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Right-Wing Ecology in Germany: Assessing the Historical Legacy

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EPILOGUE TO THE SECOND EDITION

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The original edition of *Ecofascism* appeared at a transitional moment, shortly after the Oklahoma City bombing brought right-wing extremism to broad public attention in North America. At a time when debates on the Unabomber agitated much of the radical milieu, there was relatively little literature in English on the subjects the book examined, and virtually none written for an activist rather than an academic audience. That has changed substantially in the intervening years. Today there are a variety of historical studies of the topic, and many people involved in ecological and social change movements have engaged critically with the challenges this history poses for our own time. The initial impetus for the book arose from the experience of both authors in various green movements in the 1980s and 1990s. We noticed that a number of prominent themes in

contemporary environmentalist politics bore an unnerving resemblance to ideas put forward by reactionary movements and far-right figures, both historically and in the waning years of the twentieth century. Our aim was to provide critical perspective on the legacy of reactionary ecology in order to support and encourage a radical and emancipatory ecology. This remains my aim today. If ecological activists are unaware of the political trajectory these concepts have taken in the past, we will be unprepared for the next shift in the ideological terrain.

The book had a widely varying reception and was published in Norwegian, Greek, Czech, and several other languages. Its arguments were taken up and extended by a variety of authors in the years following the original publication.[1] While historians at first took little evident notice of it, particularly perceptive early reviews came from feminist philosopher Claudia Card and anarchist scholar Ronald Creagh.[2] Some conservative readers, meanwhile, greeted the book as confirmation of their own hostility toward environmentalism, fundamentally misunderstanding the issues at stake. Indeed on several revealing occasions, right-wing politicians and pundits attempted to enlist the book in campaigns to discredit ecological politics as a whole. In one noteworthy instance in 2003, the book achieved temporary notoriety in Australia when senator George Brandis read extensive excerpts from *Ecofascism* to a parliamentary session as part of an attack on the Australian Greens, likening them to Nazis. When Australian journalists contacted me for comment, I took the opportunity to clarify both the historical context and

the contemporary relevance of ecology's problematic past.[3] Since the Brandis episode encapsulates many common misconstruals of the book's argument, I reproduce my response here:

> ***Greens and Nazis***
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> Historians rarely enjoy their fifteen minutes of fame, particularly when their work covers an obscure topic. Even if somebody out there ends up reading what we write, as likely as not we'll complain that they've missed the point. When you're thoroughly immersed in a subject, it can be hard to convey the nuances and complexities involved in a way that makes sense to a broad audience.
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> So it's probably not too surprising that I was less than thrilled to find my work at the center of a political controversy in faraway Australia, a place I have never visited and know little about. When Senator Brandis took the floor of the parliament and quoted at length from a book that I co-authored, he used my writing for purposes that are quite at odds with my own. There is nothing wrong with that in principle; it isn't my job to tell others what lessons they ought to draw from the events and movements I study. In this case, however, I think it important to point out that my scholarship offers little support for the conclusions Senator Brandis reached.
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> He is not the only reader of my work to draw such conclusions. I have heard from a number of conservative political figures in the United States, where I live, who are eager to use my historical work as a weapon in the struggle against what they

see as the Green menace. These people refer to my research on ecofascism as a cheap tactic to impugn virtually all varieties of political environmentalism. In my opinion, this is not a serious way to approach important historical questions.

The book that caught Senator Brandis's attention is titled *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience.* Along with my co-author Janet Biehl, I explore there the little-known legacy of right-wing ecology and its appropriation by one faction of the Nazi party in the 1930's. Our book says quite explicitly that there is no inherent connection between classical fascism and contemporary Green politics. What gave rise to the convergence of ecology and fascism seventy years ago was a specific set of historical circumstances and a specific version of ecological thinking, which our book examines in detail.

The excerpts which Senator Brandis presented to his colleagues ignored this crucial context, and thus failed to do justice both to the very grave history that the book recounts, as well as to the current relevance of these issues in today's world. Moreover, the concrete parallels that Brandis emphasized – an ostensible excess of radical zeal on the part of some Australian Greens, as well as their supposedly cynical attitude toward democratic institutions – are at best tangentially related to the ideological commonalities between environmentalism and fascism that my research reveals. The Nazis certainly did not come to power because the predecessors of the Greens in Germany were too vocal in their opposition to the militarist and authoritarian tendencies of their day.

> It is possible that the Australian Greens are indeed awash in mystical and antihumanist ideas, as Senator Brandis's portrait would have it; to comment on that question exceeds my competence. If such is the case, however, it scarcely means that fascism is on its way. Perhaps Brandis's ill-considered invocation of the rise of Nazism will have a salutary effect after all, if it spurs his intended targets among the Greens to study this background further. For the present, however, it would seem that vociferous disagreement with the status quo – even if its tenor is too strident for some – represents a significant bulwark against political demagoguery, not a step toward dictatorship. That Senator Brandis apparently confused this sort of vigorous dissent with the lack of dissent that allowed fascism to flourish in the first place indicates that we still have a lot to learn from the history of political shortsightedness.

Such explanations are of limited effectiveness against organized demagogy, but they are essential to comprehending why *Ecofascism* was originally published and why it remains relevant today. Misunderstandings of the book were not, of course, confined to the right. A number of ecologically-oriented readers, whether liberals or leftists or anarchists, objected to it for the same reasons that garnered misplaced approval on the right. Deep ecologists were unsurprisingly displeased with the book, complaining that the very notion of an ecofascist politics was illusory and merely an "attack term" without historical or contemporary significance.[4] Liberal environmentalists and neo-pagans were similarly irritated by our analysis, believing that we had posited a "causal link" between

environmentalism and fascism.[5] Other critical reactions were less naïve, such as the detailed assessment by David Watson of the *Fifth Estate*, and the book may even have played a role in instigating a process of clarification within the anarcho-primitivist milieu.[6] Even here the misunderstandings were sometimes remarkable; Watson, for example, surmised that I oppose organic farming as potentially fascist. My actual position is just the contrary: I want a vibrant and politically conscious organic farming movement, and that means coming to terms with the less pleasant aspects of the movement's past.

In addition to direct responses such as these, *Ecofascism*'s core themes have received thoughtful attention from a range of viewpoints. Deep ecologist Michael Zimmerman has published a series of discerning articles on ecofascism which make particularly salutary reading for those uncomfortable with a social ecology perspective.[7] A number of mainstream accounts have offered important historical insights while placing German traditions of reactionary ecology into broader context.[8] More indiscriminate treatments of the topic have tended to reduce the legacy of ecofascism to a simplistic tale meant to expose the dangers of any radical ecological engagement.[9] The religious aspects of far-right ecological thought have also generated significant scholarship.[10] This record of detailed research offers important historical background which can serve to refute two equally absurd claims: that "environmentalism is fascism" and that there are no connections whatsoever between environmentalism and fascism.

From the Past to the Present

Beyond historical matters, the persistence of ecofascist tendencies in contemporary politics and culture remains an important concern. Peter Zegers has provided an incisive overview of the ongoing legacy of reactionary ecology, while others have analyzed the continuing role of ecofascist ideas and groups in Britain, North America, and elsewhere.[11] In some cases these tendencies do not take an openly fascist form but bring together reactionary ecological themes with anti-immigrant sentiment, eugenic policies, and a nationally or racially tinged defense of the land. Prominent examples include the Finnish deep ecologist Pentti Linkola, among others. Both the Danish People's Party and the British National Party combine anti-immigrant politics with right-wing environmentalism, while the 'New Right' in both Germany and France champions ecology and bioregionalism. On the Italian far right, comparable strands can be found around the groups Forza Nuova and Alternativa Sociale. Similar tendencies are not difficult to discern in North American environmentalism, where ostensibly ecological justifications for opposing immigration are all too common, in some cases affiliated with repellent racial ideologies, and where figures like Garrett Hardin or John Tanton have little trouble attracting followers and supporters.[12] The struggles over population control and immigration policy within the Sierra Club in 1998 and again in 2004 are recent reflections of such strands, but they have a lengthy history within the US conservation movement.[13]

In the post-1945 German context, the subject of Janet Biehl's chapter, these developments have a more powerful resonance,

and an extensive critical literature on the topic has emerged since *Ecofascism* was initially published. In particular, Jonathan Olsen's book *Nature and Nationalism* and Oliver Geden's book *Rechte Ökologie* provide abundant detail on the politics of right-wing ecology in Germany, amply confirming and extending Biehl's analysis.[14] Indeed the post-war connections between environmentalism and far-right politics have been studied in considerable depth in Germany, yielding a substantial body of work that deserves more attention than it generally receives among ecologically inclined readers.[15] At the same time, it would be a mistake to conclude that this is a peculiarly German phenomenon; recent research has revealed a long history of similar trends in British political culture, among others.[16] For those concerned about the political direction of the ecological movement, the legacy of figures like Rolf Gardiner and Jorian Jenks merits critical consideration.

One theme that figured less prominently in *Ecofascism* bears further analysis: the predilection of some forms of alternative spirituality toward reactionary ecology. Two of the more troubling examples are certain strands of neo-paganism and the anthroposophical movement founded by Rudolf Steiner. Many contemporary anthroposophists and neo-pagans appear entirely unaware of the historical entwinement of their movements with deeply regressive political tendencies and are consequently taken aback when confronted with this unexamined history. Indeed some readers mistook the book for a thinly veiled attack on neo-paganism as a whole or on anthroposophy as a whole, depending on their personal affiliations, and dismissed the evidence assembled here as the fruit of mean-spirited sectarianism or of hostility to spirituality

as such. These are perilously naïve responses. There is an extensive historical literature examining the politics of both neo-paganism and anthroposophy, along with other forms of esoteric and New Age spirituality, much of which explores their affinities with reactionary ecological ideas.[17] Ignoring or denying these affinities does nothing to reduce their potency.

Esoteric and pagan worldviews are perennially popular not only within alternative spiritual circles and environmental movements but on the far right as well. As one example among many, here is an excerpt from the 2000 political position statement of the Pagan Liberation League, a white supremacist group in the Pacific Northwest:

> The PLL stands opposed to all forms of capitalist exploitation of the environment and we view any attack or intrusion upon Mother Nature as a personal attack against ourselves. We will fight the Corporate State to the death to preserve the natural beauty of the earth and its species and various races, most prominently our own species, the Aryan Species. We acknowledge that it has been chiefly the Aryan Species that has been at the forefront of the Environmental 'Green' movement, from the beginning, despite the fact that many of the pseudo-ecology organizations today who are finance-motivated betray the Aryan Spirit. We acknowledge that the true Green movement had its most radical, militant and holistic germination during the Third Reich and hereby declare ourselves to be in a Spiritual War with what we call the Judeo-Capitalist Status Quo.

The Pagan Liberation League statement continues:

> Blood and Soil, Back to the Land, and Homesteading: We advocate that our Folk learn how to live self-sufficiently, as free and independent of the System as is realistically possible. Studying animal husbandry, organic farming and herbal medicine are the ways of the future.[18]

Comparable passages can be found in far-right celebrations of anthroposophy.[19] The conflation of left and right positions in such statements represents a prominent tendency in contemporary culture and is another reason why the legacy of ecofascism warrants sustained attention among those working for an emancipatory ecological politics. For some, of course, the very notion of distinguishing right from left is futile. This stance reflects a widespread historical and political confusion which impedes meaningful debate and analysis. As Janet Biehl notes in her chapter, the foolish slogan "neither left nor right" was introduced into green politics by the right-wing authoritarian Herbert Gruhl. But the roots of the neither-left-nor-right idea go considerably further back; a version of this standpoint was popular within the nationalist and populist *völkisch* movement in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, and the pretence of offering a 'third way' between left and right was a central component in the rise of classical European fascism. Neo-fascist groups have continued this trend, attempting to recruit leftist youth via appeals to ecological themes as 'beyond left and right.'[20]

Though not as pronounced as its German counterpart, Italian Fascism also contained environmentalist impulses, another historical example—however ambivalent—of ecofascism in practice.[21] From land reclamation and

ruralization projects to reforestation efforts, such impulses played a subordinate but noticeable role in Mussolini's Italy, often enough tied to racial and national ideology. In his 1921 article "Fascism and the Land" Mussolini declared that Fascism's goal was "to reclaim the land, and with the land the men, and with the men the race."[22] The 'land improvement' campaign launched in 1928 included measures to reduce urban sprawl, discourage monocropping in agriculture, protect the soil and promote non-mechanized methods of cultivation. By the 1930s exponents of the campaign announced that in Fascist Italy "we are witnessing a return to Mother Earth."[23] The president of the Fascist Agricultural Association for the province of Trent, Luciano Chimelli, was an ardent proponent of organic farming. According to Chimelli, "the climate created by Fascism" was especially hospitable to organic agriculture.[24] In 1940 the chief German organic farming journal extolled Fascism for rescuing the Italian landscape, for "saving the soil and thereby saving the race."[25] Admirers of Fascism's ecological orientation celebrated the reforestation programs in particular, declaring that these environmental achievements were only possible under the Fascist regime.

Ecofascism Re-examined

Despite this variegated and complex history, most of the public interest in fascist ecology has gravitated toward the singular case of Nazi Germany, whose unparalleled destructiveness seems so crassly at odds with any form of environmental concern. This was the subject of my chapter,

and it remains an ongoing part of my historical research. The original chapter contained several errors, some relatively minor and some closer to the core of my argument. Since we have chosen to republish the text unrevised, I would like to correct these errors here. The claim that Ernst Haeckel joined the Thule Society late in his life, which I adopted from Daniel Gasman's work, appears to be groundless.[26] The claim that the Nazis created the first nature preserves in Europe is also mistaken. The statistic I provided from Raymond Dominick's work, that 60 percent of Weimar-era conservationists joined the Nazi party before 1939, refers not to the entire membership of conservationist organizations but to the leadership stratum. I characterized Rudolf Hess as a committed follower of Rudolf Steiner; in light of Hess's nebulous occult inclinations, I now think that description was mistaken.[27] Beyond details such as these, my figure of tens of thousands of farms encompassed by the organic farming campaign is much too high; the actual figure is probably closer to two thousand. Last, my brief depiction of the politics of Monism was one-sided. A fuller portrait of "the politically highly ambivalent Monist movement" shows that Monism, "oscillating between middle-class left social reform and *völkisch* ideals of the New Right," never achieved a clear or coherent political profile.[28]

Since the original edition of *Ecofascism* appeared, these subjects have received extensive additional study from historians in Germany and in the English-speaking world, particularly in the past decade, and this research has added considerably to our detailed knowledge of the topic.[29] In several cases these historians have presented perfunctory

but significant criticisms of my argument.[30] While there are continuing debates on important aspects of the topic, and while I disagree with central components of the recent revisionist approach, I consider a number of these criticisms legitimate. Subsequent treatments have properly offered a more nuanced and complex account than the one I provided; scholarly analyses are not the same as straightforwardly political arguments for an activist audience, and my essay on the 'green wing' of the Nazis was not directed primarily at my colleagues in the historical profession but at my comrades in the ecological movement. My hope is that ecological activists will take the opportunity to learn from the debates among historians. Toward that end, I would like to survey some of the ongoing historical disagreements on environmental politics in the Nazi era.

A crucial point of dispute concerns the relation between environmental tendencies before 1933 and their appropriation under the Nazis. My argument highlighted ideological continuities extending from nineteenth-century Romanticism and figures like Arndt and Riehl through the Youth Movement of the Wilhelmine and Weimar eras, but the same ideological legacy can be traced via early twentieth-century nature protection organizations and the landscape preservation movement.[31] Some of the recent scholarship challenges this claim, arguing that a "great difference" divides Nazi forms of naturism from the movements that preceded them.[32] In some cases this line of reasoning culminates in the re-assuring insistence that "idealistic" and "naïve" approaches to "turning toward nature" were "far removed from romantic and racist ones."[33] Comforting as

this notion may be, as a historical claim it is unfortunately false. In reality, many naïve and idealistic forms of turning toward nature found themselves in conspicuous proximity to romantic and racist forms, and still do today. Making sense of both past and present requires taking that historical proximity seriously.

As another historian has observed, summarizing the purportedly re-assuring line of argument, "the fact that the Nazis co-opted conservation does not mean that conservationists were proto-Nazis."[34] This is certainly true, but misses the point. Of course German conservationists were not all proto-Nazis, though some of them were. The problem is that pre-Nazi conservationism provided fertile ground for proto-Nazi ideas and practices, making the eventual process of co-optation all the easier. The same is true for a range of other movements that shared considerable overlap with early environmentalism, particularly the disparate *Lebensreform* or lifestyle reform tendencies, including vegetarianism, animal rights, natural healing, and back to the land movements. Much of the recent literature on these tendencies attempts to rehabilitate them by emphasizing their distance from later Nazi manifestations.[35] A more perspicacious approach would be to refine and clarify the moments of continuity and discontinuity in an effort to discern which implicit or explicit political and ideological dispositions lent themselves to appropriation by various strands of Nazism. The connections linking *Lebensreform* ideals with the *völkisch* milieu, for example, were substantial and wide-ranging, and an array of Nazi officials worked to

incorporate *Lebensreform* principles and practices into the National Socialist state.[3]

Lineages of Right-Wing Ecology

Another point of contention concerns individual figures such as Ernst Haeckel and Martin Heidegger, both of whom have vocal defenders as well as detractors. Many of the debates surrounding these thinkers are only tangentially related to their role in the development of right-wing ecology, but are historically instructive nonetheless. Even Heidegger's admirers have largely come to acknowledge that he was an active Nazi, though disputes continue over the significance of this fact for understanding his philosophical works.[37] The more relevant question in the present context is the relation of Heidegger's thought to other right-wing perspectives preoccupied with similar themes of 'rootedness in the soil' and 'authenticity' and the baleful effects of modern technology.[38] In the case of Haeckel, the politics of ecology have been overshadowed by the politics of evolution, as scrutiny of his contested legacy has become embroiled in debates with intellectually threadbare variants of contemporary creationism. Oddly, the advocates of severely misguided 'intelligent design' ideology have sometimes been more realistic in their assessment of Haeckel's racial views than the defenders of Darwinism.[39] Daniel Gasman's work on Haeckel, meanwhile, has been subjected to rigorous criticism, much of it justified.[40] His focus on the underside of Haeckel's Social Darwinism nonetheless remains in many ways appropriate and necessary. The historical stature of Haeckel and Heidegger is not in dispute; what bears further

examination is the influence of certain strands in their work on reactionary varieties of ecological thought.

That Haeckel coined the term 'ecology' and left a sizeable imprint on early popularization of ecological ideas does not in itself mean that ecology is inextricable from his political views. What it means is that the political history of ecological thinking is more complicated and ambivalent than we might wish. Simplistic versions of the 'from Haeckel to Hitler' argument are obviously untenable, but this scarcely alleviates the fundamental problem of Haeckel's combination of Social Darwinism, eugenics, theories of racial superiority and German nationalism. The point is not to posit one single all-explaining overarching narrative of how Germany got to 1933, but to take account of the specific strands that eventually contributed to the environmental aspects of National Socialism and are most relevant to comprehending the legacy of right-wing ecology. That project requires paying attention to the ideas at stake as well as to the structural factors and institutional frameworks which allowed such ideas to be put into practice; it includes tracing both longer-term cultural and ideological trends and the crucial shifts and dislocations brought about by World War I.[41] While the ecological components of Nazism may seem incidental to the overall historical narrative of the rise of National Socialism, they are not incidental to the history of ecological politics.

The status of environmental tendencies in Nazi Germany is of course contested among historians, and was indeed contested at the time, with powerful factions in party and state opposing the efforts of the 'green wing' from the beginning of Hitler's dictatorship. The resulting intra-Nazi

struggles left a conflicted and complex record. Some scholars avoid this complexity by denying that there was any green wing within the Nazi movement.[42] Such a position simply ignores the evidence examined in this book. The notion of a 'green wing,' which I borrowed from Jost Hermand's work,[43] is not meant to suggest an identifiably coherent faction within the party or a smoothly cooperating group of fully like-minded cadre – several of its leading representatives were in fact consistently at odds with one another. Rather the term refers to a tendency or shared ideological and practical orientation, common to a number of activists and officials in the Nazi movement and regime, the main outlines of which are recognizably environmentalist by today's standards. As Robert Proctor has noted, "fascist ideals fostered research directions and lifestyle fashions that look strikingly like those we today might embrace."[44] This constellation of green trends can be construed narrowly or broadly; on a broad interpretation it might include proclivities toward animal rights, vegetarianism, natural nutrition and whole foods, and natural methods of health care, for example, each of which garnered significant support from various segments of the Nazi apparatus.[45] A narrower interpretation of Nazi environmentalism would focus instead on core features such as nature protection projects, ecologically oriented landscape planning, and organic agriculture.

Fascist Ecology in Practice

An especially forthright figure in promoting nature preservation and landscape protection under National

Socialist auspices was Alwin Seifert, who has been described as "the most prominent environmentalist in the Third Reich."[46] Among other activities, Seifert designed the biodynamic garden at Rudolf Hess's villa, but his pre-eminent contribution was supervising environmental standards on major building projects, most famously the construction of the Autobahn system, which was overseen by a coterie of "advocates for the landscape" under Seifert's direction. Their task was to preserve wetlands and environmentally sensitive areas of the countryside as much as possible, to ensure that large public works projects were ecologically sustainable, and to embed the new Autobahn roadways harmoniously into the surrounding landscape.[47] Seifert and his colleagues were not merely defensively 'greening' a concrete behemoth. The new highways traversed areas that had been thoroughly domesticated for centuries; there was no question of destroying wilderness. Despite their administratively weak position, Seifert's landscape advocates pro-actively used the project to nurture ecological diversity and rollback monoculture.

Like a number of other Nazi environmentalists, Seifert enjoyed an influential role in the post-war conservation movement, and after 1945 he strongly downplayed his activities and convictions during the Third Reich. Seifert joined the Nazi party in 1938, but during his post-war de-Nazification hearings claimed falsely that he had been made a party member without his knowledge and against his will.[48] In reality, Seifert made full use of his Nazi credentials until the bitter end of Hitler's regime, continuing his friendly correspondence with other Nazi officials into 1945, and just a year before the collapse of Nazi Germany he was promoted

to the rank of General within the *Organisation Todt.*[49] He was involved in *völkisch* organizations well before 1933 and published extensively in Nazi periodicals, celebrating the environmental achievements of National Socialism.[50] It is these sorts of continuities spanning the pre-Nazi and post-Nazi periods that are of historical importance in understanding the continuing relevance of right-wing ecology, despite the modest degree of Seifert's actual accomplishments under Hitler's dictatorship. In several respects Seifert represents the very embodiment of an ecofascist outlook: he belonged to the *Wandervogel* movement as a young man, combined antisemitic views with mystical spiritual inclinations, and was influenced by various abstruse racial mythologies; he was a vociferous champion of organic agriculture in the Third Reich; and he became a principal figure in shaping Nazi environmental policy, putting his ideas into practice with the help of prominent Nazi leaders, from Todt and Hess to Himmler and Darré.

As important as Seifert is to understanding the ecological facets of Nazism, and as difficult as his relations may have been with other Nazi officials, he was hardly an isolated individual. Several of his 'advocates for the landscape' were supporters of biodynamic cultivation, including Max Karl Schwarz, "a dedicated proponent of National Socialist blood and soil ideology."[51] Schwarz, an anthroposophist and important leader in the biodynamic movement, introduced Seifert to biodynamic principles and was responsible for applying biodynamic methods to the Autobahn project.[52] Nazi conservationists like Walther Schoenichen, mentioned only briefly in my chapter, represented a similar hybrid

of ecology and fascism. The same is true even for some of Seifert's rivals, such as Hans Schwenkel or Heinrich Wiepking-Jürgensmann, who played a significant part in the attempt to shape Nazi policy in the conquered territories of Eastern Europe along environmental lines.[53] The development of German forestry during the Nazi era provides yet another instance of environmentalist trends under National Socialist sponsorship.[54] The extent and variety of such examples suggests that the phenomenon of ecological participation in the Nazi regime was not a peripheral or passing matter.

Organic Agriculture under Nazi Patronage

Perhaps the most contentious theme in the existing scholarship on 'green' facets of Nazism is the status of organic farming.[55] The controversial nature of this topic reflects the vexed relationship between Nazism's 'blood and soil' ideals and the concrete realities of ecological practice. Historically informed study of the question has been hampered for several decades by the work of British researcher Anna Bramwell, whose conspicuously sympathetic portrayal of Richard Walther Darré cast him as leader of a group of "Green Nazis." Bramwell's extended apologia for the Nazi race theorist and Minister of Agriculture emphasized his support for biodynamic agriculture, the anthroposophical version of organic farming. Her works contain much valuable information, but her interpretations are consistently distorted and have been rightly challenged by a range of scholars.[56] Bramwell's efforts to condone Darré's racial views, for example, or her risible depiction of Darré as an anti-imperialist, stand

in stark contrast to standard historical accounts, which recognize Darré as "the main theoretician of eastward continental expansion and agricultural settlement."[57] Many of Bramwell's concrete claims have also been disproven.[58]

In some cases, however, the fully justified critiques of Bramwell's work have overcompensated for her errors and produced a mirror image of her idealized portrait of Darré's enthusiasm for organic farming, thus yielding an opposite but similarly deficient image of the complex historical reality. Several of Bramwell's critics have overemphasized Darré's skepticism toward anthroposophy while neglecting the crucial support for biodynamics provided by Darré's staff. The reaction against Bramwell has even led some historians to deny that Darré supported organic farming at all.[59] This is a serious error. It is true that the biodynamic movement failed to obtain the coveted support of the Nazi agriculture minister and patron of 'blood and soil' ideology for most of the 1930s; although biodynamic principles converged with several of his core ideals, such as pastoral romanticism paired with hostility toward materialism, a return to an agrarian social order, and the vision of a simpler and healthier rural life, Darré was initially doubtful toward biodynamic farming and its anthroposophical underpinnings.[60] He looked askance at organic claims of higher quality produce and increased soil fertility and was decidedly unsympathetic to biodynamic efforts to curry favor within the network of agricultural institutions he oversaw. Darré also feuded with Seifert in 1936 and 1937, further distancing him from the biodynamic movement.

But his attitude began to shift in early 1939, due in part to economic exigencies and in part to the persistent work of the

pro-biodynamic faction among the higher-level personnel around Darré, including anthroposophist members of his staff.[61] In January 1939 biodynamic advocates initiated a concerted campign to convince Rosenberg, Göring, Himmler and other party leaders that organic agriculture offered the path toward the future for Nazi Germany.[62] Darré's perspective now changed markedly. Reversing his earlier stance, Darré announced in January 1940 that biodynamic cultivation potentially constituted an equal partner with conventional farming in "maintaining and enhancing the productive capacity of the German soil."[63] The following year he declared that biodynamic farming was the only route to "the biological salvation of Europe."[64] Though still distrusting its anthroposophical origins, from 1940 onward Darré attempted to provide concrete support for biodynamic producers and to make organic food an integral part of Germany's wartime economy. As his institutional power dwindled and his own position became more precarious, he went to elaborate lengths to circumvent anti-biodynamic officials in the agriculture ministry and the Reich Food Estate, above all his subordinate and rival Herbert Backe, who eventually replaced him in 1942.[65] At times Darré made official statements distancing himself and his staff from biodynamic methods, even while working behind the scenes to advance them.[66]

During his last two years of nominal control of the agricultural apparatus, Darré and the biodynamic supporters on his staff vigorously promoted organic farming through a series of semi-private associations, with personnel chosen for their loyalty to Darré and their sympathy for biodynamics.[67] These included staff members in the office of the Reich

Peasant Leader and the Nazi party's Office of Agrarian Policy who were committed to biodynamic agriculture. Darré adopted the phrase 'farming according to the laws of life' as a euphemism for the biodynamic version of organic agriculture; the terms were often used interchangeably. The measures showed some success for a time; in June 1941 Darré noted with satisfaction that "several circles in the highest leadership of the NSDAP have come to endorse biodynamic agriculture."[68] Some Nazi supporters of biodynamic methods were undoubtedly motivated by war-related concerns over the availability of raw materials rather than by any interest in ecological sustainability, and Darré's plans for large-scale sponsorship of biodynamic farming eventually came to naught as his effective influence waned. The meager practical outcome of such endeavors does not mean that Darré was insufficiently committed to organic farming; instead it indicates that even the concerted efforts of a Reich Minister who had fallen out of official favor were of little use in the face of opposition from other Nazi agricultural authorities.

The Politics of Blood and Soil

The peasant romanticism at the heart of Darré's worldview was not an anomaly in the Nazi milieu; Gottfried Feder's critique of urbanism or Otto Strasser's rural nostalgia display comparable tendencies.[69] Such beliefs were not, moreover, restricted to high-level officials like Darré or ideologues like Strasser. This ensemble of themes – the Nazi revival of ruralism, pastoral ideals, organicism, mythology of the peasantry, calls to return to the soil and become closer to the land for the good of the

Volk – extended to the lowest and most far-flung levels of the National Socialist apparatus.[70] Some scholars have argued that Darré had no interest whatsoever in organic farming during his tenure as Nazi minister, and that this notion was concocted by his defense attorneys at his post-war trial in Nuremberg. This interpretation is a significant misunderstanding. Darré's lawyer at Nuremberg was anthroposophist Hans Merkel, a specialist in agrarian law who had been a prominent member of Darré's staff since 1934. Along with his colleagues Hermann Reischle and Georg Halbe, Merkel was instrumental in changing Darré's stance toward biodynamic agriculture in the late 1930s. At Darré's Nuremberg trial, Merkel did portray the former Reich Minister as an idealistic protector of a revitalized peasantry as a supposedly mitigating factor, but the documentary record of Darré's active intervention on behalf of biodynamic agriculture during the Nazi era was by no means a post-war invention.

Merkel's own career is an exemplary instance of the longstanding intertwinement of biodynamic aspirations and Nazi institutional activities. He was initially recruited by Darré's assistant Hermann Reischle, an SS officer who had worked on the NSDAP's rural campaigns before Hitler came to power and who subsequently coordinated the pro-biodynamic grouping of Nazi agricultural functionaries from his position in the Reich Office for Agrarian Policy.[71] Merkel supervised the personnel who worked most closely with the Reich Peasant Leader.[72] He published widely on farming policy and wrote regularly for Darré's blood and soil journal *Odal*, combining organic metaphors with calls for expanded German *Lebensraum*.[73] Merkel had been a member of the Anthroposophical Society since 1926 and was both a faithful

spokesman for Darré's ideas and a primary proponent of biodynamic cultivation within the Nazi agricultural apparatus. He continued to work with Darré and other veterans of the Nazi agrarian bureaucracy in promoting organic farming after 1945.[74] Darré, for his part, spent his time in prison studying Steiner's writings and maintained very friendly relations with anthroposophists and biodynamic advocates until his death in 1953.

Merkel was hardly alone among Darré's deputies. Georg Halbe was another anthroposophist who worked for Darré from 1935 to 1942, concentrating on publishing projects. He was a staff member at *Odal* and manager of the *Blut und Boden Verlag*, the Blood and Soil publishing house. One of his chief tasks as an employee of the Reich Food Estate was promoting organic farming in its biodynamic form.[75] Halbe wrote dozens of articles for Nazi publications, including essays on biodynamic agriculture, and in 1942 planned to publish a book on organic farming.[76] His writings combined agrarian romanticism, Germanic myths, antisemitism, a fondness for holism, and an emphatic commitment to National Socialism.[77] When Darré was replaced by Backe in 1942, Halbe left the agricultural apparatus and moved to the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, then in 1944 to the Propaganda Ministry. While Halbe worked largely behind the scenes, biodynamic practices were praised in print by prominent representatives of Nazi agriculture policy such as Hermann Schneider, a Reichstag member, SS colonel, and former 'Reich Inspector for the Battle of Production,' the Nazi program for agricultural autarky.[78] In 1939 Schneider visited the premier biodynamic estate in

Germany as Darré's representative, and in 1940 acclaimed biodynamics as the key to achieving natural nutrition and healthy soil and restoring the peasantry as the lifeblood of the nation.[79] Even staff members of the Wehrmacht high command supported biodynamics.[80] Whatever their effectiveness may have been, the actions of Nazi authorities on behalf of biodynamic cultivation point to another instance of partial synthesis between 'green' precepts and National Socialist ambitions.

In attempting to put such occurrences into historical context and refute the ex post facto apologias and obfuscations of figures like Bramwell and Merkel, recent scholarship has sometimes maintained that Darré and his companions genuinely cared only about 'blood' and not about 'soil,' were concerned solely with race, ruralism and rootedness and not with ecological considerations, and did not exhibit any authentic environmentalism. But the notion of a clear separation between environmental tendencies on the one hand and ruralism and racial ideology on the other hand is a post-1945 imposition, a projection of current values onto the past. From the Wilhelmine era through the Nazi period, these phenomena which now seem so obviously different were not consistently distinguished and were frequently combined in various amalgamations of rural romanticism, racial utopias, back-to-the-land ideals and proto-ecological sentiment. A view which "combined landscape aesthetics, ecological concern, and racial pride," notes David Blackbourn, "was shared by most conservationists."[81] Even today, of course, racist and ethnocentric assumptions have not somehow disappeared from environmental circles.

In the context of Nazism, the promotion of racial ideology and the promotion of organic agriculture went hand in hand all along, with biodynamic proponents serving in prominent positions in the racial bureaucracy as well.[82] Hermann Reischle was the founding head of the 'Race Bureau' in the SS Office of Race and Settlement, and much of his work focused on the racial advantages of rural re-settlement programs, bringing together the health of the nation and the health of the soil. He was also a major figure in planning the 'Germanization' of territories to be conquered in the East. Hans Merkel was another leading official in the SS Office of Race and Settlement (his title was *Führer beim Stab des Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamts*), the institutional embodiment of Nazi racialism and ruralism and of Darré's blood and soil doctrines. Albert Friehe, a Nazi politician and functionary of the biodynamic association, was a party expert on both agricultural policy and racial policy. In addition to promoting biodynamic farming, Friehe served simultaneously as a specialist for peasant concerns and a staff member of the NSDAP 'Office of Race Policy.'[83] By neglecting this imbrication of organic visions and racist structures, the historiographical debate over Nazi environmentalism has partly obscured the significance of the shift in official attitudes toward organic agriculture in the guise of biodynamics.

Biodynamic Farming and Nazism

If Darré was unconvinced of the virtues of organic farming until shortly before WWII began, the biodynamic movement had been eager to prove its National Socialist credentials

for years, and had in fact cultivated contacts with Nazi circles well before Hitler's rise to power.[84] In 1933 the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture was founded under the leadership of anthroposophist Erhard Bartsch, with headquarters at Bartsch's estate in Bad Saarow. Biodynamic advocates touted their holistic version of organic agriculture as "spiritually aware peasant wisdom" in opposition to "civilization, technology, and modern urban culture."[85] Steiner's followers viewed Nazism's agrarian policy as a vindication of the biodynamic approach to farming and food, and despite opposition from the chemical industry, the agricultural establishment, and anti-occult sectors of the Nazi security apparatus, the biodynamic movement experienced impressive growth during the early years of the Third Reich.[86] Rather than a personal predilection of Darré or the peculiar preferences of Hess or the unpredictability of Himmler or the political promiscuity of biodynamics and its proponents, what the controversy over organic farming in Nazi Germany reveals is the ideological extent and practical significance of the overlap between ecological and National Socialist visions.

The biodynamic movement received extensive praise in the Nazi press, from the *Völkischer Beobachter* to rural venues and health periodicals.[87] Nazi supporters of biodynamics applauded Steiner's version of organic farming as a powerful weapon "in the National Socialist struggle against intellectualism and materialism, which are alien to our people."[88] Organic advocates returned the favor in *Demeter*, the biodynamic journal, emphasizing Nazism's effort to attain agricultural autarky for Germany.[89] A biodynamic dairy farmer from Silesia proclaimed in

1937 that both biodynamics and Nazism were based on "closeness to nature."[90] The front cover of the May 1939 issue of *Demeter* featured a bucolic picture of Adolf Hitler in an alpine landscape, surrounded by children, in honor of the Führer's fiftieth birthday. *Demeter* also celebrated Nazi Germany's military conquests and called for using prisoners of war in environmental projects.[91] Biodynamic publications combined anthroposophical, organic, and National Socialist vocabularies, including *Lebensraum* and blood and soil terminology, and touted the abundant contributions made by biodynamic practices to the environmental policy of the Third Reich.[92] Such ideological combinations carried a potent message; biodynamic representatives blamed profit-oriented chemical agriculture on the Jews, and their anti-materialist stance won them praise from Nazi antisemites.[93] Bartsch boasted with considerable justification that "the leading men of the Demeter movement have put themselves, their knowledge and experience wholeheartedly at the service of National Socialist Germany."[94]

A crucial source of institutional backing for the biodynamic movement came from Nazi *Lebensreform* officials, above all Hanns Georg Müller, a longtime Nazi who coordinated the various 'lifestyle reform' currents within the party.[95] From his post as an official in the *Reichsleitung*, the Nazi party directorate, Müller interceded repeatedly on behalf of biodynamic growers, backing them assertively in dealings with party organizations as well as private business associations. In 1938, for instance, he successfully intervened with the national potato producers guild to obtain favorable treatment for Demeter products.[96] Müller also published a

series of biodynamic books and pamphlets in his publishing house and strongly promoted biodynamics in his journal *Leib und Leben*.[97] The journal was sponsored by the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Lebensreform*, the official Nazi umbrella organization for 'lifestyle reform' groups, and took a zealous National Socialist line. Dozens of celebratory articles on biodynamics appeared in its pages, many of them written by senior officials in the Nazi *Lebensreform* movement. *Leib und Leben* and *Demeter* were sister journals and routinely advertised for one another. Among the prominent authors in *Leib und Leben* were biodynamic spokespeople, including Seifert and anthroposophist Franz Dreidax, who detailed the congruence of National Socialist ideals with biodynamic practices. Biodynamic growers were presented as pioneers of the natural German method of cultivation that had finally come into its own under the leadership of the Third Reich.[98]

Beyond aggressively publicizing its support for biodynamic agriculture, the Nazi *Lebensreform* apparatus welcomed the biodynamic movement as a leading force in its institutions. In 1935 the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture became a corporative member of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Lebensreform*, and Dreidax and Bartsch joined the organization's leadership council. The first principle of the association declared: "The worldview of the German *Lebensreform* movement is National Socialism."[99] Bartsch and Dreidax, the leading proponents of biodynamic farming in Germany, served for years as official representatives of the organization and promoted its combination of Nazi values and alternative cultural initiatives. With the energetic backing of Müller and his staff, biodynamic adherents publicly and

actively symbolized Nazism's incorporation of environmentally oriented causes. The biodynamic movement also had ample opportunity to broadcast its views in the Nazi press.[100] Once the war began, Darré arranged to have Bartsch, Dreidax, and other biodynamic leaders exempted from military service.[101]

Alongside its institutional anchoring in Nazi Germany's *Lebensreform* organs, the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture added a remarkable array of Nazi luminaries to its roster of supporters. As early as April 1934 Nazi Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick visited Bartsch's biodynamic estate and expressed his encouragement for the organization. He was followed by a parade of similarly high-profile figures, including Hess, Darré, Rosenberg, Robert Ley, Otto Ohlendorf, Alfred Baeumler, and Rudi Peuckert, head of the Reich Office for Agricultural Policy and Nazi 'peasant leader' for Thuringia. These and other Nazi leaders explicitly voiced their support for biodynamic agriculture, while Bartsch and his colleagues gained notable sympathy and interest from the highest echelons of the party.[102] Above all, Hess and his lieutenants offered continual support for biodynamics throughout the 1930s. Demeter supplied the Rudolf Hess Hospital in Dresden with biodynamic products, and even Hitler's vegetable garden at Obersalzberg was farmed biodynamically.[103]

SS Adoption of Biodynamic Agriculture

Despite this conspicuous endorsement by a wide range of prominent Nazi officials, extending well beyond Darré and his staff, the biodynamic movement faced the combined

resistance of opponents of organic farming within the agricultural apparatus and opponents of anthroposophy within the security services. SD and Gestapo agents considered biodynamic methods occultist quackery, a pointless encumbrance on traditional farming techniques. In their eyes, the biodynamic movement attempted "to spread the false international doctrine of anthroposophy disguised as National Socialism."[104] In June 1941, as part of the anti-occult campaign unleashed after Hess's flight to Britain, the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture was dissolved and Bartsch and other representatives of the movement were temporarily imprisoned, in spite of Darré's efforts to protect them. Remarkably, even this did not spell the end of biodynamic efforts in the Third Reich. The June 1941 actions removed Steiner's version of organic farming from public view, but scarcely eliminated it, as biodynamic initiatives continued apace under the unexpected protection of Himmler and the SS.

The cooperation between biodynamic growers and the SS had been underway for some time. Since the beginning of the war, biodynamic practitioners had been collaborating with the SS on various projects, including 'settlement' plans in the occupied East.[105] Biodynamic leaders saw the war as their chance to step forward in support of the German cause and as an auspicious occasion to re-shape Eastern lands along biodynamic lines. The Reich Food Estate recommended biodynamic cultivation for the annexed Eastern territories because it required no artificial fertilizers. As early as October 1939, the SS requisitioned a large farmstead in the occupied province of Posen to turn it into an agricultural

training facility based on biodynamic principles, with the active cooperation of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture.[106] Himmler's own attitude toward biodynamic farming was ambivalent; he rejected its anthroposophical foundations but appreciated its practical potential. After the June 1941 crackdown he ordered the agricultural sections of the SS to continue working with biodynamic methods, in cooperation with Bartsch, Dreidax, and their colleagues, but to keep these activities unobtrusive.[107] The term Himmler and his associates used to designate biodynamic agriculture was 'natural farming'.

Two of Himmler's most powerful lieutenants, Günther Pancke and Oswald Pohl, administered the SS biodynamic programs. Pancke was Darré's successor as head of the SS Office of Race and Settlement and played a leading role in the effort to alter conquered lands in the East according to Himmler's Germanic model once the racially 'unfit' inhabitants were forcibly removed. One of Pancke's goals was the establishment of agricultural estates in the Eastern territories governed by so-called 'soldier-farmers.' He considered biodynamic cultivation the suitable method for this would-be vanguard, pioneers of a racially dependable peasantry in the ethnically cleansed East, and the SS sent its personnel to attend courses provided by the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture.[108] Pancke's colleague Oswald Pohl was in charge of the economic enterprises of the SS and administrator of the concentration camp system. Pohl was a friend of Seifert and had his own estate farmed biodynamically. He sent Himmler biodynamic literature to demonstrate its value to the SS.[109] In January 1939 Himmler created a new SS corporation under

Pohl's supervision, the German Research Facility for Food and Nutrition, known by its German initials as the DVA. A substantial portion of its operations consisted of biodynamic plantations growing products for the SS and the German military, with production monitored by representatives of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture. The biodynamic plantations were located at concentration camps, including Dachau and Ravensbrück, as well as estates in occupied Eastern Europe and in Germany. Ravensbrück was the first DVA estate to be converted to biodynamic cultivation, in May 1940. Eventually the majority of the DVA's plantations were run biodynamically.[110]

The DVA also marketed Demeter products, cooperated with Weleda, and contributed financially to the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture.[111] The head of the DVA's agricultural section was SS officer Heinrich Vogel, an outspoken proponent of biodynamics. The centerpiece of the DVA biodynamic operations was the sizeable plantation at Dachau, which produced medicinal herbs and other goods for the SS. As at Ravensbrück, the labor on the Dachau biodynamic plantation was performed by camp inmates. With the assistance of Vogel and Seifert, from 1941 onward the Dachau operation was overseen by anthroposophist SS officer Franz Lippert, a leader of the biodynamic movement from its beginnings and head gardener at Weleda from 1924 to 1940. In 1944 Lippert received special recognition and a bonus for his efforts at the Dachau plantation.[112] Lippert also published a book for the SS in 1942 based on his work at Weleda and Dachau.[113] Weleda additionally supplied biodynamic materials to SS doctor Sigmund Rascher, who

performed infamous 'medical experiments' at Dachau involving the torture and death of many inmates. Rascher was an avid proponent of biodynamic methods, and in order to keep him supplied Weleda maintained ongoing business relationships with the SS and the Wehrmacht and was given special access to the SS's own stock of petroleum jelly, a rare commodity in war-time Germany.[114]

One of the tasks of the Dachau biodynamic plantation was to train 'settlers' for the Eastern territories, part of SS plans to use biodynamic cultivation in the environmental and ethnic re-ordering of the East.[115] Biodynamic leaders participated actively in these efforts, obtaining preferential treatment from the DVA and other SS agencies in return. In 1941, for example, the DVA offered members of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture discount prices on their Dachau products.[116] In addition to figures like Bartsch, Seifert, and Schwarz, biodynamic representative Nicolaus Remer helped oversee agricultural production in the occupied Ukraine in 1941 and 1942, while Darré's ally Rudi Peuckert supplied forced labor from occupied lands for war-time agricultural production. In 1943 another leading biodynamic advocate, anthroposophist SS officer Carl Grund, was specially commissioned to assess biodynamic farming in the conquered Russian provinces.[117] Grund had been active in the biodynamic movement since the 1920s and was head of the 'Information Office for Biodynamic Agriculture.' On Himmler's orders, Grund was given a variety of special tasks and prerogatives as an expert for 'natural farming' in the East. Himmler also directed that former members of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture be engaged in the

re-organization of agriculture in the Eastern territories and thus contribute to the "practical work of reconstruction" being carried out by German forces.[118] SS sponsorship of biodynamics continued until the camps were liberated.

The Unsettling History of Nazi Ecology

Whether presented as "farming according to the laws of life" or as "natural farming" or as a trustworthy method for restoring the health and fertility of the German soil and the German people, biodynamic cultivation found numerous amenable partners in the Nazi hierarchy. It augured the return of a balanced relationship between the German nation and the German landscape, a regenerated community living in harmony with nature. Indeed the Third Reich can be seen as the time when biodynamic agriculture received its most significant levels of state support and achieved its most impressive status among high officials.[119] In historical perspective, the quotidian details of the biodynamic movement's intertwinement with Nazi environmental endeavors may be more illuminating than well-worn debates over the 'green' inclinations of Darré or other Nazi celebrities. Why, then, has there been such resistance to acknowledging these links?[120] In light of the extremely well documented degree of Nazi support for biodynamic agriculture, why do some historians, philosophers, political scientists and others continue to deny or downplay the topic's relevance?

Part of the difficulty has to do with a confusion between normative and descriptive claims. Focusing on what ecological thinking ought to be, some authors have

overlooked what it actually has been historically.[121] This makes it harder rather than easier to discern which aspects of ecological thought are worth developing further. Another problem stems from the general challenges surrounding any effort to face the horrific legacy of National Socialism. Although the enormity of Nazism's crimes seems to render attempts to make historical sense of them futile, it is irresponsible to turn our eyes away from the subject. The close proximity – ideological as well as geographic – between Nazi programs for ecological renewal and Nazi programs for racial extermination suggests that further attention to this unlikely conjunction is called for. Boria Sax observes that "the Nazis murdered in the name of nature, invoking animals and landscapes."[122] Indeed "the National Socialist religion of nature," writes Robert Pois, "not only implicitly provided for extermination policies as a 'final solution', but in fact made them logically and, above all, *ethically* necessary."[123] The fact that war criminals like Ohlendorf and Pohl (both of whom were executed after the war for crimes against humanity) actively intervened on behalf of biodynamic agriculture lends further weight to this line of inquiry.

But the war and the holocaust were ecocidal as well as genocidal. Tracing the complex and contradictory history of Nazi naturism does not mean disregarding Nazism's enormously destructive impact on the European environment. It means taking seriously the countervailing proto-ecological tendencies within the Nazi regime, many of which sustained high levels of support from various sectors of the Nazi leadership for a remarkably long time and were notably successful on their own terms. These initiatives around environmentally sensitive

public works, organic agriculture, habitat protection, and so forth were not mere camouflage or peculiar deviations from the destructive path of the Nazi juggernaut; they were part and parcel of the Nazi project for remaking the landscape of Europe, ethnically as well as ecologically. Ignoring their impact yields an impaired comprehension of the full dimensions of that project and its attempted implementation under the banner of blood and soil.

In other instances the implications of Nazi environmentalism do not seem to have been thought through, historically or philosophically or politically. One of the more astute recent historians of the topic has written: "Far from signaling a National Socialist commitment to nature preservation, highly publicized landscape protection measures, particularly the Imperial Nature Protection Law, were weak and ineffective."[124] This is a non-sequitur. Whether Nazi environmental measures actually worked, and whether they represented a National Socialist commitment to nature preservation, are not at all the same thing. It is one thing to argue that figures like Seifert did not really accomplish much and were sidelined by other Nazis, or that the alliances between Nazis and nature conservationists were merely tactical, and quite another thing to claim that this somehow vitiates the commitment to nature that some Nazis demonstrated or diminishes the significance of ecological themes in some varieties of Nazi thought or effaces the plentiful real-world partnerships that arose between environmentalists and Nazi officials. The considerable limitations of National Socialist environmental policy in practice do not by themselves negate the scope or substance of environmental endeavors in Nazi garb.

Similarly, an insistence on neater and more orderly ideological distinctions in this context can paradoxically obscure matters rather than illuminating them. For better or worse, the history of ideas is often much less tidy than we might prefer, and the conjoining of racial fantasies and rural idylls—which extended well beyond the confines of Nazi Germany—is not something that can be wished away by re-defining terms. Since the advent of industrial capitalism, for a number of commentators in Germany and elsewhere, the rise of urbanization seemed to go hand in hand with a loss of organic community and of a harmonious relationship with the natural landscape, and the return to rural simplicity promised to restore national or racial purity as well. Specious as such beliefs may have been, they exercised a powerful influence on several generations of thinkers.[125] The notion that enviromentalist enthusiasm for National Socialism was merely a matter of strategic appropriation of Nazi rhetoric fails to take account of the longstanding *völkisch* strands in early environmentalism and of green tendencies on the authoritarian right and their multivalent political and cultural reverberations, traditions which predated the rise of Nazism by decades. These ideas came to partial fruition under Hitler's regime, with Nazi environmental projects presented as a path to regenerating the nation and organic farming as a more natural diet for a heartier, healthier, and haler German people.

Making Sense of Right-wing Ecology Past and Present

The important historiographical differences involved in these debates cannot be definitively resolved here. But too

many of the recent contributions to this ongoing debate are oriented toward debunking the notion that 'authentic' ecological elements played a significant role in the Nazi regime. I consider this approach a mistake. Much of Nazism based both its destructive and its 'constructive' aspects on a specifically naturalist vision, one that bore compelling and substantive parallels to ecological values, and these similarities were reflected in an expansive spectrum of institutions and practices. Minimizing Nazism's especially disturbing and unanticipated features does not relieve a burden for ecological activists today but conceals the continuities between some of the twentieth century's most cherished ideals and some of its most shameful crimes. Neglecting the 'green' features of Nazism is a deceptive way of shielding ourselves from what is most unsettling about the history of the topic.

To a certain extent, the strategy of deflecting this uncomfortable history has been led by liberal scholars who apparently mean to salvage the honor of environmentalism by disassociating it from the far right. From a radical perspective, this position is often based on political naïvete. Some historians seem to be defending the good name of German conservationists by pointing out that before 1933 they were apolitical liberals or mere conservatives, and just got pulled into the wake of the inexorably advancing Nazi juggernaut. Strangely, these analysts do not draw the lesson that an apolitical or liberal or conservative position was part of the problem in the first place, and that a radical ecologicial stance affiliated with a broader left politics might present a much more resistant alternative. Similar problems bedevil liberal interpretations of the fate

of conservation once Hitler came to power. Summarizing a prominent line of argument in the recent literature, one historian writes that "even when conservationists ultimately succeeded, their victory had less to do with the popularity of the cause of nature protection than the chaotic interplay of actors, institutions and interests that characterised National Socialist governance. Often the most decisive factor was support from high-ranking Nazi officials whose motives were highly dubious."[126] How would that differ from environmental successes in latter-day capitalist democracies? The motives of Nazi officials who took an approving view of conservationist measures were no doubt 'highly dubious,' but so are the motives of liberal and conservative politicians, not to mention Green politicians, in many non-Nazi contexts. By the same token, dismissing figures like Hess and Darré merely as eccentric right-wingers who happened to be attracted to environmental thinking is not a historically serious way to comprehend the problem of reactionary ecology.[127] If we want to understand the appeal of National Socialism, it is essential to face such problems squarely.

In some cases, moreover, the desire to absolve early German conservationists by not associating them too closely with Nazism reflects not only a short-sighted perspective on the past but political timidity in the present. Grassroots ecological activists today do not shy away from criticizing Al Gore or Joschka Fischer; why shy away from criticizing the environmental establishment of yesteryear? The history of environmentalism consistently reveals an authoritarian and nationalist disposition in many disparate contexts, despite the efforts of some of our forebears to forge liberatory

alternatives, and these factors are a legitimate object of critique, as are the bourgeois roots of much of mainstream conservationism and the colonial and imperialist roots of other ecological proposals and practices. A historical focus on the right-wing strands within ecological politics can help to clarify such matters and contribute to a more critical re-consideration of traditional environmental themes, from wilderness preservation to natural lifestyles to the basic relationship between humankind and the rest of the earth.[128] This sort of critical re-consideration is all the more important in an era when positions which seem radical and innovative do not in fact offer a meaningful challenge to the status quo.[129]

When historians play down the lengthy record of entwinement between ecological ideals and fascist realities, they reinforce a specific kind of historical naivete among ecological activists in the present, who then feel justified in ignoring this history rather than grappling with it head-on. When activists neglect to inform themselves about this contested history, they cede the field to Nazi nostalgists and purveyors of a putatively updated right-wing ecology. Those of us who reject nationalism and xenophobia and ideas of racial purity and oppose authoritarian solutions and reactionary panaceas have an obligation to be vocal about raising such issues in ecological contexts, as activists and as scholars. Otherwise we leave ourselves, our ideals, and our movements open to appropriation by right-wing forces hoping to recuperate fascist politics in 'alternative' attire. The ecological movement will be strengthened, not weakened, by coming to terms with the unacknowledged aspects of its past.

Exaggerated anxieties about guilt by association, understandable as they may be in the current context of anti-environmental backlash, are an inadequate response to the subject. There are indisputably critics of environmentalism ready to seize on any discussion of right-wing ecology in order to denounce green politics as such.[130] These concerns can be refuted by historically knowledgeable and politically decisive argument. The point of the research assembled in this book is not to induce guilt or shame but to instigate informed engagement with and conscious reflection on the underexamined aspects of our common inheritance. If greens today are 'guilty' of anything, it is historical ignorance, not Nazi sympathies. Avoidance will not address this challenge and will not avert attacks from those who consider environmental activism an elitist pastime and an imposition on personal liberties or community traditions. Rather than apologizing for our commitment to confronting the sources of ecological and social destruction, we can forthrightly claim an honorable legacy of radical green politics that acknowledges and abjures the mistakes of our predecessors. We do not honor our best aspirations by ignoring our past.

Part of purpose of this book is to raise such questions in spite of the discomfort they provoke. Definitive answers, on the other hand, are something that neither scholars nor activists can provide on our own; different readers will draw their own lessons from the history of ecofascism. It would be a welcome development if this history sparked a re-thinking of some of the political positions current within the contemporary environmental scene. Many of those positions are plainly inadequate in the face of the enduring

social and ecological crisis. I remain a social ecologist fully committed to a thoroughgoing transformation of society and of human relations with the natural world. If ecological thinkers and activists do not foster lasting links to a broader left political practice and a comprehensive outlook based on radical social critique, we risk losing the creative potential, subversive possibilities, and challenging prospects of an approach which takes natural and social change equally seriously. Instead of historical indifference or discounting the compromises of our past, instead of capitulating to the apprehensions of the present, a clear-eyed assessment of this conflicted legacy can help us move toward a socially and ecologically hopeful future.