Some ecologists claim that while the scientific approach has its flaws, it can be redeemed. Capra, a physicist, claims that many scientists have abandoned the ‘Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm’

The ‘new physics’ that began with Albert Einstein in the early 20th-century and was taken further by Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg focuses on studying the relationships within the system and the integration of the individual parts with the whole.

This has radical implications; objective knowledge becomes impossible because the act of observing has effects on what is being observed. Werner Heisenberg developed the ‘uncertainty principle’ to account for this

Religion provides another approach. In The Tao of Physics (1975), Fritjof Capra drew parallels between the ideas of modern physics and eastern religions like Hinduism, Taoism, and in particular Zen Buddhism, which express the oneness of everything, a relatively recent discovery in Western science

Others argue that the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) embody ecological principles when they see both humankind and nature as products of divine creation

Human beings are viewed as God’s stewards on Earth, and have a duty to cherish and preserve the planet, as with ‘deep’ ecology

The most influential concepts for ecological ideas have been pre-Christian ideas, which often drew little distinction between human and non-human objects, viewing all things (stones, rivers, mountains, and even the Earth itself) as alive. The idea of a Mother Earth has been particularly significant for ecofeminists

James Lovelock developed the idea that the Earth is alive and gave it the name of ‘Gaia’, after the Greek goddess of the Earth; according to the Gaia hypothesis, ‘Earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans and soil’ have self-regulating according to homeostasis

Perhaps the greatest example of ‘Gaia’ preserving herself when one considers the 25% increase in the temperature of the sun since life on Earth began, and yet temperatures on Earth have remained virtually unchanged because the Earth’s atmosphere has self-regulated to adjust

The idea of ‘Gaia’ has developed into an ‘ecological ideology’, but conflicts with some of ecologism

‘Shallow’ ecologists have sought to adapt human behaviour to ensure the continuation of the human species, but the Gaia hypothesis suggests that the health of the planet matters more than any species on it

Furthermore, Lovelock has been strongly committed to the need for nuclear energy, a view that clashes with many in the ecological movement

8.4.3 Sustainability

Ecologists argue that the unquestioned assumption of mainstream ideologies and parties, or ‘grey parties’, is that human life has unlimited possibilities for material growth

Ecologists often lump capitalism and socialism together as examples of ‘industrialism’

Kenneth Boulding’s 1966 The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth argued that humans have generally acted with ‘reckless, exploitative, and violent behaviour’ as though they live in a ‘cowboy economy’, with unlimited economic opportunities, as the American West did in the frontier period

A spaceship, meanwhile, is a ‘closed’ system with limited resources, the use of which we need to think seriously about.

15 Capra, F., 1975. The Tao of Physics. s.l.:s.n.
16 Boulding, K., 1966. The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth. s.l.:s.n.
Mary Daly’s 1979 book *Gyn/Ecology* argues that women have an intrinsic link to nature because unlike men they are capable of bearing and suckling children, and they cannot separate themselves from natural rhythms.

Of course, not all women can bear children and not all women have periods, so Daly’s definition of womanhood seems reductive and inaccurate – nevertheless, Daly asserts that women are biologically inclined towards nature.

According to sex essentialist ecofeminists, the differing characters of men and women affect their politico-cultural views on how nature should be treated.

The male character, detached from nature and entrenched in ideas of innovation and creation, tends to establish a synthetic world emphasising competition and hierarchy.

If men are removed from positions of power and replaced by women, sex essentialist feminists claim that the previous materialist attitude will be replaced by a more nurturing attitude that carries more respect towards nature brought forward by ‘female nature’, as Daly refers to it.

### 8.6 ECOLOGISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Shallow ecology appears to be relatively successful – many mainstream parties now adopt ‘eco-friendly’ or environmental aspects.

Equally, practices like recycling and the use of organic foods have become increasingly common, as well as the rise of vegetarianism and veganism.

However, there are a number of problems which confront ecologism in the twenty-first century:

- It may not be possible for ecologism to become a global ideology.
- Consumerism and materialism have become entrenched due to globalisation.
- The ecologist solution may be too radical to be adopted.

It is hard to see how ecologism can become a global ideology, since it appears to deny developing or emerging economies the chance to catch up with developed Western states.

Economic development led to China commissioning on average one new coal power station every week in 2006; eight of the ten most polluted countries around the world are in China – yet they argue that their pollution is of a tiny scale relative to the West during the Industrial Revolution.

Furthermore, the industrialised West is reluctant to sacrifice living standards for improved environmental conditions, as illustrated by Australia and the USA’s reluctance to sign up to the Kyoto Protocol and the Trump administration’s determination to withdraw from the Paris Agreement.

Individualism and its underpinning values, such as consumption and materialism, have been spread around the globe, and so the ecologist no longer merely has to compete with Western consumerism, but rather global consumerism.

Perhaps the most daunting challenge to ecologism is simply the scale of the problem it attempts to tackle: the deep ecologist solution is more radical than that of socialism, fascism, feminism or even anarchism.

It requires a total reversal of the role of the state and the function of the economy; ecologism challenges us not to look at human nature in a new way but rather actually change the fundamentals of human nature to realise subordinance to nature.

The problem of ecologism is that in order for it to be successful, it is based on a philosophy that is deeply and deliberately alien to the culture that it must attempt to influence.

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