would anyway not presume to offer one, in what follows I limit my observations to a problem which is central to all green critiques of Marxism, and which Lee discusses in her chapter on ‘Work and the Two Socialisms’ (a chapter which Lee herself sees as crucial to specifying the difference between ecologically sensitive and insensitive values), the two socialisms being those of Fourier and Marx.

Lee argues that, when tested for compatibility with thermo-dynamic and ecological reality, Fourier’s version is superior to Marx’s. Now, whilst I agree that ecosocialism has something to learn from the utopian socialists, and something to criticise in Marx, nevertheless the conclusion that the former are now to be preferred rests, it seems to me, on a superficial understanding both of Marx and the reality he – and we – have to deal with.

Since Fourier is here the counterfigure, let us acknowledge some points he makes which are well-taken. His socialist utopia is orientated to the fulfilment of concrete human needs rather than to the expansion of abstract needs as generated in a market economy. Men’s hostility to nature, both ‘internal’ and ‘external’, is rooted in the hostility amongst human beings themselves – especially the competitiveness of the economic system which distorts the value of both humans and nature. Thus, for example, struck by how the price of goods bore no apparent relation either to the costs of their production or their quality as goods, Fourier condemned the absurdity of an economic system orientated towards profits rather than to human needs. For Fourier, the goal of ever-increasing possession and consumption of external goods is to be transformed into a liberating development of ‘internal goods’; and this also implies a critique of the formal freedoms of bourgeois democracy, for these ‘have nothing to say about the liberating of the libido from crippling repression and hypocrisy, and of the agent from the Protestant work ethic’ (quoted on p. 247). Thus, for Fourier, true freedom was to be found in emancipation from these two kinds of repression associated with ‘civilisation’. Lee sums up Fourier’s vision of socialism as a socialism which rejects the logics of capitalism, of industrialism and of economic growth. It is an ascetic socialism, that is, one which is sufficient but frugal in material possession and consumption but paradoxically
rich in spirit - in the possibilities of self-development, in the achievement of internal goods (p. 245).

Human emancipation entails transcending the very dichotomy between work and leisure; which means moving from a system of production based on wage-slavery to one of cooperative association. Thus Lee sees Fourier as an advocate of what she calls an "artistic mode of production".45

Now Lee does recognise that what Fourier advocates basically corresponds to the regulative idea of 'unalienated labour' - a humanist ideal also shared by Marx and Engels; but she argues that in their mature works they rejected this in favour of a Saint-Simonian influenced exaltation of technological domination of nature.46 Setting aside the hyperbole here, we may note one element that they did accommodate of Saint-Simon's utopian thinking: 'Men would no longer dominate men - the substance of politics - but would together sugdue and dominate Nature' (p. 250). It is true that Marxist theory sees a positive correlation between the development of industrial production and progress towards emancipation. For Marx, the possibility of human emancipation is premised on an expansion of productive forces which apparently knows no limits, other than those posed by the social relations of production; he therefore considers it necessary to change the ownership of the means of production, not transform the industrial system itself. He also implies that with the eventual achievement of communism, politics, understood as a sphere of conflict resolution, will be rendered obsolete - the domination of men will be displaced by the administration of things.47

It is uncontroversial that ecological socialism must depart from Marx in these respects; the experience of "actually (formerly?) existing socialism", as regards both human and ecological relations, suffices to dampen such nineteenth-century optimism. However, pace Lee, it does not suffice as a reason to dismiss the critical import of Marx's work.48 In truth, she does not seem to have grapsed the latter, for she writes:

If Marx took seriously the view that the truly human society was a society of artists, then he should have come to the same conclusion as Fourier. But along the way, Marx appeared to have been seduced by Saint-Simon's logistics of industrialism and of economic growth, based on the (economists') concepts of productivity and efficiency....

It is the retention of these other assumptions which made it necessary for Marx to repudiate Fourier, and to accept the dichotomy between labour and leisure as something impossible in principle to supersede (pp. 253-55).

Whether Marx really thought this dichotomy impossible to supersede is not a question I want to address here. Rather, it is the claim that it was his retention of capitalist assumptions that led him to repudiate Fourier. For it is not the assumptions, but the reality of these 'assumptions', which obliged Marx to look beyond socialist utopia to a realizable social project. Lee thinks this project was bound to fail; and her basic reason brings us to her central charge against Marx - his treatment of scarcity.

The Marxist solution would work if its fundamental assumption were correct, namely, that science and technology could render ecological (that is, absolute) scarcity into relative scarcity, an assumption also shared by bourgeois capitalism (p. 256).

However, this statement betrays a number of confusions regarding scarcity which it is important to straighten out, especially because of the risk, which Lee herself runs, that utopian socialism will pass via catastrophism into a neo-Malthusian ecocafscism.49

Firstly, to the extent that Marx shares the above assumption it is because it is true: through the productive transformation of raw materials, unusable resources become usable; hence the degree of scarcity in any society depends not simply on the quantity of natural resources in existence, but also on the means of productive appropriation of them. This is the reason why Marx criticised Malthus's conception of scarcity.50

Since Lee dismisses this criticism as 'ideology triumphing over science and common sense' (p. 156), it is perhaps appropriate to reiterate what Marx says:

He [Malthus] stupidly relates a specific quantity of people to a specific quantity of necessaries. Ricardo immediately and correctly confronted him with the fact that the quantity of grain available is completely irrelevant to the worker if he has no employment; that it is therefore the means of employment and not of subsistence which put him into the category of surplus population. ... it relates to the conditions of production and his relation to them (1973, p. 607).

In this passage, Marx also draws attention to how scarcity is relative in a second sense: relative not only to a society's total productive capacity, but also to one's position within that society (i.e., the relativity of social relations). On a global scale this kind of relativity appears, for example, in the fact that the average American eats forty times more food than is necessary for survival while many millions of Asians and Africans have nothing to eat.51

So, whilst it is true that Marx did not dwell on (and in light of twentieth-century knowledge underestimated) the problem that population might one day reach absolute barriers, he at least provided a conceptual framework for grasping it in its proper context. As regards the implications for social and moral philosophy, I think the words of Shue speak plainly enough:

To attempt to settle the argument by merely declaring certain countries to be overpopulated is in effect to declare some of their people to be 'excess'.... To see the strength of the implicit and unargued assumption, one need only ask: why is it they who have no right to be there (consuming scarce food, energy, etc.) and not I who have no right to be here (consuming scarce food, energy, etc., at much higher rates)? (Shue, 1980, pp. 109-10).

This last question leads us into a consideration of still a third sense in which relative scarcity is produced by capitalism: however much one has, one feels a need to have more - a subjective sense of scarcity with no apparent basis in real material needs. As Sahlin (1974) says, 'Inadequacy of economic means is the first principle of the world's wealthiest peoples' (p. 3). This is relevant as regards Fourier's utopian socialism, for the kinds of psychological repression referred to by Fourier are intimately connected to the question of scarcity. An obsession with scarcity is the very
motor of capitalism, operating both in production and consumption; without a fear of scarcity the ‘Protestant Work Ethic’ would never have got beyond North European pulpits. The source of this existential fear, however, need not, in the first instance, be sought in metaphysics, but, historically, for example, in the real situation of those who, driven off the land, had the choice either to present themselves for work at the time and place dictated by the factory owner, or starve. This fear is maintained in wealthy nations today by more varied and complex means – but the continuity is clear, for example, in career structures in which one ‘careers’ along or falls out on to a social scrapheap.

The threat of absolute scarcity was not first discovered by ecologists; it has always been used by dominant classes against those who must produce more than is necessary in order to have their needs: in other words, the overcoming of this ‘artificial scarcity’ entails a transformation of the social division of labour. This would be to overcome the ‘alienation’ of labour in the various senses which Marx early on described; and if he did not spend his life painting pictures of what unalienated labour would be like, it was because (like Fourier) he had already seen that it would be the negation of the condition of labour under capitalism. Then (going beyond Fourier) he directed his efforts to understanding how this could come about as a determinate negation – a negation in reality and not merely in thought.

So when Lee says it is not obvious why the ‘true socialists’ were dismissed out of hand by Marx and Engels, what she fails to see is that they were precisely not ‘dismissed out of hand’ – they were immanently criticised. It is in missing this that she is able to suggest that Marx moved from true socialism to ‘embrace’ the logic of capital, failing to see that Marx’s analysis of capital was precisely an investigation of the reasons why ‘true socialism’ can only be utopian under existing conditions.

Lee is surely right in thinking that ecosocialism must follow Fourier in pursuing a more ‘frugal’ conception of socialism; she is probably also right in saying that economic growth is not necessary to fulfil genuine human needs. Nevertheless, it is necessary to capitalists – so what is to be done about that? Since she takes Marx to task for not having ‘appreciated enough of the implications of two senses of capital that have to be distinguished’ (p. 270), nor that ‘Capital as a process of accumulation should not and need not be endless’ (p. 192), she turns instead to advocate the ‘steady-state economy’ of Daly, for this involves the ‘rejection of capital’, the ‘rejection of GNP’, and so on. However, she leaves the reader to wonder what it means to ‘reject’ them – though it would be better at this point to heed what Ryle (1988) says:

To sum up: the critique of conventional economic ideas is salutary, but remains insufficient unless it is understood and clearly stated that the ideas are not only false (they don’t constitute the only or the optimum basis on which economic life might be organized), but true (they reflect, because they institutionalize, the exigencies of capitalism). It follows that if we reject the ideas, we must be prepared to confront the institutions which embody and enforce them... (pp. 45–46).

Granting that utopian thinkers can provide a corrective to the productivism of orthodox Marxism, still, utopia only has a practical sense in conjunction with a determinate critique of reality. If ecosocialists aim not simply at an anarchic opting out of reality, but also at changing it, then they face the simple question whether or not to inform their practices with potentially explanatory theory. There are reasons for believing that in this respect Marxism still has something to offer.

**Notes**

1. Now that ‘ecological’ and ‘green’ rank alongside concepts like ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ as unquestionable goods, the real resistance to ecological thinking comes not from denying it as a value, but from instrumentalizing and redefining its content – which is all the more reason for a rigorous self-clarification on the part of those who want to be considered ‘true’ greens.

2. The landmark is Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Of course, the history of environmentalism goes back much further. See e.g., Faber and O’Connor (1989), and their references; it is also treated in histories of ecology (e.g., Worster, 1985; Acot, 1988; Bramley, 1989), though these are to be read with varying degrees of caution. McIntosh (1985), though dry, inspires confidence (see esp. chs. 1, 8 and bibliography).

3. Ennenberger’s article (1974) must now rate as an historical document of this situation and the Left’s early response to it. Ruedig (1983) and Becker (1984), paint a similar picture of early German green philosophers like Amery, Maren-Grisebach, and others.

4. Certain notions and patterns of thought corresponding to a felt need for radical change have been developed into apparently non-negotiable aspects of green culture. In the more popular (e.g., Porritt, 1984), and ‘deeper’ ecological literature (cf. Sylvan, 1985), we encounter long lists of what ecologists are ‘for’ and ‘against’. Moreover, these intuitions are often extrapolated directly into metaphysical designs (some of the most interesting works to my mind are marred in this way – e.g., Bahro, Capra). For more critical examination of some central green ideas, see e.g., Plumwood (1986); the papers of Boehme and Schramm (1985); Cramer and van den Daele (1985); Levins and Lewontin (1980); then there is Eder (1988), who has attempted a full-scale ‘critique of ecological reason’.

5. This objection is significant: the present context not because some ecologists insist that ecology should be left to ecologists, which is fair enough, but because scientists already play a leading role in green movements. The risk is an ‘uneconomic’ division of labour between scientific experts and the grass-roots, so that if the former have a predominantly technical conception of environmental problems, and the latter a tendency to utopianism and ‘anti-intellectualism’ (Wiesenthal, 1989), an intellectual vacuum is left where the political dimension should be (Faber and O’Connor, 1988). The idea of ecology as *Leitwissenschaft* is associated with Amery (1978) as an integrative discipline with the Odums, taking a particularly reductive form in H. Odum (1971). As for ‘ecosystems theory’, this may lend itself more readily to ‘technical fix’ advocates than their radical critics – by reducing ecological and social problems to systems disturbances (Becker, 1984), even taking the place of the ‘invisible hand’ in ‘capitalist theology’ (Leigh, 1971; Barcelona, 1990).

6. In contrast to some social ecologists, I do not think it is conceding too much to the dualist world view to recognise a distinction between the spheres of theoretical and practical reason and to pursue interdisciplinary cooperation (as a concrete dialectic), rather than legislating for a unified science which has yet to emerge (Cramer and van den Daele, 1985).

7. Some might object to the ‘anthropocentrism’ of this expression. But as Silverstone (1990) observes, nature will always take care of itself, and the ‘disease called man’ may be a minor disturbance on a geological time-scale. It therefore seems worth focussing on how nature accommodates itself to being co-opted for human ends only up to a certain point – beyond which ‘ecology strikes back’.

Although ‘anthropocentrism’ falls on the ‘bad’ side of most lists
of ecological values, I am not clear exactly what objection there is which goes beyond that specifiable in terms of 'enlightened self-interest'. Certainly, in the literature on animal rights, anthropocentric values seem to be indispensable (e.g. Regan 1988); in the literature of environmental ethics a more radical critique of anthropocentrism is only achieved by purging anything recognisable as ethics (see Attfield, 1983; Bartolommei, 1989). As for 'biocentrism', 'ecocentrism' and other such alternatives, I do not think it is being too literal-minded to ask where their 'centres' are supposed to be. In an unpublished paper, 'What is wrong with anthropocentrism?', I suggest that intelligible answers depend on observing some basic distinctions between ontology, epistemology and ethics.

Either because it was a matter for a 'technical fix', or because it had to take second place to a socialist transformation of society, I think the former view is now confined to the social-democratic world-be would be crisis managers; whereas proponents of the latter now increasingly speak of an ecosocialist transformation.

The question of priorities is a familiar one for feminists too, but in this paper I am concerned only with ecology and socialism, and do not attempt to theorise the connection of either with feminism. 'Ecofeminist perspectives can be divided generally into liberal, radical and socialist (or social) ecofeminism; and each of these sub-groups gains insights from different interpretations of feminism, as well as ecological/biological and social theories'. (Thrupp, 1989, pp. 170-1). See also the overview of ecofeminism in Plumwood (1986); on women and nature, see Merchant (1980); on women and development, Shiva (1988).

Beyond the Eurocentric horizon, it is even more evident that ecological and economic exploitation are so interrelated that we cannot envisage eliminating the one without the other. See the journal Capitalism, Nature, Socialism for regular contributions from India, Brazil, The Philippines, Central America and elsewhere.

If the early tradition of claiming to be 'neither right nor left' still persists among many greens in Europe, in practice it has always been severely qualified by the nature of political realities; moreover, the rhetoric tends to self-destruct as soon as any one green faction seeks to defend its purity by accusing another of being either too far to the left or to the right.

Marxists once made a virtue of necessity in refusing to speculate about the character of a communist future, but with the demise of hopes in proletarian revolution arises an imperative to construct concrete alternatives even within - and against - the old. Ely (1986), makes such points, and suggests that criticisms by Marxists (or Habermasians) of the greens' revival of utopianism or Romantic anti-capitalism 'fail to understand the politics of concrete utopia', (p.36). (The idea of 'concrete utopia' derives from Ernst Bloch, and has become a part of green vocabulary, especially in Germany.) The only point I would make in reply is that utopia is concrete not only if it has the 'concrete' form of life-world experiments (prefigurative practices), but also when that practice is informed and complemented by immanent critique of actual social relations. (I think Bloch believed this too, which is why he wrote a book identifying the emancipatory promise within natural right, and argues for its complementarity with social utopia, (Bloch 1961).)

Notable among those who seek a stronger connection between ecology and ethics is Rolston (1986). See also the German revival of teleological natural law in Jonas (1966, 1984), and others reviewed in Ely (1989). The argument structure of an ecological critique of conventional economics, based on thermodynamics, is well-established. A classic Lee relies on is Georgescu-Roegen (1971); for a history of the literature see Martinez-Alier (1987).

On the premise of abundance in liberal political theory, see Ophuls (1977). As regards Lee's counterposing of 'relative' and 'absolute' scarcity, I have some critical comments to make in section III below.

A central argument of Shue (1980); see also his comments on Rawls on pp. 127-9. Although 'ecofascism' does not have a univocal meaning, and is also sometimes used as a generalised term of abuse, it is not merely rhetorical: if there is not a purposive anticipation of ecological crises, there can only be an ad hoc and authoritarian reactive response. Lee describes possible scenarios at pp.289-90; see also Silvestrini (1990) pp.22-5.


As is notoriously the case, for example, the success of an environmental pressure group in one zone or country can simply drive an industry to export its pollution to some poorer, less well-defended zone or country. As regards depletion and exploitation of resources (both human and natural), it is even more a case of fundamental inequalities (see, e.g., George, 1976) 1988).

E.g., Bookchin (1980, 1982a); also the works of Bahro, Gorz, and their critics (Wolter, 1980; Frankel, 1987).

A particularly sharp exchange took place in Telos some years ago (Whitebook, 1981; Bookchin, 1982b; also Whitebook, 1985). Symptomatically Habermas was the main bone of contention; and Ely (1985) has noted that he is not very popular with die Grunen either ('the big American hamburger' they call him). I suspect that the theorising of ecological politics is eventually going to require a more nuanced response (e.g. Benhabib, 1986a).

Ryle (1988) p.60 puts his finger on this problem in the practical context.

A common assumption is that humans have 'species interests' in the 'global commons'. But then a problem (which in some ways resembles that of 'imputed class consciousness') would be to account for the mis-/non-recognition of these interests in the real world—not only in the broader society, but among the ecologists themselves (Demirovic, 1989).

More explicitly, she says equality is her distributive value, and freedom of action her substantive value. Expressed in these terms I cannot see how it would differ from the view of, say, Hart (1955); but her whole argument is directed against a Hartian view of rights.

See also Macpherson (1975); Shue (1980).

There are of course those who would argue that the satisfaction of needs is not necessarily a question of extending rights: most notably, orthodox revolutionary Marxism (cf., e.g., Pashukanis (1924) 1978), following Trotsky and Lenin (see Lukes (1982); a remarkably similar critique of Recht is to be found in contemporary 'post-Marxism' (e.g., in Italy, Cassano, 1988; Barcellona, 1990). Reasons for contesting the orthodox rejection of right within Marxism are to be found in, e.g., Bloch (1961), Tay-Soon (1978), Keat (1982), Meszaros (1986) ch.5, and Hayward (1989) ch.4.

Hohfeld (1919), esp. pp.23-50. Lee objects to those theories of moral rights (e.g. Hart, 1955) which see the capacity to 'control' or 'waive' a right as essential to identifying its bearer, because this, notoriously, rules out a priori the possibility of speaking of rights of children, the mentally handicapped, future generations, etc. I agree that there is no compelling reason to accept this interpretation; but I disagree that criticising it has any relevance to the Hohfeldian distinction between claim-rights and properties, as Lee seems to think when criticising 'the contractual model of rights. Inasmuch as Hohfeld talks about 'control' at all, it pertains to legal powers (op.cit., pp.50-7) which he, unlike Hart or Bentham, radically distinguishes from rights or liberties. Although Lee criticises 'the Hohfeldian view' at some length, she offers no references to Hohfeld. A different interpretation is proposed in my unpublished 'Hohfeld on liberties: an unrecognized challenge to liberal interpretations of human rights'.

The nature of the duty is an action or forbearance - paradigmatically, the individual payment of debts or the general non-interference with others' property (see Hohfeld, 1919, esp.
corresponding legal duties, which proves, that they are not genuine legal rights and freedoms. That they are not legal rights the category of ‘unhelpful retort from the negative libertarians’ (claim-rights) did not need proving; that they are not legal liberties (privileges) is only proved if one already supposes that liberties are correlative to duties, in which case the proof follows tautologically from the definition. However, I find her definition – ‘the very concept to legal freedom includes such material requirements [as the ability to pay to dine at the Ritz]’ – unhelpful, because it risks obscuring the ideological effects of ‘equality before the law’ which can operate precisely because material requirements do not achieve formal legal expression. (This is the valid point made by orthodox Marxist critics of law).

Lee suggests at one point that rights ‘are really disguised needs’ (p.375) – this is not so much to commit the naturalistic fallacy as a category mistake. To be fair, I think what she means is what she says elsewhere: that needs ought to be recognised as a basis for rights. I can accept this moral proposition, and also her distance for the kind of view expressed with most brutal forthrightness by Cranston (1967); but we need to be clear on the issues. When liberals argue that rights cannot be directly derived from needs they are correct: even Cranston manages to state a truth when he says that the achievement of social and economic rights depend of processes of socialization and democratization; where he is wrong in thinking this does not apply to civil and political rights and liberties (so phenomena like the abolition of slavery or the achievement of universal suffrage become miracles of nature). But Lee’s attack on this view is entirely misplaced. It is not true, she says, ‘that civil and political rights alone are creations of the law. Economic rights, equally, are the creations of the law’ (p.334). Her opponents do not deny this; they deny that the material preconditions are always such as to permit such laws – which implies the challenge well expressed by Bloch (‘there are no innate rights, all rights are achieved through struggle’).

E.g., Passmore (1974); Jonas (1984). For a critique of and alternative to Jonas, see Apel (1988), esp. pp.179-216. Gilligan (1982) has suggested that an orientation to responsibility follows a different moral trajectory to that of rights. This is an illuminating discussion, but I think it would be a mistake to go so far as to imply that the two orientations are incommensurable: on their complementarity see, e.g., Benhabib (1986b).

In brief, this is the situation when individual herdsmen graze their cattle on common land. If one herdsmen adds one cow to his herd, this has no noticeable effect. The ‘tragedy’ occurs if a greater number does so; a threshold point is reached at which the common is overgrazed to the detriment of all the herdsmen. See Hardin (1968).

For a critique of these terms of reference, see Offe and Weisenthal (1980).

I am not here concerned to analyse how Lee moves with such facility between Utilitarianism and Kantianism, for I am more concerned about her uncritical acceptance of the individualist presuppositions common to both.

For example, it may have more to do with quibbling over the conclusiveness of data, or massaging it, or redefining levels of harm (in all of which he may be aided and abetted by his friends in government). If pressed hard enough by domestic environmental legislation, though, as a last resort he may shift his operation to somewhere like Bhopal. I cannot share the assumption that an entrepreneur ‘intends’ to make profits but does not ‘intend’ to externalise his costs.

The situation where arable land which previously met the food needs of a local community is given over to some other crop for export. For fuller discussion and further references, see George (1976), and Shue (1980).

It is not necessary to deny that agents are ‘rational egoists’; it is necessary, rather, to recognise how they may be in very different situations of choice. Those who trek ten miles to cut some firewood are unlikely to be much impressed by being told that their self-interest needs enlightening. (Cf. also Bishop, 1990.)

See, e.g., Deigh (1988). Two other points worth noting are: first, a distinction between responsibility and duty (e.g., any parent has a responsibility for their child’s upbringing, but it depends on the culture whether they have specific duties to send her to school for ten years, etc.); second, that typically the sanction for failing in one’s responsibilities is removal from office, and not punishment of the agent – indeed, an office-holder can assume responsibility for some fault (e.g., of a junior) for which she has no moral culpability.

It might be noticed that, historically, the Enclosure Acts, which Lee refers to in another context, proved to be a greater ‘tragedy’ than overgrazing; and global ‘overgrazing’ (in both literal and figurative senses) today cannot be grasped in abstraction from the question of land ownership.

In this connection it might be noted that ‘the tragedy of poverty-stricken masses pushed into marginal lands by interpersonal capital and forced to degrade the environment out of sheer survival needs has little or no counterpart in the socialist world’ (O’Connor, 1989d, p.104). This is not to deny the devastation wrought also by the latter, but to insist on concrete and differentiated analyses of causes.

On strict liability see, e.g., Sistare (1989). The introduction of ‘green taxes’, if not alone sufficient, is nevertheless an important arm of the struggle to save the environment (Weizsacker, 1989); and can be increasingly strengthened where there is the political will (see the legal theorists reviewed in Demirovic, 1989); Silvestrini (1990) suggests various ways of shifting the boundary of the market to increase social control of the means of production.

O’Connor (1989a) p.5 gives a sample list of the questions which to ask is already to have answered. Lee in fact goes much further than most. Fore example, when Marx and Engels observe that descriptions of ‘Arcadian nature’ (see Worster, 1985) have little bearing on social theory, this is evidence of their ‘mechanistic worldview’; when they point out that nature is also ‘red in tooth and claw’, this earns them the suspicion of Social Darwinism. But the clinching proof that Marx is irredeemably ‘uneological’ is his belief that the relation between economy and ideology is one of simple linear cause and effect – ‘in spite of lapsing into dialectical talk’ (p.54).

For serious treatment of the question of Romantic anti-capitalism and the concept of nature in Marx, see, e.g., Schmidt (1971) and the essays of Ely (1988, 1989a) on Bloch and Lukács.

Among the most influential are those of Bahr in Germany and Bookchin in America. What is common is an affirmative valoration of the themes of the young Marx – with special emphasis on the aim of transforming work from drudgery into a humanly expressive activity – and a rejection of much of his later work insofar as this is premised on continuing the trajectory of industrialism and the ‘rational domination of nature’. The Frankfurt School had identified similar problems; but whereas they focused on the nature of the rationality of the domination, the Greens tend to eschew an investigation of its dialectics; whereas the former strived for a critical Marxism, the latter tend to reintroduce a theoretically uninformed dichotomy between an early and a late Marx.

To the extent that this refers to production at all, ‘artistic’ seems to mean ‘artisanal’. However, it is perhaps misleading to talk of it as a ‘mode of production’ in the context of a discussion of Marx, for Lee is really describing a ‘mode’ of action (she
discusses production as 'exosomatic action' – e.g., pp.114ff), not an ensemble of social practices and relationship.

Lee pivots much of her argument on a contrast between 'Marx's wholehearted scorn for Fourier' and his 'enthusiasm for what Saint-Simon stood for' (p.258) – which is difficult to square with Engels' judgement in the Preface to The Peasant War in Germany (see Marx and Engels (1968) p.246).

This is the utopian element in Marx – and is arguably reproduced by greens: see the criticisms of Kolakowski (1974), which are worth heeding in any discussion of radical democracy.

Contrast Bahro (1977) on this. If Lee goes too far in attributing the defects of 'real socialism' to Marx's theory, it would be a more serious mistake to disregard them entirely: see O'Connor (1989a) for the beginnings of a more differentiated analysis.

Lee is quite determined in her attempt to rehabilitate Malthus, and in criticising Marx (and Ricardo) for inadequately appreciating his insights. What Lee fails to appreciated, equating the finitude of natural resources with 'absolute scarcity', is that since scarcity is a relation of means to ends (cf. Sahlin's, 1974), there is a sense in which scarcity is intrinsically relative – a sense captured by Ricardo in opposition to Malthus. Thus Ricardo and Marx proposed examining actual means and actual ends rather than arithmetical tables.

Lee is not insensitive to these problems (see, e.g., p.158), but her discussion of them is generally vitiated by her premises. In this case (p.157) she says: 'By all accounts India is overpopulated ...'. In fact many other accounts are available which would suggest that such a proposition cannot be properly discussed until the question of income distribution is addressed (e.g., those cited in Shue, 1980, pp.200ff). Lee seems to be unduly influenced by the Ethirics in her a priori scepticism on this point. In any case, it will be time to argue that each country should limit its population to its own carrying capacity only when there no longer persists a net transfer of resources from poor to rich countries (see George, 1988).

In Daly's definition, quoted by Lee, it is emphasised that the SSE (steady-state economy) is a physical concept. As such, it may provide a useful reference point for ecocentralist thinking, but only as long as it is also remembered that the economy consists of social relations too. This last point is also insufficiently appreciated by Lee's predecessors: cf. Goldman and O'Connor (1988) on Ophuls, Schumacher and others; and Altvater (1989) on Georgescu-Roegen.

References


Barcellona, P. (1990), Il ritorno del legame sociale, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin.


