

## ECO-REALISM: AN EMERGING PARADIGM?

In the left hand column is what we might call 'vulgar greenery': the standard views and assumptions mostly deriving from the first wave of environmental awareness in the 60s and 70s. As time goes on, many of these are showing signs of strain but they tend to persist as the 'default green view' for lack of anything better. In the right hand column are more complex modern views, not necessarily adding up to a coherent philosophy, but increasingly influential.

TRADITIONAL PARADIGM	EMERGING PARADIGM?
Ideological, self-confirming, 'culty'	Pragmatic, self-checking, sceptical
Apocalyptic myth: driven by bad news	Progressive, evolutionary myth: driven by good news
Static, preservationist, opposed to change	Dynamic, assumes there is no steady state
Thinks of nature as given, fixed	Thinks of nature as dynamic, self-renewing, even self-inventing
Correcting something that's wrong	Creating something that's new
Nature basically fragile, incompatible with human culture. Presumption on separation of natural and artificial	Nature basically robust, responding positively to challenges, presumption on integration of natural and artificial
Ecocentric values - nature's 'interests' can be interpreted	Humanistic values - nature's 'interests' cannot be interpreted
Nature is located 'out there'	Most of nature is in our heads, a social construction
Disparate 'environmental' values conflated, giving rise to misunderstandings and inconsistencies	Care taken to discriminate different values to achieve consistency.
Choices are obvious to all right-thinking people	Choices are difficult, multi-dimensional, and depend critically on assumptions made
Special emphasis on environmental aspects of sustainability	Equal emphasis on the 'three legs': environmental, social and economic sustainability
Frequent confusion of short and long-term problems – the 'cash-flow' and 'profitability' views of sustainability	Makes a distinction between the requirements of 'cash flow' and 'profitability' – which might conflict
Perfectionist, aiming at 'zero emissions'	Opposed to perfectionism, sceptical about zero emissions
Literal interpretation of precautionary principle	Pragmatic interpretation of precautionary principle
Paranoid attitudes to contamination and 'ritual pollution'	Robust common-sense attitudes to pollutants. Nothing is non-negotiable
Non-negotiable absolutes (nuclear, GMO, landfills)	
Green principles often a cover for unconscious NIMBYism	Alert to this tendency; might well favour YIMBYism -- taking in other people's dirty washing
Environmental problems seen as linked, to be tackled all of a piece as a matter of urgency	Environmental problems not necessarily linked, nor equally urgent. Attempts to classify and rank
Inclined to set high, fixed standards and move to them instantly	Prefers step-by step improvement through series of realisable goals
Preferred strategy of high standards with initially low take-up	Preferred strategy of initially low standards with high take-up
Hostile to any economic growth, which is considered incompatible with environmental quality	Would support well-distributed general economic growth in poor societies, discriminate economic growth in moderately affluent societies, and would regard economic growth as socially irrational in very rich societies.
Opposed to capitalism, tends to view market forces as intrinsically malign	Accepts the inevitability of market forces. Developing a complex critique of capitalism
'Development' assumed to reduce habitat and biodiversity, so generally opposed	Well-planned development can increase habitats and biodiversity; emphasis on specific design quality
Evidence of environmental improvement is habitually interpreted as a cosmetic illusion	Evidence of environmental improvement is accepted with due circumspection
Prefer qualitative, subjective assessments	Prefer quantitative, numerical assessments
Operate on 'popular' risk rankings	Operate on 'official' risk rankings
Soft spot for self-sufficiency and domestic autonomy	Sceptical about environmental benefit of self-sufficiency; prefers concept of 'optonomy', mixed on-site and reticulated systems
Prescriptive attitude to lifestyle change: 'thou shalt not...'	Positive attitude to lifestyle change: it improves the quality of your life
Lifestyle changes are regarded as essential on all timescales	Inclined to favour technical solutions in the short-term, lifestyle or aspirational changes in the long-term
Tendency to confuse conspicuous items of greenery with genuinely reduced impact	Attempts to isolate the essentials, might not appear superficially green
Slogans: STOP! ENOUGH!	Slogans: BETTER! SMARTER!