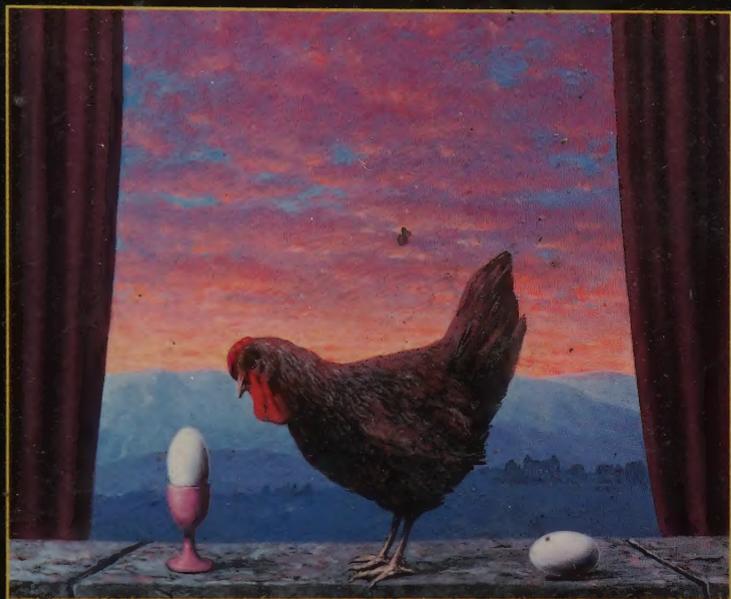


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What is Nature?



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What is Nature?

Culture, Politics and the non-Human

KATE SOPER



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For my parents,
Horace and Julie Sanders
and my sister,
Vivian Sanders

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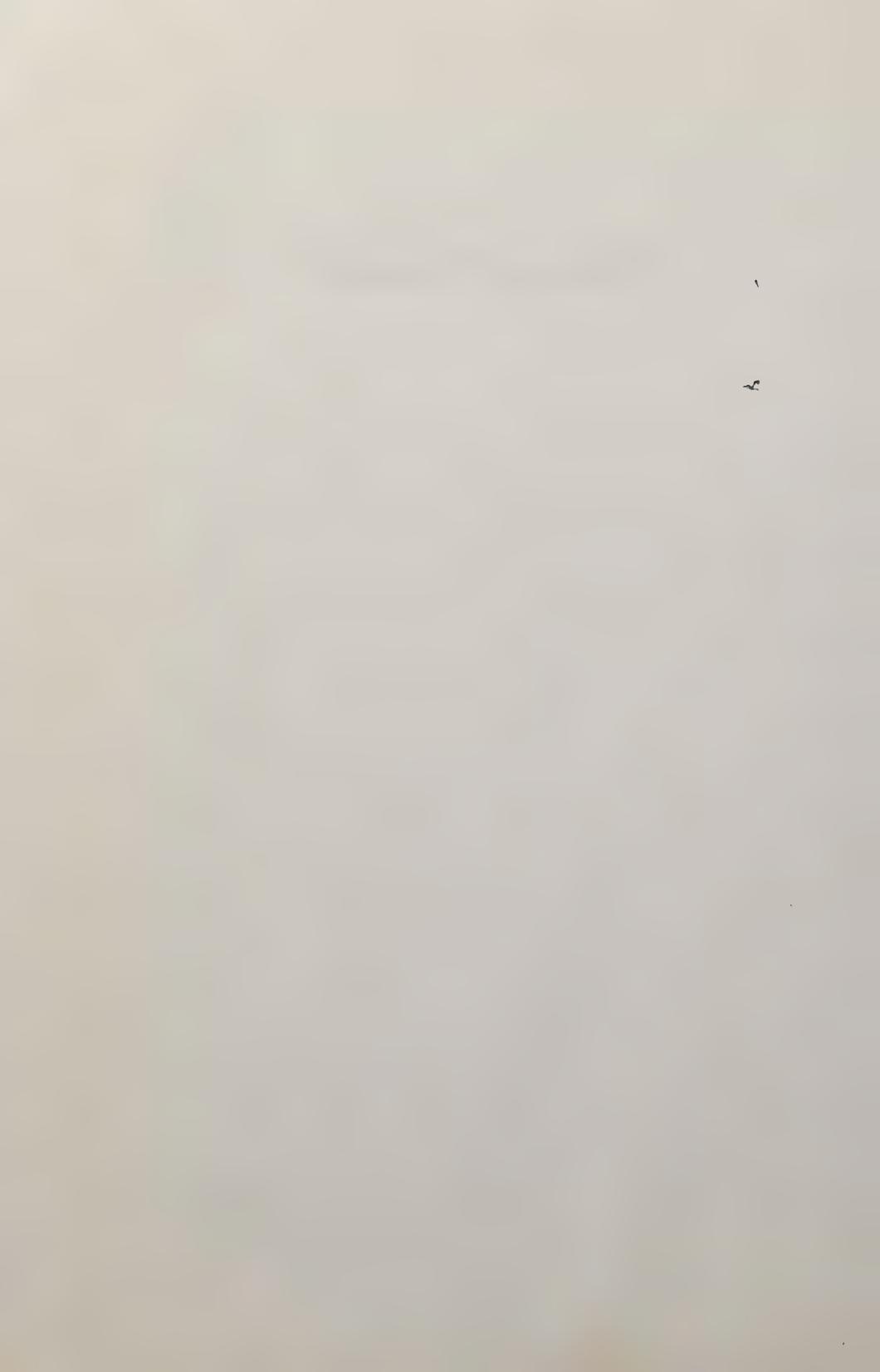
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What is Nature?



INTRODUCTION

'Nature', as Raymond Williams has remarked, is one of the most complex words in the language.¹ Yet, as with many other problematic terms, its complexity is concealed by the ease and regularity with which we put it to use in a wide variety of contexts. It is at once both very familiar and extremely elusive: an idea we employ with such ease and regularity that it seems as if we ourselves are privileged with some 'natural' access to its intelligibility; but also an idea which most of us know, in some sense, to be so various and comprehensive in its use as to defy our powers of definition. On the one hand, we are perfectly at home with it, whether the reference is to the 'nature' of rocks or to rocks as a part of 'nature'; to that 'great nature that exists in the works of mighty poets'² or to the humbler stuff of 'natural' fibre; to the 'Nature' park or the nature encroaching on our allotment; to the rudeness of 'nature' or to a 'naturalness' of manners. On the other hand, merely to contemplate this range of usage is to sense a loss of grip on what it is that we here have in mind. For the 'nature' of rocks which refers us to their essential qualities is not the 'nature' conceived as the totality of non-human matter to which they are said to belong. Nor, it seems, is the latter quite what the poet is invoking, or the poet's nature the kind of thing we eat for breakfast. Equally, we may ask how we may so readily speak of what is clearly humanly cultivated, whether it

be breakfast cereal or our own modes of comportment, as 'natural' while also distinguishing so firmly between what 'we' are and do, and the being and productions of 'nature'; how we speak of both preserved land and wilderness as 'nature', or think of our garden or allotment as both belonging to 'nature' and keeping it at bay.

To attempt to disentangle these various threads of nature discourse is immediately to realize what a vast range of possible topics a work such as this one might be addressing. For nature refers us to the object of study of the natural and biological sciences; to issues in metaphysics concerning the differing modes of being of the natural and the human; and to the environment and its various non-human forms of life. The natural is both distinguished from the human and the cultural, but also the concept through which we pose questions about the more or less natural or artificial quality of our own behaviour and cultural formations; about the existence and quality of human nature; and about the respective roles of nature and culture in the formation of individuals and their social milieu. Nature also carries an immensely complex and contradictory symbolic load; it is the subject of very contrary ideologies; and it has been represented in an enormous variety of differing ways. In recent times, it has come to occupy a central place on the political agenda as a result of ecological crisis, where it figures as a general concept through which we are asked to re-think our current use of resources, our relations to other forms of life, and our place within, and responsibilities towards the eco-system.

Indeed, the debates that have been generated round the idea of nature are so various and complex that the title of this book will seem presumptuous, if not downright absurd. I must therefore dispel some expectations that it may invite, and specify in what sense it is intended. Firstly, this work is not conceived as a historical account of the

idea of nature and does not pretend to offer any comprehensive survey or scholarly engagement at that level. Nor, secondly, will it be defending a specific philosophy of nature or elaborating a theoretical position on the various debates which have been generated around the concept of nature in social theory and psychology, though it will bear on those debates, and at times specifically relate to them. It is not, then, either a contribution to the 'history of ideas', nor is it primarily focused on questions of ontology, debates in the philosophy of science or controversies on the respective roles of 'nature' and 'nurture' in the formation of human beings and their societies.

My engagement here is essentially with the 'politics' of the idea of nature, with the social and cultural demarcations which have been drawn through the concept, and with the ways it is both defended and contested in the social movements of our times. It is therefore in many ways much more restricted than my title might suggest. For though I shall be offering some more general mapping of Western attitudes to nature, and theories of it, the map is drawn in the light of the particular forms of attention being paid to nature at the present time, and with the specific aim of staging an encounter between two currently very influential perspectives upon it: that of ecology, on the one hand, and that of much recent theory and cultural criticism, on the other. The distinction, broadly speaking, here is between an approach to nature that has emerged in response to ecological crisis, is critically targeted on its human plunder and destruction and politically directed at correcting that abuse; and an approach that is focused on the semiotics of 'nature', which would recall us to the role of the concept in mediating access to the 'reality' it names, and whose political critique is directed at the oppressive use of the idea to legitimate social and sexual hierarchies and cultural norms. The contrast, crudely, is between discourses which direct us to the 'nature' that

we are destroying, wasting and polluting, and discourses that are focused on the ideological functions of the appeal to 'nature' and on the ways in which relations to the non-human world are always historically mediated, and indeed 'constructed', through specific conceptions of human identity and difference.

To avoid misunderstanding, I would emphasize that, although this might be broadly construed as a contrast between ecological and postmodernist argument, my essential concern here is with the tension between diverging approaches to nature both of which may have a role to play in shaping a particular political outlook, and which I certainly do not view as neatly dividing between two oppositional political camps. Postmodernism has indeed become loosely associated with a politics, but it seems to me quite misleading to use the term as if it referred to a definitive programme of action rather than to a set of theoretical perspectives which are deployed by their advocates in the interests of a number of specific and often quite differing agendas. Nor can ecology be viewed as constituting a singular political vision since there are widely differing programmes of action which are recommended in the interests of nature conservation. For this reason, I would prefer to speak of a contrast between what might be termed 'nature-endorsing' and 'nature-sceptical' arguments with no presumption being made that these reflect some simple antithesis between a 'green' and a 'postmodernist' politics. Many 'nature-sceptical' discourses do indeed draw on postmodernist theory, but there are others deriving from Marxist, socialist or feminist positions that are highly critical of the postmodernist resistance to any realist or foundationalist metaphysics. It is one thing to challenge various cultural representations of nature, another to represent nature as if it were a convention of culture, and there are many in the Green Movement who reject this conventionalist approach while readily subscribing to

critiques of the ideological naturalization of social and sexual relations. But there are also many committed to postmodernist anti-realism who subscribe to the general aims of the ecological movement and view themselves as pursuing emancipatory projects consistent with it. In short, part of the complexity of the issues with which I shall be dealing derives from the fact that very differing discourses or theoretical perspectives on nature may be deployed in support of a shared set of political values.

One relevant instance here is the prescriptive overlap between the more distinctively postmodernist forms of scepticism about nature and ecological critiques of Enlightenment. Both, for example, have put in question Western models of progress and have sought to expose the oppressive dimensions of the faith in scientific rationality and its associated 'humanist' commitments. Many in the Green Movement have denounced the technocratic Prometheism of the Enlightenment project, and have argued that the 'anthropocentric' privileging of our own species encouraged by its 'humanism' has been distorting of the truth of our relations with nature and resulted in cruel and destructive forms of dominion over it. They have criticized Western 'instrumental rationality' as responsible for abusive and alienating exploitations of the environment and its other life forms, and have argued that its scientific approach must yield to a more proper sense of our actual dependency on the eco-system and of our organic ties and affinities with the earth and its various species. In these and similar critiques, ecological politics clearly subscribes to key themes of the postmodernist argument, which has equally cast doubt on the emancipatory claims of Enlightenment thinking, and regards its universalist 'humanist' commitments as the vehicle of an ethnocentric and 'imperialising' suppression of cultural difference.

Yet despite these broad affinities at the level of political critique, there is no doubt that the two positions diverge

very considerably in respect of the discourses they offer on nature, and that to focus on this difference is to be made aware of the extent of tension between these seemingly complementary forms of resistance to Western modernity. For while the ecologists tend to invoke nature as a domain of intrinsic value, truth or authenticity and are relatively unconcerned with questions of representation and conceptuality, postmodernist cultural theory and criticism looks with suspicion on any appeal to the idea as an attempt to 'eternize' what in reality is merely conventional, and has invited us to view the order of nature as entirely linguistically constructed. Derridian deconstruction, for example, in focusing on the binary dependencies of all philosophical categories, including that of 'nature', has called in question the coherence of any appeal to the latter as if to some reality external to its 'text', and his theory has prompted numerous cultural readings which emphasize the instability of the concept of 'nature', and its failure of any fixed reference. In contrast, moreover, to the naturalist impulse of much ecological argument, which has emphasized human affinities with other animals, and regards a dualist demarcation between the cultural and the natural as a mistaken and inherently un-eco-friendly ontology, postmodernist theory has emphasized the irreducibly cultural and symbolic order of human being and has consistently criticized naturalist explanations of the being of humanity. Thus Foucault presents the distinction between the 'natural' and the 'unnatural' (or 'perverse') as itself the effect of discourse, and rejects the explanatory force of the reference to a common natural foundation in the approach to psychology or sexuality. People are not 'mad' by nature, but as a result of classification; the discourses of sexuality are in an important sense the source of so-called 'natural' sexual feeling itself; even the body must be viewed as the worked-up effect of a 'productive' power and its cultural inscriptions. In all this

argument a culturalist perspective has not only challenged the naturalism and realism of ecological appeals to nature, but in the process has invited us to view the very idea of nature – the idea of that which has standardly been opposed to culture – as itself a cultural formation.

The upshot of this is a kind of communicational impasse between the two perspectives. For while the one party invokes nature in reference to features of ourselves and the world regarded as discourse-independent, the other responds by querying the supposed signified of the signifier: a stance it supports by pointing to the multiple constructions placed upon 'nature' at different historical periods and in different cultural contexts; by deconstructing its dependency on the binary other of the 'human' or the 'cultural'; and by highlighting the ideological service it has performed in a whole range of discourses from the Enlightenment, by way of Social Darwinism through to contemporary naturalism in social and psychological theory. From this latter perspective, the one thing that is not 'natural' is nature herself, and the 'herself' can serve to reinforce the point.

My argument here is thus shaped by the conjuncture at the present time of two perspectives, both of them centrally concerned with questions about nature and appearing to share certain prescriptive positions in common, but driven by quite contrary impulses: the one concerned with the limits of nature, and with our need to value, conserve, and recognize our dependence upon it; the other concerned to remind us of the cultural 'construction' of nature, of its role in policing social and sexual divisions, and of the relativity and ethnocentric quality of our conceptions about it. The query of my title is therefore contextually specific and should be construed more as a gesture towards a problem than as a promise to supply a solution to it. It is intended, that is, as an echo, or index, of the politically contested nature of 'nature' in our own times, and of the ways in

which the question of its 'being' is, at least implicitly, at issue in so many of our current discourses about it. But it is also intended to reflect the underlying rationale of the book, which is written in the conviction that both 'nature-endorsing' and 'nature-sceptical' perspectives need to be more conscious of what their respective discourses on nature may be ignoring and politically repressing. Just as a simplistic endorsement of nature can seem insensitive to the emancipatory concerns motivating its rejection, so an exclusive emphasis on discourse and signification can very readily appear evasive of ecological realities and irrelevant to the task of addressing them. Both therefore, one may argue, need to review their theoretical perspectives in the light of the other's political agenda, especially wherever there is a presumption that these are committed to projects which are in principle mutually supportive.³

With a view to achieving some reconciliation of these perspectives, I engage at some length with cultural representations of nature, and attempt to give full due to those ways in which it may be said to be a cultural 'construction'. But I defend a realist position as offering the only responsible basis from which to argue for any kind of political change whether in our dealings with nature or anything else. I recognize, that is, that there is no reference to that which is independent of discourse except in discourse, but dissent from any position which appeals to this truth as a basis for denying the extra-discursive reality of nature. I seek to expose the incoherence of an argument that appears so ready to grant this reality to 'culture' and its effects while denying it to 'nature', and argue that, unless we acknowledge the nature which is *not* a cultural formation, we can offer no convincing grounds for challenging the pronouncements of culture on what is or is not 'natural'. Where the nature-culture division is theorized as entirely politically instituted, and hence indefinitely mutable, those seeking to change the 'text'

can appeal to nothing more compelling as the grounds for doing so than their particular personal preference or prejudice. But I also argue that such realism requires us to acknowledge the force of certain forms of critique of nature essentialism, and to review the rhetoric of ecological politics in the light of it. Representations of nature, and the concepts we bring to it, can have very definite political effects, many of them having direct bearing on the cause of ecological conservation itself. Just as the ecologists are talking about features of the world which the postmodernists are too loath to recognize, so the Green Movement can afford to be more discriminating in its deployment of the concept of 'nature' and to pay heed to some of the slidings of the signifier that have been highlighted in postmodernist theory. By exploring the tensions between these two perspectives on nature, I would hope both to reveal what I think are simplistic and potentially reactionary dimensions of ecological argument, and in the process to allow nature as spoken to by the ecologists to be taken more seriously by those who would have us attend only to its semiotics.

But if these perspectives and their discourses on nature are particular to our times, they also relate to a history of debates round the idea of nature in Western thought and reflect longstanding equivocations in the use of the term. Since part of my aim is to illuminate contemporary controversies by locating them within this larger framework, the preliminary chapters of the book are devoted to discussions of a more general and historical character. In chapter 1, I open with some reflections of a fairly abstract kind on the concept of nature, focusing on the disjunctures between the use of the term in reference to an order opposed to that of humanity, its use in reference to the totality which comprises both non-human and human orders, and its use in reference to the 'nature' of humanity itself. The exercise is designed to reveal the ways in which

these multiple, and in many ways incompatible, conceptions of nature are at work in contemporary arguments and have contributed to the tensions between them. In chapter 2, I emphasize the reliance of all ecological prescription on a prior discrimination between humanity and nature, and briefly chart the ways in which the distinction has been drawn in philosophy and social theory. The focus is on the differing conceptions of ourselves and the natural world which are reflected in dualist and non-dualist approaches (the one insisting on the irreducible difference between the natural and the cultural, the other viewing the being of humanity as on a continuum with that of nature). The chapter concludes with some reflections on the ways in which all Western discourses on nature, including those most critical of its abuse, carry within them the ethnocentric legacy of a metaphysical tradition that has covertly identified the 'human' side of the humanity-nature distinction with 'civilized'/'developed' humanity.

This sets the stage for the more historical survey I offer in chapter 3 of the ambivalences that have marked our 'civilized' conceptions of, and responses to nature, and the symbolisms associated with these. I argue that Western configurations of nature – notably its association with the 'primitive', the 'bestial', the 'corporeal' and the 'feminine' – reflect a history of ideas about membership of the human community and ideals of human nature, and thus function as a register or narrative of human self-projections. Attitudes to nature map the exclusions, devaluations and revaluations through which Western humanity has constituted and continuously re-thought its own identity. They also, I suggest, and particularly in the case of the feminization of nature, reflect ambiguities and anxieties of feeling regarding the use of nature conceived as an external environment and set of resources.

The implications of the woman-nature association for ecology are addressed more directly in chapter 4, where

I explore the tensions between ecological 'naturalism' and the 'anti-naturalist' impulses of feminism, gay politics and contemporary theories of the body and sexuality. I suggest that these tensions have a particular interest in the case of feminism given the widely perceived parallels between the oppression of women and the destruction of nature and the complementarity of much feminist and ecological argument. But I also suggest that the question that is posed about 'nature' in this conjuncture between the politics of sexual emancipation and the politics of environmental preservation can only be addressed by way of certain conceptual discriminations that are seldom observed in the respective arguments of either. While I argue that a realist conception of nature is essential to the coherence of contemporary theories of sexuality, I endorse their resistance to naturalist explanations of human behaviour.

The discriminations at issue here are further elaborated in chapter 5, where I argue for the importance of distinguishing between the different concepts of nature which are invoked in ecological argument, and consider their respective implications for political prescriptions about its use. Nature conceived in a realist sense as causal law and process is not the observable nature of aesthetic and moral evaluation, nor is it that which we can be said to 'destroy' or be called upon to conserve. Ecological policies are therefore essentially shaped by the concerns we have for a 'surface' nature conceived as a set of utilities, a source of aesthetic pleasure, or site of 'intrinsic value'. They are also, I argue, shaped by the particular perceptions we bring to the nature-culture, humanity-animality distinctions, though, in considering their role, I take issue with the presumption of much environmental philosophy that an anti-dualist or naturalist position on this is essential to the adoption of eco-friendly policies.

The focus of chapter 6 is on this 'surface' (or, as I term it, 'lay') concept of nature: nature as an observable set of

phenomena, and moves from consideration of the criteria through which we distinguish between the more or less 'natural' features or dimensions of our environment, to an engagement with the 'nostalgia' for a lost time-space of 'nature' and ideological representations of rurality. This in turn leads on to some reflections on heritage and environmental preservation and the criticisms it has elicited. I here argue for the adoption of a dialectical approach that would neither deny the mythologizing and patrician dimensions of environmentalism, nor dismiss the preservationist impulse as merely elitist and sentimental.

In chapter 7, I pursue one strand of ecological argument: that which calls on us to preserve nature as a site of aesthetic pleasure and consolation, or as a value in itself, and consider how far the presumption of a common aesthetic (or sensibility to the worth of nature) can be justified in view of the extent to which conceptions of the beauties of nature have been socially conditioned and determined in part through specific – and often politically motivated – representations of landscape and the world of nature. Many of the claims regarding the quality of 'human' responses to nature have been articulated by and on behalf of restricted groups who have been relatively unaware of their own partiality and its sources. This problem, I argue, continues to vex ecological discourses on the feelings elicited by nature and considerably complicates the task of developing a genuinely democratic discourse on environmental preservation.

In chapter 8, I offer a concluding survey of the different reasons that have been offered within the spectrum of ecological politics for preserving and conserving nature, and consider how far they are compatible in their moral appeal. I am critical of any attempt to argue the case for ecology from a position of moral absolutism, and suggest

that many of the arguments, rooted in the idea of nature possessing an 'intrinsic' value to which we should always give priority, are ethically confused and potentially reactionary. Generalized accusations of 'human speciesism' invite us to overlook oppressions and divisions within the human community, and are ethically irresponsible if they imply that the cause of nature should be promoted at the cost of a concern with social justice and equity in the distribution of resources. The problem of the destruction of nature has to be located at the level of specific relations of production and consumption and cannot be attributed to some generalized set of human attributes or attitudes. Moreover, insofar as we can speak in general terms here, it is inevitable that our attitudes to nature will be 'anthropocentric' in certain respects since there is no way of conceiving our relations to it other than through the mediation of ideas about ourselves. To suggest that it could be otherwise is to be insensitive to those ways in which the rest of nature is different, and should be respected as being so.

Notes

- 1 Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (Verso, London, 1980), p. 68.
- 2 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book Five, 594–5.
- 3 There will be readers who will reject this formulation as altogether too even-handed. They will object that postmodernist theory is the vehicle of reactionary forms of neo-liberalism which have nothing to offer a green movement committed to radical social change. But as I hope to have indicated my own perspective is rather more complex. I do not dismiss all forms of postmodernist argument as irrelevant to the left, nor do I presume that all those deploying them are apologists of the system whose professed espousal of left-wing values must be viewed as in some sense hypocritical. On the other hand, I would agree that these values cannot be coherently defended by those adopting an anti-foundationalist position and that postmodernist theory is

in this sense deeply inconsistent in claiming adherence to them. This much I would concede to those who would dismiss the emancipatory credentials of the postmodernists. It is no part of my aim here to undermine the fundamental cause of ecological conservation, or to defend any 'postmodernist' posture which would have us focus only on the 'textuality' of 'nature' and its continually shifting signifier.

1

THE DISCOURSES OF NATURE

In its commonest and most fundamental sense, the term 'nature' refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity.¹ Thus 'nature' is opposed to culture, to history, to convention, to what is artificially worked or produced, in short, to everything which is defining of the order of humanity. I speak of this conception of nature as 'otherness' to humanity as fundamental because, although many would question whether we can in fact draw any such rigid divide, the conceptual distinction remains indispensable. Whether, for example, it is claimed that 'nature' and 'culture' are clearly differentiated realms or that no hard and fast delineation can be made between them, all such thinking is tacitly reliant on the humanity–nature antithesis itself and would have no purchase on our understanding without it. The implications of this are not always as fully appreciated as they might be either by those who would have us view 'nature' as a variable and relative construct of human discourse or by those who emphasize human communality with the 'rest of nature', and I shall have more to say on this in the following chapter. Suffice it to note here that an *a priori* discrimination between humanity and 'nature' is implicit in all discussions of the relations between the two, and thus far it is correct to insist that 'nature' is

the idea through which we conceptualize what is 'other' to ourselves.

But for the most part, when 'nature' is used of the non-human, it is in a rather more concrete sense to refer to that part of the environment which we have had no hand in creating. It is used empirically to mark off that part of the material world that is given prior to any human activity, from that which is humanly shaped or contrived. This is the sort of distinction which John Passmore makes central to his work on *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, where he writes he will be using the word 'nature'

so as to include only that which, setting aside the supernatural, is human neither in itself nor in its origins. This is the sense in which neither Sir Christopher Wren nor St Paul's Cathedral forms part of 'nature' and it may be hard to decide whether an oddly shaped flint or a landscape where the trees are evenly spaced is or is not 'natural'.²

Passmore himself admits that this is to use the term in one of its narrower senses; yet it is also, I think, to use it in the sense which corresponds most closely to ordinary intuitions about its essential meaning. The idea of 'nature' as that which we are not, which we are external to, which ceases to be fully 'natural' once we have mixed our labour with it, or which we have destroyed by our interventions, also propels a great deal of thought and writing about 'getting back' to nature, or rescuing it from its human corruption. Ecological writing, for example, very frequently works implicitly with an idea of nature as a kind of pristine otherness to human culture, whose value is depreciated proportionately to its human admixture, and this is an idea promoted by Robert Goodin, in his attempt to supply a 'green theory of value'. What is crucial to a 'green theory of value', argues Goodin, is that it accords value to what is created by natural processes rather than by artificial human ones; and he employs the analogy

with fakes and forgeries in art to argue that replications of the environment by developers, even if absolutely exact, will never be the same, or have the same value, precisely because they will not be independent of human process:

... a restored bit of nature is necessarily not as valuable as something similar that has been 'untouched by human hands'. Even if we simply stand back and 'let nature take its course' once again, and even if after several decades most of what we see is the handiwork of nature rather than of humanity, there will almost inevitably still be human residues in its final product. Even if we subsequently 'let nature take its course', *which* course it has taken will typically have been dictated by that human intervention in the causal history. To the extent that that is true, even things that are largely the product of natural regeneration are still to some (perhaps significant) degree the product of human handiwork. And they are, on the green theory of value, that much less valuable for being so.³

But persuasive as these approaches may seem, in some ways, there are a number of reasons to question their tendency to elide 'nature' defined as that 'which is human neither in itself nor its origins' with 'nature' defined as that part of the environment which is humanly unaffected. Much, after all, that is 'natural' in the first sense is also affected by us, including, one may argue, the building materials which have gone into the making of St Paul's Cathedral. On the other hand, if 'nature' is identified with that part of the environment that is humanly unaffected, then, as Passmore rightly notes, it is being defined in such a way as to leave us uncertain of its empirical application, at least in respect of the sort of examples he gives: the oddly shaped flint, the landscape where the trees are straight, and so on. The fact that we may not be able concretely to determine what is or is not 'natural' in this sense is no objection, of course,

to its conceptualization as that which is unaffected by human hand; but when we consider how much of our environment we most certainly know *not* to be 'natural' in this sense, and how much of the remainder we may be rather doubtful about, we may feel that the conceptual distinction, though logically clear enough, has lost touch with the more ordinary discriminations we make through the idea of 'nature' – as between the built and unbuilt environment, the 'natural' and the 'artificial' colouring, the 'Nature' park and the opera house, and so forth.

If we consider, that is, the force of Marx's remark that: 'the nature which preceded human history no longer exists anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral-islands of recent origin)';⁴ and if we then consider the human 'contamination' to which these possible 'exceptions' have been subject since he wrote, then it is difficult not to feel that in thinking of 'nature' as that which is utterly unaffected by human dealings, we are thinking of a kind of being to which rather little on the planet in reality corresponds. Now this, it might be said, is precisely the force of so construing it, namely that it brings so clearly into view its actual disappearance; the extent, that is, to which humanity has destroyed, nay obliterated, 'nature' as a result of its occupation of the planet. This certainly seems to be the kind of prescriptive force that Goodin, and some of those associated with a 'deep ecology' approach, would wish to draw from it, insofar as they present human beings as always desecrating nature howsoever they intervene in it.⁵

But to press this kind of case is inevitably to pose some new conceptual problems. For it is to present humanity as in its very being opposed to nature, and as necessarily destroying, or distraining on its value, even in the most minimal pursuit of its most 'natural' needs. Since merely to walk in 'nature', to pluck the berry, to drink the mountain

stream, is, on this theory of value, necessarily to devalue it, the logical conclusion would seem to be that it would have been better by far had the species never existed. But, at this point, we might begin to wonder why the same argument could not apply to other living creatures, albeit they are said, unlike ourselves, to belong to nature, since they, too, make use of its resources, destroy each other, and in that sense corrupt its pristine paradise. In other words, we may ask what it is exactly that makes a human interaction with 'nature' intrinsically devaluing, where that of other species is deemed to be unproblematic – of the order of nature itself. If humanity is thought to be an intrusion upon this 'natural' order, then it is unclear why other creatures should not count as 'intrusions' also, and inanimate 'nature' hence as better off without them. We may begin to wonder what it is exactly that renders even the most primitive of human dwellings an 'artificial' excrescence, but allows the bee-hive or ant-heap to count as part of nature; or, conversely, whether the humanity–nature relationship is not here being conceived along lines that might logically require us to question the 'naturalness' of species other than our own. Or to put the point in more political terms: we may suspect that this is an approach to the 'value' of nature that is too inclined to abstract from the impact on the environment of the different historical modes of 'human' interaction with it, and thus to mislocate the source of the problem – which arguably resides not in any inherently 'devaluing' aspect of human activity, but in the specific forms it has taken.

But rather than pursue these issues further here, let me return to the point I earlier raised concerning ordinary parlance about 'nature'. For there is no doubt that any definition of nature as that untouched by human hand is belied by some of the commonest uses of the term. In other words, if we count as 'nature' only that which

preceded human history, or is free from the impact of human occupancy of the planet, then it might seem as if we were committed to denying the validity of much of our everyday reference to 'nature'. To speak of the 'nature walk' or 'Nature Park'; of 'natural' as opposed to 'artificial' additives; of the 'natural' environment which we love and seek to preserve – all this, it might follow from this approach, is a muddle; and a muddle, it might be further argued, that we ought to seek to correct through an adjustment of language. But tempting as it might seem, in view of the conceptual imprecision of ordinary talk of 'nature', to want to police the term in this way, there are a number of reasons to resist the move. In the first place, talk of the countryside and its 'natural' flora and fauna may be loose, but it still makes discriminations that we would want to observe between different types of space and human uses of it. If ordinary discourse lacks rigour in referring to woodland or fields, the cattle grazing upon them, and so forth, as 'nature', it is still marking an important distinction between the urban and industrial environment. As we shall see in chapter 6, the criteria employed in such distinctions may be difficult to specify, but the distinctions are not of a kind that we can readily dispense with, or that a more stringent use of terminology can necessarily capture more adequately. Or to put the point in more Wittgensteinian terms, it may be a mistaken approach to the meaning of terms to attempt to specify *how* they should be employed as opposed to exploring the *way* in which they are actually used. The philosopher's task, suggested Wittgenstein, was not to prescribe the use of terms in the light of some supposedly 'strict' or essential meaning, but to observe their usage in 'ordinary' language itself; and it is certainly in that spirit that much of my pursuit here of the 'meaning' of nature will be conducted, even if that only serves to expose its theoretical laxity relative to any

particular definition we might insist it ought to have. Indeed, there is perhaps something inherently mistaken in the attempt to define what nature is, independently of how it is thought about, talked about and culturally represented. There can be no adequate attempt, that is, to explore 'what nature is' that is not centrally concerned with what it has been *said* to be, however much we might want to challenge that discourse in the light of our theoretical rulings.

Cosmological 'Nature'

These, then, are some of the reasons for questioning the adequacy of any attempt to conceptualize 'nature', even when we are thinking primarily only of the 'natural' environment, as that which is wholly extraneous to, and independent of, human process. Moreover, of course, we do not simply use the term 'nature' to refer to an 'external' spatial domain, from which we and our works are clearly delineated. We also use it in reference to that totality of being of which we in some sense conceive ourselves as forming a part. We have thought, that is, of humanity as being a component of nature even as we have conceptualized nature as absolute otherness to humanity. 'Nature' is in this sense both that which we are not *and* that which we are within.

When the order of 'Nature', for example, was conceived as a Great Chain of Being, as it was in the physico-theology which prevailed from the early Middle Ages through to the late eighteenth century,⁶ humanity was thought of very definitely as occupying a place within it, and a rather middling one at that. Based on the Neoplatonist principles of plenitude (the impossibility of a vacuum or 'gap' in being), hierarchy and continuity, the Great Chain of Being perceived the universe as:

composed of an immense, or – by the strict if seldom rigorously applied logic of the principle of continuity – of an infinite, number of links ranging in hierarchical order from the meagerest kind of existents, which barely escape non-existence, through ‘every possible’ grade up to the *ens perfectissimum* – or, in a somewhat more orthodox version, to the highest possible kind of creature, between which and the Absolute Being the disparity was assumed to be infinite – every one of them differing from that immediately above and that immediately below it by the ‘least possible’ degree of difference.⁷

Or, as Pope expressed it in his *Essay on Man*:

Vast Chain of being! which from God began,
 Natures aethereal, human, angel, man,
 Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,
 No glass can reach; – On superior pow’rs
 Were we to press, inferior might on ours;
 Or in the full creation leave a void,
 Where, one step broken, the great scale’s destroy’d;
 From Nature’s chain whatever link you strike,
 Tenth, or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.⁸

Pope in the eighteenth century is emphasizing the coherence of the ‘natural’ cosmos and chaos that would ensue from breaking its ‘chain’, where as the stress of Mediaeval thought was on the creative and generative power of God’s love in divinely willing the fullest of universes.⁹ But the essential idea that humanity is within this order of ‘Nature’, and indeed occupies a fairly modest rung in its hierarchy of being, remains common to both. Humanity is thought of as infinitely inferior to the deity, but also to all those aethereal spirits, angels, possibly more sublime mortals elsewhere in the universe, who people the myriad degrees of difference within the abyss which yawns between man and God. When ‘Nature’, then, is conceived in cosmological terms as the totality of being, humanity is

neither opposed to it nor viewed as separable from it. This is not to deny that there is much in the conception of the Chain that directly encouraged the idea of human lordship over the rest of animal (and vegetable) life. The teleological purposes it attributed to a deity, who had so designed all things and laws of nature as to place them at the service of his human servant, were frequently used to justify a dominion over all those creatures below us in the Chain, and an instrumental use of earthly resources. In the words of a key text of Scholastic philosophy: 'As man is made for the sake of God, namely, that he may serve him, so is the world made for the sake of man, that it may serve him',¹⁰ and this was echoed in many other expressions of a similar complacency over the ensuing centuries. The increasingly ingenious and anthropocentric use of Christian doctrine by English preachers and commentators prior to the Reformation to support an instrumental use of nature has been charted by Keith Thomas, who concludes his survey by suggesting that 'a reader who came fresh to the moral and theological writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could be forgiven for inferring that their main purpose was to define the special status of man and to justify his rule over other creatures'.¹¹ In this sense, the idea of the Chain supported those currents of Enlightenment thought which emphasized our difference from, and right to exploit, 'nature', and operated as a kind of theological complement to their secular and temporalized teleology.

All the same, we should note that when conceived as a way of considering the question of 'Man's place in Nature', the cosmology of the Great Chain of Being can by no means be viewed as supplying a straightforwardly anthropocentric answer, and this is particularly true of the inflections it acquired in the age of Enlightenment itself. Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz had all agreed to the principle that *non omnia hominum causa fieri* ['not everything is created for human ends'],¹² and Locke, Kant, Addison,

Bolingbroke, and many others, were to invoke the idea of the Chain as a reminder of the numerous creatures superior to man, and as a caution against arrogant assumptions of human dominance within 'Nature'. Addison wrote, for example, that the difference of species 'appears, in many instances, small, and would probably appear still less, if we had means of knowing their motives'. Thus, if under one aspect man is associated with the angels and archangels, under another he must 'say to Corruption, Thou art my Father, and to the worm, Thou art my sister'.¹³ In similar vein, Bolingbroke argued that superior as man was, he was nonetheless:

. . . connected by his nature, and therefore, by the design of the Author of all Nature, with the whole tribe of animals, and so closely with some of them, that the distance between his intellectual faculties and theirs, which constitutes as really, though not so sensibly as figure, the difference of species, appears, in many instances, small, and would probably appear still less, if we had the means of knowing their motives, as we have of observing their actions.¹⁴

We may say, then, that, although the Promethean assumptions of human separation from and superiority over 'Nature' do eventually triumph over the idea of our 'middling' rank within its overall cosmology, they were nonetheless continually countered by less confident assumptions, deriving from the Mediaeval theology, about humanity's place within this order. Worth noting, moreover, in this connection are the quite striking similarities between the contemporary ecological emphases on humanity's continuity with nature and place 'within' it, and those of the Great Chain of Being. Of course, there can be no direct analogue between a secular critique of instrumental rationality and of a 'technical fix' approach to nature, and a Neoplatonist theology

which grounds its demand for human humility in the distance which separates man from the lowliest of divine beings. Ecology, moreover, is generally opposed to the hierarchical ranking of species that is the organizing principle of the Great Chain. But if we extrapolate the cosmological principles from their theological trappings, and focus simply on the idea of plenitude, diversity and organic interconnection informing the idea of the Chain, then there would at least seem some parallel here with current arguments concerning the interdependency of the eco-system, the importance of maintaining bio-diversity, and the unpredictable consequences of any, however seemingly insignificant, subtraction from it. Moreover, there is no doubt that, in a general way, ecology would have us revise our attitudes to 'nature' and the place of humanity within it, along lines that would reintroduce some of the conception of the Chain; rather than view 'nature' as an external and inorganic context, we should regard the eco-system as a plurality of beings each possessed of its particular function and purpose in maintaining the whole.

Human 'Nature'

The limitations of thinking of 'nature' as that which is independent of us, and external to us, are also brought into view when we consider the way in which we use the term in reference to ourselves. For we, too, it is said, are possessed of a 'nature', and may behave in more or less 'natural' ways. Now, it might be argued, that all that we should read into this vocabulary is the idea that human beings possess properties which are of their 'essence', with no presumption being made about their 'naturalness' in any other sense. In other words, in speaking of 'human nature' we are not necessarily implying that human beings par-

ticipate in the 'nature' we ascribe to animality or pointing to the continuity of their being with that of the 'natural' world. On the contrary, it might be said, we are precisely designating those features which are exclusive to them, and mark them off from 'nature' conceived on the model of 'animality'. Certainly, it is true that the idea of 'human nature' is very often used to emphasize our difference from 'natural' species, as when it is said, for example, that human beings are 'by nature' rational and moral beings in a way that no other species are, that it is against their 'nature' to behave 'like animals', or that in taking 'nature' as a model they are precisely reneging on what is true to their own.

It is in line with this view of 'human nature' that John Stuart Mill in his essay on 'Nature' denounces the immorality of following the course of nature and rejects any consecration of instinctual action. Since natural phenomena, he argues, are 'replete with everything which when committed by human beings is most worthy of abhorrence, any one who endeavoured in his actions to imitate the natural course of things would be universally seen and acknowledged to be the wickedest of men.'¹⁵ Coming at the issue from a very different political perspective, Baudelaire employs a similar vocabulary in denouncing Romantic conceptions of 'nature' as a model of human beauty and goodness. 'Nature,' he writes, 'cannot but counsel that which is criminal . . . [In] all the actions and desires of the purely natural man, you will find nothing that is not ghastly.'¹⁶ Yet there would be little point in moving these arguments were it thought that human beings are 'by nature' incapable of following the 'counsel' of nature, and their point, in fact, is not so much to assert the actual impossibility as to emphasize the immorality or cultural degeneracy of doing so. What is being disputed here is not so much the human possession of instinct or 'animal' desire, but the ethics of human conduct, and

specifically the extent to which 'nature' offers itself as an appropriate guide to this; in other words, whether it is conceived essentially as a source of virtue or of vice, and thus as a mode of being we should seek to emulate or disown. Clearly, as Mill himself in effect points out,¹⁷ there is little point in recommending that human beings either follow or reject the model of 'nature' if nature is here being construed as a set of powers or properties that they have no choice but to comply with. Admonitions of this kind implicitly reject a deterministic conception of 'human nature' even as they advocate a certain view of its 'order' and propriety. To suggest, for example, that 'human nature' is betrayed by following the course of 'animal' nature is paradoxically to acknowledge that human beings are capable of defying their 'nature' in ways denied to other animals. It is to suggest, in effect, that 'human nature' is such as to be realized only in compliance with a certain order of 'conventions' of a kind that no other creature can be expected to recognize or would require its fellows to observe. As Empson wryly notes, the animal 'is at least unconventional in the sense that it does not impose its conventions.'¹⁸

Yet there is no doubt, too, that the idea of a 'human nature' cannot be so readily divorced from the assumption of humanity's sameness with the animal world and rootedness within the order of nature. This is in part because the notion of our having a 'nature' carries with it something of that same necessity we attribute to animal and inorganic modes of being: to speak of 'human nature' is to imply that we are possessed of preordained features, and subject to their order of needs in the way that other creatures also are. These features may be supposed to be very different from those of animals, but in describing them as 'natural' to us we are imputing a similar determination and necessity to them.

But we should note, too, the way in which the idea has

been used to condemn the 'perversity' of human behaviour where it is thought to *diverge* from that of other animals – as in the case, most notably, of certain forms of sexual practice. The 'convention' through which homosexuality has been perennially condemned as a 'crime' against nature would have us conform to, rather than contravene, a supposed 'norm' of animal conduct; and a similar rationale is at work in the condemnations of much else that is thought 'perverse' in our own behaviour: here the point is to exclude those human modes of conduct that have been deemed (though often mistakenly in fact) *not to conform* to those of other animals.

But against all those cases in which the 'healthy' human norm is established by reference to the custom of nature, must, of course, be set all those numerous others in which we become creatures of 'nature' in failing to conform with the custom of humanity. The conception of what is proper to human nature is thus arrived at both in approval and in rejection of what is thought 'spontaneous' or 'instinctual', and it is this ambivalence of attitude that Edmund in *King Lear* turns powerfully to his own account in calling upon God to stand up for the bastards bred in the 'lustly stealth of Nature' rather than for the 'tribe of fops' who are got in the 'dull stale tired bed' of matrimony.¹⁹ (Although we might note that what God is to stand up for are rights of inheritance to land which no 'lustly Nature' ever bestowed.)

The history of the ways in which the idea or model of nature has figured in human self-conceptions is extraordinarily complex, and there can be no question of offering more than the sketchiest account of its convolutions in this context.²⁰ But one of the main divisions which can be drawn is between those ethical, political and aesthetic arguments that are constructed upon a view of culture as offering an essential corrective to 'nature', or providing the milieu in which alone it acquires any definitively

human form, and those that view nature as releasing us from the repressions or deformations of culture and as itself a source of wisdom and moral guidance. The former regard human 'nature' as appropriately and fully reflected only in those achievements of 'civilization' that distance us from the sinfulness or naïvety or crudity of 'nature'; the latter would have us see the very process of authentic human fulfilment as jeopardized or distorted by the corrupting effects of cultural 'progress'. In the one conception, the emphasis falls on those human powers in which we transcend 'nature', and on the moral goodness which is realised only in our freedom from its order; in the other on the 'nature' within us that is the well-spring of human virtue and thus of social regeneration.

Broadly speaking, we can say that the one provides the animating idea of the high Enlightenment, the other of the Romantic reaction to its economic and social consequences. In releasing humanity from a Deist conception of the order of Nature as hierarchically fixed or Providentially designed to secure the 'best of all possible worlds', the Enlightenment sought to realize the inherent dignity of the individual as a self-motivating rational and moral being: the progressive development of art, science and culture is thus viewed as the vehicle for the realization of a 'human nature' previously held in thrall to superstitious fears of 'nature' and theological bigotry. In the Romantic reaction, which is profoundly influenced by Rousseau's summons to attend to conscience as the 'voice of nature' within us, the integrity of nature is counterposed to the utilitarianism and instrumental rationality through which the Enlightenment ideals were practically realized and theoretically legitimated: the point is not to return to a past primitivity, but to discover in 'nature', both inner and outer, the source of redemption from the alienation and depredations of industrialism and the 'cash nexus' deformation of human relations. In the aesthetic theory

of the Romantic movement the artistic or poetic imagination is charged with the task of expressing this latent and occluded force of nature as redemptive resource, and this idea remains central to the forms of expressivism into which it subsequently flows. In social theory, the Romantic critique receives its most powerful elaboration in the argument of the Frankfurt School critical theorists: 'instrumental rationality', in oppressing nature, cuts us off from it as a source, and thus betrays its original promise to release us from thralldom to a Deistic order by entrapping us in relations to nature that are deeply oppressive of ourselves as well.²¹

Let it be said immediately, however, that this is to offer only a very general framework of opposing viewpoints, both of which are subject to numerous mutations and inflections, and neither of which provide compartments into which we can readily slot the argument of particular writers. The argument of Descartes and Locke, for example, was crucial in laying the foundations of the Enlightenment idea of subjectivity, but remained committed to Deistic or Providential conceptions of the social whole. Kant is a major architect of the Enlightenment conception of the autonomous subject, but exerts a lasting influence on Romanticism in rejecting the utilitarian ethic and the 'civilization' that 'progresses' in accord with it; Marx combines a Promethean aspiration to transcend all natural limits on human self-realization with a quasi-Romantic critique of alienation; and there are many other examples one might give of such hybrid modes of thinking and lines of influence.

We must allow, too, that very divergent and often antithetical moral postures and political ideologies can be defended from either of these perspectives on the model offered by 'nature'. An Enlightenment conception of our 'nature' as 'improvable' has been of critical importance to the promotion of the ideals of equality, justice and freedom

which have come to ground the Western conception of progress. The (alas, continuing) horrors of the twentieth century have severely dented the faith in the ameliorative powers of 'civilization', but in a sense this itself speaks to a presumption that our 'human nature' is such as to allow and require us to act in ways that transcend 'nature': to act in accordance with justice and to observe a system of rights. Moreover, the importance attached by a *tabula rasa* conception of nature to providing the appropriate cultural and physical milieu for human growth and self-realization has issued in some of the most progressive programmes of social reform.

On the other hand, it must be recognized that the emphasis on the role of culture in the formation or improvement of human nature can lend itself both to enlightened forms of educational and social policy and to the crudest forms of 'social engineering' and technocratism. The Enlightenment acclamation of human freedom and autonomy, moreover, carries within it a potentially repressive legacy of the modes of thought from which it breaks in the form of a continued elevation of mind over body, the rational over the affective. Though pitted against the more puritanical suppressions of bodily appetite and 'animal' instinct sustained in Christian dogma, the rationalist element of Enlightenment thinking may also be charged with fostering modes of 'corrective' education and regulation that have denied self-expression and served as the continued prop of class, race and gender divisions.

In view of this, it is not surprising that the Romantic conception of 'nature' as an essentially innocent and benevolent power has played such a key role in the discourses of sexual and social emancipation from the time of Blake and Shelley through to the 'flower power' politics of the sixties and much of the ecological argument of our own time. Liberating the 'nature' within or without us has been a constant theme of emancipatory discourse (and one

might argue, some reference to a 'repressed' nature is a condition of the coherence of any such talk). But we should not forget the irrationalities and repressions to which this 'nature libertarianism' can also lend itself. Romantic conceptions of 'nature' as wholesome salvation from cultural decadence and racial degeneration were crucial to the construction of Nazi ideology, and an aesthetic of 'nature' as source of purity and authentic self-identification has been a component of all forms of racism, tribalism and nationalism. Equally, of course, the appeal to the health, morality and immutability of what 'nature' proposes has been systematically used to condemn the 'deviants' and 'perverts' who fail to conform to the sexual or social norms of their culture.

Finally we might note the ways in which some of these inflections of the pro-nature ethic have prompted a series of counter-Romantic denunciations of the quest for humanist redemption through 'nature', ranging from T. E. Hulme's rejection of any Rousseauan confidence in human amelioration and preference for all that is 'life-alien', to Baudelaire's protestations against 'ensouled vegetables';²² from Oscar Wilde's professions of hatred for nature, to Foucault's conventionalist leanings towards an erotic-aesthetic of 'cruelty' and 'dandyist' ethic of style.²³ In these voices we encounter some of the more 'violent' attacks on the 'violence' of 'nature' and a systematic refusal to endorse its truth, authenticity or regenerative powers. But we should note that they also give expression to a form of resistance common to all those who have challenged the appeal to 'nature' to legitimate and preserve a status quo, whether of class relations, patriarchy, sexual oppression or ethnic and racial discrimination. What is put in question through such challenges is precisely the extent to which what is claimed to be 'natural' is indeed a determination of 'nature', and hence a necessity to which we must accommodate, as opposed to a set of conventional

arrangements, which are in principle transformable. In the case of many of these expressions of dissent, however, it is not so much *any* invocation of nature that is rejected, but that construction of it which has pre-empted or distorted the potential forms in which it might be realized.

Within the general opposition to the naturalization of the social, therefore, we may distinguish between two rather differing types of claims: between those that reject the specific accounts that have been given of what is 'natural' in the name of the equal or more authentic 'naturalness' of what they seek to institute; and those that insist on the non-natural, or normative, or culturally-constructed quality of all social arrangements, practices and institutions. Whereas the former position retains the idea of there being some sort of 'natural' order in human society, which if instituted will guarantee the well-being of its members and allow them to realise their essential 'nature' as persons, the latter emphasizes the discursive and revisable quality of what is claimed to be 'natural' to human beings and their societies at any point in history. For the latter position, then, 'nature' in human affairs is a concept through which social conventions and cultural norms are continuously legitimated and contested; it does not refer us to an essential or true mode of being from which we may think of ourselves as being culturally alienated at any point in time, or as having realized in some historical past, or as able potentially to realize in the future. The concept of 'nature' according to this 'culturalist' argument is certainly always employed *as if* it referred us to what is 'essential', 'true' or 'authentic' to us, but it is a usage that at the same time necessarily denies the historicity of what has been believed at any time to be the dictate of nature. Since 'progressive culture' has constantly re-thought the limits it has imposed on what is 'natural' or 'proper' to human beings and their society, the use of 'nature' as if it referred to an independent and permanent order

of reality embodies a kind of error, or failure to register the history of the legitimating function it has played in human culture. From this 'culturalist' perspective, then, 'nature' is a kind of self-denying concept through which what is culturally ordained is presented as pre-discursive external determination upon that culture. From a 'realist' perspective, by contrast, nature refers to limits imposed by the structure of the world and by human biology upon what it is possible for human beings to be and do, at least if they are to survive and flourish. It is an order of determinations that we infringe only at the cost of a certain 'loss' of self or 'alienation' from what is true to ourselves, and in this sense provides the essential gage by which we may judge the 'liberating' or 'repressive' quality of human institutions and cultural forms, including those through which we relate most directly to the environment and other creatures.

The essential difference or tension is, then, as suggested, between a generally 'nature-endorsing' and a generally 'nature-sceptical' response. For the former, which may take either conservative or progressive forms, 'nature' is appealed to in validation of that which we would either seek to preserve or seek to instigate in place of existing actuality; for the latter, which is usually advocated as progressive, but may be charged with conservatism in the free hand it gives to cultural determination, the appeal is always to be viewed as a dubious move designed to limit and circumscribe the possibilities of human culture.

Notes

- 1 In his essay on 'Nature' John Stuart Mill speaks of nature in this sense as 'what takes place without the voluntary and intentional agency of man'. See Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (Longman, London, 1874), pp. 3–65.
- 2 John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, 2nd edn (Duckworth, London, 1980), p. 207.

- 3 Robert E. Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Polity Press, Oxford, 1992), p. 41; cf. pp. 30–40.
- 4 Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968), p. 59. (The observation is illuminatingly discussed by Neil Smith in *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1984), p. 54f. The idea of ‘nature’ as ‘cultural construction’ is more fully discussed in chapter 5.
- 5 Thus Goodin’s general claim is that pristine nature is always to be preferred to that which has been tampered with, however congenial the effect. More specifically he argues that, if faced with the choice between a small-scale English village ‘more in harmony with nature’ and ‘postmodern’ Los Angeles, we must always opt for the former. All the same, ‘grubbing out’ nature to build even the most harmonious hamlet is a less acceptable option than leaving nature in its original state. See *Green Political Theory*, pp. 51–2.
- 6 The classic work on the subject is that of A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1964) where it is argued that it is only in the late eighteenth century that the idea attains its widest diffusion. See esp. p. 183.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.
- 8 Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle 1, 237–46 (Methuen, London, 1950), pp. 44–5.
- 9 Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, p. 67f.
- 10 *Libri Sententiarum*, II, 1, 8, cited in Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, pp. 186–7.
- 11 Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (Allen Lane, London, 1983), p. 25. In his preceding survey (pp. 17–24), Thomas cites, as instances of such anthropocentric ingenuity, the suggestion that horse-flies had been created ‘that men should exercise their wits and industry to guard themselves against them’; that apes had been designed ‘for man’s mirth’; and the argument of the Elizabethan, George Owen, concerning the multiple purposes of the lobster: that it provided food to eat, exercise in cracking its legs and claws, and an object of contemplation in its wonderful suit of armour.
- 12 Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, p. 188f.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 195.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 196.
- 15 J. S. Mill, ‘Nature’ in *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 65.

- 16 Quoted in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989), p. 434.
- 17 J. S. Mill, *Nature*, pp. 13–19.
- 18 Willam Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966), p. 212.
- 19 Shakespeare, *King Lear*, I, ii. Cf. John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (Faber and Faber, London, 1949), esp. parts I, II.
- 20 One of the most illuminating and discriminating accounts of the role played by the idea of nature in shaping conceptions of human subjectivity is to be found in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, especially parts IV and V. My discussion here draws extensively on this work.
- 21 The seminal text here is Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso, London, 1979). For a full bibliography on the Frankfurt School, see David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980).
- 22 On both, see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 426–9, 434–42, 459–63.
- 23 For an illuminating tracing of these veins of Foucaultian resistance to 'nature', see James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (Harper Collins, London, 1993).