**Ecologism:**

The term was first used in 1866 by a German zoologist, **Ernst Haeckel**, from the Greek *oikos,* or ‘habitat’. It is the study of the relationship of living organisms to the environment.

In the 1960s it gained political impetus with the emergence Green movement.

Ecologism asserts a belief in interconnectedness. Principally there are two types of ecologists:

1. **Shallow ecologists**: (a term coined by Arne Naess) are also called ‘environmentalists’. They eschew radical change in favour of reform. They are anthropocentric (placing humans at the heart of their thinking). They harness resources to human ends and argue that ‘deep ecologists’ (see below) are unrealistic and mystical. They can be sub-divided into the ***‘light greens’***, who are environmentalists who favour measures such as recycling, sustainability and alternative energy sources, but are essentially anthropocentric; and the ***‘bright greens’,*** who are less concerned about the problems and limitations we need to overcome than the "tools, models, and ideas" that already exist for overcoming them (in other words they seek modern scientific and technical solutions to the ecological problems we face).
2. **Deep ecologists:** who are ecocentric and reject human superiority. These are the **‘*dark greens’*** who seek to radically reform our way of live to save the earth’s eco-system.

The light, bright and dark green distinction was devised by Alex Steffen (2009).

**Origins:**

To some observers, ecologism has its origins in pagan religions, eastern mysticism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc.

To others ecologism has its roots in the romanticism of German pastoralism, Thomas Hardy and William Morris, the socialist, and in the anarchist ideas of Peter Kropotkin’s ‘mutual aid’.

Its rise as a political force owes much to the growing industrialisation globalisation and urbanisation of the late 20th century. Early works which furthered ecologist thinking include:  
Rachel Carson’s ‘Silent Spring’, 1962 (in which she envisioned a word bereft of nature);The Club of Rome, ‘Limits to Growth’ (1972’); Hilary & Steven Rose, ‘Only one Earth’ (1972)’; and the Brundtland Report (on sustainability), 1987.

Ecologism has a *transnational character* (eg the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, 1997, and the Paris Accord, 2016).

**Core Themes:**

Note: Ecologism is different to other ideologies because it considers the interconnectedness of things (Capra’s ‘web of life’) and because deep ecologism offers an ecocentric, rather than an anthropocentric, perspective (all other ideologies are anthropocentric).

1. **Ecology:** is a distinct branch of biology which examines self-regulating eco-systems (the balance of nature). It is pursued in different ways by ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ ecologists.
2. **Holism:** This is the notion of the interconnectedness of the natural world. It was posited by the South African General, Jan Smuts, in 1926. More recently Fritjof Capra (‘The Turning Point’, 1982) proposed ecologism as a response to the ‘Cartesian/Newtonian paradigm’ (an anthropocentric/mechanical view of the world which suggests that the world’s resources are there to be utilised exclusively to support human need). The modern world has become dominated by ***scientism***: the flawed belief that scientific method provides an objective truth, and this feeds into our depletion of the earth’s resources. However, the new physics of quantum mechanics challenges the Cartesian Newtonian paradigm. Capra talks about the Tao of Physics, establishing a relationship between physics and eastern mysticism.

Other ecologists support the pre-Christian ideas of a ‘mother earth’.

James Lovelock, posits the Gaia hypothesis: that the earth is self-regulating (in a state of homeostatis), but we have begun to destroy that state by pollution and depletion. Lovelock believed that the earth’s self-regulating mechanism would fight back and that, in the end, our species would become extinct as a result. (Note: Lovelock supported nuclear power, though he was a deep ecologist.)

1. **Sustainability**: all the so-called ‘grey’ parties (ie those non-green parties: Conservatives, Lib-Dems, Labour, SNP, etc) argue that we have the capacity for limitless growth. Capitalism ans socialism both support industrialisation.

Kenneth Boulding argues the earth is like a spacecraft (‘Spaceship Earth’): it is a closed system, capable of entropy or decay, and is being wrecked by ‘cowboy economies’. We are using up the non-renewable resources.

Schumacher (‘Small is Beautiful’, 1973) says that the earth’s resources are being treated as if they were ‘capital’ (to be disposed of when necessary/desirable).

Hardin (‘The Tragedy of the Commons’, 1968), also argued that collectively we are destroying the earth by exhausting its resources.

**Sustainability ties to set limits on human ambitions**. It requires a new approach to economic activity which is not selfish. The light greens believe this can be done by taxes. The dark greens believe taxes are not enough: we need to radically transform society!

1. **Environmental ethics**: ***shallow ecologists*** offer conventional (anthropocentric) ethics. They try to grapple with our moral obligation to future generations. **Eco-conservatives** believe the planet is ‘property’ to be held for future generations and that the current generation are merely custodians. **Eco-socialists** argue that we should have compassion for humanity (fraternity) and not pollute or destroy the homes and livelihoods of our fellow humans around the planet (eg through rising sea levels).

**Peter Singer** (1965) argued that we are guilty of **speciesism,** of placing our needs above the needs of other species. Applying utilitarianism to the argument, he suggested that ‘the greatest good of the greatest number’ would require us to be secondary importance to other species (which outnumber us). Animal rights should therefore be placed above human rights.

***Deep ecologists*** argue nature has value in its own right. Goodwin (1992) posited the ‘green theory of value’: resources should be valued because they result from nature. Aldo Leopold’s ‘land ethic’ argues that ‘a thing is right when it preserves the biotic community’.

Arne Naess talks of ‘biocentric equality’: the ‘equal right to live and bloom’ of all species.

Ecologists suggest the wider the range of diversity, the healthier and more stable the community.

1. **Self-Actualisation**: this suggests that fulfilment can be found in nature. In a *post-material* world quality of life is more important than material gain. Deep ecologists believe we should share a spiritual closeness to nature, which provides self-fulfilment. It is sometimes linked to the Buddhist notion of ‘no self’ (we do not exist as individuals because we are inextricably linked to the universe). **Eric Fromm** argued that ‘being’, rather than ‘having’ allows personal growth and spiritual awareness/fulfilment.

**Nature & Politics:**

Ecologists are drawn from a wide variety of ideological traditions:

1. **Right wing ecologists** draw inspiration Walter Darre, a Nazi responsible for the romantic ‘back to the land’ movement in Nazi Germany. Others draw inspiration from the Nordic idealization of rural life. Conservatism also has nostalgia for the rural idyll.
2. **Eco-socialists** sometimes draw from William Morris’s romanticism (a rejection of the worst excesses of industrialism).

Others, such as **Rudolf Bahro**, blame capitalism for the environmental crisis. He argued that if capitalism was the problem ecologists should join the Labour movement, not form separate green parties. (But socialism also exploits the planet for the people – it is anthropocentric). Socialists have been slow to embrace environmentalism and the Soviet Union was an economic disaster.

1. **Eco-anarchism:** owe a debt to Peter Kropotkin’s ideas of ‘mutual aid’ (mutualism eschew the notion of ‘something for nothing’).

Murray Bookchin proposed ‘social ecology’: the notion that ecologism provides social stability. A ‘stateless’ society is similar to an ecosystem with a ‘balance’ of forces. Communal life is therefore closer to nature.

Many in the Green movement support decentralisation and direct action (BUT, more moderate Greens see governments as a vehicle for progress).

1. **Eco-feminism:** argues that ecological destruction has resulted from patriarchy. Men are divorced from the ‘private’ wold of nurturing, home-making and personal relationships. Ecofeminists (eg Mary Daly) are *essentialists* who recognise fundamental differences between men and women.

Ecofeminists make much of the analogy of ‘*Mother* Earth’ (as in the Gaia hypothesis) and see the feminist connection with nature in bearing children and suckling babies. Nature therefore operates in and through women, whilst men are creatures of culture, not nature, and place materialism, competition and hierarchy above nature.

**The Future?**

Ecologism is fragmentedas a movement and the ‘grey’ parties have absorbed policies on environmentalism (although their record on delivery is patchy). Often the West tries to stop other countries from catching up with them. Globalism is largely ignored. Worse still, Trump has pulled the USA away from environmentalism, although China has recently come on board (in word if not in deed yet). However, the goal of deep ecologism to establish zero growth and radically transform society seems as far away as ever. That said, shallow ecologists have enjoyed recent modest success in the UK with renewable energy sources increasingly delivering over 50% of our energy needs.

*(Notes from Heywood)*