that avoids the anthropocentrism of the progressive conservation tradition.

In 1913 the U.S. Congress and President Wilson approved a bill authorizing the public construction of a dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley of Yosemite National Park. The reservoir created by the dam was to supply water to San Francisco—a city that had suffered chronic water shortages throughout its history—about one hundred fifty miles away. Although both houses of Congress overwhelmingly favored construction of the dam,[1] the years preceding the final vote were filled with a vigorous and often bitter debate over the issue. On the one side were progressive conservationists, such as Gifford Pinchot, who endorsed the project as a "wise use" of natural resources, answering obvious human needs. On the other side were wilderness preservationists, led by the president and founder of the Sierra Club, John Muir, who viewed the scheme as an unjustifiable intrusion on a magnificent, even holy, wilderness area. Never before in American history had a development project generated such national attention and so clearly pitted advocates of wilderness preservation against progressive conservationists. As Roderick Nash writes, "For the first time in the American experience the competing claims of wilderness and civilization to a specific area received a thorough hearing before the national audience."[2] Historians frequently refer to the battle over Hetch Hetchy as the first significant split between conservationists and wilderness preservationists, and it was certainly the event that forced preservationists like Muir to publicly articulate and defend their break with Pinchot's views. The manner in which they did so continues to strongly influence the work of contemporary environmentalists who believe it is necessary to reject and replace, rather than reform, the tradition of progressive conservationism.

For progressive conservationists like Pinchot, the proposal to dam Hetch Hetchy presented no significant moral dilemmas. In the first place, an engineering study in 1907 had found that the dam was the only practical solution to San Francisco's water problems.[3] This study came out only a year after the devastating earthquake and fire in San Francisco, which had generated tremendous sympathy for the city's need to rebuild and develop its infrastructure. On strictl

handiwork of God, and to destroy the valley (even if the reservoir were to be made into a beautiful public park) would be to destroy this divine masterpiece for crass materialistic purposes. In Muir's view, "These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar. Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man."[11]

For Muir, a dam in Yosemite is comparable to allowing money changers in the temple.[12] The wilderness of Hetch Hetchy represents values that can elevate human life above the corrupt commercialism and materialism found in urban centers such as San Francisco. That these values do not appear to many Americans as superior to material comfort only indicates the depths to which American society has fallen. Even to consider building such a dam suggests rampant moral decay. "That any would try to destroy such a place seems incredible; but sad experience shows that there are people good enough and bad enough for anything."[13] Arguments for the dam are like the whispers of the devil, and it was he, of course, who had instigated expulsion from Eden.[14]

Supporters of the dam must have been taken aback by rhetoric like this. In their view, it was not mammon but democracy that was at stake. They saw themselves as the champions of the public good, democratically defined, rather than the defenders of "commercialism" or unbridled capitalism. Although Pinchot and Muir had been very friendly in earlier times—in his autobiography Pinchot fondly remembers a night's encampment with Muir on the rim of the Grand Canyon[15]—the conflict over Hetch Hetchy illustrated in bold relief their radically different conceptions of conservation and the importance of nature. As Roderick Nash puts it, this incident demonstrated that "for all of his love of the woods, Pinchot's ultimate loyalty was to civilization and forestry; Muir's was to wilderness and preservation."[16] Pinchot's private papers and correspondence reveal that the Hetch Hetchy experience led him to become increasingly short-tempered about "nature lovers" like Muir.[17] For Muir, Pinchot's brand of conservation came to represent a direct assault on nature and the virtues it embodied.

chanical inventions, determined to devote the rest of my life to the study of the inventions of God."[23] He then embarked on his famous thousand mile walk from Indianapolis to the Gulf of Mexico and continued to roam until he found his adopted home in the Sierra Mountains of California. The degree to which Muir's wanderings led him away from human community is illustrated by his temporary abandonment of his fiancée when he took a long trip to Alaska, causing his future wife distress over his neglect.[24] Although in later life he would become involved in the political controversy over Hetch Hetchy, he did so only because his beloved wilderness was being threatened by American society. He was always distrustful of political reformers and only reluctantly became one himself because of what he viewed as extreme circumstances.[25]

For Muir, social activities, professions, and relationships hold slight allure at best and are useless and destructive at worst. "So-called sentimental, transcendental dreaming seems the only sensible and substantial business that one can engage in."[26] When reflecting on the world of men, Muir finds little to praise, seeing little more than "gross heathenism" in modern civilization.[27] Urban America overwhelms and disgusts him, and his attitude frequently becomes overtly misanthropic. Visiting New York City as a young man, he thought he might like to explore it, but only if all the people left![28] Perhaps his view of urban life is best summarized by his judgment about the citizens of San Francisco: The "boasted freedom of the town" is actually nothing but "pagan slavery," and all the people there "are more or less sick; there is not a perfectly sane man in San Francisco."[29] In comparison with the "intense purity and cordiality and beauty of Nature," the refinement and culture of civilization are but "gross barbarisms."[30] Nor are Muir's censures confined to urban society. He refers to shepherds in Yosemite as "money changers . . . in the temple,"[31] and, in even more startling language, he views the other men he stumbles upon in Yosemite as alien, even revolting: "As for the rough vertical animals called men, who occur in and on these mountains like sticks of condensed filth, I am not in *contact* with them; I do not live with them."[32] Muir concludes early on that his affinities lie with the wild creatures rather than with his fellow humans. "Well, I have precious little sympathy for the selfish propriety of civilized man, and if a

tual storms he witnesses there. "Nature like a fluid seems to drench and steep us throughout, as the whole sky and the rocks and flowers are drenched with spiritual life—with God."[45]

It would obviously be a mistake to underestimate the fundamentally religious quality of Muir's comprehension of nature.[46] What he claims to have discovered in his wanderings in the wilderness is nothing less than immortality. In *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, he exclaims, "I joyfully return to the immortal truth and immortal beauty of Nature."[47] Not only does he observe this truth and beauty, but by putting the world of civilization behind him he is able to actually become a part of this natural world. "Presently you lose consciousness of your own separate existence: you blend with the landscape, and become part and parcel of nature."[48] Time stands still when one is able to cultivate an unmediated relationship with wilderness. "One day is as a thousand years, a thousand years as one day, and while yet in the flesh you enjoy immortality."[49] It is ultimately salvation itself that Muir finds in nature.

The extremism of Muir's religious embrace of nature is largely the result of his rebellion from a very painful childhood, inflicted by his tyrannical, radically Calvinist father. There were physical beatings and excessive work loads; as a child, Muir almost died from seeping gas and lack of oxygen while being forced by his father to dig a seventy-foot well. Moreover, the elder Muir's Calvinism led him to object to the worldliness of his son's primary talents and interests—his mechanical genius and his love of nature. Even after he had fled his father's house, Muir suffered from the extreme disapproval and moral bullying of his father. For example, after reading Muir's published account of a storm on Mount Shasta, his father sent him a letter in which he self-righteously attacked Muir's mountaineering and literary efforts:

> Were you as really *happy* as my *wish* would make you, you would be permanently so in the *best* sense of the word. I received yours of the third inst. with your slip of paper, but I had read the same thing in "The Wisconsin," some days before I got yours, and then I *wished* I had not seen it, because it harried up my feelings so with another of your hair-breadth escapes. Had I seen it to be *God's work* you were doing I would have felt the *other* way, but I

4
The Spiritualization of Nature

> Integrity is wholeness, the
> greatest beauty is
> Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine
> beauty of the universe. Love that, not man
> Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions,
> or drown in despair when his days darken.
>
> —*Robinson Jeffers*

> We are learning finally that the forests and mountains and desert canyons are holier than our churches.
>
> —*Edward Abbey*

While the inheritors of progressive conservationism have attempted to reconcile its emphasis on the multiple use of natural resources with the need to develop a respect for the environment that transcends social utility, other contemporary environmental theorists have turned away from that heritage altogether. Rejecting both the utilitarianism of progressive conservationism and its liberal reform, they have revived the pastoral tradition inspired by Thoreau. This tradition is founded on the belief that nature is less significant as a source of material goods and well-being than as a moral guide and educator. When this postulate was translated through the life and writings of John Muir, however, it lost its political character: The experience of nature became important for religious inspiration and personal satisfaction, not as a fount of political knowledge and radical principles. In addition to providing a general criticism of contemporary society, modern pastoral environmentalism has moved in the direction of offering an alternative lifestyle for those alienated from commercial society, as well as an account of the independent moral significance of the natural world

grounds, the project made obvious good sense. Pinchot explained his support for the plan by appealing to his own conservationist values: "The fundamental principle of the whole conservation policy is that of use, to take every part of the land and its resources and put it to that use in which it will serve the most people."[4] Even later critics of the dam, such as John Muir's biographer Michael Cohen, concede that when judged on the basis of utility, the dam clearly had the better argument. "When the issues were reduced to the realm of utilitarian and materialist ideology, there was not much doubt that the water for San Francisco would be seen as a greater good for a greater number."[5]

But to Pinchot and like-minded conservationists, there were equally important democratic considerations that prompted them to throw their support behind the project. California congressman William Kent, a Progressive who had always been sympathetic to conservation and was a friend of both Pinchot's and Muir's, viewed the dam as an opportunity to assert the principle of public ownership and control of utilities. As Roderick Nash explains, "While [Kent] realized that Hetch Hetchy was valuable as wilderness and part of a national park, he also knew that the powerful Pacific Gas and Electric Company wanted the valley as a step toward consolidating its control over California hydroelectric resources. Municipal control of Hetch Hetchy's water by San Francisco would block this plan, be a significant victory for the ideal of public ownership, and, beyond that, assert the democratic principle."[6] Progressives like Kent feared private monopolies in general but were most passionate about monopolies of essential goods and services.[7] To them, damming Hetch Hetchy would not only be good for San Francisco on straightforward utilitarian grounds but would also serve to boost the democratic agenda of publicly controlled utilities. As Nash points out, it was a combination of these views that generated congressional support for the project.[8]

Although Muir and other opponents of the dam claimed that there were alternative, potentially adequate water sources for San Francisco, they did not fully develop this line of argument in their attack on the proposal. Rather, they concentrated on themes of virtue and corruption. Support for the dam was support for "mammon."[9] As Muir describes it, the dam is a "grossly destructive commercial scheme."[10] The wilderness of Hetch Hetchy Valley represents the magnificent

What is perhaps most striking about Muir's defense of the Hetch Hetchy Valley is the degree to which he was either blind to the progressive democratic commitments that lay behind much of the national backing of the project, or unwilling to distinguish these commitments from unholy support for capitalism, commercialism, and money worship. In Muir's eyes, the choice is stark: Either we respect and protect natural wonders like Hetch Hetchy, or we succumb to the vices of a corrupt commercial civilization. Muir's lifelong project, and the project of those who follow his example today, is to give an account of his rejection of the democratic and utilitarian tenets of progressive conservationism and to articulate an alternative understanding of the importance and value of nature, which can serve to mediate the competing claims of civilization and the environment.

Nash is certainly not exaggerating when he locates Muir's ultimate loyalty in wilderness and its preservation. Muir's life can be read as a series of retreats from society to the wilderness, from the world of human activities and obligations to the refuge of nature. In 1863 Muir left the University of Wisconsin to study in what he called the "University of the Wilderness" in Canada.[18] This decision to abandon his formal schooling coincided with a determination to give up the study of medicine; as he wrote to a friend, although practicing medicine would contribute to the lessening of human misery, his reason told him, "You will die ere you are ready to be able to do so."[19] Significantly, his wanderings in the Canadian wilderness also coincided with the Civil War—a timing motivated by Muir's tremendous fear of being dragged into a conflict to which he was not a party.[20] Although he would experience guilt about avoiding the draft and fleeing to Canada, as a Scottish immigrant he did not feel implicated in the greatest moral and political crisis facing the United States during his lifetime. As one biographer puts it, Muir "was paralyzed by the threat of conscription. . . . Politics still lay outside his ken; he had no strong feelings about the moral aspects of the war. It simply intruded on his life."[21] In fact, he would not become an American citizen until he was sixty-five, and only then in order to obtain a passport for a planned trip around the world.[22]

After the war, Muir went to Indianapolis to work in a machine shop, having demonstrated mechanical genius throughout his youth. After an accident left him temporarily blind, he "bade adieu to all of my me-

should occur between the wild beasts and Lord Man, I should be tempted to sympathize with the bears."[33]

Muir once perceptively wrote that he did not "mould in with the rest of mankind,"[34] and yet he was not without the need for at least an abstract kind of human relationship. "It is easy enough to live out of material sight of friends, but to live without human love is impossible."[35] Nonetheless, the primary source of love for Muir is not found among humans, but in the experience of nature. He believes that as long as nature is unaltered by human activity, it embodies a perfect beauty. "None of Nature's landscapes are ugly so long as they are wild."[36] This beauty, in turn, is the pure expression of God's love. "Where all is beauty, all is love."[37] When in the wild, Muir considers himself in an intense and immediate relationship with God, or what he refers to as "Nature-God."[38] The animals he sees are "happy" ("the whole wilderness is enlivened with happy animals"[39]), and here, unlike in the tame world of human society, God looks after the needs of all living things: "God takes care of everything that is wild but he only half takes care of tame things."[40] As a result of God's loving attendance, life in the wilderness is literally care-free in a way that is unimaginable in the social world of men and women. To experience nature is to experience the "pure and the beautiful," which can only be the direct expression of God's will.[41] Nature is attractive and important not because of its material (or even aesthetic) qualities, but because it expresses the complete spirituality of perfect love—God's love.

Aside from the pure and the beautiful, Muir also discovers God's power in nature. He was most ecstatic when he found himself in the midst of a violent storm. Nature may have a "warm heart,"[42] but the warmth is paradoxically expressed most perfectly when accompanied by a display of God's overwhelming might. "Yet all that we call destruction is creating, and it is just where storms fall most violently that the greatest quality of beauteous, joyous life appear."[43] Storms actually serve, for Muir, as the best metaphor of his experience of God's love in the wilderness. We know that we are becoming more like the wild things—for which God cares completely—when we can "lean fully and trustingly on Nature," not only for the "infinite tenderness," but also for the equally infinite "power of her love."[44] The spiritual awakening that Muir undergoes in Yosemite is much like the ac-

knew it was not God's work, although you seem to think you are doing God's service. If it had not been for God's boundless mercy you would have been cut off in the midst of your folly. . . . It is no use to look through a glass darkly when we have the *Gospel* and its *fulfillment*, and when the true practical believer has got the Godhead in fellowship with himself all the time, and reigning in his heart all the time. . . . You cannot warm the heart of the saint of God with your cold icy-topped mountains. O, my dear son, come away from them to the spirit of God and His holy word, and He will show our lovely Jesus unto you, who is by His finished work presented to you, without money and price. . . . And the best and soonest way of getting quit of the writing and publishing your book is to burn it, and then it will do no more harm either to you or others.[50]

It is not especially surprising that Muir revolted against a father who could respond to his work in this manner. Nor is it surprising, however, that Muir's own beliefs, although conceived in rebellion from his father's Calvinism, retain crucial similarities with it. Muir disavowed Calvinism and retreated to nature, but his relationship with nature is perhaps one that only a Calvinist could truly appreciate. Muir's nature is not earthy or sensuous or material in any significant sense. Rather, what he worships is a purely idealized, spiritual nature. As Catherine Albanese notes, "Muir's idealism provided a way to accommodate a former Calvinism without acknowledging it. If the world in all its alluring beauty pointed beyond itself to spirit, then . . . it could be safe to contemplate matter without guilt or stain. And so long as one held on to the emblematic theory that nature made sense as sacramental sight of spirit, it could be safe to relish the splendor of mountain and forest."[51] Like all rebellions, Muir's was deeply influenced by the character of what he was rebelling against: His pantheistic worship of nature, and his rejection of the "pagan slavery" of American urban society, grew out of and mirrored a Calvinist repudiation of the sensuous and material world.

For Muir's father, the nature to which his son had fled was the world of "icy-topped mountains," of brute matter. His son's sin was his rejection of true Christian community and spirituality, and he saw no meaningful difference between Muir's embrace of nature and liv-

ing a life of sensuality in human society—both glorified the flesh rather than the spirit. For the son, however, the wilderness was a spiritual community precisely because it taught values that transcended worldly materialism. Although Muir expresses an occasional fear of other creatures and a longing for human companionship (Muir mentions both his loneliness and his fear of Florida's alligators in his *Thousand Mile Walk*[52]), the overall lessons of his wanderings are of "divine harmony"[53] and the "friendly union, of life and death so apparent in Nature."[54] As such, the experiences teach Muir not only to overcome the fear of death and injury from other animals, but to lose interest in material concerns generally. The wilderness represents a community of creatures united in their subjection to the divine hand of God. As we have seen, the more wild the creatures, the more completely they are subject to God's care.

If nothing else, Nature's grandeur, immortality, harmony, and power reveals the hubris of conventional human self-importance. As Stephen Fox writes, "In reading his Sierra landscapes Muir was overwhelmed by a sense of human insignificance."[55] In the context of nature, human life stands in a relationship of equality with all other living plants and creatures—all are equally subject to the natural processes created and controlled by God. "But what is the size of the greatest man, or the tallest tree that ever overtopped a grass! Compared with other things in God's creation the difference is nothing. We are all only microscopic animalcula."[56] Muir ingenuously refers to animals as "animal people" who are "intimately related to us,"[57] because all creatures must equally submit (differences of degree being relatively insignificant) to the overwhelming power of nature.

For Muir, the religious essence of nature is the antithesis of life in American society. "Toiling in the tread mills of life we hide from the lessons of nature."[58] Life in society is materialist and mundane, the very opposite of the religious transcendence nature can offer. While "there is no daylight in towns,"[59] Muir frequently refers to the mountains as the source of our spiritual renewal: "In every country the mountains are fountains, not only of rivers but of men."[60] Whatever obligation Muir feels toward his fellow men and women is met by, in Fox's words, "preaching the mountains" in the hope that the "multitude would come and be baptized."[61] Muir's writings are meant to proclaim the religious qualities of nature and to invite his readers to

experience nature on these terms. When describing Yosemite, for example, he writes, "It was a special church or temple in which all the landscape loving world should do extraordinary worship."[62] The purpose of *Our National Parks* is to encourage people to visit the parks and "get them into their hearts, so at length their preservation and right use might be made sure."[63] To the extent that Americans are taking his advice and sharing his view of nature, the crude "barbarism" of society is being challenged by the sublime: "The tendency nowadays to wander in wilderness is delightful to see. Thousands of tired, nerve shaken, over civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."[64]

For Muir, then, the primary purpose of nature is not so much to service the practical needs of American civilization as it is to offer an alternative, essentially religious source of values and experiences. Although Muir was not entirely opposed to scientific management—for example, he approved of the artificial breeding of salmon,[65] and in *Our National Parks* he praises the "dawn of a new day in forestry"[66]—he never believed that the principal value of nature is to be found in the useful resources it provides for society and the economy. In a close paraphrase of Thoreau's famous claim that "in wildness is the preservation of the world," Muir writes, "In God's wildness lies the hope of the world—the great fresh, unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and the wounds heal ere we are aware."[67] Wilderness is precious as the fount of a truer life and purer wisdom than society can ever provide.

Catherine Albanese refers to Muir as Thoreau's "celebrated spiritual heir in the preservationist movement,"[68] and it is certainly true that Muir modelled his own writings on Thoreau's and generally traced his intellectual roots to New England transcendentalism. Nonetheless, Muir's biographers are quick to point out that Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson were ultimately too civilized for Muir. "Compared to Thoreau," writes Nash, "who cringed at an excess of wildness and idealized the half-cultivated, Muir was wild indeed."[69] Fox also notes that "both Emerson and Thoreau seemed insufficiently wild" to Muir.[70] And when Muir was able to meet Emerson in Yosemite, the event was a tremendous disappointment. Muir looked forward to

Emerson's visit, since he "felt sure that of all men he would best interpret the sayings of these noble mountains and trees."[71] Upon arrival, however, Emerson and his companions balked at the idea of actually spending a night camping in the mountains. From Muir's perspective they were interested in gaining only the most superficial impression of what these mountains had to teach. "[Emerson's] party, full of indoor philosophy, failed to see the natural beauty and fullness of promise of my wild plan [to spend the night outdoors], and laughed at it in good-natured ignorance, as if it were necessarily amusing to imagine that Boston people might be led to accept Sierra manifestations of God at the price of rough camping."[72] In all, the episode was a "sad commentary on culture and the glorious transcendentalism."[73] The crowning blow for Muir must have been when he later received a letter from Emerson encouraging him not to stay too long in solitude—as if this solitude had not been the source of his inspiration to begin with![74] Emerson was too settled into armchair philosophy to appreciate and experience true wilderness; he was past his prime, and was now as a child in the hands of his affectionate but sadly civilized friends."[75] And Thoreau's wanderings around Concord and his experiment at Walden must have seemed a far cry from the true wilderness Muir sought, worshipped, praised, and defended.

Muir differs from his eastern forebears, however, not simply in some measure of "wildness." Nor does he merely take Thoreau's example to its logical extreme. Rather, Muir breaks in fundamental ways with Thoreau's views regarding the nature of wilderness and its value for human beings. For Thoreau, "wildness" must be more than a refuge from society; it must also serve as a guide for a reformed and just society. For Muir, wilderness represents not so much the moral inspiration for a reformed society as the alternative to the human community in any form. Muir replaces Thoreau's interest in Native Americans and the early European colonists in America—that is, in those who lived in intimate contact with the natural world—with a love for a wilderness altogether lacking a human presence. Thoreau praises the European farmers who settled the lands of America; Muir refers to "the invading horde of destroyers called settlers."[76]

As we have seen, Muir's nature is the source of an intensely religious individual salvation, while for Thoreau it was the potential tutor

of human communities. Muir shares with Thoreau a host of attitudes toward the natural world—that it is basically benevolent and should be treated with profound respect, for example—but under Muir's influence, the preservationist movement lost an overtly political and communitarian focus. Instead, the nature that is to be respected and protected is a nature without people. It can address only individual spiritual needs, not common political problems; in fact, nature's distance from human influence is what makes it so attractive, pure, and divine. The interest in political problems falls away altogether (except when society threatens nature), and American society is viewed as something to be combatted in the name of an alternative set of individual values rather than criticized and reformed according to some more "natural" social order. As nature takes on the role of spiritual savior for Muir, so it also becomes increasingly silent as a guide for social life. Wilderness preservationists fought their first political battle against progressive conservationism under Muir's leadership, using a discourse that effectively removed nature from the human world. In nature, individuals could (and should) experience the transcendent and the sublime, but no longer would they find there the type of knowledge that spoke directly to their social concerns. As nature became for Muir a religious and not just a moral force, so it became increasingly irrelevant to the mundane and the material components of human life.

Elements of Muir's criticism of American society and arguments for wilderness preservation emerge unmistakably in contemporary environmentalist literature. Bill McKibben, for example, in his best-selling book *The End of Nature*, has mourned the passing of Muir's strong sense of nature as a realm apart from, and superior to, human society. Modern science and technology have created tremendous environmental problems and have altered and intruded on almost every imaginable natural process. As a result, McKibben argues, "We have ended the thing that has, at least in modern times, defined nature for us—its separation from human society."[77] This makes it next to impossible for us to think of the earth, as Muir did, as "a museum of divine intent,"[78] or to understand nature as "the separate and wild province, the world apart from man to which he adapted, under whose rules he

was born and died."[79] The result has been a radical disenchantment and demystification of the world, cutting us off from greater meanings and values than those encountered in merely human, artificial settings. McKibben writes that "the comfort we need is inhuman," and this comfort can no longer be found in our contrived environment.[80]

In addition, as nature has become increasingly artificial, so too have we become unable to imagine nature as having integrity or value outside of a human context. "The idea that the rest of creation might count for as much as we do is spectacularly foreign, even to most environmentalists."[81] If we can rediscover a natural realm, perhaps beyond our own world, that holds an independent mystery and wonder, we may recover an awareness of human limitations that can teach us to live within the confines of the natural world.[82] As Peter Reed writes, "We have lost, in our daily lives at least, a precious sense of our own insignificance."[83]

Others, too, have been deeply sympathetic to the theme found in Muir's writings that humans have radically inflated their own importance in relation to the rest of creation. The legacy of progressive conservationism is an emphasis on the scientific management and control of the natural world for human benefit. However, since the 1960s, a number of writers and activists in the environmentalist movement have perceived a practically dangerous and morally indefensible human arrogance in the way society generally, and progressive conservationism in particular, exploit and control the environment. Lynn White, in an influential paper published in 1967, argues that the ecological crisis is largely due to the extreme human-centeredness of Christianity. More than any of the world's major religions, modern Christianity inclines toward the almost complete subordination of nature to human interests: "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen."[84] In White's view, the first step in solving our environmental problems must be to devise a new religious sensibility that renounces nature's servile status. "Hence 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. . . . Since the roots of our troubles are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not."[85] To this end, White proposes St. Francis as an appropriate patron saint for ecolo-

gists,[86] since he alone in the Christian tradition took seriously the moral, even spiritual, value of nonhuman life. White's point is that by deflating our sense of the unique and higher value of human life relative to the rest of creation, we may be able to design our society so as to respect nature and live in a more acceptable balance with it.

In a similar vein, David Ehrenfeld attacks modern society's belief that human knowledge and technology are capable of satisfactorily controlling and developing the environment to meet human needs and desires. Arguing that "we must come to terms with our own irrational faith in our own limitless power,"[87] Ehrenfeld concludes that there "is no true protection for Nature within the humanist system—the very idea is a contradiction in terms."[88] Like Muir, Ehrenfeld believes that only when we understand our human bounds will we begin to treat the natural world more responsibly. And nature would not be the only beneficiary of such an attitude change. "Those who can understand the limitations of humanity can partake more than others of the creation of God, and in this there is both satisfaction and a different kind of power. We yearn to see the human spirit freed once again from the fetters of self-adulation, so that it may soar aloft if favorable winds occur."[89] For Ehrenfeld, as for White and Muir, an appreciation of the natural world, and right treatment of it, require a greater sense of humility and human equality with the rest of creation than is found in our conventional beliefs and practices.

The theorists who have perhaps done the most to revive Muir's sense of the spiritual importance of nature are a loose grouping of environmentalists who refer to themselves as "deep ecologists." Their most visible American publicists are Bill Devall and George Sessions. Drawing on the work of Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, Devall and Sessions aim to lay the groundwork for a new "ecological consciousness."[90] The problem with what they call reformist environmentalism, or, in the language of this study, the progressive conservation tradition, is that in the final analysis such environmentalism bolsters an anti-ecological attitude toward the natural world. As Devall writes, "In using reformist arguments . . . activists help to legitimate and reinforce the human centered (anthropocentric) world view of decision makers."[91] The goal of deep ecology is not just to criticize liberal and reformist ecologists, but to pursue the more ambitious project of attacking the underlying worldview of contemporary society. From this

perspective, what we face today "is not so much a crisis of the environment as a crisis of character and culture."[92]

What is the guilty defect in the "character and culture" of modern society? In the terminology they would use, the central problem is the anthropocentrism and humanism that informs contemporary civilization; in other words, we are selfish, and the society we live in reflects and institutionalizes this selfishness.[93] Because of our belief that human interests are fundamentally more important than the interests, needs, and integrity of nature, we have shamelessly exploited and damaged the natural world. Science and technology have become dangerous tools in the hands of such a powerful and self-absorbed species as our own, and they will continue to menace the environment until they are tamed and redirected by a radical shift in human consciousness and values.[94] This attack on the selfishness of society reaches its greatest (and least credible) heights in Devall's work, when he condemns the contemporary era as an "Age of Nihilism,"[95] and equates students of natural resources management with the guards in Nazi death camps.[96] Less flamboyantly, Devall and Sessions suggest that at the very least our anthropocentrism has created a profound imbalance between human interests and the interests of the rest of the natural world. "Excessive human intervention in natural processes has led other species to near-extinction. For deep ecologists the balance has long since been tripped in favor of humans. Now we must shift the balance back to protect the habitat of other species."[97] Since they believe that *all* of the dominant "Western views" of nature suffer from arrogance and selfishness,[98] deep ecology offers an alternative biocentrism that can potentially reorient human activities, lifestyles, and consciousness in an ecologically sound direction.

Devall and Sessions believe that humans as well as nature would benefit from such a reorientation. Besides encouraging us to do unjustifiable violence to other living things, anthropocentrism has perverted human life. Devall attacks what he calls the "imperialism of modernity and urbanism" because it is anti-ecological and it destroys human lives.[99] Again employing hyperbolic rhetoric, he claims that the "modern city is a necropolis—a vast city of the dead."[100] Deep ecology intends not only to liberate nature from human exploitation, but to liberate humans from their own perverse lifestyles and thinking.

The two "ultimate norms" of deep ecology, then, are the promotion of "self realization" and "biocentric equality."[101] Self-realization is to be achieved by widening our understanding of "self" to include the natural world—apparently a twofold process of overcoming a narrow, egoistic understanding of self-interest, and simultaneously developing a sympathy with other living things.[102] "As long as we think of our *self* in a narrow, 'me first,' self-serving way, we will suffer. When we put the vital needs of other beings above our narrowly conceived self-interest, then we discover that our broader and deeper needs are met in the context of meeting the needs of the 'other,' because we have broadened and deepened our self to include the other into ourselves."[103] This "maturity and growth"[104] of the self can lead to an "all-inclusive Self-realization in the sense that if we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves. There are no boundaries and everything is interrelated."[105] As Devall puts it, deep ecology's grasp of self-realization teaches that "there is a literal intermingling of person and Other, of mind-in-nature."[106] This "expanded, deepened self is not impersonal but transpersonal," and to discover it is a "part of the transforming process required to heal ourselves in the world."[107]

It is ironic that the deep ecology criticism of anthropocentrism and selfishness leads to such a strong emphasis on personal "healing" and self-interest—even allowing for the expanded sense Devall and Sessions attempt to articulate. Biocentric equality, in fact, is less a separate norm of deep ecology than an extension of the notion of self-realization to all of nature. "The intuition of biocentric equality is that all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization within the larger Self-realization."[108] The central claim of deep ecology, therefore, is that this idea of self-realization fosters not only human satisfaction but a proper ecological orientation as well. "The positive message of deep ecology is maximal Self-realization of all beings."[109] The trick is to recognize that ecological well-being and human well-being are essentially the same thing, and this can be done through an expanded understanding of the relation between the "self" and nature.

Deep ecology is basically a contemporary expression of the religious, even ecstatic language found in Muir's writings. For Muir, nature offered a spiritual experience of transcendence, immortality, and losing one's self in the greater majesty of creation. Devall and Ses-

sion's language is updated, but they too are struggling to express a similar transcendence in which we "become one" with nature, forsake our narrowly defined individual interests, and identify our own good with the natural world as a whole. Although deep ecology has grown out of genuine environmentalist concerns, protecting the environment has become for these theorists a happy consequence of an even more fundamental interest in personal satisfaction. This is nicely illustrated by Devall's discussion of his own development as a deep ecologist. His involvement in environmental issues began with political activism aimed at enlarging the boundaries of Redwood National Park in the 1970s.[110] His increasing dissatisfaction with reform environmentalism, however, turned him in the direction of deep ecology. He concludes his book by asserting that winning and losing conventional political battles no longer has meaning for him and that the practice of deep ecology principles and lifestyle has become his only objective. "Life is a war dance and in the dance there is meaning. Practicing is the end in itself. If through practicing one comes to a kind of deep ecology philosophical position from exploring the broad and deep self, then well and good. If not, then keep practicing."[111] The pragmatic concern with the protection of nature has become secondary to the ultimate goal of personal salvation from an alienating and repulsive human world.

The inherently religious, even antirational, quality of this liberation is suggested by the way deep ecology principles and insights are discovered. Although Devall and Sessions claim that deep ecology must be "both rational and spiritual,"[112] they admit that their norms "cannot be fully grasped intellectually but are ultimately experiential."[113] This experience can be aided by pursuing simplicity of lifestyle[114] and by studying anthropological literature about premodern, primal, and small-scale cultures,[115] but the insights of deep ecology are primarily derived from the direct experience of nature and the honest inspection of intuitions. As Devall notes, deep ecology is "best expressed, not explained."[116] Only by contact with nature can we "find our bearings,"[117] have "earth bonding experiences,"[118] and rediscover the "direct land wisdom" once known by primal peoples and now obscured by modern science.[119] Although the content of deep ecology is apparently very fluid and open to individual interpretation—Arne Naess invites people to invent their own personal "ecosophy" from their par-

ticular experiences[120]—it presumably will reinforce a universal intuition about the "sacred space" of wilderness[121] and promote the rediscovery of the "enchantment of Gaia [Mother Earth], the sacredness of Gaia."[122] And, to use a favorite word from this literature, deep ecology will demonstrate the "maturity" of people who live in greater harmony with nature than contemporary society does. Although Devall is at pains to defend deep ecology from the charge that it is a new religion or cult and to insist that their only purpose is to fight against "thoughtless and mindless behavior,"[123] by the end of his book he admits that deep ecology is "primarily a spiritual-religious movement."[124] Like Muir's radical transcendentalism, deep ecology is fundamentally a personal religious experience beyond the realm of rational defense and explanation.

Although Devall and Sessions attempt to outline the political implications of deep ecology, the private character of this perspective reduces its relevance for discussions of political and collective life. When Devall admonishes us to experience our "sense of place" in the environment, what is most striking is that no one else seems to be there.[125] When he tries to describe the model of a mature human being—one who is fully integrated into the natural world—he conjures up that most solitary of mythical creatures, Sasquatch (Big Foot): The ideal of Sasquatch teaches "a more mature kind of human, a future primal being" who can show "us one possibility to a more fully developed, integrated way of dwelling on this earth."[126] This is obviously not an auspicious position from which to evaluate the nature of human society and political life.

Despite the asocial, even antisocial, implications of deep ecology, Devall and Sessions argue that there is a "natural social order" in which "people refrain from dominating others."[127] This social order consists of a "self-regulating community"[128] that allows "genuine freedom for humans and nonhumans" alike.[129] These communities will be located geographically within bioregions, rather than within artificially contrived political boundaries, and political power will be decentralized and democratic. "The real, organic community is simple in material goods but rich in individuation, communalism, awareness of the way things are, in affectional and spiritual connections with a specific landscape."[130] In the long run, deep ecology aims at a radical conversion of human consciousness to make way for a totally new (or

perhaps long-forgotten) social form. "The basic social thrust of the deep, long-range ecology movement is transformation of the masses into a new kind of society. The aim is not to create a utopia of experts, a perfectly managed technocratic state, but to empower more and more ordinary people with their ecological self and to empower grass-roots movements with solidarity and effectiveness when facing vast bureaucracies and hierarchical organizations."[131]

Presumably, when individuals achieve a deep ecology understanding of self-realization, a just, pastoral, anarchic society will become a possibility. Although we find here a partial vision of what a just social order might involve, deep ecology's disinterest in political questions prevents Devall and Sessions from developing this vision in more detail or discussing any of the obvious problems of transition, institutional forms, justice within these communities, how individuation and communalism will both be respected, and so forth.[132]

There is another and much less optimistic dimension to deep ecology's portrayal of the possible relationship between human communities and the greater "biotic community." As mentioned, Devall and Sessions believe that human interests have for too long ranked higher than those of nature and that the time has come to "shift the balance back" to safeguard other species. Elaborating on this, Devall observes that "we lack compassion and seem misanthropic if we turn our backs on hundreds of millions of humans who reside in megalopolises. However, when a choice must be made, it seems consistent with deep ecology principles to fight on the side of endangered plants and animals."[133] These comments reveal a significant ambivalence in the deep ecology position. On the one hand, the authors argue that if the needs of people and nature are properly understood, there are no necessary conflicts between humans and the natural world: We would simply realize a commonality of interests between ourselves and the environment, because "there are no boundaries and everything is interrelated." On the other hand, they correctly recognize that there are potentially very serious collisions between human needs and interests and the protection of the environment—especially in the pristine and wild form that deep ecology advocates.

Even if it is true that exploration of the "ecological self" promises to liberate individuals and the natural world, this opportunity is limited, even under ideal conditions, to those who are fortunate enough to be

able to escape the life of the megalopolis. In their more frank moments, Devall and Sessions imply that their "biotic equality" may require massive sacrifices (perhaps the lives of large numbers of urban dwellers?) by the human species in order to regain an appropriate balance with nature. Devall and Sessions do not forthrightly acknowledge the devaluation of human life implied by their position—nor, indeed, how it undermines their own theory of self-realization. However, their occasional recognition of the potential for conflict between humans and the wilderness indicates at least a partial appreciation of the possible incompatibility of deep ecology's two basic norms—self-realization and biocentric equality. The primary message Devall and Sessions want to convey is one of harmony and liberation—we can experience complete self-realization along with the rest of creation. The secondary and more sober message they are periodically forced to acknowledge is one of human limitation and sacrifice inspired by the recognition of the equality of all living things.

This ambivalence raises conceptual problems for deep ecology, which are illustrated in a recent response by another deep ecologist, David Johns, to the criticism of Ramachandra Guha, an Indian environmentalist. Guha's position is that the emphasis on wilderness preservation by radical American environmentalists and deep ecologists does real damage to both the environment and the people of India (and the rest of the Third World). "What is unacceptable are the radical conclusions drawn by deep ecology, in particular, that intervention in nature should be guided primarily by the need to preserve biotic integrity rather than by the needs of humans."[134] Our most significant environmental problems, Guha contends, have little or no relation to the contest between "anthropocentrism" and "biocentrism." Rather, environmental degradation tends to be caused by overconsumption in the First World and among Third World elites and by worldwide militarization. "Neither of these problems has any tangible connection to the anthropocentric-biocentric distinction. . . . If my identification of the major dangers to the integrity of the natural world is correct, invoking the bogy of anthropocentrism is at best irrelevant and at worst a dangerous obfuscation."[135] Focusing on wilderness preservation in the Third World is actually a form of imperialism in which the interests and values of western elites end up harming native populations. Tiger preserves in India are an example of western-

imposed conservation practices that have done little but displace and cause misery for the peasants excluded from these areas.[136] Guha concludes that the "wholesale transfer of a movement [deep ecology and wilderness preservation] culturally rooted in American conservation history can only result in the social uprooting of human populations in other parts of the globe."[137]

Johns attempts to defend deep ecology from this rather damning attack, and in so doing he unwittingly expresses the oscillation in deep ecology between human self-realization and outright misanthropy. Johns first makes the predictable argument that it is not wilderness apart from the human community that deep ecology is promoting, but rather a human community appropriately integrated into the natural environment. "Given the human-nature relationship that deep ecology espouses—that to be effective in allowing nature to heal itself, one must also heal one's own self and community—it seems odd to suggest that deep ecology is unconcerned with human communities and their place in nature."[138] Deep ecology, by teaching a better way of living in nature, actually leads to greater human empowerment than current societies can provide.[139] "Biocentrism offers us back our body by recognizing that the Earth is our real community—that by healing our split from it, by healing the split between cortex and heart, and by healing nature within, we can begin to heal all of nature."[140] The biocentrism of deep ecology lights the path toward a "fundamental transformation" for human society "which stresses the centrality of finding our place *in* nature."[141] Guha is wrong to reject biocentrism, for it is precisely what holds out hope for a resolution between human interests and the needs of the environment.

Yet Johns also points out that biocentrism refuses to grant a privileged position to human life within the greater scheme of nature.[142] In addition, he observes that "in much of the world almost any human impact is destructive of the biosphere."[143] And this causes a problem, because "if nonhuman nature is valued for itself, if the integrity of the biosphere as a community is valued for itself, then human consumption which disrupts it is wrong: it would constitute overconsumption."[144] Thus, "in practice much of the Earth cannot be used for permanent human settlement" because of the disruptions such settlement produces.[145] It is not clear why *any* human settlement of the earth is acceptable to Johns—since all human activity disrupts the biosphere to some degree—but certainly his conception of an appropriately integrated human community is so hypothetical as to be meaningless when evaluating the problems of real human beings presently in the world. "There is, I believe, widespread agreement among . . . deep ecologists that fewer humans (and especially less extensive occupation of the globe) as well as equitable and drastically curtailed consumption are essential to restoring the balance of the planet."[146] Since the peasants that Guha is concerned about are obviously too impoverished to limit their consumption further, a skeptic might be tempted to suspect (presumably contrary to Johns's intention) that perhaps they are examples of some of the people who should not be taking up so much space on the globe.

Be that as it may, even though Johns has promised that deep ecology teaches the unity between human and the natural environment's interests, he now correctly observes that "humans compete for habitat with other species, threaten their destruction, and otherwise degrade the environment, even diminishing its carrying capacity."[147] If Johns believes that this competition can be eliminated in some future society, it still tells us little or nothing about what to do for Guha's peasants who are struggling for survival today. At the very least, Johns's discussion will not persuade Guha that the interests of the Third World will carry sufficient weight in the moral evaluations of a deep ecologist, or that deep ecology has a coherent program for protecting both the environment and the interests of human communities.

Numerous other objections can and have been raised to deep ecology: It is guilty of grossly romanticizing the experience of "primal peoples";[148] even if its anthropological portrait were accurate, it would provide very little practical guidance for the mass of humans living in contemporary urban industrial society;[149] deep ecology promotes a type of knowledge that is entirely beyond rational human discourse and debate;[150] and the biocentrism embedded in deep ecology is actually a remarkably self-interested and ultimately anthropocentric position.[151] In short, deep ecology appears to have only a vague environmentalist program outside of a generalized commitment to wilderness preservation, it advocates a philosophical position that has yet to receive a strong rational defense and that is quite possibly internally inconsistent, and it makes claims about the human condition that seem to be based on weak empirical evidence at best.

What, then, has constituted the strength of deep ecology's appeal? It has primarily stemmed from deep ecology's criticism of contemporary consumer society and thus its alliance with the broader tradition of Thoreau, Muir, and pastoral environmentalism. As Tim Luke writes, "Deep ecological self-realization is to be the antithesis of consumerism,"[152] and it promises to displace the crude materialism and environmental exploitation found in modern society. Deep ecology also offers an alternative to the utilitarianism of progressive conservationism, as it looks to nature, rather than human desires, for philosophical first principles and moral guidance. Convinced that human desires have generated the massive environmental deterioration they find in contemporary society, deep ecologists contend that nature teaches the type of humility and restraint needed for a more environmentally satisfactory, and ultimately humanly satisfying, life.

The criticisms of society and the alternate visions that are actually offered, however, suffer from having been inspired more by Muir than by Thoreau. When we move from the understanding of nature found in Thoreau to that in Muir and deep ecology, we see that the environment has been depopulated; wilderness has replaced the pastoral and agrarian as the ideal. What had originated in Thoreau's writings as a radical political critique of industrial civilization has been transformed by Muir and his latter day followers into an individualized program for personal happiness and salvation. For Thoreau, nature provides the material for philosophical reflection and the discovery of an alternative political community; for Muir, nature is a medium through which to receive grace; for deep ecologists, Muir's spiritual goal has been translated into the significantly less inspiring ideal of "self-realization." In Thoreau's writings, nature calls us to a political rebellion and reconstruction. In the version of the pastoral environmental tradition that grows out of Muir's revision of Thoreau, this call to rebellion suspiciously resembles one more lifestyle option offered by the consumer society from which pastoral environmentalism is rebelling in the first place.

Others working within pastoral environmentalism as it has evolved under Muir's influence have taken this tradition in another direction. Although the deep ecologists claim that they are both attacking anthropocentrism and developing a new and environmentally sound conception of self-realization, we have seen that these two concerns

finally collapse into an overwhelming interest in self realization. For those who share the suspicion that human selfishness is fundamentally responsible for the deterioration of the environment, a more rigorous philosophical defense of biocentrism—one separated from the deep ecological interest in self-realization—is necessary.