

‘Morris the red, Morris the green’ – a partial review

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It is difficult to know where the idea of Morris the proto-green originated. Jack Lindsay, for example, states that ‘at the core of (Morris’s) socialism was the struggle against pollution and destruction of the environment’, and the knowledge ‘that the only way in which the ... tide could be turned was by the ending of commodity-production and competitive systems’. And A.L. Morton alludes to Morris’s conviction that Socialism would renew the ‘thousands of years of co-operation between man (*sic*) and his environment’ which capitalism had ‘brutally interrupted’. But even these rather limited statements were far too much for E.P. Thompson, who found the idea that Morris is ‘a pioneer of responsible “ecological” consciousness’ a ‘remarkable discovery’.¹

As for greens, by the 1970s Nicholas Gould was already writing about Morris in *The Ecologist*,² in an article which correctly represents his views on art, and technology, but fails to mention socialism! In literary criticism, it may be that Raymond Williams was one of the earliest to discuss the environmental aspects of Morris’s ideas. For example, in *Culture & Society*, he indicates that, for Morris, commercialism was responsible not only for destroying human lives, but also for ruining nature.

... our green fields and clear waters, nay the very air we breathe are turned not to gold (which might please some of us for an hour may be) but to dirt; and to speak plainly we know full well that under the present gospel of Capital not only there is no hope of bettering it, ... Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die—choked by filth.³

Williams later pointed out that one of Morris’s greatest potential contributions to what he termed ‘ecological socialism’ is that he offers reconciliation between two apparently conflicting themes: how do we solve the problem of ‘limits’, when a major ‘traditional’ socialist belief is that the way to deal with poverty is *more* production? – a belief which may no longer be sustainable. Mor-

ris’s solution (following Ruskin) involved asking ‘What kind of production?’ (‘Useful work or useless toil?’) – thus emphasising the *quality* of product, not the quantity.⁴

At about the same time, Jan Marsh explored Morris’s influence on late nineteenth century social and artistic movements, in the shape of the Arts and Crafts, and ‘Back to the Land’, which she described as one of example rather than exhortation.⁵ Although his initial reaction to industrial society was aesthetic, for Morris simplicity of life and socialism went together, and by 1884 he had already identified ‘production for need’ – ‘what Nature gives us, and what a reasonable man can make out of the gifts of Nature for his reasonable use’⁶ – as the key to what today we call sustainability.

These themes were taken up by Peter Gould, who argued that Morris’s case illustrates the distinction between ‘environmentalism’, and a more radical approach to nature. Morris’s early agitations on nature’s behalf were aimed at defending human and natural habitats from capitalism via organisations such as the S.P.A.B. and the Kyrle Society, none of which posed much fundamental threat to the established order. But once he became a socialist, Morris was less active in these societies, and sought a more fundamental readjustment between humanity and nature, based on ‘fellowship’, and the ‘fullness and completeness’ of a ‘free and unfettered animal life’.

However, the ‘real, long-lasting and bitter split in the ... socialist movement’ (particularly the S.D.F.) which took place in 1884 was not only between parliamentary and revolutionary socialists, but between ‘realists’ whose strategy was to gain control of productive forces and use them for the public good, and ‘utopians’, whose socialism placed much more emphasis upon ‘the totality of individual needs’. Therefore, defeat of the utopians, and adoption of a more utilitarian calculus, may not only have led to a victory for parliamentary socialism, but to the long postponement of discussion of environmental issues by the parliamentary left to which Raymond Williams referred a century later.⁷

In 1990, I made my own initial attempt at explaining the greener aspects of Morris’s ideas.⁸ I pointed out that, especially in *News from Nowhere*, Morris anticipated many aspects of modern green thought – alternative technology, renewable energy, simplicity of lifestyle, community self-reliance, production only for need, prolonging the life of goods in order to reduce resource depletion, reduction of waste, and above all the key role of what is defined as ‘work’ (for both men and women) in allowing us all to express our essential humanity in a free and sustainable society. But Morris went further than most greens, of course, both then and now, and explained that the kind of restorative changes to ecosystems and landscapes they demand can only be achieved by abolition of the profit motive.

It is profit which draws men into enormous unmanageable aggregations called towns, for instance; profit which crowds them up when they are there into quarters without gardens or open spaces; profit which won't take the most ordinary precautions against wrapping a whole district in a cloud of sulphurous smoke; which turns beautiful rivers into filthy sewers, which condemns all but the rich to live in houses idiotically cramped and confined at the best, and at the worst in houses for whose wretchedness there is no name.⁹

And of course the really important thing about Morris is that in *News from Nowhere*, he showed us that an ecological society does not need to be an authoritarian one – a lesson many greens still have not learned.

By the mid 1990s, Morris's role as an ancestor of the modern green movement began to be more widely acknowledged. Peter Marshall described him as 'an advanced ecological thinker', and David Pepper as elaborating 'virtually all of the themes "discovered" by radical environmentalists over the past quarter-century about a century before they did'. Unlike his early mentors Ruskin and Carlyle, Morris possessed a clear strategy for change, and the notion that 'if people envisaged a future which was not discordant with nature, it *would* come about'.¹⁰

In 1994, Nora Gillow kindly invited me to give the Annual William Morris Lecture at the William Morris Gallery.¹¹ Here, I examined Morris's attitude to a number of then key environmental problems – Pollution, Conservation (of resources), Preservation (of habitat), and Multiplication (of people).¹² Even in his first lecture on *Art and Society*, Morris identified the essential cause of what today we call pollution.

Is money to be gathered? cut down the pleasant trees among the houses, pull down ancient and venerable buildings for the money that a few square yards of London dirt will fetch; blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke and worse, and it's nobody's business to see it or mend it: that is all modern commerce, the counting-house forgetful of the workshop, will do for us herein.¹³

In other words, pollution is not a 'side-effect' of industrial capitalism, or even an 'externality', but a direct consequence of industrialisation, the market economy, and in particular, use of the profit motive. Such is the insanity of this system, that

... the time will come when people will find it difficult to believe that a rich community such as ours ... could have submitted to live ... such a mean, shabby, dirty life as we do.¹⁴

In 1973, the pioneer environmental philosopher Richard Routley had called for a

new environmental ethic, based on (1) respect for the needs of future generations, (2) the rights of non-human animals, and (3) the intrinsic value of Nature.¹⁵ In terms of resource conservation, Morris had already identified the importance of the first of these

What kind of an account shall we ... give to those who come after us of our dealings with the earth, which our forefathers handed down to us still beautiful ... ?¹⁶

Morris was concerned that the wealth of Nature, handed down from the past, would be destroyed for the future – not the spurious wealth created by the market, however, but that natural wealth which human beings will always be able to rely on, provided they conserve it wisely, and exploit it only for need

... I will forever refuse to call (articles of folly and luxury) wealth: they are not wealth, but waste. Wealth is what Nature gives us, and what reasonable (people) can make out of the gifts of Nature for (their) reasonable use. The sunlight, the fresh air, the unspoiled face of the earth, food, raiment and housing necessary and decent; the storing up of knowledge of all kinds, and the power of disseminating it; means of free communication ... works of art, ... all things which serve the pleasure of people, free, manly and uncorrupted. This is wealth.¹⁷

Although nowadays many greens associate ‘resource conservation’ with ‘shallow environmentalism’,¹⁸ Morris possessed a much wider definition of natural wealth.

In terms of habitat preservation, Morris did not follow the Romantics or the Transcendentalists in advocating wilderness preservation. Instead, what he wished to preserve was the English cultural landscape, produced by what we now know to be more than six thousand years of what Morris believed to be sustainable land use, before the advent of the market.

... the land is a little land, too much shut up within the narrow seas, it seems, to have much space for swelling into hugeness: there are no great wastes overwhelming in their dreariness, no great solitudes of forests, no terrible untrodden mountain-walls: all is measured, mingled, varied, gliding easily one thing into another: little rivers, little plains, swelling, speedily changing uplands, all beset with handsome orderly trees; little hills, little mountains, netted over with the walls of sheepwalks: all is little; yet not foolish and blank, but serious rather, and abundant of meaning for such as choose to seek: it is neither prison nor palace, but a decent home ...¹⁹

Morris did know the value of wild nature, but mainly for its instrumental value as a source of resources, or its inherent value as a place of human recreation.

We like pieces of wild nature, and can afford them, so we have them; let alone that as to the forests, we need a great deal of timber, and suppose that our sons and sons' sons will do the like.

... children ... often make up parties, and come to play in (Kensington!) woods for weeks together in summer-time, living in tents, ... We rather encourage them to it; they learn to do things for themselves, and get to notice the wild creatures; and, you see, the less they stew inside houses the better for them. ... many grown people ... go to live in the forests through the summer; though they for the most part go to the bigger ones, like Windsor, or the Forest of the Dean, or the northern wastes.²⁰

However, there are also natural processes operating independently of human beings, which may be a source of what Routley saw as the third aspect of his new ethic – the intrinsic value of nature

.... all the while, Nature will go on with her eternal recurrence of lovely changes – spring, summer, autumn, and winter; sunshine, rain and snow; storm and fair weather; dawn, noon and sunset; day and night – ever bearing witness ... that (we have) deliberately chosen ugliness instead of beauty, and to live ... amidst squalor or blank emptiness.²¹

More controversial may be Morris's attitude to the fourth issue – Multiplication (of population). United Nations policy states that the best way to approach the causes of rapid population growth is to raise the economic, political, cultural and educational status of women.²² And in *News from Nowhere*, from descriptions of the relationship between Dick and Clara, from conversations between Guest and Old Hammond, and from statements later in the book by Ellen – 'I shall have children; perhaps before the end a good many; – I hope so' – it is clear, I think, that, as far as Morris is concerned, in *Nowhere*, women have already gained equal political, economic and social status to that of men, and hence, presumably, full control over their own fertility.²³

However, Jan Marsh, for example, has criticised Morris for confining women's labour in *Nowhere* largely to the domestic economy.²⁴ But here, Morris was surely not writing about the middle-class households of the nineteenth century, or even the mid-twentieth, from which much of the modern feminist critique of 'women's work' sprang. What Morris surely had in mind was the rural medieval economy, in which raw materials were produced in the woods and fields (mainly, but not exclusively) by men, and processed in the house (again, mainly, but not exclusively) by women.²⁵ As Carolyn Merchant has shown, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with development of commercial society, it was precisely this kind of 'subsistence' work which was professionalised and

commercialised, to the detriment of the economic status of women.²⁶

The population of Nowhere is ‘pretty much the same as it was at the end of the nineteenth century’,²⁷ (i.e. *ca* 40 million) a statement which may also be implausible to many greens, especially those who still subscribe to the idea that the underlying cause of all environmental problems is ‘overpopulation’. However, like his contemporary Peter Kropotkin, Morris was convinced that by adopting intensive methods of food production, and producing food locally, including in cities, it would be possible to feed substantial urban populations, most of whom, unlike their modern counterparts, would produce their own food.²⁸

In 1996, Florence Boos contributed her own very extensive survey of Morris’s green ideas to *Centenary Essays*; an article which gives us the subtitle of this issue.²⁹ Unlike Thoreau, Darwin or Muir, Morris was not really a ‘nature’ writer, which turns out today to be one of his strengths, in that his principal preoccupations were cultural-anthropological – the relationship between human freedom and nature.

According to Boos, it was with Morris’s adoption of socialism (1883) that he began to develop insights into the *causes* of the defacement of nature.³⁰ Morris’s initial reaction was aesthetic, although even here, he had already identified the likely consequences of ‘progress’ – ‘a danger that the strongest and wisest of mankind, in striving to attain complete mastery over Nature, should destroy her simplest and widest-spread gifts’.³¹ But in his later essays (e.g. ‘The Society of the Future’, 1888, ‘Makeshift’, 1894), he makes the connection with social justice, and with consumption

Shall I tell you what luxury has done for you in modern Europe? It has covered the merry green fields with the hovels of slaves, and blighted flowers and trees with poisonous gases, and turned the rivers into sewers; till over many parts of Britain the common people have forgotten what a field or a flower is like, and their idea of beauty is a gas-poisoned gin-palace or a tawdry theatre ...³²

As for ‘Morris and ecology’, Boos sees some parallels between his own thought and that of present-day ‘deep ecologists’ and ‘spiritual ecologists’,³³ but surely she is correct when she also writes that his clearest heirs are ‘social ecologists’ or ‘ecosocialists’; advocates of environmental *and social* justice. In particular, Morris’s discussion of the growth and rapacity of the nineteenth century global colonial market is ‘strikingly prescient’. She concludes

Morris’s prose embodied a deep and resonant late-nineteenth-century critique of contemporary environmental and social devastation ... (to which he) added a fiercely concrete ... sense ... of the need for a proper harmony of people and the natural order they live in, ... and a radical call for the communal ownership not

only of 'property' and the 'means of production', but also ... the inherent beauty of our common possession of nature—woods, rivers and sky. ... His fundamental insights were ... founded in the conviction that human happiness lies in our ability to live in ... symbiosis with (nature) —understanding it, preserving it, transforming it, and sometimes resisting it, in loving and artistic ways.³⁴

The above (both myself and Boos) seems to have been too much for Sara Wills, who suggests that the 'refashioning ... remaking and relabelling' of Morris as proto-green has once again 'appropriated (him) for a back-projected history of "green" discourse', and that (quoting Isobel Armstrong) 'Once more, ... we (are) "re-valuing" a Victorian by claiming that he was like us'. Instead, Morris's idea of 'nature' was not ecocentric, but anthropocentric: 'there was nothing "eco-centric" about Morris, "if being "eco-centric" ... means putting the whole "eco-system" above its human parts ...'³⁵

Instead, the (main) 'importance of Morris's work lay ... in his thinking (1) about the ways in which nature might be "reasonably shared" (within) and between *human* societies (emphasis original), and (2) the (essentially green) notion that 'if one gets livelihood right, nature stands a much better chance of surviving'. In Morris, this is achieved by insisting that work be pleasurable, which in turn leads us to 'consider the possibility of new relationships within work, and between work as production and nature'.³⁶

However, having cast some green writing about Morris as 'more celebratory than critical',³⁷ Wills arrives at a position not unlike that of several more enthusiastic advocates of 'Morris the Green' – including Boos and myself – that his ideas regarding a 'shift in the work paradigm' would render competition and the profit motive obsolete, would lead to major socioeconomic as well as ecological change, and would reduce the human 'ecological footprint' on nature. Therefore, Morris may indeed not be the intellectual ancestor of 'deep greens' or 'spiritual greens', but he is, along with Kropotkin, a direct antecedent of 'red-greens'.³⁸

Bradley Macdonald further examined an idea mentioned by Boos – that Morris's initial ecological thoughts were aesthetic, but that his earlier insights were modified by his conversion to socialism. However, for MacDonald, it is the aesthetic experience which informs the later socialist ideas, generating an explicit sense of ecological regeneration and sustainability. Morris's 'ecosocialist vision' thus arose not just from his exposure to Marxism, but also from his commitment to 'a notion of critical beauty', which he obtained from his earlier medievalism, Pre-Raphaelitism and aestheticism, all of which furnished him with 'an intense naturalism which ... (provided) him with (the) impetus to articulate what would later become a consistent ecological vision'.³⁹

Like Boos, MacDonald maintains that Morris's early lectures (1877-1883)

largely examine art and beauty related to pleasurable labour, intimately related to a reverence for the Earth. But he soon realised that only way to regenerate art and beauty was to transform social conditions, and to abolish the profit motive, and its consequent overproduction. His socialism was therefore a logical outcome of his thinking about the arts, and as soon as he realised that pleasurable labour could only come about under socialism, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to it.⁴⁰

Morris’s idea of socialism was clearly ‘incubated’ in his thinking about the nature of art. When he described his vision of socialism, he could not help but discuss its role in bringing about an ecologically sustainable world. At present, the real limit to human impact on the Earth appears not to be, as previously thought, the availability of scarce resources, but the ability of the planet to absorb human impact – its ‘carrying capacity’ for our ‘ecological footprint’.⁴¹ Responding to this problem will require a decrease in consumption and contraction in industrial production which many greens (and anti-greens) portray as a *reduction* in the human ‘standard of living’. Morris’s thought is the key to solving this conundrum.⁴²

Morris’s analysis – ‘amazing in its prescience of what (became) almost *de rigueur* (during) the twentieth century’ – still represents the clearest assessment of the ways in which ecological sustainability is linked to socialism (and *vice versa*), and is based not just on an appreciation of the Earth as an abstract entity, but an ethical injunction for its restoration and continued protection. His melding of a unique combination of theoretical and conceptual ideas and discourses into a potent ecological analysis and vision, therefore mean that he must be regarded as one of the most important visionaries of ecosocialism.⁴³

Martin Delveaux argues that, in *News from Nowhere*, Morris did not just envisage a new social order in which communities are socially just, participatory, independent, economically viable and environmentally sustainable. By stressing the need for a decentralised and ‘polycentric’ country, and by showing how co-operation, as opposed to competition, can form a symbiosis between the members of the society, he also effectively linked the local with the global, a central green idea. In ‘The Society of the Future’ (1893) describes

... a society which does not know the meaning of the words rich and poor, or the rights of property, or ... nationality: ... in which equality of condition is a matter of course, ... a society conscious of a wish to keep life simple, to forgo some of the power over nature won by past ages in order to be more human and less mechanical ...⁴⁴

People no longer differentiate between ‘country’ and ‘town’, a change which followed a reversal of the processes which created the great manufacturing cities

of the nineteenth century – ‘Enclosure’, and forced removal of labouring people to the town.⁴⁵ Communities are economically self-reliant, producing only for need, in a polity based on ‘Federations of Independent Communities’, integrating the local with the global, the individual with the collective.

Such changes not only pre-figure, as indicated, such earlier movements as ‘Back to the Land’ and ‘Back to Nature’, but also ‘bioregionalist’ elements of modern environmentalism.⁴⁶ Delveaux therefore suggests that *Nowhere*, as described by Morris (and *pace* Sara Wills), is clearly an ecocentric (as opposed to an anthropocentric) society, in which human beings and nature are of equal importance. Since ownership does not exist, people cannot possess nature.

Interaction between Morris’s ‘ecological’ ideas and his designs is discussed by David Faldet, who suggests that several of his ‘Thames tributary’ patterns not only commemorate locations which figure in Morris’s life, but also incorporate the sinuosity of the meander, that most fractal of features of an undamaged river valley, thus typifying ‘the fertile power of slowness’. In *News from Nowhere*, the rejuvenated Thames – clear, recolonised by salmon, and therefore re-oxygenated – is the symbol of ‘an epoch of rest’, re-establishing ‘the old lines of connection between people and the Earth’.⁴⁷ This theme is further explored by Jed Mayer, who suggests that *Trellis*, for example, portrays ‘an ethic of natural stewardship’ which brings order to nature but does not dominate, and that *The Strawberry Thief*, like Darwin’s tangled bank, illustrates ‘harmony and symmetry amongst abundance and complexity’.⁴⁸

Such qualities stem from Morris’s underlying pre-occupation with the limitations of scientific method for understanding the natural world, a theme which runs through his lectures of the 1880s, in which he was influenced by Ruskin, Edward Carpenter, and (again) his early, Pre-Raphaelite experience. As with Ruskin, Morris’s critique of industrial capitalism emphasises ways in which ‘scientific and commercial culture reduce humans, animals, and landscapes to the status of raw material to be worked for material gain’. Both imagined a ‘greener’ science which provides ‘an alternative means of interacting with the natural world which emphasises the aesthetic and the emotional ... as well as the intellectual’. Morris’s designs educate the eye into seeing patterns and coherences in nature which convey ‘a more harmonious relationship between humans and non-humans’, ‘an image of natural cooperation drawn from the familiar (and the) domesticated’.⁴⁹

Similar patterns were recorded during the nineteenth century by Ernst Haeckel, and the early twentieth by Darcy Thompson, and are now part of the new ‘science of complexity’ based on pattern rather than process, understanding rather than manipulation, and in an echo of Morris (and of course, Kropotkin), cooperation rather than competition. In choosing the Thames Valley as the

‘bioregion’ of Nowhere, Morris even prefigures later twentieth century developments in the environmental sciences.⁵⁰

In 2008 I was delighted to be asked to give the Penelope Fitzgerald Memorial Address, part of which I devoted to a Morrisian critique of ‘dark green’ environmentalism, in the shape of James Lovelock’s *The Revenge of Gaia*, which I compared to Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*.⁵¹ Lovelock (probably rightly) believes that the Earth is now in a dangerous and unstable condition, and may soon ‘flip’ to a new state much less comfortable for us. The potential impact of such a change on human life is severe, so that we need to take urgent action. There is hope (of a kind!) – ‘it might even be possible to sustain ten billion or more (of us) living in well-planned, dense cities, eating synthesised food’ – but such changes will demand sacrifices, none of which will be of any use unless we control our population. One fundamental problem, however, is that human beings are ‘a planetary disease’, programmed by evolution as ‘tribal carnivores’. Therefore, as we cannot trust humanity to ‘do the right thing’ by itself, what we need is ‘a book of knowledge ... a manual for living well and survival ... , and (of course!) ‘a small permanent group of strategists who ... will ... be ready for surprises to come’.⁵²

The Revenge of Gaia is therefore typical of the misanthropic, pessimistic, elitist and authoritarian aspects of much green thinking which have long (and rightly) made it unattractive to socialists. But its regimentation, mechanisation (of production and life), authoritarianism, elitism and artificiality are also very similar to *Looking Backward*, and both texts, in which human beings live completely artificial lives, totally separated from nature, are essentially ultra-modernist. They are also the antithesis of *News from Nowhere*, in which Morris explains how to build an ecological society which is neither authoritarian nor totalitarian.

In September 2009 I updated my earlier lecture at the William Morris Gallery,⁵³ in terms especially of two issues which had found their way onto the environmental agenda since the first occasion – globalisation, and sustainability. In Morris’s day, globalisation meant the colonial world market, which by then had more or less reached its zenith, and against which he spoke and wrote many times, not just its devastating social and environmental effects, but also that it was system out of control; a point which resonates strongly with us today.

It is clear ... that in the last age of civilisation men had got into a vicious circle in the matter of production of wares. They had reached a wonderful facility of production, and in order to make the most of that facility they had gradually created (or allowed to grow, rather) a most elaborate system of buying and selling, which has been called the World-Market; and that World Market, once set a-going, forced them to go on making more and more of these wares, whether they needed them or not. So that while (of course) they could not free themselves

from the toil of making real necessities, they created in a never-ending series sham or artificial necessities, which became, under the iron rule of the aforesaid World-Market, of equal importance to them with the real necessities which supported life. By all this they burdened themselves with a prodigious mass of work merely for the sake of keeping their wretched system going.⁵⁴

Morris had earlier described the impact of this system on the colonial world

... the Indian or Javanese craftsman may no longer ply his craft leisurely, working a few hours a day, in producing a maze of strange beauty on a piece of cloth: a steam engine is set a-going at Manchester, and that victory over nature and a thousand stubborn difficulties is used for the base work of producing a sort of plaster of china-clay and shoddy and the Asiatic worker, if he is not starved to death outright, as plentifully happens, is driven himself into a factory to lower the wages of his Manchester brother worker, and nothing of character is left him except, most like, an accumulation of fear and hatred of that to him most unaccountable evil, his English master. The South Sea Islander must leave his canoe-carving, his sweet rest, and his graceful dances, and become the slave of a slave: trousers, shoddy, rum, missionary, and fatal disease – he must swallow all this civilization in a lump, and neither himself or we can help him now till social order displaces that hideous tyranny of gambling that has ruined him.⁵⁵

Ironically, since Morris's time, economic globalisation has been reversed, with manufacturing largely removed from Europe and North America and centred on China, and provision of services to India. Under the Doha round of the GATT, it is even proposed that provision of *local* services be taken away from individual communities, and given over to global corporations. Fortunately, this round is currently seriously stalled.

As for sustainability, the definition most people follow is that provided by the 'Brundtland Report' – 'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs'⁵⁶ – but in my lecture I proposed another, simpler definition which I believe represents true sustainability – 'Local production for local need'. Once again, Morris had already arrived at this definition, some one hundred and twenty years before.

The wares which we make are made because they are needed: men make for their neighbours' use as if they were making for themselves, not for a vague market of which they know nothing, and over which they have no control: as there is no buying and selling, it would be mere insanity to make goods on the chance of their being wanted; for there is no longer any one who can be *compelled* to buy them. ... whatever is made is good, and thoroughly fit for its purpose. Nothing *can* be made except for genuine use; therefore no inferior goods are made. More

over, as ... we have now found out what we want; and ... are not driven to make a vast quantity of useless things, we have time and resources enough to consider our pleasure in making them.⁵⁷

Two recent essays must also be given very brief attention. In the first, Tony Pinkney laments the apparent lack of economic and scientific progress in *Nowhere*; that in this essentially ‘fourteenth century Gothic paradigm’, some people (Annie, Old Hammond) are disappointed with the parochialism which has beset their revolution.⁵⁸ What *Nowhere* therefore lacks, according to Pinkney, is a fourth element beyond the air and the water it has cleaned, and the earth it has healed – fire, in the shape of progress. Indicating that similar problems are encountered in Ursula Le Guin’s magnificent utopia, *The Dispossessed*, Pinkney opts for what he considers a more dynamic solution, Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*.⁵⁹ But that book – a highly centralised, strongly governed and regulated, ‘hi-tech’, ‘technocentric’ future, which has retained both money, and competition between private corporations⁶⁰ – can surely in no way be compared to *News from Nowhere* (or *Annares*). Besides, mature ecosystems use ‘fire’ (i.e. energy) not to promote progress, but to perform work, all of which, in ecological terms, is highly ‘useful’.

In the second, Piers Hale⁶¹ discusses the Darwinian context of the familiar issue of socialism and ‘human nature’. Apparently, many late-nineteenth century socialists still adhered to the by then scientifically discredited evolutionary concept of the French zoologist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck (1744-1829) – the inheritance of characteristics acquired during an organisms lifetime – to explain how they might succeed in ‘Making Socialists’. Under the onslaught of pro-capitalist scientists such as Thomas Henry Huxley (‘Darwin’s Bulldog’; 1825-1895), these ideas were eventually abandoned by (one-time) Fabians such as H.G. Wells; another factor which may have led to the century of neglect of environmental issues by the social-democratic left in Britain referred to by Raymond Williams (Notes 4, 7). Of course, as Hale ultimately points out, ‘making socialists’ does not rely on genetic inheritance, but on cultural learning, so that this flirtation with Modernism on the part of that particular generation of socialists is at least doubly unfortunate.

Over the past thirty-five years, the image of William Morris has been transformed from confused and hesitating proto-modernist, who did not really mean what he wrote in *News from Nowhere*,⁶² via ‘designer, poet, businessman’, to one of the most important founders of the modern red-green movement (such as it is). As discussed, he achieved this via a synthesis between his earlier aesthetic ideas and his later Marxism which stressed the equal importance of human and

environmental factors – so much so that Morris is one of the few ‘green’ critics of capitalism who provides us with a concrete example of how to build an ecological society without resorting to authoritarianism. Perhaps this will yet be Morris’s greatest contribution to ‘The Society of the Future’.

NOTES

1. Jack Lindsay, *William Morris. His life and work*, New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1975 (1979), pp. 382-383; ‘Introduction’, in A.L. Morton, ed, *The Political Writings of William Morris*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979, pp. 27-28; E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, New York: Pantheon, 1976, p. 801.
2. Nicholas Gould, ‘William Morris’, *Ecologist* 4 (6), July 1974, pp. 210-212.; http://www.theecologist.org/back_archive/19701999/ (as accessed 27 June 2011).
3. ‘Art and Socialism’, 1884, as quoted by Raymond Williams, *Culture & Society: 1780-1950*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1958 (1983), p. 152.
4. Raymond Williams, ‘Socialism and Ecology’ (1982), in Robin Gable, ed, *Resources of Hope. Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, London: Verso, 1989, pp. 210-226. (Afterwards ‘Socialism and Ecology’).
5. Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England, 1880-1914*, London: Quartet, 1982, pp. 12-17.
6. ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’, 1884; as in A.L. Morton, ed, *The Political Writings of William Morris*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973 (1979), p. 94. (Afterwards Morton)
7. Peter C. Gould, *Early Green Politics. Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1989, pp. 16-17, 24-27, 30-32; ‘Socialism and Ecology’, p. 7.
8. Patrick O’Sullivan, ‘The Ending of the Journey: William Morris, *News from Nowhere* and ecology’, in Stephen Coleman & Patrick O’Sullivan, eds, *William Morris and News from Nowhere: A vision for our time*, Hartland: Green Books, 1990, pp. 169-181.
9. ‘How we live and how we might live’, 1884; Morton, p. 153.
10. Peter Marshall, *Nature’s Web. Rethinking our place on Earth*, London: Cassell, 1992, p. 313; David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism. An introduction*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 214 (Afterwards Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*); *Ecosocialism. From Deep Ecology to Social Justice*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 129 (emphasis original; afterwards Pepper, *Ecosocialism*).
11. ‘The man who saved the world – ecology and the thought of William Morris’, William Morris Annual Lecture, William Morris Gallery, 27 October

1994. See also *William Morris Society Newsletter*, January 1995, p.19.
12. John Passmore, *Man's responsibility for Nature*, London: Duckworth, 1980, 227 pp.
 13. ‘The Lesser Arts’, 1877; Morton, p. 53.
 14. ‘How we live and how we might live’; Morton, p. 153.
 15. Richard Routley, ‘Is there a need for a new environmental ethic?’, in Michael Zimmerman, ed, *Environmental Philosophy. From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, London: Prentice Hall, 1999, pp. 17-25.
 16. ‘Art under Plutocracy’, 1883; Morton, p. 58.
 17. ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’; Morton, p. 91.
 18. Arne Naess, ‘The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movements. A summary’, *Inquiry*, 16, 1973, pp. 95-100.
 19. ‘The Lesser Arts’; Morton, p. 46.
 20. James Redmond, ed, *William Morris, News from Nowhere*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, Chapter X, pp. 62-63; Chapter V, p. 23. (Afterwards *NfN*)
 21. ‘The Lesser Arts’; Morton, p. 59. For discussion of instrumental, inherent and intrinsic value, see Patrick O’Sullivan, ‘On the value of lakes’, in Patrick O’Sullivan & Colin Reynolds, eds, *The Lakes Handbook. Vol. 2, Lake Restoration and Lake Rehabilitation*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 3-24.
 22. United Nations International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994 (ICPD ’94), Summary of the programme of Action, <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/populatin/icpd.htm> (as accessed 4 July 2011).
 23. *NfN*, Chapter IX, ‘Concerning Love’, pp. 43-53; Chapter XXIX, p. 168. See also Florence S. Boos, ‘An (almost-) egalitarian sage: William Morris’s later writings and “The Woman Question”’, in Thäis Morgan, ed, *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse. Renegotiating Gender and Power*, Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990, pp. 187-206, 296-301.
 24. Although they do take part in the harvest, and there is always Philippa the stonemason; *NfN*, Chapter XXVI, pp. 148-152; Jan Marsh, ‘Concerning Love’, in Stephen Coleman & Patrick O’Sullivan, eds, *William Morris and News from Nowhere*, Green Books: Hartland, Devon, 1990, pp. 107-125.
 25. E. Estyn Evans, ‘The ecology of peasant life in medieval Europe’, in William L. Thomas, ed, *Man's role in changing the face to the Earth*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956, pp. 217-239. For a different Morrisian take on this issue see Ady Mineo, ‘Eros unbound: sexual identities in *News from Nowhere*’, *Journal of the William Morris Society*, IX, 1992, pp. 8-14, and ‘Beyond the Law of the Father: the “New Woman” in *News from Nowhere*’, in Peter Faulkner & Peter Preston, eds, *William Morris. Centenary Essays*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996, pp. 200-206.

26. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature. Women, ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, Chapter 6, pp. 149-155.
27. *Nfn*, Chapter X, p. 62.
28. A topic given considerable attention by Kropotkin; *Fields, Factories, and Workshops, or Industry combined with Agriculture, and Brain Work with Manual Work*, London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1912, Chapters III to V, 'The Possibilities of Agriculture', pp. 79-240.
29. Florence S. Boos, 'An Aesthetic Ecommunist. Morris the Red and Morris the Green', in Peter Faulkner & Peter Preston, eds, *William Morris: Centenary Essays*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996, pp. 21-46. (Afterwards Boos)
30. Boos, p. 23.
31. 'The Beauty of Life', 1880; Boos, p. 29.
32. 'The Society of the Future', 1888, as quoted in Boos, pp. 34-35. See also Morton, p. 193.
33. See Naess (Note 18) and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-first century*. London: Shamballa, 1995, 520 pp.; Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology. The search for a liveable world*, London: Routledge, 2005, 283 pp. For a similar overview of Morris's relation to the wider green movement, see Jacqueline Guegain, 'William Morris, prophète d'un âge d'or écocentrique', in Marie Thérèse Bernat & Michael Hearn, *Morris et L'Utopie*, Lettres et Civilisations Étrangères, Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2007, pp. 109-125.
34. Boos, pp 44-45.
35. And that there are 'more appropriate uses' of this 'monumental Victorian'; Sara Wills, 'Woods beyond Worlds? The greening of William Morris', *Australian Victorian Studies*, 7, 2001, pp. 137-149 (pp. 138, 139, 140).
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 140, 143.
37. Sara Wills, 'Nature, socialism, livelihood: the greening of William Morris?', *Melbourne Historical Journal*, 31, 2003, 74-92 (p. 75). See also Sara Wills, 'Writing about Morris's nature', in Martin Crotty & Doug Scobie, eds, *Raiding Clío's Closet*, Parkville: University of Melbourne Press, 1997, pp. 219-230, and *The Greening of William Morris: A Reasonable Share in the Beauty of the Earth*, Circa, 2006, 314 pp., neither of which were available to me in time for writing this article.
38. For a discussion of these terms, see Pepper, *Ecosocialism*, pp. 45-55, and Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*, Chap. 1, especially pp. 42-43.
39. Bradley MacDonald, 'William Morris and the vision of ecosocialism', *Contemporary Justice Review*, 7, 2004, pp. 287-304. (pp. 287, 288, 295; Afterwards MacDonald)
40. *Ibid.*, p. 295, 296.
41. Mathis Wakernagel & William Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint. Reducing*

- human impact on the Earth*, Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 1996, 160 pp.
42. MacDonald, p. 288, 291, 292.
 43. *Ibid.*, pp. 298, 300, 301.
 44. ‘The Society of the Future’, 1893, as quoted in Martin Delveaux, ‘“O me! O me! How I love the earth”: William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* and the birth of sustainable society’, *Contemporary Justice Review*, 8, part 2, 2005, pp. 131-146. (Afterwards Delveaux, *CJR*) See also Morton, p. 201.
 45. Martin Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England. The transformation of the agrarian economy, 1500-1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 257 pp.
 46. Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: the bioregional vision*, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1985, 230 pp.
 47. David Faldet, ‘The river at the heart of Morris’s ecological thought’, in David Latham, ed, *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, pp. 73-84. (p. 77, 79) Although Martin Delveaux (*CJR*, p. 150) suggests that *News from Nowhere* is not located in any particular bioregion, it surely takes place in the valley (‘watershed’, catchment, drainage basin) of the River Thames.
 48. Jed Mayer, ‘William Morris and the greening of science’, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 17, 2008, pp. 57-76. (p. 67, 70)
 49. *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 64, 68 (Though Morris was much the more sceptical, science being ‘too much in the pay of the counting house ... and the drill sergeant’; ‘The Lesser Arts’; Morton, p. 53).
 50. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70; Brian Goodwin, *How the Leopard changed its spots. The evolution of complexity*. London: Phoenix Giants, 1995, 233 pp; Patrick O’Sullivan, ‘The ecosystem-watershed concept in the environmental sciences – a review’, *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 13, 1979, pp. 273-281.
 51. James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia. Why the Earth is fighting back – and how we can still save humanity*. London: Allen Lane, 2006, 177 pp. (Afterwards Lovelock, *Revenge*); Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*. London: Penguin New Edition, 1986, 240 pp.
 52. Lovelock, *Revenge*, p. 141, pp. 4, 10, pp. 157-158, p. 153.
 53. ‘William Morris and Nature’, Lecture given as part of *News from Nowhere revisited*, William Morris Gallery, Lloyd Park, Walthamstow, London, 8 September 2009.
 54. *NfN*, Chapter XXV, p. 79.
 55. ‘How we live and how we might live’; Morton, p. 140.
 56. World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 43.

57. *NfN*, Chapter XV, p. 82.

58. Tony Pinkney, 'Versions of ecotopia in *News from Nowhere*', in Phillipa Bennett & Rosie Miles, eds, *William Morris in the Twenty-first Century*, Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 93-106 (p. 98). (Afterwards Bennett & Miles) They may not be the only ones. Towards the end of the book, Ellen, Pinkney's 'new kind of utopian', (p. 102) states

I should be quite content to dream about past times, and if I could not idealise them, yet at least idealise some of the people who lived in them. But I think sometimes people are too careless of the history of the past – too apt to leave it in the hands of old learned men like Hammond. Who knows? *happy as we are, times may alter; we may be bitten with some impulse towards change*, and many things may seem too wonderful for us to resist, too exciting not to catch at, if we do not know that they are but phases of what has been before; and withal ruinous deceitful, and sordid (*NfN*, Chapter XXIX, pp. 167-168, my italics).

59. Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, London: Panther, 1975, 319 pp; Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*, Berkeley, Calif.: Banyan Tree Books, 1975, 181 pp.

60. Martin Delveaux, 'From pastoral arcadia to stable-state mini-cities: Morris's *News from Nowhere* and Callenbach's *Ecotopia*', *JWMS*XIV, No. 1, 2000, pp. 75-81. (p. 79) It has also been described – rightly, in my view – by David Pepper (*The Roots of Modern Environmentalism*, London: Croom Helm, 1984, p. 204-208) as 'ecosfascist'.

61. Piers J. Hale, 'William Morris, Human Nature and the Biology of Utopia', in Bennett & Miles, pp. 107-127. See also my 'Editorial – Science under Plutocracy', *JWMS*, XVII, No. 2, pp. 3-14.

62. See my article, this volume, p. 93-111.