

Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism

The end of environmentalism?

**Edited by Marcel Wissenburg and
Yoram Levy**

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Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism

Is there still a need for environmental political thought?

In recent decades, environmental issues have increasingly been incorporated into liberal democratic thought and political practice. Environmentalism and ecologism have become fashionable, even respectable schools of political thought. This apparently successful integration of environmental movements, issues and ideas in mainstream politics raises the question of whether there is a future for what once was a counter-movement and counter-ideology.

The hypothesis that environmentalism is at an end can only be proved or disproved by establishing whether environmentalists still have a reason to be environmentalists. Beyond any empirical concern with the ‘greening’ of political practice lies the deeper question of ‘greening’ political thought. This book thus focuses on whether liberal democracy’s normative foundations can absorb or have absorbed the most fundamental green ideals and whether its institutions can incorporate them if they have not already.

Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism provides a reflective assessment of recent developments, the social relevance and the future of environmental political theory, concluding that although the alleged pacification of environmentalism is more than skin deep, it is not yet quite deep enough. This book will appeal to social scientists and philosophers, students and researchers with an interest in environmental issues.

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Series editor's preface

Liberal democracies seem to be able to pacify and integrate many diverse interests and claims in an astonishing way. The demands of workers, feminists and pacifists have all been taken into account along with the more conventional proposals of farmers, big business and car users. Although many of these groups started with very critical views of liberal democracy, liberal democracy has survived their attacks. The latest victory seems to be the pacification of the environmental or ecological movement. Starting as a radical movement about four decades ago, its most prominent proponents have, in the last few years, reached cabinet positions in Germany, France and several other countries. Technical solutions appear to be much more efficient in many areas than was expected, reversing, for instance, the destruction of the ozone layer. Virtually all political parties and governments now subscribe to the need for environmental protection and conservation. Just because the environmental and ecological movements have been so extremely successful, should we thank them and then relegate them to a warehouse of outlived social and political movements?

This volume explores the suspicion that liberal democracy has successfully adopted or even absorbed the green agenda that was so forcefully put forward by environmental and ecological movements in many countries since the late 1960s. Yet the question whether environmentalism has come to its end because of its own accomplishments is approached here in a rather unusual way. Instead of dealing with, say, the assimilation of the greens into existing party systems, or the bureaucratization of environmental protection policy programmes, the perspective here is on *political theory*. As the editors outline in their introduction, the focus is on the question of whether liberal democracy's normative foundations and institutions can absorb the most fundamental green ideals, and whether possible flaws are contingent or a matter of principle. It is this combination of discussion about liberal democracies on the one hand, and the opportunities of green ideals to be adopted on the other, which defines the unique character of the collection of essays presented in this volume. While there is certainly no lack of research on either of these two topics, only a few publications aim explicitly to explore the relationships between these two areas in a systematic way.

The contributions to this volume are grouped in four parts. Before the various aspects of the relationships between democracy and green ideals are examined, Gayil Talshir offers an overview of the role of environmentalism and a framework

of analysis (Chapter 2). The next three chapters deal with ways to conceptualize the 'end' of environmentalism. First, Ingolfur Blühdorn discusses the transition to 'post-ecologist politics' (Chapter 3), while Yoram Levy pleads for truth to be re-embraced and for less commitment to tolerance among environmentalists (Chapter 4). Marcel Wissenburg critically reviews many of the claims in this area and comes to the conclusion that the concept 'environment' has become politically redundant and that a return to the distinction between ecologism and environmentalism is required (Chapter 5). The second set of three contributions deals directly with the relationships between democracy and environmentalism. Mike Mills and Fraser King conclude that 'deep ecology' still presents a challenge to democracy (Chapter 6). The right to individual freedom on the one hand, and the sustainability of the environment on the other are analysed by Marius de Geus (Chapter 7) and Karin Bäckstrand concentrates on the opportunities for a democratization of scientific work (Chapter 8). The third part contains three contributions on the ideals of a green society. From Mathew Humphrey's enquiry, it follows that the relationship between green ideals and liberal democracy is not as simple as often presumed (Chapter 9), while Meira Hanson and Graham Smith discuss, respectively, the role of the precautionary principle and environmentally sensitive behaviour of citizens (Chapter 10 and Chapter 11). The final part addresses the perspectives and possibilities of environmentalism. First, Dorothee Hortschötter attempts to bridge the gap between plurality and sustainability with the help of John Rawls's theory (Chapter 12). Second, a similar approach is presented by Michael Wallack in his discussion of the 'minimum irreversible harm principle' (Chapter 13). In the third and final contribution John Barry shows that the 'end' of environmentalism is better depicted as a transformation (Chapter 14). The editors' summary and interpretations of the main findings are presented in Chapter 15.

Liberal democracy and green political ideals appear to be partly compatible and partly unable to get along, but the advance of reconciliation and pacification is hard to overlook. However, this statement refers to the *empirical* aspects of the relationship. As usual, empirical findings can be easily used to reach false conclusions. As the authors of this volume show, a number of difficult questions remain when we focus on the *theoretical* matching of liberal democracy and green ideals, be they ecologism, environmentalism, eco-politics, eco-feminism, eco-democracy, or eco-philosophy. The crucial issue is nicely summarized by Mathew Humphrey in his contribution to this volume: 'Ultimately, that there may be both good reasons to be green and good reasons to be a democrat does not entail a necessary connection between green politics and democracy'. It is this ambivalent relationship which forces us to reconsider the ways we have been thinking about liberal democracy and green ideals.

Jan W. van Deth
Mannheim, August 2003

1 Introduction

Yoram Levy and Marcel Wissenburg

This book, *Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism: The End of Environmentalism?*, discusses the relation between environmental political thought on the one hand, and real existing liberal democracy and liberal democratic political thought on the other. Its subject matter is, in other words, quite specific. Yet it is not a book for specialists, or for specialists only. Our aim, as authors and editors, is to offer anyone who might be interested an insight into recent developments in an important area of political life.

Despite short-term fluctuations in public interest, environmental problems are, by their very (physical) nature, bound to stay around for generations to come. They will, by implication, be subjects of intense political debate. For almost five decades now, philosophers and theorists have advocated ways to address these issues in our personal lives, in nature and resource management, in the economy and in politics.

Environmental thought in general, and environmental political thought in particular, often demanded radical and even utopian changes in society and in individual lives and attitudes. It is only recently that environmental political thinkers have, sometimes grudgingly, accepted that environmental interests can or should (also) be accommodated within the framework of modern liberal democracy. The – at first sight – successful integration of environmental movements, issues and ideas in mainstream politics raises the question whether there is a future for what once was a counter-movement and counter-ideology.

The various contributions to this book are all unified by one central question: has environmentalism¹ reached its end? For many readers, this may be a counter-intuitive question: environmental issues have increasingly been incorporated into liberal democratic thought and political practice; environmentalism and ecologism have become fashionable, even respectable, schools of political thought. Yet it is precisely this success that incites us to raise this question.

Recent empirical studies suggest a decreasing interest in environmental issues among the European and American publics – with occasional hiccoughs (see e.g. Witherspoon 1996; Nas 2000; and van Muijen 2000). At the same time, it appears that the environmental dimension has become a standard part of everyday policy-making in virtually every Western liberal democracy (cf. Rootes 1999), not to mention, in the form of the PPP (people, profit, planet) interpretation of sustainable development, in North–South politics (see also Bernstein 2001). Environmental

audits are part of the preparation of every major project, both governmental and in the private sector. Discouraging polluting activities, encouraging environmentally friendly modes of production and consumption, and the reduction of pollutants (greenhouse gases, toxic and nuclear waste, etc.) by financial and other means are all generally accepted policy goals and strategies.

In addition, environmental movements have become more and more institutionalized. Internally, they increasingly become bureaucratic organizations moving away from protest strategies in the direction of negotiation and lobbying. Externally, increased access to, and participation in, the political process has ever more encapsulated them in existing political structures, most often as part of advisory bodies in the policy designing and implementation phases. Occasionally, as NGOs, they also appear as policy-executing parties where new forms of governance have sprung up in which government(s), economic and social actors try to operate as equal partners rather than in a hierarchical relation (cf. I.M. Young 1998). Direct contacts between environmentalists and economic actors (without state participation or interference) have increased, changed form, and are bearing fruit in the form of an increased environmental awareness within firms, increased openness to public scrutiny, gentlemen's agreements and branch-wide environmental covenants (Eden 1996).

From a discursive point of view, the main problem with the environment was that of creating a context for communication on, definition of, goal setting for, and solution of environmental problems (cf. Barry and Wissenburg 2001). This would help to transform environmental issues from intrinsically controversial, normative political issues into technical, policy issues (cf. Lieshout's (1995) and Schmitt's (1987) conceptions of the political). It may seem then that this problem has been solved, and even that the pacification of the environmental issue implies the pacification of the environmental movement itself, as one of the great New Social Movements of the 1960s–1970s. If all that mattered was to create room for co-operation, then the war for the environment has been won. The issue is rapidly moving off the political agenda, out of the public arena, into the backrooms and corridors where engineers and civil servants dwell, from whence hardly any rumours of skirmish reach the greater public.²

Finally, an important part of the literature in recent years focused on repositioning green political theory in the context of liberal democracy (e.g. G. Smith 2003; Barry 1999a, 1999b; Dobson 1998, 1999; Hayward 1998). Attempts at a reflective assessment of these and like developments can be found in *Sustaining Liberal Democracy* (2001, edited by John Barry and Marcel Wissenburg, based on a 1996 ECPR workshop), in Ingolfur Blühdorn's *Post-Ecologist Politics* (2000b) and in *Political Theory and the Environment: a Reassessment* (edited by Mathew Humphrey, a special issue of *Environmental Politics*, 2001). This book, *Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism: The End of Environmentalism?*, takes the debate one step further: assuming the repositioning operation was successful, what is left for environmentalists to hope for?

In sum then, there are good grounds for believing that green concerns are being addressed in, and have been successfully incorporated into, everyday politics

and political thought. In other words, there seems to be no reason why environmentalism as an independent school of thought should continue to exist. This book, based on papers presented in the ECPR Joint Sessions workshop ‘The End of Environmentalism?’ in Turin, Italy (2002), explores whether this suspicion is correct: has liberal democracy successfully adopted or even absorbed the green agenda? But there is a twist to this story. Two twists, even.

First of all, *Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism* focuses on the alleged pacification of environmentalism from the perspective of political *theory*. It is only here, the contributors believe, that the question just raised can be answered. The question whether environmentalism has come to its end is not dealt with in *empirical* terms – the contributors do not discuss questions such as whether, or to what degree, the pacification of environmental movements in terms of their institutionalization and bureaucratization in this or that country or region has succeeded, nor whether environmental law and policy-making are successful in securing sustainability. These are questions dealt with adequately and at length in professional journals such as *Environmental Politics* and *Environment and Planning* (Series A, B, C, and D).

Empirical questions about the end of environmentalism are perfectly valid, not to mention appropriate. There is a long series of reasons to suspect that issues once raised by environmentalists have not yet been, or can never be, moved from the political sphere of fundamental, normative controversy into the sphere of policy-making, given the structure and legitimate *modi operandi* of liberal democratic institutions. Some of these reasons are purely scientific: one may doubt whether specific environmental policies are successful in *technical* terms, that is, in ensuring (global) sustainability. This, however, would not disprove the hypothesis of a successful adoption of the green agenda – it merely sheds doubt on the success of specific policies. Other reasons are of an empirical social scientific nature: can we really *observe* that environmental movements have been pacified? The radicalization of the animal rights movement and the increased public appeal of post-decisional civil disobedience suggest otherwise. Then again, environmental protest may be inspired by irrational ideas or incomplete information.

Research on empirical questions like these could lead to the conclusion that, for instance, given a certain environmental problem definition, certain environmental policies are great failures or great successes; or that, within a given political institutional context, a certain political strategy succeeded or failed to achieve certain environmental goals; or that, given certain environmental goals, certain political institutions are (in)effective. And yet the empirical approach cannot answer the central question of this book.

The hypothesis that environmentalism is at an end can only be proved or disproved by establishing whether environmentalists still have a *reason* to be environmentalists. Beyond and underpinning any empirical concern with the ‘greening’ of political practice lies the deeper question whether environmental political *theory*’s ideas are (still) valid. The focus in this book then is on whether liberal democracy’s normative foundations can absorb and have absorbed the most fundamental green *ideals*, whether its institutions can incorporate (and have

incorporated) them, and if either one is not the case, on determining where the causes lie (in liberal democracy or in green thought) and whether these flaws are contingent or a matter of principle. The ‘fundamental green ideas’ (or ‘basic green concerns’) to which we refer include at least the following: radical democratization, representation of future generations and non-human stakeholders and interests in political decision-making, de-objectification of the natural environment (from ‘resources’ to ‘ecology’) and an abandonment of anthropocentric ethics. Marius de Geus, John Barry and Dorothee Horstkötter elaborate these ideas further elsewhere in this book.

Environmentalism is traditionally not only concerned with the capability of existing political arrangements and institutions to successfully address the environmental challenge. It also entails or suggests a different conception of the good society. In addition to solving environmental problems, environmentalism is also, maybe even primarily, concerned with an analysis of the *nature* of such problems. In addition to a concern with acting *effectively* within a given political institutional context, environmentalism is also engaged in redefining and *reshaping* that context. And in addition to its concern with *institutional* design, environmentalism is also engaged in specifying and defining the environmental *goals* those institutions should promote, goals like the preservation of a self-sustaining nature or natural biodiversity. In other words, prior to its instrumental dimension environmentalism has a normative and moral dimension determining the way in which the whole environmental issue makes sense to us – if at all. It is with regard to this dimension that we ask whether environmentalism has come to an end. The empirical approach cannot answer this question, since, by its very nature, it treats the normative and moral dimension as a given.

This book, then, discusses the political theoretical grounds for believing or rejecting the hypothesis of the end of environmentalism. But as announced, there is a second twist to our story. Even in environmentalist political theory there seems to be a consensus on the absorption of environmentalism in mainstream liberal democratic thought – even there it seems that the end is nigh. But *what* end is nigh, and *how* nigh exactly? Endism, a very popular doctrine these days, exists in many forms, and to answer our basic question, we must be sure we know about which type of end we are talking – for even in a strictly normative and moral sense can ‘the end of environmentalism’ mean many different things.

There are, first of all, teleological and historicist views, according to which the end of environmentalism refers to some final point of either absolute perfection or completion, where, in the normative political sense, environmentalism ceases to exist. According to the teleological world view our relation with the world is about restoring or maintaining a natural state of harmony (one could call this metaphysical naturalism). Hence the *end* of environmentalism would refer to this harmonious end-state and to the conception of human society it entails. From the historicist perspective, where environmentalism is viewed as an ideology or as (a part of) a tradition, the end of environmentalism can be thought of, for example, in terms of the idea of the end of history, or in terms of the Hegelian sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

The end of environmentalism can however also be conceived of from what is sometimes referred to as the *humanist* world view, according to which being in the world is about achieving the goals we set ourselves, given our conceptions of the world. Here the word ‘end’ means a goal rather than a final point. In that sense the end of environmentalism can simply refer to a certain environmental goal or set of goals that we want to achieve, like sustainability, naturalness, natural beauty etc. (we call this position substantive environmentalism). Here we can distinguish between the view of environmental goals as social constructions (idealism) or as more or less given interests and values in terms of which human–nature relations make sense to us (a moderate form of realism). Alternatively, the word ‘end’ can refer to a conception of political society that makes the achievement of such environmental goals possible. Obviously this ‘endism’ is the main focus of humanist versions of environmentalism. At that level we can also distinguish between *procedural* and *outcome-oriented* conceptions of political society, between democratic and non-democratic conceptions, but mainly between different conceptions of democracy.

The chapters in this book cover four dimensions of the ‘endism’ debate. Part I asks which conception of endism is appropriate (teleology, historicism, humanism)? Given a certain position on the former point, Part II deals with the question whether we should conceive of the end of environmentalism as procedural or substantive, democratic or non-democratic, or as a certain type of democracy. Part III asks what environmentalism has achieved relative to this or that end. Finally, Part IV addresses ways in which any remaining theoretical gaps on the way to a particular ‘end of environmentalism’ can be closed.

Each of these themes is addressed with one of three specific *areas* of green thought in mind: (a) epistemological *concepts*, (b) normative *principles* aimed at translating concepts into practice, and (c) concrete *policy norms* derived from those principles and concepts. Thanks to their diverse backgrounds, the authors are often able to extensively use empirical illustrations drawn from a wide range of nations.

Each of the contributors to this book analyses the end of environmentalism hypothesis from one of these perspectives. In doing so, the reader will also be informed about the current state of affairs in environmental political theory in general. Even that, however, is only part of what environmentalism is all about – environmental *political* thought cannot be understood but within its overall context. Hence we open, in Chapter 2, with Gayil Talshir’s discussion of the chequered past and uncertain future of environmentalism as a school of thought on the ‘Good Green Life’. Talshir maintains that environmentalism had a crucial role in facilitating some of the major challenges to political studies that emerged since the 1960s, though it was only one component in a cluster of social phenomena that co-influenced the political sphere in the same direction. This instrumental role indeed changed the face of political research, ideology and theory, yet it is not clear whether the subject matter of environmentalism stands to benefit from this in the longer run.

In Part I different conceptions of endism are discussed. In Chapter 3, Ingolfur Blühdorn examines the sources of hyper-idealist, or what he calls simulative

tendencies, of contemporary environmentalism. His analysis places the *end of environmentalism* debate into the wider discourse on the *end of modernity*. It aims to get beyond the controversy between eco-sociological pessimists who lament the terminal failure of liberal democracy to take the ecological agenda on board and neo-modernist eco-optimists who believe in the comprehensive reconciliation of ecological and economic imperatives. Blühdorn sketches two theoretical models (*post-ecologism* and *simulative politics*) that challenge the popular thesis that a *reinvention of politics* might inaugurate a *second modernity* that finally fulfils the promises of (ecological) modernization. Blühdorn suggests that something like a *silent counter-revolution* has radically changed the foundations, objectives and strategies of contemporary eco-politics and triggered the *end of ecologism*.

In Chapter 4 Yoram Levy argues for a humanist, substantive conception of environmentalism. He argues that the ecocentric metaphysical picture of a human society facing an independent non-human world, the interests of which it ought to accommodate, is unintelligible. Environmentalism necessarily has a human face. Taking issue with contemporary theories of green democracy Levy argues that, by sticking to that dualistic picture, the recent embracing of humanism boils down to sheer proceduralism, which cannot in any way secure substantive environmental goals and which threatens to turn green political thought into an intellectual desert. Levy then concludes that the end of environmentalism should be to formulate a substantive conception of human–nature relations, which is grounded in a moderate realistic notion of reasonable judgement.

Marcel Wissenburg (Chapter 5) asks whether the environmental issue has really been pacified, or whether there is still a future for environmental movements and theories. Taking an idealist perspective he argues that the only justification for the concept of environment, and hence for environmentalism and a unified environmental movement, was its epistemological value as a useful social construction. Although it is no longer useful for some ‘environmentalisms’, different conceptions of the concept environment can still serve justifiable tactical purposes – different purposes in different environments.

Part II of the book discusses the contents of environmentalism’s ends. In Chapter 6, Mike Mills and Fraser King suggest that there is a shift within current green political theory. This shift is, amongst other things, characterized by environmentalism’s attempt to distance itself from many of the substantive principles of deep ecology and to move towards an accommodation with more conventional, proceduralist political theory. The authors argue that although this recent shift sets out to solve the problems of deep ecology – the problematical status of its metaphysics, its idea of community and the need for transformation of personal environmental attitudes – many of these problems still remain unsolved. Hence they conclude that, speaking in terms of the principles of green political theory, the debate about the content of environmentalism has not yet reached its end.

In Chapter 7 Marius de Geus argues towards a substantive environmentalism, albeit in another form. He accentuates that in the last three decades Western liberal democracies have tried to pacify the environmental issue by developing new planning and legislation, opting for win–win strategies, thus absorbing most

of the radical environment interest groups into the general framework of policy-making. Accordingly, governments have mainly relied on ecological modernization and technological solutions or strategies, while ignoring changes in culture and lifestyles, and while not addressing individual consumption levels and material affluence in society. De Geus argues that in our times a fundamental shift in the eco-political dialogue is both imminent and needed. The old type of environmentalism which used to be directed at goal setting, technical planning and general policy design will be replaced by new forms which will have to balance ecological considerations against arguments in favour of freedom of action, individual longing for pleasure and craving for luxury.

Chapter 8 by Karin Bäckstrand asks whether we can talk about the ‘end of environmentalism’ as manifest in the expanded role of science and technology in environmental governance. In green political thought, links have been made with the entrenchment of technocratic science and the marginalization, pacification and co-optation of radical ecological ideas and practices. However, Bäckstrand argues, green political theory needs a more sophisticated representation of, and engagement with science in order to enhance the prospects for securing ecological change and reversing the end of environmentalism. She then argues that the institution of science, like liberal democracy, needs to be amended in the light of challenges posed by global environmental risks. Bäckstrand proposes the idea of ‘deliberative science’ as a way to ‘green up’ and democratize science as well as to re-invent environmentalism.

Part III discusses the achievements of environmentalism with respect to certain ‘ends’. In Chapter 9 Mathew Humphrey challenges the idea of ‘green democracy’. He claims that green politics has been conceived as a radical challenge to existing liberal-democratic politics, be that the overarching ideology of ‘industrialism’ or bureaucratic managerialism and sectional bargaining. Recent theoretical innovation has, however, posited a necessary connection between ecological values and democratic processes. If green politics does become confined to a liberal-democratic form of agency, its status as a radical challenger to existing forms of political organization ends. This chapter looks at one argument for a non-contingent link – the autonomy-based ‘argument from principle’ – and suggests that the conceptual innovation involved actually breaks the link between autonomy and democracy. Thus the argument is untenable, and greens would be better advised to accept that contingency between substantive values and ‘neutral’ processes is an ineliminable feature of political life.

Meira Hanson, in Chapter 10, looks into the relation between liberal democracy and the precautionary principle as a guiding principle for the protection of human health and the environment in the face of scientific uncertainty. In the first part Hanson addresses the controversy over the precautionary principle, drawing out two main lines of debate – on science and on the political regulation of risks – as they have been introduced in the literature. In the second part Hanson shows that the precautionary principle may have radical implications for central tenets of liberal democracy. Science performs a central function by making decisions transparent and accountable in liberal democracies. However, proponents of the

precautionary principle are calling into doubt the transparency of scientific expertise. Hence, one cannot easily uphold the role of science and scientists in liberal democracy. Moreover, by effectively ruling out an appeal to science or economics as a rationale for policy, precautionary measures cannot always be justified on the *neutral grounds* so preferred within liberal democracies.

In Chapter 11 Graham Smith interprets ‘the end of environmentalism’ broadly as the realization of environmental sustainability. The emergence of more environmentally-enlightened practices on the part of citizens will be an essential element in the achievement of this end. Without making the claim that the emergence of such practices is simply the product of state action, Smith asks whether liberal democratic states have the capacity to enhance or shape environmental citizenship. Liberal democratic states have a range of potentially effective policy instruments that could facilitate more environmentally-enlightened attitudes and behaviours. However, their effective deployment is hampered by a lack of trust and growing cynicism towards the intentions of political authorities. The enhancement of democratic deliberation has been offered by many contemporary political theorists (green or otherwise) as a potential answer to overcoming this political alienation within a liberal democratic framework. Smith’s chapter analyses these arguments, paying particular attention to the institutional implications of and available empirical evidence for the effects of deliberation.

In Part IV, the focus is on theoretical gaps between environmentalism’s desiderata and its possibilities. Dorothee Horstkötter (Chapter 12) questions the Rawlsian principle of neutrality in the light of the condition of pluralism. In real life and real societies the most appropriate courses of both ecological and social action differ from situation to situation, from place to place, and from time to time. They cannot be prescribed in advance, nor explained *post factum* by any one particular theory. Such a concrete reality is not only difficult to grasp; it is also difficult to interpret adequately within any one single perspective, no matter which. Hence we need concepts that embrace concrete situations and concrete social groups as well as the commonness between them in a differentiated way. This means that we need concepts that are neither merely abstract nor purely relativistic. ‘Muddling through’, she concludes, appears to be the most adequate strategy for addressing a problem whose solution not only requires that the course adopted be reversible but also that it is open to social input from outside or below.

Michael Wallack (Chapter 13) addresses the question of intergenerational justice from an environmental perspective. As he argues, Rawlsian liberal and utilitarian approaches to the problem of justice between generations propose a zero pure time discount or a Pareto optimum principle for balancing the interests of present and future generations. But for long time perspectives each of these principles discounts harm that occurs far in the future to a zero present value, and thus neither one can serve as an impartial intergenerational standard for green liberal democracy. The ‘minimum irreversible harm principle’ is proposed as an alternative principle that would extend utilitarian or Rawlsian theories to environmental issues without presupposing a pre-commitment to any particular environmentalist value framework.

In Chapter 14 John Barry argues that there is no doubt that environmentalism, understood as radical green politics, does face serious challenges, especially from the dangers attendant upon its insertion as a ‘normal and mundane’ aspect of (bureaucratized administrative) liberal democratic politics, aided by a corporate-based anti-environmentalist backlash, and the pervasive dominance of economic power and knowledge. However, rumours of its death are, to paraphrase Mark Twain, greatly exaggerated. As can be seen in practical political struggles from the anti-globalization and anti-war movements, to the continuing vibrancy of the environmental movement (including green political parties), as well as academic and activist writing and thinking on the ecological implications of democracy, citizenship etc., radical environmentalism is alive and well, and set to become more relevant in shaping the politics of the twenty-first century.

The book ends with a brief concluding chapter by the editors.

Notes

- 1 We fully realise that there is a substantial difference between (shades of) ecologism and (shades of) environmentalism. For the purposes of this introduction, ‘environmentalism’ will be used to represent all these shades with one simple term. The shades, and the gap between ecologism and environmentalism, will however be clearly distinguished throughout the remainder of the book.
- 2 For further descriptions and assessments of these developments, see, among others, the chapters on this by John Barry (Chapter 14), Marius de Geus (Chapter 7) and Karin Bäckstrand (Chapter 8).

2 The role of environmentalism

From *The Silent Spring* to
The Silent Revolution

Gayil Talshir

Introduction

Sara Parkin, once the public face of the Greens in Britain, disclosed in 1994, after her departure from the party's leadership: 'there is no need for the Green Party any more. Our role was to bring into awareness the ecological perspective and set the agenda. Once we achieved that it is the task of scientists to determine the nitty-gritty details of how to bring that about' (Greenscreen, Oxford, Oct. 1994).¹ Her colleague, Sir Jonathan Porritt, titled his influential bestseller *Seeing Green*. All that it takes to become environmentalist, it implied, is merely seeing the world through the only realistic perspective – green, for 'it is surely self-evident that we cannot continue expanding at past rates of growth' (Porritt 1984: 120). The Greens did not seek to be an interest group represented within the parliament, but endeavoured to make the House of Commons into a Green House.² In other words, their main task was to enlighten people and make them realize that the latest scientific developments point to the environmental damage which is man-made and threatens humanity and the Earth itself: there is no choice but to see green. The facts speak for themselves, and the Greens are there merely to point to the facts. Once the facts are disclosed, the rules, behaviour and attitudes would inevitably follow.³

It seems that the same process that happened with some green politicians has now caught up with environmental theorists, albeit a decade later. Environmental philosophers, the argument goes, have raised new questions, reassessed man–nature interrelationships, introduced new concepts such as ecological modernization, sustainable development and intergenerational justice, expanded the realm of morality and the discourse of rights, as well as contextualized green political thought within the old ideological spectrum and created a new axis – from 'deep ecology' to light 'environmentalism' (S. Young 1992). Ecological philosophers have dealt the cards, it is now others' job – politicians, activists, and educators – to play them and bring about environmental and social change. The possible complaisancy of green political thinkers is at the centre of this book.

*Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism: The End of Environmentalism?*² both raises the issue and places a grave question mark after it. The book critically studies a somewhat common assumption that environmental philosophers have reached the end of their road; it is up to the practitioners to run the extra mile. The analysis

examines the major achievements of environmentalism, its perceived shortcomings and possible ways to move beyond them.

This chapter contributes to the effort by mapping the influence of environmentalism and assessing its successes. Admittedly, its perspective is that of the social studies. This is why the framework it offers might be more familiar to political scientists than to environmental philosophers. This is also why it is more optimistic than most commentators – for it designates the significant contribution that ecological politics, green ideology and environmental theory have had on social research. Alas, adopting such a broad framework also suggests that environmentalism was not the unique phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century, but rather a part of a plethora of new public concerns, which arose as part of new politics. This is why the significant influence of environmentalism has, in many cases, helped other social issues to be raised – indigenous cultures, women’s rights, ethnic minorities – but the tendency to neglect ecological concerns and address a whole range of injustices and inequalities has sometimes led to tragic results for purely environmental concerns and has not necessarily helped solving ecological problems.

The chapter, therefore, has three aims: first, to introduce a framework of analysis in order to classify and assess the contribution and influence of environmentalism. Second, to argue that environmentalism had a crucial role in facilitating some of the major challenges to political studies that emerged since the 1960s, though it was only one component in a cluster of social phenomena that co-influenced the political sphere in the same direction. Third, that this instrumental role indeed changed the face of political research, ideology and theory; however, it is not clear whether the subject matter of environmentalism stands to benefit in the longer run. The chapter begins with a contextualization of the subject of environmentalism within the ‘end of ideology’ debate. A fivefold analytical framework is then offered, introducing the role of environmentalism on the levels of natural processes, the science of ecology, politics, ideology and theory and assessing the challenge of environmentalism at each level.

Environmentalism and ‘the end of ideology’ thesis

The subtitle of this volume, ‘The End of Environmentalism?’, falls in line with a sentiment of ‘endism’ which appears to beset the turn of the twentieth century: ‘the end of modernity’, ‘the end of history’, ‘the end of education’, ‘the end of “isms”’, ‘the end of politics’ and ‘the end of certainty’ are all part of the same trend (Vattimo 1988; Fukayama 1992; Postman 1996; Shtromas 1994; Boggs 2000; Prigogine 1997, respectively). Yet, the ‘end’ that set the tone was undoubtedly ‘the end of ideology’ thesis. Daniel Bell argued for the end of ideology, back in 1960, on two grounds. First, the end of the debate between democracy and totalitarian regimes with a resounding victory of the former: the Second World War was won by democracies, and in the battle against communism, thirty years before the collapse of the USSR, in light (or darkness) of the Moscow trials, democracy won a clear moral triumph. Second, the big controversy of the nineteenth century –

the ideological row between the left and the right – had in fact diminished, as in the 1950s all democracies had accepted the welfare state framework (Bell 1988: 402). The differences between the pro-interventionist left and the free-market capitalistic right has turned insignificant, argued Bell; thus, the age of ideology was over twice.

Bell himself ruled out the possibility of the emergence of a new ideology (Bell 1988: 404). The only candidate for a new world view, he thought, could have come from the developing world, in its quest for material gains and self-determination. Bell contrasted the ideologies of the nineteenth century with those of the twentieth, thus: ‘The driving forces of the old ideologies were social equality and, in the largest sense, freedom. The impulsion of the new ideologies is economic development and national power’ (Bell 1988: 403).

It is within this context that the ‘end of environmentalism’ should be considered. For it is exactly in defiance of this thesis that environmentalism has emerged. Thus, the great hope of the new social movements and the new left that arose in the 1970s in the advanced industrial world, was precisely to generate a new world view which contrasted the material, individualistic, power-centred and masculine-dominant ideology with an alternative post-material, community-oriented, responsible and other-regarding ideology, in which the protection of nature had a central role. The struggle of the ecological and social movements was definitely a political, rather than a purely societal one. The main issue was the redefinition of what is ‘politics’: ecological problems, women rights, third world exploitation and inequality of minorities, argued the movements, were political issues and not merely cultural concerns. The politicization of civil society was a foregone conclusion. The new world view was all-embracing and went beyond national borders. Furthermore, the very essence of environmentalism was the struggle against economic development as the major criterion for success and progress. Since the Limits to Growth report (Meadows *et al.* 1972) the ecological movement argued that while the right and the left alike have adopted the dominant ideology of material growth, the only viable alternative is a sustainable mode of development.

It is therefore crucial to understand that adopting the ‘end of environmentalism’ idea, set within the framework of Bell’s thesis, actually dismisses the possibility of a new ideology which defies economic growth and put forward an alternative world view. Alternatively, the argument might be that now, once environmentalists have outlined the counters of such a new ideology, it is the task of social and political agents to realize it; the ‘end of environmentalism’ merely implies that the new world view has been established and is awaiting realization.

The contested concept of environmentalism

What do we mean by environmentalism? Is it the hole in the ozone layer, desertification processes, the greenhouse effect and global warming? Or is it the ecological awareness that arises in defining these processes as ecological problems? Maybe environmentalism, in the best tradition of other ‘isms’, means the ideology of the environment? Alternatively, environmentalism could mean the theoretical realm

that addresses the moral, normative and philosophical issues stemming from ecological awareness. In order to understand the phenomena clustered under the term ‘environmentalism’ and assess their significance we offer a fivefold analytical framework. It is an analytical framework, as in the political reality all the processes and phenomena are interdependent, and interact. Nevertheless, the cleavage into different analytic levels would enable us to focus the discussion and consider each realm on its own ground. Furthermore, the role of environmentalism on each level would enable us to establish a pattern concerning the influence environmentalism has on social science and society at large.

A fivefold framework of analysis

The five levels of the analytical framework include actual environmental processes and ecological problems, the science of ecology – and its resonance in the public agenda – politics of nature, green ideology and environmental theory.

Natural processes and man-made ecological problems

Human society has always lived off the environment, changed and influenced it. Clearly, environmental changes have to be considered as dangerous or endangering in order for them to qualify as ecological problems. They can threaten either natural ecosystems, or human health or quality of life. The process of realization itself is not an ecological but a social one. The very problematization of certain phenomena – the extinction of species, the disappearance of wilderness, rising levels of carbon dioxide, the greenhouse effect – is predicated on empirical changes which the environment underwent. Recognizing the role of man-made influences on the environment is fundamental for developing environmental awareness. Actual ecological processes underlie environmental consciousness; natural reality is mediated through scientific and social discourse. Moulding environmental knowledge is relevant to this discussion, but, crucially, the actual condition of nature is a constituent part of it.

Several things should be noted at this level. The first is that some ecological problems are not immediately apparent: one cannot always actually see water, air or soil pollution; the process by which acid rain produced in Britain, say, finds its way to Norway is not easy to understand; or that global warming influences the sea level and that coastal cities might be flooded. In other words, grasping ecological problems and their possible effects already requires complicated and abstract thinking. Second, ecological processes are gradual and take a long time – they are therefore difficult to assess *vis-à-vis* urgent economic needs (for example, even if a factory produces polluting substances which might cause lung cancer in its employees in ten years time, the workers would still be reluctant to lose their jobs and be unemployed today because of possible consequences in the long run). Third, politically, the discourses of interests and representation are foreign to ecological issues. Ecological problems rarely speak for themselves – they need to be explained and therefore require second-order representation (Talshir 1997).

The translation procedure – from environmental processes, to scientific knowledge, to political awareness – is highly complex and contested. Thus, it is not clear what is ‘best for nature’ or whether situations should be considered from the perspective of the ecosystem, the local community, the nation, humanity or the Earth. Ecological problems hence conflate with the basic intuitions of how politics and economics work and require a sophisticated understanding of interrelated and gradual processes.

The problem of political representation raises another set of issues, which emerge from the context of the rise of environmentalism. Crucially, in the 1980s and 1990s, the theoretical discourse was highly influenced by the postmodernist critique. Thus, environmentalism emerged at the same time as the politics of identity. The main charge of identity politics (and of environmentalism as well) against the established system is that the dominant material ideology spoke with one, exploitative voice, which undermined other perspectives, minority groups and ecological concerns. The unified opposition to this dominant ideology was part of the strength of civil society and its claim against the ruling elites.⁴ As we shall shortly see, environmentalism was the flagship in this struggle. However, identity politics takes this point one step further, and argues that each group has its own narrative, its own story and history to tell and that no one – especially not the dominant culture – should judge their narratives. Afro-American culture is not inferior to that of white America, and indigenous cultures have their own ways of life and should not be subjected to western consumerism. Thus, each culture, group or association has its own truth; there is no unified framework, only different voices and perspectives.

Consequently, the relativist stances of many subjects of politics of identity contradict the essence of the ecological crisis. For environmental problems are actual problems – irreversible ecological damages, health problems and depletion of natural resources that are real and dangerous – not merely a matter for representation, interpretation or discussion (apart from scientific disputes and ‘selling’ the story to the media). Environmental problems are out there in the world, not just in our world view. While nature is a fundamental element in many ancient cultures’ heritage and postmodern narratives, the reliance on science and the call for a ‘realistic’ – hence hegemonic – assessment of the situation clashes with relativistic stances. This is not to suggest that the politics of identity is not ‘real’, only to imply that identity politics requires politics of recognition (C. Taylor 1992; I.M. Young 1998; Fraser 1998). Part of the social change of identity politics is by empowering communities themselves and the case of environmentalism is therefore categorically different. In other words, at the very moment that the postmodern notions of multiplicity of narratives and variety of voices began to penetrate public discourse, arguing for the ‘politics of truth’ and moral relativism, ecological problems demand the ‘old paradigm’ of seeking the truth, accepting scientific evidences, changing policies. This is why Porritt’s *Seeing Green* merely begs the facts and tries to cling on to the enlightenment ethos.

This attitude, nevertheless, ignores the fact that scientific knowledge is contested and that in order for environmental problems to be addressed politically they have

to compete with other issues on the limited public agenda, economic resources and political concerns. Thus, the nature of environmental issues is different from that of other social subjects, but ecological problems inevitably become subjected to representation. Unfortunately, environmental changes could hardly be noticed without scientific research on the one hand, and political awareness on the other. While ecological problems have an ontological dimension, the epistemology of ecology is crucial for grasping these problems and handling them. The politicization process of environmental problems, despite the naive call for realism, begins in the science of ecology.

Ecology – from a sub-discipline of biology to environmental studies

Ecology was introduced into the science of biology by Haeckel, in 1866: ‘Ecology should be understood as the theory of the household of nature; better still, the interrelations of the life-forms with one another and with the environment’ (quoted in Die Grünen 1979: 1).⁵ Indeed, the theory of evolution highlighted the role of the environment in the natural selection process; however, ecology was always second in importance to the field of genetics. The human genome project, genetic engineering and cloning are exemplars of the high profile and high hopes genetics raised. Nevertheless, in the second half of the twentieth century it became clear that solving the riddle of human genes is not going to solve pollution problems, desertification or the extinction of species. Ecology has acquired a place of its own in the scientific pantheon. Whilst the developments within the science of ecology are significant, it is its social aspects which will be discussed here.

First, consider the scope of ecology. Established as a sub-discipline of biology, ecological studies have gradually developed into graduate programmes, interdisciplinary programmes within the natural sciences and eventually into university departments of ecology. However, the fascinating evolution of this science happened outside the ambit of life sciences. Since the 1970s, programmes of environmental studies have emerged in geography, politics, sociology, economics and international relations. Interdisciplinary graduate programmes in the social sciences, as well as courses located in law schools and schools of public administration are offered by many universities. The University of Oregon introduces its environmental studies programme as follows: ‘Environmental Studies is a field that crosses the boundaries of traditional disciplines, challenging faculty and students to look at the relationship between humans and their environment from a variety of perspectives’ (University of Oregon, 2001).

The Yale School for Forestry and Environmental Studies states its mission in the following way:

We believe that the human enterprise can and must be conducted in harmony with the environment, using natural resources in ways that sustain both resources and ourselves. We believe that solving environmental problems must incorporate human values and motivations and a deep respect for both human

and natural communities. We seek to integrate concern for Earth's ecosystems with equal concern for social equity.

(Yale School for Forestry and Environmental Studies 2001)

Note the interdisciplinary nature of the programmes, their interrelationship-oriented approach and the emphasis on human values and harmony with nature. The social, political, international and economic aspects of ecology are at the centre of the programmes offered. The scope of this field of interest by far transcends that of biology.

Thus, at the same time that women's studies, gay and lesbian programmes and multicultural studies emerged, we can see the rise of environmental studies as a growing field of interest. All of them indicate an interdisciplinary approach to a subject matter, more than a cohesive discipline of established departments, and therefore signify a challenge to the traditional way of perceiving sciences as unified disciplines of knowledge.

The same phenomenon may be seen in the academic journals in the field. The proliferation of professional journals of ecology is indicative, but even more so the journals which address social aspects of ecology. As well as *Conservation Ecology* and *Ecological Modelling* one finds *The Journal of Environmental Management* and also *Environmental Politics and Environmental Values*. Popular science journals – such as *National Geographic* – have included an ecological emphasis for many years. They contributed significantly to the popularization of ecological concerns in the public mind. An interesting case in point is *The Ecologist*, a magazine first published in 1970, which combined ecological research with a distinctive ideology. In 1972, *The Ecologist* published a *Blueprint for Survival*, hoping to establish an ecologically based new philosophy of life, which would instigate a 'movement for survival' (Goldsmith *et al.* 1972). A social vision was deduced from ecological terminology. This diversification process of ecological journals demonstrates the prominence environmental studies have acquired over the last two decades, but also the decentralized manner which made it difficult to maintain a common discourse among them, let alone generate a united alternative paradigm.

Three more points are noteworthy. First, the expansion of interest in environmental studies also influenced the politics of science. The public attention for ecology has certainly aided the salience of environmental research. However, one of the ongoing battles is the priority of research and funding. High-profile projects like genetic engineering, space exploration, the arms race and nuclear energy still attract much more attention than ecological research. Incidentally, international bodies are more prone to fund environmental projects than national entities; the UNESCO fund and the allocation of resources by the European Union are good examples. Environmental issues seem less contentious and pose a smaller threat to national sovereignty.

Second, the science of ecology had an ambivalent role in the development of the ecology movement. On the one hand, the greens were always anxious that their issues would look too scientific and hence less popular. Thus, the national executive of the Ecology Party (later the Green Party in the UK) changed its logo

in 1985 to ECO ‘free of the cumbersome suffix “logy”’ (Wall 1994: 33), because, as Porritt conceded, ““Ecology” is still a rather daunting word, perhaps too scientific, too specialized to convey the full scope of the green perspective’ (Porritt 1984: 3). On the other hand, the ecology movement has used the aura of science to gain respectability and convince its followers that their concerns are backed by science, and do not result from personal interest or sectoral needs as those of other parties. The German Greens introduced their first electoral manifesto in 1979 with Haeckel’s definition of ecology (Die Grünen 1979). The legitimization of science provided the contrast between an interest-driven politics of the old parties and the scientific truth of the alternative Green party.

Finally, ecology has a profound influence on the new language of the extra-parliamentary opposition, which appropriated scientific concepts from ecology into the social discourse. Thus, ecological metaphors were abundant in the 1980s – e.g. Mother Earth, ecological interrelationships, biodiversity and ecological thinking. Dobson, in his *Green Political Thought* attempts to demonstrate that social values can be extrapolated from nature:

Diversity: toleration, stability and democracy
Interdependence: equality
Longevity: tradition
Nature as ‘female’: a particular conception of feminism

(Dobson 2000b: 22)

Clearly, there is no reason to suppose that diversity is more fundamental to ecology than the survival of the fittest, or that interdependence is more significant than natural selection and competition. Nevertheless, supposedly ecological concepts signalled the mood of the ecological camp in the 1970s, what they called ‘the new paradigm’,⁶ one that emphasized life, love, relationships, care, togetherness, holism, harmony and diversity. All of these were concepts that fundamentally challenged the traditional key notions of politics: interests, needs, competition, individualism and struggle.

Politics: from The Silent Spring to The Silent Revolution

When did environmental politics begin? Some would argue environmentalism is as old as human history. Humans always lived – and will always live – off the environment, influencing it, changing it, interacting with it; be it as hunter-gatherers, nomads, early farmers, ancient cities and empires – or advanced industrial societies. Industrialism merely changed the scope and magnitude of these interactions, and pushed them towards irreversibility, but the man–nature relationship is an immanent dimension of human existence. Another possibility is to argue that environmental politics begins when environmental concerns are translated into political demands. The natural candidate for such a definition would go back to the mid-nineteenth century, when environmental protection organizations and conservation groups – such as the Royal Society for the Protection of

Birds (RSPB) in Britain, the Sierra club in the USA, and Naturschützband Deutschland (Society for the Protection of Nature) in Germany – started to emerge in Europe and North America (Bramwell 1989: 23).⁷ These organizations are indeed the roots of environmental movements, and are important to the evolution of ecological awareness. Yet, they were purely environmental groups – in the non-political sense of the word – with local or national interest in the preservation of natural resorts or wilderness, interest in pursuing a hobby, or maintaining a certain way of life. If they did have a political dimension to their activities, it was by acting as an interest group, usually through direct connection with decision-makers or by lobbying.⁸ Thus, conservation was purely within the cultural arena – within what we would call today civil society – with no political ambition beyond facilitating the regulations that would enable them to enjoy their lifestyle; they did not challenge the political system, they played by its rules.

The third option I want to pursue here is the linkage between environmentalism and ‘new politics’ – the argument that environmental politics is not merely about the preservation of nature, but entails a different conception of what politics is, and how political research should be conducted. For environmental exploitation has always been an integral aspect of human activities in the world, a natural part, as it were, of people’s way of life. Indeed, the radical transformations in demographic, geographical and socio-economic patterns, maturing in the late nineteenth century, led the western industrialized nations to rely heavily on global natural resources for their rapid growth. World resources were gradually incorporated into one central pool of capital, managed largely through international market mechanisms, resulting in a rapid depletion of resources on a world-wide scale. It took recovery from two world wars for relatively affluent and stable advanced industrial democracies to settle into the bipolarity of the cold war, a balance of power which set in motion environmental problems, leading to their introduction onto the political agenda. By far the most profound experience that led environmental awareness to take root in western societies was the real prospect for a global destruction through nuclear war. The current fear of the use of weapons of mass destruction being used on innocent populations is the most recent appearance of the same basic worries. The culmination of global threat and personal anxiety in the name of national interest led to a popular realization that a thorough assessment of environmental issues is fundamental for a humane future. Nuclear war, the disposal of nuclear waste, atomic, biological and chemical (ABC) weapons, an accelerated arms race and the threat of the development of weapons of mass destruction comprise, however, only the tip of the iceberg of environmental problems threatening to overwhelm the global village.

Thinking about environmentalism in this context, one ‘founding mother’ is Rachel Carson, who in her book *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962) set out the need for a change in understanding the role of environmental demands in public life. Written with the image of the nuclear mushroom cloud over Hiroshima still in people’s minds, she went on to look at local chemical pollution thus linking local to global man-made environmental hazards. Ten years later her concerns were no longer just an issue for ecological experts, but a more widely recognized problem defined

by the industrial, economic and public leaders. The report of the Club of Rome, an informal organization of ‘scientists, educators, economists, humanists, industrialists and national and international civil servants’, as they defined themselves (Meadows *et al.* 1972: 9), developed an interdependent, international model titled *The Limits to Growth*:

Our world model was built specifically to investigate five major trends of global concern – accelerating industrialization, rapid population growth, widespread malnutrition, depletion of non-renewable resources, and a deteriorating environment. These trends are all interconnected in many ways, and their development is measured in decades or centuries rather than in months or years.

(Meadows *et al.* 1972: 21)

Their interrelated approach and their call ‘to establish a condition of ecological and economic stability that is sustainable far into the future’ (Meadows *et al.* 1972: 24) was a true breakthrough in the way of thinking about ecological-cum-political problems and set the agenda for many years to come. Their approach received unexpected proof with the world oil crisis of 1973, which demonstrated the shortage of non-renewable natural resources and emphasized the global aspect of environmental goods. The first influential wave of ecological protest and green movements emerged at this time. The rush for alternative energy accelerated the nuclear power station construction, and with them the second wave of protest in the mid-1970s, which brought millions to the streets in Europe and the USA. It generated a wave of political protest and facilitated the emergence of new forms of political organization on a scale and scope that were unknown ever before. The third wave came with the threat of the USA to station Pershing II and Cruise missiles in Europe, and instigated the peace demonstrations of the early 1980s. The final upsurge was the advent of the anti-globalization movement and anti-war rallies we witness today.

It is against this background that the challenge to the established political system and to political research should be analysed. Two dimensions are most crucial in understanding the linkage between environmentalism and new politics: new political institutions – professing new political means, and a new phase in the structuralist paradigm. Significantly, it was not environmental groups alone that challenged the established system – they were one important protagonist among the new collective actors, but all marking the change from a fringe theatre of the counterculture to rocking the walls of the political fortress, seeking to demonstrate that the whole world is a *political* stage.

The first challenge to what came to be known as ‘old politics’ was from new collective political actors who contested the notion of which associations may be perceived as a political group. Traditional politics within advanced democracies came to be identified with political parties. The party system is the hegemonic characteristic of democracies, and political parties are the key actor in them. Parties aggregate concerns of citizens, clients and interest groups, and constitute the

representative body, sovereign in a democracy (Robertson 1976: 5). Democratic regimes – whether parliamentary or presidential – were studied primarily in relation to the ruling authorities and the key political institutions or roles. Established channels for voicing demands – such as interest groups, media and lobbying – are part of the official political sphere. Yet, the emergence, since the 1960s, of political protest against the governments and the party system itself brought into being a whole new spectrum of collective actors: protest groups, citizens' initiatives, local activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, new social movements (NSMs) and alternative parties.

The challenge these organizations raised to the traditional way of analysing politics is evident in political literature: it was over two decades before these groups were first analysed as political entities. Indeed, students' revolts and the extra-parliamentary opposition (EPO) were first studied by psychologists as being abnormal or deviant forms of behaviour. They then were studied as fringe groups and cultural phenomena. With the rise of the NSMs, sociologists have taken over, first with resource mobilization theory and then with the structure of opportunities analysis. The theory of NSMs has to date been dominated by sociological analysis (Morris and Mueller 1992; Tarrow 1994; Della Porta and Diani 2000). It was only recently that political scientists have started studying these phenomena as *political*, and the new thesis – that of new politics – was put in place (see Dalton and Kuechler 1990; Müller-Rommel and Poguntke 1995).

Consider the range of environmentalist bodies that have emerged since the early 1970s and the challenge to the political system they embody. There were local citizens' initiatives and conservation groups, many of them responding to specific threats to their own local environment such as a road construction or large building projects. These groups formed spontaneously, with no outside influence, and exemplify one of the basic pillars of the EPO – grassroots activity, 'democracy from below'. The idea was that it is part of a citizen's responsibility to be involved in the decision-making process and make the voice of those directly affected heard along with the interests of private owners and the government. It is true that such groups, identified as 'nimbys' (not in my back yard), tend to disband after the specific problem has been resolved, but the diverse nature of environmental hazards has been recognized as a mobilizer of political protest. Usually it was not a one-off protest, but cyclical form of political activity (Brand 1990; Della Porta and Diani 1999: 165–92).

Another dimension to environmental groups is that of local communities and regional thinking. The idea of sustainable communities, and a more ecological way of life, captured the imagination of local populations and ecological communities appeared throughout the west. These were somewhat different from the students' communities, which were usually located in inner cities. Even students were influenced by ecologism and adopted environmentally-minded consumerism: organic farming products, vegetarian and a 'green' way of life became fashionable among students' communities. Ecological villages were situated in rural areas, practising a sustainable way of life with a focus of alternative education and lifestyle. The main thrust against traditional politics embodied in these communities is the

importance of ways of life and of quality of life as opposed to economic growth and materialism.

On a national level, there were traditional organizations for the protection of nature, active since the late nineteenth century. Even these organizations have diversified beyond the traditional lobbying and interest groups activities into education and local politics. More significant were the new forms of organization. The typical new collective political actors of the period are the NSMs. Though there were students', women's, peace, civil rights and solidarity movements, the most prominent of them all was the ecology, sometimes called the green movement:

Of all the issues raised by the social movements over the last thirty years, 'environmentalism' has had the greatest impact, permeating many diverse areas of social, economic and political life not only domestically, but also on a global scale.

(Byrne 1997: 128)

A change from focusing on conservation to tackling ecological problems was significant in explaining this success. Here the main thrust of environmentalism – that green demands are not about ecology, but about politics – comes to the fore. Understanding the implications of the greenhouse effect or global warming on humanity requires a shift in the way we practise economics and politics, for the assumption of neverending growth is problematical if natural non-renewable resources are scarce. The new social movements embodied a different conception of how to conduct politics. They were characterized by informal interaction of networks, providing the infrastructure for collective action focused on conflicts and the use of protest, based on shared beliefs and solidarity (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 14–15). This challenged the theory and practice of political participation. These movements do not rely on voting every few years, but on grassroots activity which understands citizenship rights as being involved and responsible for decision-making processes at all levels of politics – local, regional, national and global. While political party membership is declining, the movements' membership, political protest and civic activity are on the rise, making post-industrial democracies into movements' societies (Neidhardt and Rucht 1991).

The ecological movement has another facet, which distinguished it from other social movements. Ecological groups were able to go beyond the various single issue struggles and form a coalition as a 'life and peace' group; thus, in Germany, they united the *Lebens- und Überlebensbewegung*, that is, the Life and Survival group. This was demonstrated by the establishment in 1977 of the *Federal Union of Citizens' Initiatives for Environmental Protection*,⁹ which was the first attempt to politically integrate the whole alternative movement – *Gesamtalternativebewegung* – women's, peace and ecological movements (Beuys 1980: 169). Indeed, one of the characteristics of the NSMs was co-operation through inter-movement networks, as was the case, to varying extents, between the German, French and Italian environmental movements (Della Porta and Diani 2000: 134–5). Thus, civil society was not, in the eyes of the activists, just a cultural phenomenon but a politicized arena in

which different ideas of active political participation through grassroots democracy could be pursued.

In the course of the 1980s many of the NSMs were also established as alternative parties: left-libertarian (Kitschelt 1989), women's, ecological and radical left parties, of which the green parties are the most prominent example. The old political system is constituted around parties which differ in their stance on the right-left spectrum – i.e. hold opposing economic stances. The new call of the green movement was: 'neither right nor left we are ahead'. In other words, the whole ideological spectrum is superseded as ecological problems undermine the main presupposition of both left and right – economic growth. The *Limits to Growth* thesis challenges the old hypothesis; democracies need to focus on the quality of life rather than materialism and consumerism. New politics parties initially perceived themselves as the parliamentary arm of the movements. These parties particularly emphasized their alternative organizational forms and focused on grassroots activists, non-hierarchical leadership, the principle of rotation and equal representation: '[...] A new model of intra-party democracy characterized by a low degree of formalization, dominance of the grassroots over higher level functionaries or MPs, and politics with a strong emphasis on close linkage with the new social movements' (Poguntke 1993: 388).

Some green parties have significantly changed the party system, and the German Bündnis 90/Die Grünen is a good case in point: Germany has gone from a two-and-a-half party system to a four party system. Whereas initially they characterized themselves as an anti-parties' party, principle opposition party and a movements' party, they ended up as a coalition party and hence part of the ruling power.¹⁰ Others, such as the Finnish greens, have not changed the structure of the system but become governing parties within coalitions (Müller-Rommel and Poguntke 2002; Burchell 2002). However, the main challenge new politics parties gave to traditional parties was that of changing the public agenda and the new ideological dimension that green parties represent – that of material versus post-material values (Inglehart 1990; Lijphart 1990).

Beyond the national level, one of the most significant developments in environmental organizations was the establishment of cross-national movements and INGOs. Moving the level of the state into the global arena challenged the existing hegemony in international relations of sovereign states. It contested the borders of political power, strengthened international authorities such as the UN and EU and brought into attention the immense power of multinational corporations. International environmental organizations have a different characteristic: Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Earth First! and WWF exemplified new methods of protest, ways of political action and internal structures for international organizations. Some of them are organizations with huge fee-paying memberships, others small and professional organizations; some work mainly through media and others have local, regional, national and international activists.

The second defining characteristic of new politics was the new repertoire of strategies and methods for political change, characterized as 'unconventional' (Barnes *et al.* 1979). New politics transcended the framework of formal political

representation and the established channels of interest and lobby groups by employing a range of alternative political styles. New politics was defined as 'interrelated extension of *participatory dispositions* and *techniques* and the *partial change* of the *political agenda* through the surge of a new set of political demands' (Poguntke 1993: 9). Mass demonstrations, sit-ins, rallies, sabotage of heavy equipment, alternative media, internet sites and tree-huggers are all by now familiar strategies of acquiring media attention and reaching out to public opinion as a means of influencing policy-makers. These and other new politics techniques were not unique to the ecological movement. The significant contribution of environmentalism was the accessibility of nature-oriented images and a unifying paradigm of a holistic, interrelated view that enabled coalitions to form and the struggle to unite different political actors by challenging the established political system.

Furthermore, the environment was instrumental in challenging the boundary of the political as the environment was, par excellence, the non-political issue. The Enlightenment ethos of progress, dependent on the exploitation of nature and advancement of science and technology, was rarely challenged before on these grounds. Nature was never a subject in the moral or political sense. The realization that natural problems are political, that economic growth – advocated by left and right alike – encroaches upon Earth's limited resources, and that national systems can hardly address ecological issues, challenged the underlying assumption concerning the political arena.

The new collective actors transformed the political sphere within advanced industrial democracies. They challenged not only the analysis of politics as top-down policy-making, and the emphasis on the established political system, but also on the notion of what political participation consists of. A host of protest cells, citizens' initiatives, social and environmental movements, and alternative and green parties reshaped the way we think about politics and fashioned what was called contentious politics (McAdam *et al.* 1997: 143).

The new political actors have accordingly changed political research. One way of incorporating the newcomers into the analytical framework was the new institutionalism approach (Hall and Taylor 1996; March and Olson 1989). It combined the rational choice theory, extended to collective actors as well, with political opportunity and culture-sensitive approach. New institutionalists

[...] argue that many of the features of human action and especially modern organizations that are normally attributed to the drive for greater efficiency actually derive from a search for legitimacy or culturally appropriate forms of endeavour... they conceptualise culture in more cognitive terms, as a repertoire of strategies for action or commonly accepted ideas about how one can behave that influence behaviour, not by prescribing or proscribing particular acts but by providing the basic templates through which the world and its possibilities are construed, much like social scripts to which symbolic interactions refer.

(Hall 1997: 194)

The second breakthrough in political research was the challenge new politics introduced to the structuralist–functionalist approach. Lipset and Rokkan argued for a frozen cleavage structure, resulting from the three historical revolutions – the reformation, the French revolution and the industrial revolution – that shaped the party systems in western Europe (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Evidence since the 1970s – volatility in electoral voting, processes of realignment and dealignment, and declining party membership – indicated that these patterns have been shifting. The rise of contentious politics could have been seen as jeopardizing this analytical framework:

From the 1970s onwards, however, the agenda of new politics represented a substantial departure from these well-trodden paths. The younger and better-educated citizens of western democracies began to concern themselves with political goals such as ecology, self-determination, non-military approaches to international conflict resolution, equal rights for minorities, and improving conditions in the third world.

(Müller-Rommel and Poguntke 1995: 1)

The advent of new politics was explained in Inglehart's *Silent Revolution* (Inglehart 1977). The rise of the new middle classes in the economically affluent period following the Second World War catered for a change from material to post-material values (Inglehart 1990a). This generation was free of security worries and economic scarcity, and therefore could pursue ends such as self-actualization, belonging, and meaningful participation. These trends certainly challenge Lipset and Rokkan's structuralist framework for they demonstrate political dynamics, volatility and social change. Alternatively, we could try to synthesize the two approaches. Inglehart situates the rise of green politics within his framework thus:

Some 30 years ago, research on individual values showed a gradual, yet unmistakable shift towards post-materialist value orientations in western publics. Within a few years, the first Green councillors were elected, and less than a decade later, Green parties successfully fielded candidates in national elections in many European nations. What had begun as a 'Silent Revolution' was beginning to manifest itself in institutionalised politics, starting, quite appropriately, on the local level but swiftly moving upwards towards national parliaments.

(Inglehart in Müller-Rommel and Poguntke 2002: vi)

Perceiving green parties as representatives of the new middle classes, and hence cementing anew the party system, we could see the *Silent Revolution* as the fourth and latest phase in the structuralist–functionalist framework. A new social cleavage resulted in a new ideological dimension – materialist versus post-materialist (Lijphart 1990) – and this is reflected in the party system through new politics parties.

Of course, Inglehart's model has had fierce critiques (Böltken and Jagodzinski

1985; Flanagan 1982). One of the immanent problems of Inglehart's analysis is demonstrated by his understanding of environmental concerns. He introduces such issues as 'concerning the quality of the physical and social environment' (Inglehart 1990b: 46). In the questionnaire, options related to the environment, which help determine whether a person professes post-material values, are worded in the following way: 'Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful' (Inglehart 1997: 355). According to Maslow's pyramid of needs, Inglehart conceptualizes environmental concerns as having to do with aesthetic needs. Crucially, environmental politics viewed in light of the ecological crisis were definitely not about aesthetic needs. Rather, the whole point was to protest against the government's short-sightedness in identifying and addressing threat to human health and to the life-sustaining systems. Air and water pollution, desertification, radioactive radiation are hardly aesthetic needs. What is at play here is more complicated. Inglehart's application of Maslow's pyramid of needs holds inasmuch as people who are unemployed or who have low social status are unlikely to find the time to demonstrate against the hole in the ozone layer or gain intellectual comfort from such activities. However, those members of the educated middle classes enjoying relatively safe lifestyles and economic prosperity have the means to think beyond immediate sectoral needs. Environmental concerns provide a fascinating example of altruism or, put differently, of universal concerns rather than one of a specific interest group. The notion of interest-driven politics is hence undermined by the ecological critique.¹¹

The deeper analysis of the silent revolution thus considers the challenge to old politics by contesting the direct representation and aggregated interest framework, suggesting that the new middle classes have the time and education to realize problems that transcend the traditional identification of needs with certain sectors of the population. They demand that issues and agendas that are considered as political be expanded to include areas such as ecological problems, identity politics and multiculturalism. Environmentalism, hence, provides a critique of Inglehart's analysis, but also facilitates a more complex understanding of the structuralist–functionalist approach.

Green ideology: environmental, left or modular ideology?

What was the contribution of environmentalism to the study of ideologies? One needs to disentangle the notion of ideology before addressing this issue. For already in the discussion several different concepts of ideology have been introduced. Bell provided two notions of ideology – one that identifies ideology with regimes (democratic versus totalitarian), the other perceived ideology as a stance on the left–right axis. Following Inglehart, Lijphart argued that a new ideological dimension has evolved in western political systems: the cleavage between materialism and post-materialism (Lijphart 1990). This ideological dimension cuts across the left–right axis. New politics analysts have argued for a new politics ideology (Poguntke 1993). But what could that ideology be? What connects women's movements and environmentalists; civil rights' movements and sexual minorities;

and third world solidarity, catering for politics of identity with anti-war campaigns? New politics never developed much beyond eclectic ecological and social issues. What, if anything, provides a new belief system, a social vision and a political world view? Three main directions present themselves in the analysis of green ideology: re-examination of man–nature relationship, a revised left position, and a modular ideology. We introduce each of them briefly.

The most popular identification of green ideology is with environmental approach to man–nature interrelationships. Burchell, for example, identifies green politics with two strands: the rise of new social movements and the ideology of eco-philosophy (Burchell 2002: 8–15). However, he introduces eco-philosophy ‘ideology’ solely by citing environmental theorists. Here one fundamental problem with green ideology comes to the fore: is it the world view pursued by green activists, or one conceived in the comfort of the theorist’s study? Since practitioners have rarely read the theorists, the two bodies of writing have quite different ideologies in mind.¹² It is much easier for a theorist to isolate the environmental realm and construct an ideology, than for the activist who takes part in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a feminist group or anti-globalization protest. Eco-philosophy – whether written by ideologues or theorists – suffers from two crucial problems. The first is the ‘is–ought’ fallacy. As we already implied, one can describe man-influenced and natural processes, environmental problems and the ecological crisis; determining what should be done about it is not prescribed in the nature of things – it is a normative position, which cannot simply be deduced from ecological principles.

Consider the following example: should we take the main ecological insight of self-sustaining ecosystems and apply it to human society, advocating decentralized communities, living in harmony with nature; or should we begin with the problem of accelerated development and encroachment on wilderness and open land, and promote high-density inner-city building, in order to conserve natural ecosystems and wildlife? Even if we agree with Hayward that

to live in communities whose economies and politics are of human scale, whose principles embody the aim of living in a closer relation to nature, and where belonging is a relation of reciprocity and membership rather than ownership, are desirable ends.

(Hayward 1994: 190)

These social and political beliefs cannot be deduced from, or reduced to, environmentalism, despite the argument of most ecologists and their analysts. The choice is not written into ecological theory – it is a normative ideal that needs to be justified through social rather than ‘natural’ causes. Thus, the same ecological policy might be better implemented by a dictator rather than by a participatory democracy. Should we then prefer that form of government? The answer lies in our societal norms, not in any ecological understanding.

The main danger, therefore, of environmental ideology is the attempt to establish, on the basis of man–nature relationships, the principles of the good

society. Environment in and of itself lacks social prescriptions. The political values an ecologist chooses are a projection of his or her moral and political values, hidden behind the screen of 'naturalism'. The second major problem with a purely environmental ideology is already embedded in the first: environmentalism fails to address the interrelationship between ecological and social ideas from within man–nature interactions. Attempts were made to connect ecologism with feminism (ecofeminism), liberalism (ecoliberalism) and socialism (ecosocialism). Reconciling ecology with liberal democracy was also a major endeavour (Doherty and de Geus 1996; Wissenburg 1998). In all of them the ecological critique was incorporated into a social philosophy. The ecosocialist position provides a good case in point.

Thus, the second major direction in which green ideology was analysed is as a left ideology adjusted for late-capitalistic societies (Kitschelt 1989; Markovits and Gorski 1993; Pepper 1993). Some of the better studies have maintained that the greens are essentially left-libertarians, and that their project is to reconstruct Marxist socialism with due adaptations to ecological problems. The thrust of the argument is not that the greens have actually developed a distinct ideology, but that their ideational configuration updates social democratic and Marxist convictions, refashioning them in an adequate form for the third millennium. Three problems may be identified with this position. First, there is a fundamental animosity between Marxist theory and ecologism. A crucial endeavour of Marxism, in light of the Enlightenment project, was isolating 'history' from 'nature', seeing human development in the realm of freedom, and away from the realm of necessity – an emancipation from *Naturwüchsigkeit* – the embeddedness of man in nature.¹³ External nature, for Marx, was a fundamental 'other' for humans, the 'world out there' against which man's nature was defined: the *Gattung* – human species – is characterized by an ability to mould nature in the process of production, man as *homo faber*. Indeed, the very freedom of humans – inherent in their human nature – is to mould nature, according to their needs, in the course of the process of production. nature is a substance, a given, an object through which – in the process of cultivation – the subjectivity of man is established. nature is the world of necessity, from which man, in entering the world of freedom, has to be released. Indeed, for Marx, the kingdom of freedom begins where work, dictated by needs and derived from external ends, ends.¹⁴

The second difficulty is that greens and environmentalists alike emphasize that the major problem from which the ecological critique emanates is the limits to growth. However, the belief in economic growth is a presupposition which underlies the right and left position. Moreover, the thrust of socialism originates from the notion of economic injustice between classes. The main claim of ecologism, and other new politics ideas, is that there are different forms of injustices which do not rise from economic inequality, as will be shortly discussed. The third problem with ecosocialism is the centrality of the state to the left. The idea of state intervention and redistributive justice, so fundamental to socialist convictions, is inconsistent with the emphasis of decentralization, autonomy, self-sustaining communities so dominant in ecological thought.

Finally, another approach to green ideology was that it is inherently connected to other new politics ideas through the modular ideology (Talshir 2002). What is the relationship between anti-militarism and the rights of disabled people, or the 'limits to growth' thesis and feminism, or refugees' rights and unemployed people? The constituency of greens' ideas proves a curious one, as on the face of it there is very little in common between the issues which the green ideology addresses. Consider the following analysis – new politics issues emerged from structural deficiencies in two main realms: advanced industrial societies and institutional democracies. The former includes problems such as foreign workers, unemployment, the underclass, the gap between rich and poor, homelessness and equal pay for women. The latter produced issues of ethnic minorities' rights, gay and lesbian rights, women's equality, multiculturalism, regard for nature and disabled people's rights. Thus, while the conflicts themselves have very little in common, and usually affect very different groups of people, they all originate from problems within advanced industrial democracies. The internal changes within the labour market, levels of affluence and the expansion of education gave rise to new, educated middle classes. These classes are the constituency of new politics ideology: those who struggle for social and ecological justice on behalf of the disadvantaged who do not, under the current system, have a voice of their own. While each of these groups has a unique battle – politics of identity – they all share a common struggle against institutional industrialized democracies. This analysis demonstrates that traditional theories of ideology are unlikely to accommodate such an ideology. The analytical process reveals a new, comprehensive political ideology, not confined to an ecological perspective, representing a modular type of ideology.

A modular ideology was thus devised, encompassing a double structure. First, an *ideological frame*, i.e., the shared ideological premises of new politics. The ideological frame is comprised of several principles: primacy of ecology; respect for others (nature, refugees, disabled people, women etc.); pluralism (multiculturalism), tolerance, social justice and participatory democracy. Second, the *sub-ideologies*, i.e., the various ideological currents, which subscribe to the ideological frame, yet emphasize a module of their own sub-ideology. Hence, different ideological currents, which despite varied emphases and concerns, share an ideological frame, join forces against institutionalized democracies and fight to end discrimination and exploitation by uprooting them in practice, not just by law.

The problem with this ideological analysis is that it undermines the centrality of environmentalism as the key tenant of a green ideology. Nature becomes the most radically exploited agent, followed by indigenous cultures, ethnic, cultural, religious, national and sexual minorities, rather than the only subject of the ideology. Another problem is that ecological problems are essentially different from the other social problems, as politics of identity involves empowerment of the disadvantaged communities and giving them a voice of their own, while ecological issues would always require a second-order representation. Yet, all the constitutive subjects of new politics ideology share a fundamental element – a threefold process:

raising political awareness, generating a political critique channelled at social change, and an alternative political vision of a participatory grassroots democracy. This process unites the ecological and social dimensions of the modular ideology. Each of the options for analysing green ideology challenges the existing ideological spectrum and transcends Bell's end of ideology thesis.

Environmental theory: expanding the boundaries of normative discourse

The final level for this classification is the realm of theory, which will be only briefly discussed as most of the chapters in this book dwell on the different aspects of environmental philosophy. Perhaps the most innovative and significant endeavour of environmentalism was the rising spectrum of green political thought. Two realms of influence are introduced here: transcending the human-centred discourse and deliberative models of democracy.

Ecological thinking challenged the presuppositions of the dominant moral and political discourse. This was pursued in different ways. First the idea of extending beyond the dominant legal and normative discourse – that of rights and interests – beyond people. The discourse of rights is fundamental to the constitutive understanding of democracy. Interesting attempts were made in three directions. First of all, extending human rights to include the right for a clean environment – thus hoping to incorporate the ecological critique into the dominant discourse of basic laws (Hayward 1994: 128–72). Second, the argument for intergenerational justice, which required that public goods would be justly divided between the current and future generations, thereby taking the rights of the next generations into the discussion (de-Shalit 1995). Third, the subject of animal rights and environmental rights, which symbolizes the extension of the normative discourse beyond people.

Expanding the moral discourse was equally innovative. Several positions were offered. First, extending moral discourse to include all sentient beings, called biocentrism (Taylor 1986). A closely related idea was that of including all species, rather than all individual plants and animals, under the moral blanket, thus anchoring the idea of the extinction of species and endangered species in the same moral discourse. Second, the idea that ecological problems should not be advocated from an individually-based perspective, but from that of the ecosystem, was conceived as ecocentrism (Rolston 1982; Eckersley 1992). On the same spectrum two other positions were offered: anthropocentrism, arguing that despite everything else consideration for nature should come from within human interests, and deep ecology, arguing that humans should not be the centre point of moral discourse (Naess 1984). While some have argued that nature is a moral subject, and sought 'partnership' with nature and 'communicative discursivity', it is radical enough to suggest that nature is a moral agent, or a moral object. This alone necessitates a different understanding of the boundaries of moral discourse and human responsibility.

Another fascinating example of the influence of environmental theory is the idea of the good society, and the forms of social vision, that were facilitated by ecological thinking. Bioregionalism, the global village, Gaia paradigm, self-sustaining communities and decentralization were advocated as best to accommodate new polities. The way and means to facilitate environmental discourse – grassroots activity, discursive methods, direct action – significantly contributed to the idea of grassroots democracy, and deliberative model of democracy (Dryzek 1990a).

Conclusions

Environmentalism opened the way to significant changes on the political, ideological and theoretical levels. However, the instrumental role of the environment was often misunderstood as a singular political issue, or as a comprehensive world view. The analysis demonstrated that while environmentalism was a facilitator of new politics and contributed to challenging some of the dominant approaches to political analysis, facilitated the emergence of a new type of ideology and extended moral theory beyond humanity's boundaries, these challenges are hard to meet in a democratic system which is adaptable and resilient enough. The strength of advanced industrial democracies is in their very ability to co-opt new cleavages and issues into the existing political patterns. *Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism: The End of Environmentalism?*⁹ examines whether liberal democracy successfully adopted or even absorbed the green agenda, thus making its success into the demise of environmentalism, or whether a new horizon for environmentalism is lurking behind the turn of the millennium.

Notes

- 1 Sara Parkin was one of the leading figures of the British Greens until her departure from the party in 2000. The citation is taken from her lecture at the Green Films festival, Greenscreen (Oxford, October 1994).
- 2 Needless to say, due to the UK electoral system, the Green Party never received any parliamentary representation in Britain – apart from the European elections, where the system was changed.
- 3 The German counterpart of Porritt and Parkin – the late Petra Kelly – had somewhat different views as her book title, *Thinking Green*, entails. For her being green implied a whole new way of thinking about the interrelationships between society, politics, economics and Mother Nature. For a comparative analysis of the ideology of the greens in Britain and Germany see Talshir (2002).
- 4 For accounts of the rise of environmentalism and politics of identity see Talshir (1998: 169–92).
- 5 This definition is used by the first manifesto of the German Greens, in order to juxtapose the scientific knowledge of ecology with the power-driven politics of the traditional parties (Die Grünen 1979).
- 6 See for example Capra's *The Turning Point* (1982) and Maren-Grisebach's *Philosophie der Grünen* (1982).
- 7 For an earlier account see Keith Thomas (1983).

- 8 For a debate concerning the nature of the nineteenth versus the twentieth century social movements see Brand (1990) and Rucht (1990).
- 9 Bundesverband der Bürger-initiativen für Umweltschutz – BBU. See Van Hüllen (1990: 161).
- 10 For the debates within the German Greens on the roles of the party see Talshir (2002: 127–41).
- 11 This is not to argue that everyone suffers equally from ecological problems, as, in most cases, weaker populations would also be more prone to environmental hazards or less free to address ecological concerns.
- 12 John Barry (1999a) distinguishes differently between ideology and theory, both of which he analyses by theoretical writings. For an interesting analysis of the interrelationships between theorists and activists see de-Shalit (2000).
- 13 For an excellent discussion see Jay (1988: 2–3).
- 14 Marx, cited in Ebermann and Rainer (1984: 234).

Part I

The faces of endism

3 Post-ecologism and the politics of simulation

Ingolfur Blühdorn

Introduction

At a time when the USA and its closest European allies are pursuing the most unashamed resource war in recent history, any talk of a *pacification* or even *end* of environmentalism can only be described as the worst imaginable cynicism. Never before has it been so blatantly evident that for the stabilization of the socially exclusive and ecologically ruinous system of consumer capitalism, military force is indispensable. Never before has it been made so unambiguously clear that with regard to western lifestyles and privileges no compromise, let alone radical alternative, is acceptable. Whatever the concerns of environmentalists, the western way of life clearly *is* sustainable – at least for the time being, and at least for some parts of the global population. It is sustainable in the sense that the necessary military hardware and ideological superstructure *are* available and *will* be mobilized. ‘Every Generation Must Wage War For Freedom. Pray For Our Soldiers’.¹

Yet, while the increasing dependence of the western system on the use of surveillance technologies and military force provides clear evidence that liberal democracy has failed to *absorb* the environmental agenda and reconcile ecological imperatives with those of the capitalist consumer economy, it is also undeniable that scientific research, technological advances, new actor alliances and innovative policy instruments have helped to disarm the ecological time bomb and bring about tangible improvements in the living environment. Also, there can be no doubt that the more radical ecological demands, in particular, have lost much of their wider societal appeal and mobilizing force. Even though concerns for health and safety, or consumer protection, remain high on the agenda, and although some radical demands continue to be rehearsed in contemporary movements against corporate globalization, a certain deradicalization of the ecological debate and eco-politics is undeniable. Environmental issues have indeed lost much of their ideological explosiveness.

In this chapter this deradicalization of ecological discourses and eco-political conflicts in late-modern societies is conceptualized as the decline of *ecologist* patterns of thinking and the transition to *post-ecologist politics* (Blühdorn 1997; 2000b). Any rhetoric of the end of environmentalism, on the other hand, is regarded as just another variety of the old discourse of *endism* and an attempt to avoid the problems

with conceptualizing what is a very complex transformation. The argument to be developed is that late-modern societies are fairly successful in convincing themselves that liberal democracy has integrated and thus pacified the environmental issue because they have reformulated environmental issues in ways which conform to both the imperatives of the capitalist system and those of late-modern patterns of identity construction. Their *post-ecologist* approach to environment related issues, however, raises its own set of problems. In order to cope with these unavoidable implications, late-modern societies have, arguably, developed strategies of *simulation*.

In the exploration of contemporary eco-politics, the question is not simply whether or not the existing and emerging technologies, procedures and institutions can respond to environmental concerns and implement ecological imperatives. A very important, but as yet neglected, dimension in the ongoing transformation of eco-political debates and policy approaches is that ecological imperatives and concerns themselves are subject to change. The *theory of post-ecologist politics* therefore focuses on the cultural and normative foundations on the basis of which late-modern societies formulate their environmental concerns and implement their remedial policies. It suggests that processes of cultural change have given rise to value orientations and social concerns which devalidate or overlay those advanced by ecologists. The suggested theory of *simulative politics* (Blühdorn 2002, 2003) is an interpretative tool for the analysis of a variety of contemporary discourses, including, for example, the ones on social inclusion, democratic renewal, or the global civil society. In the present context this theory is important because strategies of simulation contribute to the impression that the ecological issue has been pacified and resolved.

The first question to be addressed in this chapter is why the concerns and demands of radical ecologists, in particular, do not have the same kind of societal resonance today as they did in previous decades. The answer that is developed in the second section is that the *intrinsic* values and *categorical* imperatives promoted by ecologists had a wider societal appeal because they reflected specifically modernist values and corresponded to traditional ideals of identity construction which have since become less attractive. On this basis the third section outlines how more contemporary patterns of identity formation reshape the way in which late-modern societies formulate and process environment related problems. Section four aims to pre-empt some misunderstandings, and responds to a range of critical comments that have been made about the *theory of post-ecologist politics*. The final section discusses the problems caused by late-modern society's post-ecologist practices and explores the remedial strategies of simulation.

Categorical imperatives and intrinsic values

The eco-political agenda has always comprised a wide spectrum of demands. Different currents have always had different emphases (Hayward 1994; J. Barry 1999a; Dobson 2000b). Yet one problem that ecologists, environmentalists and all other currents contributing to the larger eco-movement have in common is that they have always found it hard to explain exactly where their values and imperatives

actually emerge from. There must be a reason why environmentalists get concerned about certain conditions in, or of, the physical environment, why eco-socialists believe in radical democracy and redistribution, or why deep ecologists worry about something like the intrinsic value of nature. There must be a reason why they adopt certain ethical standards on the basis of which particular phenomena then appear as problems, and certain kinds of behaviour as suitable remedies. When environmental issues can be reduced to decisions between human health and illness, or better still, life and death, the question of the normative foundation seems least urgent. Yet, in most cases, such an argument cannot convincingly be made, and from an eco-centric perspective, these criteria might be regarded as unacceptable anyway. More or less explicitly, eco-political actors have always been aware of this problem, and in order to become less dependent on moral arguments, they have increasingly taken refuge in scientific and economic arguments. But ultimately, of course, even scientific research and economic reasoning can only *apply* but not themselves *generate* normative standards. Science and economics, too, need to make reference to pre-existing value systems.

In the search for the normative foundations of environmental concerns and ecological imperatives, Inglehart's well-known theory of post-materialism provides an important cue. Inglehart suggested that the social movements since the late 1960s were essentially centred around the goals of *self*-development, *self*-expression and *self*-determination (Inglehart 1977, 1990a, 1997). The value of *autonomy* represented their key concern. On the one hand this regarded the *collective* self, *collective* autonomy and *social* identity; on the other hand this was about the emancipation and realization of the *individual* self, *individual* autonomy and *individual* identity. Post-materialist politics may thus be described as identity politics. *Eco*-politics, which according to Inglehart is just one sub-strand of post-materialist politics, appears as a variety of *ego*-politics. This is not to say, of course, that eco-political discourses are not concerned with the physical environment and nature–society relations. It only calls to mind that the normative criteria by which environmental and social conditions are classified as problematic emerge from specific ideals of identity construction which both shape and mirror a particular understanding of nature and naturalness. The close connection between the politics of the environment and the politics of the self derives from the fact that any awareness and experience of the self dialectically depends on that of the other. The dominant parameters of identity construction are, arguably, at the same time the dominant parameters of the social construction of nature.

Thus, the ultimate reliance on identity-related standards of nature and naturalness is common to all strands of ecological thinking. It becomes most explicit in the case of deep ecologists who make direct reference to *categorical* imperatives or an *intrinsic* value of nature. But beyond this, every eco-political concern and demand is ultimately backed up by an *ecologist* nucleus. The recognition that ecological politics has – beyond its concern about specific environmental and social conditions – ultimately always centred around issues of identity (Blühdorn 2000b) is crucial to the theory of *post-ecologism*. It is in line with Habermas's well-known argument that environmental problems are subjectively experienced collisions of

subject-centred rationality with system-centred rationality – collisions that trigger reactions of defence against infringements upon identity claims (Habermas 1981; Brulle 2000).

The identity needs and the ideals of identity construction that are reflected in *ecologist* thinking, in particular, were conditioned by the reverberations of European idealism. The Kantian enlightenment tradition had forged the ideal of the *autonomous identical subject* which by means of its innate freedom and rational faculties of self-determination has to emancipate itself from its environment – nature, the instinctive, the non-rational – constitute and preserve its autonomous self, and realize the full potential nature has given to it (Kant 1970). The belief in a Kantian-style transcendental reason and common good merged the emancipatory project of each enlightened individual into the project of the emancipation of humanity at large. It was an assumption of enlightenment thinking, handed down from Kant to Marx and beyond, that the innate human capabilities would be fully developed only in the human species as a whole, but not in the human individual. Very importantly, the modernist project of the full realization of freedom and self-determination has thus been understood as a *collective* project centring around a *common* good.

The historical conditions of the 1970s and 1980s reinforced this traditional ideal of identity construction. The relative saturation of material needs allowed for a strong emphasis on post-material dimensions of identity construction which reflected the idealist emphasis on inner freedom, ethical standards and rational autonomy. Furthermore, the combination of the Cold War experience and rapid technological progress, both of which implied potentially uncontrollable risks, forged the sociological paradigm of the *risk society* and brought new concerns of security to the forefront of the debate (Beck 1992). The apocalyptic concern that military and ecological threats could potentially eliminate humankind as a whole reinforced the old emphasis on the *social* dimension of human identity.

What this analysis suggests is that the eco-political debates of the 1970s and 1980s were informed and normatively underpinned by a specific notion of social and self-identity. Behind the *categorical imperatives* and the *intrinsic value* of nature was the idealist vision of the *identical subject*. It was part of the pre-modernist set-up of ecological thought that it claimed to be exempt from the requirement to subject its categorical imperatives to discursive scrutiny. The integrity of nature was assumed to represent an intrinsic value. Ecological problems were assumed to be intrinsically problematic conditions. However, any perception of ecological problems is ultimately based on essentially contingent values and norms; and even where ecological concerns seem to be triggered by fears of illness and death, they still reflect culturally determined norms of identity formation.

The post-ecologist constellation

The end of the Cold War and the dawn of the era of globalization signalled the demise of the historical constellation that had reinforced the idealist foundations of ecologist thought. Fears of the global apocalypse were superseded by concerns

about regional wars and ecological disasters. The paradigm of the *risk society* was complemented by that of the *opportunity society*. As globalization generated unprecedented opportunities for material accumulation and consumption, Inglehart's trend towards post-materialism was superseded by a new phase of *hyper-materialism*. Accelerated processes of social differentiation gave rise to ever more specific and thus less inclusive notions of identity. Pressures for comprehensive flexibilization began to undermine the very idea of a stable and integrated identity. For the purposes of self-construction, self-realization and self-experience, the idealist model of the consistent, rational, ethical and inclusive subject became too restrictive. Multiple, inconsistent, fluid patchwork identities proved superior because they provide more flexibility and open up more pathways for self-realization and self-experience (Bauman 2000). Whilst the Enlightenment ideal had strong connotations (categorical imperatives) of duty, self-discipline, consistency and social (ecological) responsibility, the emancipation from the rational self, and the conscious re-acquisition of all those dimensions that this notion had excluded, bear significant potentials for further self-development, self-realization and self-experience.

In the formation of the new patterns of identity construction, the dynamics of the capitalist system has an important role to play. Economic thinking and the logic of the market have invaded all societal sub-systems, and marginalized all alternative ways of thinking. The permeation of all social relations and activities by the code of payment and profitability implies that identity formation becomes a primarily economic matter, and takes first and foremost the form of material accumulation and consumption. The increasingly one-dimensional pattern of identity construction and self-experience fuels competition for scarce resources and opportunities. These developments establish an inherent link between individual identity and material inequality. In an increasingly one-dimensional society, material competition, inequality and exclusion become indispensable (J. Young 1999; Touraine 2000; Bauman 2001). There is no comparable means of identity construction and expression.

The new conceptualization of the self, and the new identity needs emerging from it, reshape the perspective on the environment. In the same sense that the traditional ideal of identity can be said to have given rise to *ecologist* views about natural and social relations, contemporary patterns of identity construction give rise to *post-ecologist* conceptualizations of environmental problems and imperatives.

The *ecologist politics of nature* was shaped by the principles of libertarianism, post-materialism, inclusiveness and long-term continuity. Relying on the fundamental validity of the normative belief system of modernity, it developed a high level of tolerance towards individual value-diversification. Building on the economic security of post-war societies, it cultivated the idealistic emphasis on moral qualities (inner values) and post-materialist priorities. Inspired by the idealist emphasis on collective identity and by the apocalyptic threats of the *risk society*, it developed a strongly inclusive and egalitarian orientation. Even though it responds to the experience of unprecedented threats, ecologist thinking and politics, very importantly, emerged from a constellation of *high certainty*.

The *post-ecologist politics of nature*, in contrast, thrives in the new *political economy of uncertainty* (Bauman 1999). In response to the reflexive dissolution of the *normative certainties* of traditional modernity, contemporary society turns towards new *constructed certitudes* (Beck 1997) which are enforced in a neo-fundamentalist manner at the expense of established standards of civil liberty. New *economic uncertainties* reinforce neo-materialist value priorities, which in late-modern society represent the only reliable basis for social consensus. Within this constellation of *high uncertainty*, the post-ecologist politics of nature adopts a short-term perspective and is guided by the principle of inner-societal differentiation and exclusion. The cultural and economic conditions at the beginning of the so-called *century of the environment* (von Weizsäcker 1999) thus provide a radically new framework for the way in which eco-politics is conducted. It might be called the *post-ecologist constellation*, yet the repercussions of radical uncertainty and the new patterns of identity formation obviously reach far beyond the narrow field of eco-politics. They have reshaped the entire political agenda placing unprecedented emphasis on issues such as tax cuts, public expenditure, welfare parasites, border control and the protection against crime and terrorism. Contemporary political debates are fuelled by neo-materialism, social envy and the fear for security. These concerns trigger neo-authoritarian and strongly exclusive responses in many policy areas.

With regard to the questions that were raised at the beginning of this chapter, it would now seem that a two-dimensional process of *dissolution* accounts for the perceived pacification of the environmental issue:

- 1 Late-modern societies have reformulated some elements of the ecological problem as scientific, technological, economic and managerial issues. In this reformulated form, they could – more or less successfully – be integrated into the existing structures and institutions which proved sufficiently flexible to adapt to the new requirements. As these dimensions of the ecological issue *dissolve* indistinguishably into other discourses and policy areas, potentially emerging conflicts and tensions are no longer recognized as *eco-political* conflicts, and the successful integration provides a sense of reassurance.
- 2 Those dimensions which could not be reformulated to fit the terms of the established structures have, obviously, not been integrated. Yet, it would be simplistic to insist they have been marginalized and suppressed. Instead, the emergence of the post-ecologist constellation has rendered many of the older eco-political diagnoses and concerns outdated. Somewhat provocatively one might say that to the same extent to which the ecologist normative framework (identity) has dissolved, ecologist problem perceptions have dissolved as well. This does not mean, of course, that empirically measurable social and environmental conditions have improved in any way. But it does mean that these conditions are perceived in a different way, and that they trigger different reactions.

Clarifications

The theory of post-ecologist politics provides answers to a wide range of questions: it may explain why ecologist analyses and demands find less societal resonance and have less mobilizing potential today than they had in previous decades. It helps clarify to what extent liberal democracies may be said to have absorbed the environmental issue, and it sheds light on the normative foundations on the basis of which late-modern societies formulate environmental problems and policies. Furthermore, the theory of post-ecologist politics suggests an explanation why the long-desired ecological U-turn has still not been performed, why late-modern societies so willingly reformulate the ecological issue in the economic terms of natural capital, resource efficiency and market instruments, and why they prefer short-term techno-fixes to any long-term solutions. Beyond this, it also explains the radical insistence on patterns of behaviour which eco-political reasoning has long revealed as unsustainable, and it provides an indication of where late-modern societies might be moving in terms of biodiversity, social justice, resource conflicts and so forth. Nevertheless, a note of caution seems in order: the theory of post-ecologist politics is no more than a *theory*. Like any theory it is an offer of plausibility and may have to be supplemented by, and compete with, other such offers. Its explanatory potential remains conditional on the parameters of its generation, and its predictive potential may be limited. Of course it relies on simplifications: complexity reduction is the tool and objective of any rationalization.

Keeping these limitations in mind can help to avoid misunderstandings. The question may be raised, for example, whether we really need a theory of post-ecologism to explain the ongoing changes in eco-political movements, debates and policies. Surely, there are very concrete and powerful factors such as well-organized corporate interests, the impact of the mass media, or the neutralization of environmental movements by anti-environmental counter-movements (see Chapter 14 in this volume). Furthermore, eco-political achievements, the falsification of earlier predictions, and the anti-scare stories of *sceptical environmentalists* (e.g. Beckerman 1995; Lomborg 2001) have an important role to play. What is the relationship between all these explanatory approaches and the proposed theory outlined above? The theory of post-ecologism does not suggest that these explanations are irrelevant or over-estimated. Undoubtedly they are all very important and need to be researched separately. But the question here is why these factors could become so powerful in the first place. And the suggestion is that their success was possible not least because something like the *silent counter-revolution* outlined above paved their way. In turn, these factors obviously also nurture and accelerate this silent counter-revolution.

The strongly theoretical approach to contemporary eco-politics has, furthermore, given rise to concerns that the theory of post-ecologism refuses to engage with the empirical reality of environmental problems, the concrete suffering of local people, and the untiring struggles of eco-political activists. Mick Smith has suggested that the theory of post-ecologism 'entirely ignores the perspectives of the many creatures and cultures now gone for ever' (M. Smith 2002: 183), and

John Barry fears that it ‘has absolutely nothing to say’ to all those ‘involved or concerned with real and *real-world* environmental struggles and politics’ (Barry in this volume). Such comments emerge from a confusion between sociological analysis and political campaigning. Of course, the two sides have always been closely related, but this must not obscure the fact that they *are* separate exercises. The list of questions at the beginning of this section clearly outlines exactly what the theory of post-ecologism has to offer. And its analytical focus neither implies ignorance of the hardship and suffering caused by the lifestyles of a global minority, nor any justification for the clearly unacceptable *status quo*.

Admittedly, suggesting that ecologist problem perceptions may have *dissolved* rather than been *resolved* means giving hostages to fortune because this seems to imply that the theory of post-ecologism not only refuses to *engage with*, but actually *denies*, the reality of environmental problems. John Barry insists that the plight of the ‘average slum dweller in the developing world’, or of the ‘Indian peasant faced with water shortages’, or indeed the ‘mother concerned about ... dioxin in her breast milk’ will never dissolve discursively (see Barry in this volume). Smith has criticized the theory of post-ecologism for trying to ‘debunk the idea of an environmental crisis’ (M. Smith 2002: 182) and for being ‘sustainable only on the basis of refusing to hear, see or speak of the real damage done’ (M. Smith 2002: 184). However, the theory of post-ecologist politics neither denies the reality of any environmental conditions, nor is it blind to the misery of real people. Instead, it simply tries to establish why the undeniable facts to which Smith and Barry are referring do not trigger the same outrage in everybody else as they do in them – and indeed myself. Exploring why some people get concerned about the complete deforestation of the hills in the English Lake District whilst others do not, does not mean to deny that the hills are barren. Similarly, exploring why some people see the radical redistribution of global wealth as a matter of utmost urgency whilst others believe it is more urgent to protect their privileges by means of pre-emptive military strikes, does not mean to deny the reality of unprecedented inequality and the starvation of whole populations, nor indeed the reality of terrorist atrocities. The theory of post-ecologist politics neither denies any empirical realities, nor does it deny that all societies, including late-modern ones, have to deal with a range of problem perceptions. It is therefore nonsensical to maintain that ‘a post-ecologist politics is no politics at all’ (M. Smith 2002: 184); and it should also be entirely clear how the post-ecologist *dissolution* of the environmental problem differs from President Bush’s denial of global warming (see Barry in this volume).

This comparison to Bush leads on to the criticism that the theory of post-ecologism has a ‘profoundly conservative’ agenda that demands us ‘to limit ourselves to what is currently politically and culturally possible’ (see Barry in this volume). Barry believes that there is essentially no difference between ‘*post-ecologist* politics and conservative/right-wing critiques of environmentalism’. In a similar vein, Smith suggests that ‘what is being portrayed as a radical argument’ in reality bears ‘the hallmark of every reactionary politics’ (M. Smith 2002: 181–3). Of course, political activists have to take a normative stance, and for a theoretical model that – irrespective of its author’s political convictions – is indeed susceptible to being

instrumentalized for reactionary purposes, unfair left-wing criticism is always preferable to right-wing usurpation. Nevertheless, in appreciation of the explanatory potential of the post-ecologist model, politically committed social theorists should refrain from rushing to the conclusion that *whoever is not for us must surely be against us*. This simplistic logic is regularly mobilized by forces which ecologists would certainly prefer not to be associated with.

A final point of clarification concerns the criticism that the theory of post-ecologism ‘conveniently defines all environmentalists, from deep ecologists to ecological modernists as buying into a single ideology’ (M. Smith 2002: 183). Arguing along the same lines, Barry criticizes the post-ecologist analysis for ‘reducing all green politics’ to ‘fundamentalist forms’ assuming that ‘all greens are *really* fundamentalists anyhow (even if they don’t realise it!)’ (see Barry in this volume). Further developing this criticism one might also argue that the theory of post-ecologism hugely overestimates the significance of *ecologist* currents. In the wider eco-movement these radical currents have never been more than a vociferous minority, but the suggestion that late-modern societies approach their environmental issues in *post-ecologist* ways seems to imply that previously *ecologist* approaches were dominant. Indeed, in the present context, the term *ecologist* is not simply the label for radical currents in the eco-movement. For the purposes of the above analysis, it refers to the normative reliance of eco-political diagnoses and demands on the value system that is tied to the idealist notion of identity. As was outlined above, this reliance is most explicit in the fundamentalist arguments of radical ecologists. But beyond this, it also backs up the rationalizations offered by other currents. In contrast, what is referred to as *post-ecologist* is a perspective, discourse and politics that is informed by a new and radically different set of values and notion of identity.

Self-referentiality and simulation

In section three it has been argued that contemporary societies have developed a new understanding of identity and adopted new patterns of self-construction, self-realization and self-experience. Whilst the modernist and ecologist principles are becoming counter-productive, a new set of principles has begun to restructure late-modern societies. However, it is characteristic of these societies that the old modernist values which provided the basis of the ecologist belief system can neither be retained nor given up. They cannot be retained because they no longer serve the needs and interests of the late-modern self. But they cannot be abandoned, because this would jeopardize the highly precarious societal arrangements.

First, the modernist value system is indispensable because the intensifying conflicts of late-modern societies, if they cannot be *resolved*, at least need to be *managed*. The political economy of uncertainty and contemporary patterns of identity formation increase social competition and tension. Technological advances and efficiency gains have expanded the limits to growth, but despite all rhetoric of a *Natural Capitalism* (Hawken *et al.* 1999) and *Factor Four* revolutions (von Weizsäcker *et al.* 1998) the standards of material wealth in the industrial countries can only be

maintained and further increased if they remain restricted to a privileged minority. Significant parts of national populations and humanity at large necessarily have to remain excluded and resources appropriated, not only in cultural terms (identity formation through material differentiation) but also in physical terms; social deprivation, marginalization and exclusion have thus become a necessary condition of late-modern society. Social stability and peace therefore become highly fragile, yet they are preconditional to both a thriving economy and the enjoyment of privileges and wealth. In this situation, the modernist value system is an indispensable tool of conflict management.

Second, the modernist value system remains crucial because late-modern individuals still like to conceive of themselves as distinct from the all-embracing system of the market and as the centre, normative standard and motor of societal development. To the same degree that the economic system permeates the contemporary individual and colonizes its patterns of identity formation, the individual needs to reassert its distinctiveness from the market. The very notion of identity demands distinctiveness, and only the modernist value system provides the tools for maintaining it.

Finally, modernist ideals cannot easily be given up because the economic system, too, depends on the dualism between its internal logic of operation and an external source of meaning. In the same way that the modernist self required nature as its other *vis-à-vis* which it could constitute and experience itself, the economic system depends on the autonomous individual without which it would collapse into self-referentiality.

Indeed, self-referentiality is the central challenge late-modern societies have to confront. As the logic of the market conquers all formerly autonomous social systems and the individual itself, the modernist project of the all-integrating systemic coherence is coming closer to completion. However, instead of the traditional vision which saw the autonomous individual at the centre of this cohesion and as its point of reference (metaphysics of reason), late-modern society has established an all-embracing system in which this place at the centre remains unoccupied (metaphysics of the market). This condition may suitably be described as the *denucleated modernity* which distinguishes itself from Beck's narrative of the *second modernity* in that it has lost the ideals and promises of traditional modernity as its external point of reference.

The strategy by means of which late-modern society escapes its problems of self-referentiality is the *politics of simulation*. This concept describes a set of societal practices which function to preserve and regenerate a societal self-description which is rapidly losing its sociological foundation. By means of its simulative politics, late-modern society reassures itself that it continues to be working towards the complete realization of the unfinished project of modernity, in the full knowledge that the completion of this project is neither possible nor even desirable. The strategy of simulation turns the *as if* of the Kantian regulative ideas of reason – strive towards their implementation *as if* they could be fully realized – into *as if* we intended to implement these ideals of modernity. Rather than undertaking – necessarily counter-productive – attempts to complete the unfinished project of

modernity, late-modern societies have shifted the emphasis towards perfecting the *simulation* of modernist politics, towards constructing the *myth* of the further modernization of modernity.

Importantly, what is described here as *simulative politics* must not be confused with *symbolic politics* (e.g. Edelman 1985; Schäfer-Klug 1999; Sartor 2000). The problem of late-modern societies is not simply that liberal democracies provide their political actors with insufficient means for addressing certain problems in an effective way, and thus tempt them into resorting to symbolic action. Also, simulative politics is not purely the conspiratorial deception of the underprivileged by certain social elites. Beyond that, late-modern societies need to address the fundamental problems of *denucleated modernity* by regenerating the belief in the modernist dualisms on which they desperately depend. In contrast to symbolic politics, the politics of simulation is, therefore, a *societal* strategy of *societal* self-deception. It entails, first, the reflexive redefinition of the core values of modernity; second, the cultivation of reformist discourses such as those on ecological modernization, democratic renewal, and social inclusion; and third, the implementation of policy programmes designed for the cost-effective *management* of the unavoidable side-effects of contemporary self-realization.

The underlying principle in the exercise of reflexive redefinition is that the conceptual instruments which had once served the emancipation and autonomy of the inclusively defined human self are being turned into instruments for the reproduction and stabilization of the economic system (Blühndorn 2003). Thus, the struggle for freedom turns into that for free markets and consumer choice; the struggle for equality turns into campaigns for equal access to the market; the struggle for social inclusion turns into that for inclusion into the job market, and so forth. Conveniently, this agenda not only stabilizes the economic system, but it also serves the revised identity needs of the late-modern individual. And with the conceptual shells of the old ideals being retained, there is actually a triple dividend: the continued presence of the old concepts provides an effective antidote to any allergic reactions against the principle of exclusion. Ulrich Beck was right in describing such practices of redefinition as 'façadism in politics' (Beck 1997: 138). Yet he was wrong in believing that the *reinvention of politics* would tear down the façades, thus paving the way towards a *genuinely* modern society. Instead, the *simulation of politics* reinforces these façades because they are indispensable for the stabilization of a self-referential *denucleated modernity*.

The reformist discourses of ecological modernization, social inclusion, civic empowerment, and so forth, amplify the effect of the conceptual redefinitions. The discourse of *ecological modernization*, for example, simulates the possibility and the political will to achieve environmental justice, integrity and sustainability (Blühndorn 2000a; 2002), whilst at the same time ensuring that established lifestyles, privileges and patterns of economic development are maintained. The discourse of social inclusion simulates the validity of the old ideals of equality and collectiveness, whilst at the same time taking care that the underlying principle of differentiation and exclusion remains intact. The policy programmes related to these reformist discourses define the problems to be addressed in economic and

managerial terms. They are expected to lead to efficiency gains in terms of reduced public spending and increased economic returns. Whilst ecological integrity, social justice, or a genuinely equal distribution of political influence and control are neither achieved nor really intended, such policy programmes reduce the tax burden to be carried by the wealthier social strata, and turn the less well-off into socially pacified and economically profitable consumers. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to denounce these discourses and policy programmes as pure rhetoric which is not supported by any genuine commitment and which does not lead to empirically measurable policy impacts. These struggles are genuine and they do bear empirical results. To a greater or lesser extent, ecologization, social justice, democratization, etc. are being achieved – yet what these concepts signify has radically changed.

In all likelihood, these strategies of simulation are not just a feature of a transitional phase in which the values of traditional modernity still coexist with those of late modernity, and in which the idealist notion of identity openly clashes with its late-modern successors. To the extent that late-modern individuals will always continue to perceive themselves as distinct from, and autonomous *vis-à-vis*, the economic system, and in as much as the economic system will always continue to depend on the individual which alone can infuse its products with a market value, both the late-modern individual as well as the economic system develop a permanent interest in the ongoing simulation of their difference.

Conclusion

The starting point for the analysis in this chapter was the recognition that eco-political debates have recently become much less controversial, and that in late-modern societies radical eco-political demands enjoy little public support. The way, however, in which the most advanced industrialized societies develop and secure their non-generalizable life-styles defies any claims that the environmental issue may have been pacified. For social theorists and environmental sociologists this situation represents a double challenge: it calls for sociological analysis and explanation, and it demands normative evaluation and political prescriptions. This double challenge is very serious because what we are witnessing is not only the uncompromising insistence on economic patterns and lifestyles which are known to overstretch natural resources, destroy environmental integrity, and jeopardize social peace. But beyond this the neo-realist reorganization of national politics and international relations seems to suggest that whatever is being said about the new significance of social justice, democratic renewal, public accountability, or the emerging global civil society amounts to little more than ‘a drug to stupefy the intellect and an antidote to despair’ (Gray 1997: xi).

In this chapter normative judgement and political prescription have not been my business – although my normative stance will undoubtedly have become clear. Instead, two theories have been sketched which attempt to conceptualize the ongoing changes in contemporary eco-political discourses. It is important to emphasize once again that the theories of *post-ecologism* and *simulative politics* imply not the slightest attempt to deny the reality of ecological collapse and human

suffering. In no way do they support any suggestions that the loss of biodiversity, the increase of social inequality, or the change of the global climate are pure simulations or irrelevant imaginations of sick minds. The theory of post-ecologism does not provide any justification for the *status quo*. Even less must it be understood as an attempt to say that late-modern society is on the right track and should perhaps even accelerate the pace of its progress.

Neither the theory of post-ecologism nor that of simulative politics suggest that there is no scope for changing and improving late-modern society. The point is not to suggest that the efforts and achievements of political activists are pointless, unreal, or not worth pursuing. *Of course* there is a space for sketching scenarios of a better society. And of course there also is a space for formulating and debating (eco-)political strategies and imperatives. Political actors from local eco-warriors right up to the UN clearly *do* make a difference, and they clearly *are* the origin of any eco-political progress we might identify. But for the purposes of this chapter I have tried to draw a clear line between academic analysis and political campaigning. For political activists attempting to abandon a normative stance and to simply take up an observing and explanatory perspective is, indeed, not an option. But with regard to the questions to be answered in this chapter, their strict separation is imperative.

Note

- 1 Billboard in Hinesville, GA, photograph reproduced in *Der Spiegel* (2003/4: 140).

4 The end of environmentalism (as we know it)

Yoram Levy

Introduction

Central, and probably most significant, to environmentalist political thought is its systematic account of the ethical relations between human beings and their natural environment, and the implications of those relations for the basic political arrangements of society. Environmentalism is built on a (metaphysical) dualistic view of a human society facing an independent non-human world, the good or interests of which human society ought to respect and promote (see Eckersley 1992). As such, environmentalist political thought is not only concerned with the capability of existing political arrangements to successfully address the environmental challenge; it also suggests a different conception of the political ‘ends’ of environmentalism.

As Barry argues:

The resolution of environmental problems from a green point of view involve normative as well as practical considerations [...] these problems are not just about the social-environmental means which sustain human welfare, but also about what human welfare means, and whether considerations of human welfare alone ought to regulate social-environmental relations.

(J. Barry 1999a: 109)

One of the most significant developments in normative green political thought of the last decade or so is the rise of green democracy, which has now come to dominate the field (see Humphrey’s chapter). There is, undoubtedly, more than one explanation for the rise of green democracy, but from the perspective of traditional ecocentric political thought it should be understood as a reaction to its dogmatic and authoritarian roots. However, this revolt against the traditional authoritarian and dogmatic aspects of traditional green political thought is not a revolt against the metaphysics of a human society facing an independent non-human world, the interests of which it ought to accommodate, but against the way in which this accommodation should be shaped and brought about. In other words, the theory of green democracy sticks to the traditional view that the task of environmentalism is to adapt human society to the requirements of an independent non-human world, but it rejects the dogmatic, authoritarian interpretations of that task.

Saward, for example, argues that:

[...] abandoning foundationalist myths of intrinsic merit, Greens abandon the implicit arrogance that has made democracy such a tenuous part of green political theory. This does not mean anyone has to stop believing in the need for a radically changed society. It does suggest that the grounds on which someone might seek to bring such a society about will not include the claim to have access to some immutable laws of nature, or of human nature.

(Saward 1993: 77)

And as Barry claims: 'While green politics is ultimately presaged on a belief that there can be a rational harmony between human and non-human interests, it is not supposed that there is only one equilibrium pattern [...]' (J. Barry 1999a: 219). According to Barry, sticking to the notion of a sole 'true' equilibrium pattern 'is both dangerous and potentially undemocratic since it can function as a way to close debate and discussion' (ibid.). So environmentalism, as we know it, tries to 'soften' the dogmatic and authoritarian elements of ecocentric political thought, but at the same time it maintains the metaphysics of the human/non-human dualism.

In the first part of this chapter I argue for a humanist conception of the 'end' of environmentalism (as opposed to teleological and historicist conceptions). I argue that the metaphysical human/non-human dualism is unintelligible. Instead, I claim, the object of environmentalism should be the conflict between different human conceptions of the good and green society, and not the traditional task of adapting human society to the requirements of an independent non-human world. This I refer to as the 'curse' of humanism. In the second part I argue that, by holding to that metaphysical dualism (as opposed to the common sense distinction), the argument for green democracy boils down to sheer relativism, thus failing to provide us with a humanist and realist (as opposed to utopian) conception of human–nature relations. Finally, I suggest that if our aim is the good and green society, it would be better to argue for that directly, rather than to hope that it will come to us as a by-product of democracy.

A common argument against the whole idea of normative green political theory says that the non-human world can only be valuable as a means to certain human ends; it can never be valuable in its own right let alone be morally considerable. This argument rejects the environmentalists' value theory and consequently also rejects the idea of the environmental foundation on which green normative political theory rests.¹ Here I want to emphasize that my argument against environmentalism as we know it is *not* based on the rejection of the idea of the intrinsic value.

The curse of humanism

As I have already mentioned, what distinguishes environmentalist political thought is its account of the moral aspects of human–nature interactions and their implications for the basic political arrangements of society. Normative green

political thought basically aims to specify the values and practical environmental imperatives by appeal to which society should decide between alternative courses of action. However, when looking around, one is inevitably struck by the plurality of conceptions of human–nature relations, many of which appeal to different and frequently incompatible values and practical imperatives.

Wissenburg, for instance, discusses twenty-four dimensions on which green theories can take positions, which ‘leaves us with a staggering 39,731,628,000 possible theories to choose from, each of them being green in the sense that they are remotely related to a political interest in the environment’ (Wissenburg 1998: 63). Dobson articulates three conceptions of environmental sustainability, namely critical natural capital, irreversibility and natural value (Dobson 1998). Des Jardins distinguishes between atomistic and holistic and between deontological and consequentialist conceptions of human–nature relations (Des Jardins 2001). Horstkötter draws our attention to the communal face of environmental pluralism (see her contribution to this volume). At the level of practical environmental imperatives we find, among others, the precautionary principle, the minimum irreversible harm principle (see the contributions by Hanson and Wallack), and the savings principle (Wissenburg 1999b: 173–98).

In this situation, where people hold different and frequently opposing views about what is valuable and true, certain questions arise: how should they behave as a collective towards the environment? By which values and practical imperatives should they live? Despite differences about the way in which we should go about dealing with the challenge of moral pluralism, green democracy theories usually assume that conflicts and disagreements regarding the shape of the environmental conduct of society should be resolved through non-coercive argument and deliberation.

This fundamental demand, grounded in the reality of moral pluralism, is, I believe, the trademark of contemporary green political thought. Saward, for example, argues that epistemological uncertainty (both in ethics and science) should lead ‘Greens to abandon imperatives and accept that persuasion from a flexible position [...] can be their only legitimate strategy’ (Saward 1993: 77). It should lead them to realize that political argument cannot ‘include the claim to have access to some immutable laws of nature, or human nature. Therein lies respect for the nonbeliever [...]’ (ibid.), or as Barry so clearly puts it: ‘It is the normative indeterminacy together with epistemological uncertainty associated with social–environmental interaction that calls for democratic political deliberation’ (J. Barry 1999a: 219).

Generally speaking, then, the shift of contemporary green thought away from ecocentrism amounts to embracing the idea that the environmental values and practical imperatives, by appeal to which a society decides between alternative courses of action, should be *agreed* upon by those who are required to live by them.

As Barry puts it:

One of the central objectives of rethinking green politics is to see that it is not geared towards the discovery of some scientific or metaphysical truth regarding

social-environmental relations, but rather is concerned with the creation of agreement in respect to those relations.

(J. Barry 1999a: 205)

It is important to notice, however, that I do not claim or even insinuate that there is any necessary relation between moral pluralism and the demand for non-coercive agreement. It is simply the basic working assumption of green democracy theories. A gap necessarily opens between my substantive 'green values' and myself when reaching or creating an agreement with respect to human–nature relations, thus raising the question: what should I demand, or refrain from demanding, given the fact that other persons have their own conceptions of how society should order human–nature relations? In other words, given the condition of moral pluralism and the agreement demand, we are forced to come out of our 'internal citadel' and we are asked to consider and defend our conceptions against other conceptions. In what follows I shall show that against the background of this demand for justification the 'curse of humanism' becomes visible and conceptually compelling. But let me start by clarifying some basic ideas.

By conceptions of human–nature relations I mean the normative frameworks by which environmental ethical concepts are applied to define the shape of the political arrangements of society. A conception of human–nature relations consists of two basic, complementary elements: (i) environmental ethical concepts such as animal rights, natural authenticity, ecological stability or any other environmental cause; (ii) rules and principles of application. A concept such as animal rights might involve, for example, the demand that people should not cause unnecessary suffering to rabbits. This demand as such has nothing to do with normative political thought. It becomes relevant to normative political thought only when it is introduced as a reason for shaping a certain political order, e.g. when the suffering of rabbits is regarded as a relevant consideration while deciding how to distribute certain resources. By taking rabbits into consideration, however, we apply certain rules and principles that define, for example, which resemblances and differences between humans and rabbits are relevant for the distribution of these resources, and that define the proper balance between conflicting claims. Those rules and principles of application define the position of rabbits relative to other elements of society, such as humans and other non-human entities. These elements of society and their positions relative to each other constitute what I shall refer to as the shape of society.

With this idea of human–nature relations at the back of our minds, we see that the relative position of some non-human entity, ζ , in the political order is always internal to a certain human point of view. What does this mean? First of all, as far as political justification is concerned, non-humans, although they might be proper objects of moral concern, do not have opinions concerning their own or anybody else's position in the political order. Humans therefore always define the position of ζ in the political order. Second, the fact that non-humans are proper objects of moral concern does not imply any self-evident political order. The category of environmental ethical concepts and the category of rules and principles of

application, which define the shape of the political order, are ontologically independent. Therefore the way humans and non-humans relate to each other through the political institutions of society is determined by (human) interpretation, rather than by any necessity.²

Let me take the concept of environmental justice as an example. When applied to political institutions it is usually thought of in terms of non-arbitrary or fair distribution of environmental bad and good.³ However, because human and non-human entities resemble each other in some respects and differ in others, terms like non-arbitrariness and fair distribution remain empty shells until we know *which* resemblances and which differences are relevant and *which* balance between different entities is proper. It is important to realize that empty forms like environmental justice can be filled, so to speak, in distinctive ways, which ultimately result in distinct political conceptions of environmental justice. Atomistic and holistic environmental theories would, for instance, employ different criteria of non-arbitrariness. The first would focus on certain properties of individual organisms like the capacity to feel pain, self-consciousness or rationality. The second would emphasize larger units like ecosystems, speaking in terms of stability, integrity, complexity, etc. Another example is the difference between consequentialist and deontological environmentalist conceptions. The former would emphasize the greatest good for the greatest number of morally considerable entities; the latter would employ the language of individual interests and rights. These different interpretations are all possible and applicable in the real world, each embodying certain values, beliefs and convictions that reflect a certain human point of view.

Finally, let us recall that environmentalism stresses that a certain society is 'good' if it adheres to one set of environmental practical imperatives instead of another, representing reasons that are unique to human–nature relations. Obviously, if we do not choose between such different sets in the light of reasons concerning human–nature relations, our decision will be arbitrary in that respect and therefore meaningless from the traditional 'green' point of view. Traditional environmentalism demands, then, that when deciding between alternative sets of practical imperatives, we should consider them relative to a certain environmentalist standard – an overarching environmental good – which is prior to, or independent of those alternatives. We should realize, however, that such an independent, or absolute, environmentalist moral standard is exactly what we cannot have. 'We are fated to occupy in any case, the position of beings who cannot have a view of the world that does not reflect our interests and values [...]' (H. Putnam 1990: 178). Therefore, the choice between alternatives would be arbitrary from the 'green' point of view.

Taking environmental justice again as an example, let me assume that we all know that justice means fair distribution of environmental good and bad. However, we cannot decide between different conceptions of environmental justice in the light of the idea of 'fair distribution', as if that idea conveys any self-evident, practical implications that are prior to, or independent of, anybody's interpretation of what 'fair distribution' should entail. When we need to decide between competing conceptions of justice, we cannot distance ourselves from our own point of view, so to speak, and have an independent idea of fair distribution, even if we all agree

that environmental good and bad should be distributed fairly. We cannot stand outside all points of view and compare what each point of view says through a conceptually independent entity called fairness. The concept of 'fair distribution' does not, by itself, provide us with any independent standard relative to which competing conceptions can be compared and ranked. At best we see our own deliberative path, by which we have arrived from the general concept of fair distribution to a certain conception thereof, allowing only for the conclusion that what we believe is what we believe.

So although our own individual conceptions of human–nature relations may all directly concern the 'good' of certain non-human entities, when justifying our conceptions to one another, we actually weigh different human perspectives in relation to each other. Thus the substance of normative political justification is not the 'good' of any non-human entities, but rather the way the good of non-human entities should be reflected in our common environmental conduct, which is necessarily intrinsic to a human point of view. Since, necessarily, there is a human face to political conceptions of human–nature relations, the fundamental normative problem that green political thought faces lies at the level of inter-human relations and *not* at the level of human–nature relations. Therefore the shape of human–nature relations should be defined within a conception of inter-human relations. This is what I refer to as the 'curse' of humanism.

Green democracy?

In the introduction I argued that contemporary environmentalism aims to undo normative green political thought from its dogmatic, authoritarian elements and at the same time maintain the ecocentric idea that human society should be shaped so as to accommodate the interests of the non-human world. The 'curse' of humanism implies that the second part of this aspiration is unintelligible: there is no humanity facing a conceptually independent non-human world, the good of which it ought to accommodate; there are only human conceptions of human nature relations. However, claiming that the justification for the political order cannot be found in human–nature relations is not the same as claiming that human–nature relations do not matter at all. What counts in political justification is the human point of view, and the fundamental moral problem of normative political thought is the conflict between different human points of view. A core problem of green political thought, then, is showing how a human-centred conception of the good society can be environmentally sane. In this section I shall ask whether theories of green democracy can live up to this task.

The relation between green political thought and democracy has always been uneasy. Broadly speaking, democracy is a political system in which, whenever alternative courses of action are perceived to exist, the alternative selected and enforced is the one *actually agreed upon* by the members of society, barring of course certain limitations necessary for the persistence of democratic rule itself.⁴ As Goodin puts it, 'to advocate democracy is to advocate procedures, to advocate environmentalism is to advocate substantive outcomes' (Goodin 1992: 168). In other words,

on pain of inconsistency, greens, who advocate ecological stability and integrity, natural authenticity, animal rights, or any other environmental cause, can never make an ultimate commitment to democracy itself. That is, they cannot be committed to the idea that the outcomes of the political process can be good if they are actually agreed upon, *regardless* of their content. Strictly speaking, the moral value of democracy cannot underpin a genuine green conception of the good society.

In order to escape this paradox, green political thought has generally tried to argue that there is some relation between democracy and substantial green outcomes. Frequently, justifications of green democracy are instrumental. That is, one way or another democracy is viewed as the best means for realizing certain green ends.⁵ This instrumental attachment to democracy is, however, problematic since it necessarily involves the ecocentric idea that there is some independent or absolute conception of human–nature relations, and that all democracy is about is realizing those proper relations. This, I argued, is an unintelligible idea. However, I must immediately admit that it would be too easy a conclusion to ‘accuse’ all contemporary green theories of democracy of being merely instrumentally attached to democracy. The matter is slightly more complicated.

Green democracy is frequently justified against the background of ethical indeterminacy and scientific uncertainty. Hayward, for example, argues that ‘Given this range of uncertainties [...] there is a strong case for enhancing the democratic capacity of state institutions [...]’ (Hayward 1998: 163). Barry says: ‘general uncertainty and disagreement about causes, extent and possible remedies for social-environmental problems underwrites the necessity for democratic, open-ended decision making procedures’ (J. Barry 1999a: 203).

For Saward, embracing uncertainty does not

[...] mean anyone has to stop believing in the need for a radically changed society. It does suggest that the grounds on which someone might seek to bring about such a society will not include the claim to have access to some immutable laws of nature, or of human nature. Therein lies respect for the non-believer, and a reconciliation between green principles and democracy. (Saward 1993: 77)

What Saward actually says, then, is that in order to establish a non-instrumental attachment to democracy we need to show that people can hold and pursue green values and at the same time rationally believe that this is not a sufficient ground for imposing their values on the non-believers, as he calls them. This problem is, I believe, at the basis of all green democracy theories, and therefore it is worthwhile seeing where Saward’s argument takes us.

Saward’s solution to this problem, at least as I understand it, is that the reality of ethical indeterminacy and scientific uncertainty should lead us to accept that we do not have access to any immutable laws of nature. It is important to notice that this kind of uncertainty, or self-doubt, can only be possible if we can view the contents of our own beliefs from a distance, so to speak. In other words, self-doubt

implies a distinction between the *contents* of people's beliefs on the one hand and their *epistemological status* on the other. If the contents and the epistemological status of our beliefs were indiscriminately intertwined, and taking into account the existence of persisting ethical and scientific disagreement, it would be impossible to establish that all reasonable people should have an attitude of doubt towards their own beliefs. Without this distinction between contents and epistemological status, this kind of moderate scepticism would be either a sectarian epistemological doctrine or a contingent psychological state.

In appealing to uncertainty Saward has two related goals. First, uncertainty as self-doubt makes possible a commitment to a political strategy of non-imposition that does not involve a moral commitment to democracy. According to Saward, realizing we do not have access to some 'immutable laws of nature', we 'suspend full belief' in our claims if we are reasonable, and stand open to 'persuasion from a flexible position' (Saward 1993: 77). At the same time, however, self-doubt does not mean anyone has to stop believing in the need for a radically changed society. Uncertainty, he argues, means we should be open to 'constant self-interrogation' on what we take to be true (*ibid.*). But this is not the same as saying that we need to suspend judgement about the truth of our beliefs, since that demands positive reasons, which is exactly what uncertainty does not provide. Uncertainty, then, is *not* the same as scepticism. And this is an important point for Saward, because if he admits to scepticism, if everything is just a matter of personal faith, his argument loses its point.

At first sight Saward's argument seems to succeed in being both green and democratic or non-authoritarian. But the argument has serious flaws. First, we should notice that, according to Saward, 'greens' should not impose their convictions and beliefs on the non-believers, because none of them can claim that he or she has access to some *immutable* laws of nature. Arguing against the notion of 'immutable laws of nature', Saward rejects a certain metaphysical image of objectivity, namely the image of absolute truth. Saying, however, that we do not have access to any such absolute truth, is *not* the same as saying that all conceptions of human-nature relations and possible courses of action are equally (un)acceptable or (un)reasonable. In other words, the rejection of the notion of absolute truth does not eliminate rational political argument.

As Putnam argues:

We are fated to occupy in any case, the position of beings who cannot have a view of the world that does not reflect our interests and values, but who are, for all that, committed to regarding some views of the world – and, for that matter, some interests and values – as better than others. This may mean giving up a certain metaphysical picture of objectivity, but it does not mean giving up the idea that there are what Dewey called 'objective resolutions of problematical situations' – objective resolutions to problems which are *situated* in a place, at a time, as opposed to an 'absolute' answer to 'perspective independent' questions. And that is objectivity enough.

(H. Putnam 1990: 178)

This idea of ‘objectivity without absolute truth’ is commonly used in game theory, rational choice theory and economics (see, for example, Luce and Raiffa 1957). But it is also applied within moral and political philosophy. One well-known example of ‘objectivity without absolute truth’ is the idea of reflective equilibrium (see, among others, Elgin (1999); DeGrazia (1996: 11–35); de-Shalit (2000: 21–36); Daniels (1996)). Another example is Putnam and Misak’s argument to the effect that we should stop equating objectivity with description and start seeing it as a matter of rational controllability by the standards appropriate to particular situations (H. Putnam 2002: 33; Misak 2000: 48–101).

Now, if the notion of objectivity in normative political argument is not nonsensical, the basic problem of marrying democracy and green thought – the tension between what people *actually* want or believe they should do, and what is *objectively* most reasonable for them to do – will inevitably come up again. In other words, if there are ‘objective resolutions of problematical situations’, uncertainty collapses either into full-blown scepticism or into sheer irrationality. The argument for democracy must get stuck between (sceptic or irrational) ‘eternal suspension of judgement’ and ‘rationalist dogmatism and authoritarianism’.

In breaking this conceptual deadlock, the argument for democracy is driven from the realist discourse of truth to a pragmatic discourse of politics, where politics is a substitute for certainty or truth (Saward 1993: 77). But this pragmatism is a self-defeating view according to which, for example, Wissenburg’s Global Manhattan or Bush’s ideal of (un)sustainable development are perfectly acceptable. Once we step into the swamp of ‘politics as a substitute for truth’ there is simply no assurance whatsoever that environmental sanity or anything else of value will emerge out of it. Moreover ‘persuasion from a flexible position’, which is the essence of the conception of politics as a substitute for truth, is a hollow phrase that avoids the real questions of normative politics: what should we persuade people of? how should we do that? can persuasion fail? and what should we do if and when it fails? And whilst avoiding these questions and leaving the answers to ‘politics’ rather than to rational argument, the conception of politics as a substitute for certainty is above all a ‘denial of the possibility of *thinking* (as opposed to making noises in counterpoint or in chorus)’ (H. Putnam 1983: 235).

An important cause of this collapse into relativism is the incorrect use of the concept of tolerance. There is a vital difference between *specifying* the shape of a political conception of human–nature relations and *applying* that conception to the world. The question of application always comes after the theoretical question of *specifying* the conception of human–nature relations. This ‘space’ between theory and practice is where pragmatic political solutions can, and sometimes should be found. This is where tolerance is relevant. But to justify such pragmatic solutions we do not need uncertainty; our common sense is more than equipped to do the job. So this far we can speak of ‘the Stalins of greenery’, not because traditional greens refuse to suspend full belief in their ‘truth’, but because their ‘truth’ is dogmatic and oppressive. In other words, the root of dogmatism and authoritarianism is not the *having* of a certain view of society, but the *contents* and *structure* of such a view. The route to a tolerant and open society is therefore not via the

eternal suspension of all *belief*, but via the continuous search for better beliefs, beliefs that are more in line with reason.

The idea of politics as a substitute for truth is frequently justified in reaction to the fact that rational argument frequently fails to deliver objective resolutions (for some relevant discussions of this issue see Chapter 11 by Smith and Chapter 8 by Bäckstrand). But the inference from the failure of rational argument to politics – or to actual agreement – is very strange to say the least: if there is no objective resolution to a certain problem, then there is no objective solution. Therefore the appeal to politics in such cases is as arbitrary as any other solution. This conceptual ‘quantum leap’ from rational deadlock to politics is supported by the belief that institutions and virtues – such as public deliberation, participation, citizenship – would transform people’s attitudes in the ‘right’ direction towards ecologically rational behaviour (see Chapter 6 by Mills and Fraser).

Fundamental to this view is the assumption that there is a ‘correct’ pattern of human–nature relations, independent of any human perspective. Otherwise this idea of transforming people’s attitudes in the ‘*right*’ direction would not make sense. But the idea of such an independent conception of human–nature relations is unintelligible. Therefore, the idea of transforming people’s attitudes in the ‘right’ direction doesn’t make sense either, unless the ‘right direction’ is understood as a part of a human conception. But if the ‘right direction’ is a matter of a specific human conception of human–nature relations, and if we cannot exclude the possibility of more than one such conception – which in reality we cannot – then we are back at the beginning. We cannot avoid arguing about which ‘direction’ makes more sense, and ill-founded views will have to be rejected.

There are many different reasons that determine our respect for what people *actually* believe and want. But such reasons can never imply a principled commitment to actual agreement. Take, for example, the appeal to personal autonomy. As the communitarian argument shows, ‘respect for what people actually believe and want’ could very well be based on reasons other than personal autonomy. This may also give rise to conflicting practical imperatives. Also, even if the value of personal autonomy were universally embraced, there may still be different interpretations of what it means in terms of ‘respect for what people actually want and believe’. The plurality of ‘liberalisms’ is a good example of this kind of disagreement.

When the reasons that determine our respect for what people *actually* want, conflict with each other, they all tend to apply beyond the context in which they are accepted as valid reasons. On pain of self-defeating relativism, the reasons that determine our respect for what people *actually* believe and want are incompatible with a principled commitment to actual agreement. In other words, if we have reasons that determine our respect for what people actually believe and want, then we shall probably have to override at least some of the reasons some people *actually* have.

The end of environmentalism (as we know it)

I have argued above that both ecocentrism and the theory of green democracy are trapped in one and the same impossible view of a human society facing a conceptually independent non-human world. While the first is trapped in metaphysical fantasies, the other is trapped in an equally fantastic idea of abolishing metaphysics altogether. However, I believe that environmentalism has made, and still can make, an important contribution to normative political thought. Focusing on the sphere of human–nature relations it exposes a major blind spot in traditional human-centred political thought. It points out the problem that part of our reality still lies beyond the reach of traditional political thought. In doing so it exposes an important element of arbitrariness in contemporary liberal democratic political culture.

Yet if it wants to repair this element of arbitrariness, environmentalism should re-embrace truth and do away with its unreasonable commitment to tolerance. As for instance Taylor and Putnam have argued: as *thinkers* we are committed to there being *some* kind of substantial truth (C. Taylor 1989: 3–52; H. Putnam 1983: 244–7). So while hiding behind ‘uncertainty’ and tolerance, environmental political thought is inevitably engaged in ‘truth-talk’. We should recognize that tolerance is itself a moral concept – equally metaphysical as all other values – and that the true believer in tolerance can be just as dogmatic and oppressive as a true believer in God. The relevant question for environmentalism is whether the interpretation of tolerance as ‘politics as a substitute for certainty’ provides us with an acceptable conception of truth. It does not. Politics as a substitute for certainty implies an incoherent and self-defeating relativism, which threatens to turn environmentalism into an intellectual desert.

We have seen that the idea of objective truth in ethics is not imaginary or hopeless. Where normative political argument is concerned, concepts such as reflective equilibrium or warranted assertibility seem to suggest that in seeking true answers to our political problems we should minimize the gap between reason – thoughts or considerations in terms of which a certain issue make sense to us – and the *actual* range of considerations in terms of which our common conduct regarding that issue is justified. In other words, minimizing the gap between reason and the *actual* grounds of justification provides us with an objective standard of truth or rightness in practical judgement.

Environmentalists frequently acknowledge this gap between reason and the *actual* grounds of justification. Sagoff, for example, remarks that in reducing the whole environmental issue to a mere question of a cost–benefit analysis, the individual ‘must reveal himself or herself as the “rational person” of economic theory simply because economical theory demands it. As one commentator rightly points out, no such social role exists, unless it is the role of a social moron’ (Sagoff 1988: 55). Or as O’Neill puts it: ‘to treat price as a neutral measuring device and acts of buying and selling like an exercise in the use of a tape measure is to fail to appreciate that acts of exchange are social acts with social meanings’ (O’Neill 1993: 119). But environmentalists seldom proceed and develop this insight and

explore its implications for our common environmental conduct, or for the shape of society in general.

First, as de-Shalit puts it:

environmental policies should be made by reference to people's values, as expressed in political debates about the good, rather than by reference to their preferences, as expressed in market behavior.

(de-Shalit 2000: 90)

Instead of dealing with environmental issues in the full range of the relevant considerations, a distinction is often made between different kinds of considerations, some of which are then declared inappropriate or irrelevant. And by doing so conceptions of environmentalism are chronically uneasy with reality, i.e. the full range of considerations in terms of which our environmental problems make sense. Second, even when the above kind of utopianism is avoided, the exposed gaps between reason and the *actual* grounds of justification are ultimately 'solved' by an appeal to democracy, which – in Sagoff's own words – is itself a category mistake. But worst of all, by invoking democracy to 'bridge' such gaps rational political argument is terminated long before it even started.

These attitudes towards the scope and nature of normative political argument keep environmentalism dangling between unsatisfying intellectual conformism and rationally unappealing utopianism. Environmental political thought should free itself from the suffocating embrace of tolerance and re-engage in uncompromising truth-talk. Strengthened by a reasonable commitment to seek the right answers to our environmental problems, environmentalists should set out to criticize contemporary political culture as well as to reconsider their own positions and commitments with regard to the shape of society in general. This should be the end of environmentalism, and the end of environmentalism as we know it.

Notes

- 1 A good example of this type of argument is found in Wissenburg (1998: 91–106).
- 2 An interesting discussion of that matter can be found in Stone (1987).
- 3 Here I use the term environmental justice in the sense of fair distribution of environmental goods and bads between humans and non-humans, and not in the sense of justice between humans. For this use of the term see for example Dobson (1998: 12–32).
- 4 Note that this definition of democracy allows for different kinds of democratic procedures and agreements; it involves no commitment whatsoever to the majority rule, Dahl-like proceduralism, etc.
- 5 For more on the relation between green thought and democracy see, for example Dryzek (2000: 140–61); Hayward (1998: 151–66); de-Shalit (2000: 130–219); J. Barry (1999a: 193–247); O'Neill (1993: 123–44); Goodin (1992: 113–68).

5 Little green lies

On the redundancy of 'environment'

Marcel Wissenburg

Introduction

Newton's model of the solar system required God's active interference to prevent the planets from drifting off. A popular story has it that when Laplace presented a new model to explain the persistence of the planets' orbits to the Corsican tyrant Bonaparte, the latter asked him where in this model God was to be found. Laplace's immortal reply was: 'Sire, I have no need of that hypothesis'. In this chapter, I hope to find out if we need the environment hypothesis.

First, let me clarify my terms. I shall use the word 'environment' to denote the shared object of analysis, concern and sometimes justification of all green movements and thinkers: environmentalists, ecologists, animal liberators, and so on. I distinguish between the concept of environment and conceptions of it: a 'concept' refers to an in some sense real-existing entity; in contrast, 'conceptions' refer to 'deeper' or (in Rawlsian terms) 'thicker' interpretations of that entity (cf. Rawls 1971). Society (for instance) is a concept; ideas like *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* refer to interpretations, conceptions. By calling environment a concept, I emphasize a claim that I shall try to refute here, the claim that it has an *epistemologically* legitimate existence in the world (more precisely, in the political universe) – that is to say, it would be an idea that cannot be reduced to other concepts.

I shall use 'environmentalists' and 'environmentalism' both as *general* terms for all (members of) environmental movements and organizations, and for all 'green' political theories; and where appropriate to refer to a *specific* conception of environment. As the common object for *environmentalists* in the strict sense, 'environment' refers to everything which surrounds humans, in particular (but not necessarily) the parts that have not (yet) been substantially transformed by humans. A human-made forest is still a forest; it is substantially transformed when it is turned into paper. This is a rough definition, not without problems, but it will do for now. Ecologists refer to their object as being 'the ecology', a system of entities, subsystems and relations that must be understood as a whole. Humankind is inseparably part of this ecology. Again, this is a rough but functional definition. Animal liberators refer to their object, among others, as being species within or individual members of the set of non-human 'animals', who are either part of 'nature' or live as domesticated creatures. This is an even more questionable definition, but again, it is sufficient for now.

The concept ‘environment’ is a *construction*: its primary location is in our consciousness. We use it to order the world in ways similar to the distinctions we make between left and right or near and far. It is a *social* construction: we use and construct it in social intercourse and practices. Finally, it is a *political* construction: it plays a key role in attributing rights (power, values, goods) to individuals in societies. What it is not is a *scientific* concept: empirical political scientists seldom use it in any other way than to describe how their objects of research (e.g. environmental movements), not the researchers themselves, perceive the world. In so far as political theorists do accept environment as a legitimate concept, my claim thus implies that empirical political scientists are right in keeping an intellectual distance from environment, and that political theorists are wrong when going native.

The environment then is a political concept – just like the state, gender, nobility and politics itself. The topic that I want to discuss in this chapter, whether we need the environment, must be seen against this background. As indicated in the Introduction to this book and in several other chapters, there is a lot of ‘environmental’ policy, politics and politicking going on, apparently ‘pacifying’ developments that make it worthwhile to ask if, and in what way, environmentalism has reached its end(s). In the language of the Introduction, we can interpret the end of environmentalism in the historicist, teleological or humanist senses of ‘end’, but all three would imply that a state of affairs has been reached with regard to *conceptions* of the environment that eliminates the need for politics aimed at only those *conceptions* that exist (or survived until) *now*. If environmentalism has reached its end, or ends, or goals, or aims, or purposes in any of these senses, it has not necessarily done service to the environment as a *concept* – just as the victory of the free market is not necessarily a victory for liberalism. I do not in any way wish to exclude the possibility that environmentalism has (or has not) reached its end or is at an end in historicist, teleological or humanist terms, but we cannot talk about ‘the’ end of environmentalism if there is a *real* sense in which environment exists, that is, as an epistemologically legitimate concept, independent of human-made preferences (as in the humanist interpretation of end), ends (teleology) or states of mind (historicism), and if environment in that *real* sense still has a *raison d’être*. My aim in this chapter therefore is to question the *realist* interpretation of ‘the end of environmentalism’, the idea that ‘environment’ prescribes something intelligible: a substantive ideal of human–nature relations that we need to satisfy (politically as much as personally).

I will investigate three sets of reasons for the political belief in the existence of environment, each resulting in its own assessment of the legitimacy of (the *raison d’être* or need for) environment, environmentalism and environmental politics. The first set of reasons is empirical: the existence of biological, economic and social problems pertaining to the environment, and the persistence of environmentally inspired social actors and of the normative theories (conceptions) of the environment that inspire them. I will argue that, on the one hand, empirical developments point to *shifts* in environmental politics and to reasons to believe that there is still a future for environmental politics; but that, on the other hand, this is in a sense irrelevant to the question of the *legitimacy* of the existence of environmental politics. All it does is beg the question of the reality of environment *as such*.

This brings me to my second and third sets of reasons for belief in the environment. We must either have deeper good reasons than the mere fact that people believe in the environment to justify belief in the environment, or there must be good reasons to adhere to a false belief (or both, of course). The discussion of the first set of reasons leads me to apply Ockham's razor to the concept of environment – radically I shall argue that, from a philosophical point of view, the concept of environment is redundant.

To discuss the second set of reasons, I will apply a distinction attributed to Maimonides between taking the Torah (or any other holy book) as literal truth and taking it as a collection of metaphors to be studied for their deeper truth. This distinction allows a justification of 'doing good for wrong reasons' or believing the right thing for the wrong reasons. The ultimate historical source here is, of course, Plato: the philosopher, returning to the cave, cannot tell the prisoners the truth because they cannot fathom it. He has to tell them that their souls are made of silver or bronze, rather than that they are only fit to be soldiers or peasants. In the context of this chapter, I shall ask if (promotion of) a false belief in environment can be justified – and if so, for what reasons. Although my answer to the first question is affirmative, I argue that the implications of that answer differ for green activists and thinkers on the one hand, and academics on the other.

The political future of the environment

There is a long series of reasons to suspect that issues once raised by environmentalists have not yet been, or can never be, moved from the ethical through the political spheres of fundamental, normative controversy into the sphere of policy-making, given the structure and legitimate *modi operandi* of social and political institutions in developed liberal-democratic nations. *Mutatis mutandis*, most of these reasons also apply in the context of developing and other, non-liberal-democratic nations, as well as at a supranational level. (For further discussion, see the chapters by Barry, de Geus, and Bäckstrand in this volume.)

Some of these reasons are purely scientific: one may legitimately doubt whether specific environmental policies are successful in *technical* terms, either by their own standards or in contributing to the ultimate end of global sustainability. Even if they seem successful, it is in the nature of scientific knowledge to be provisional – 'real' success remains uncertain. Here, then, is a first reason why environmentalism can have a future: a problem is not solved by merely *trying* to solve it. Unfortunately, logic reminds us that grounds for the *persistence* of environmentalism are not enough to justify the *existence* of environmentalism as such.

A second group of empirical reasons that may lead one to expect environmentalism to still be around for some time are of a social scientific nature, that is, they deal with how humans as social beings *perceive* environmental problems. Is it really true that environmental movements have been pacified and thus lost their *raison d'être*? Is there sufficient and sufficiently valid empirical support for this thesis? There is reason to assume that the thesis cannot be true in all respects. The radicalization of the animal rights movement and the increased public appeal of post-decisional civil disobedience suggest as much.

As a matter of fact, quite the opposite is true. First of all, pacification (in so far as the phenomenon is real) does not necessarily imply that environmental movements and ideas become superfluous. In the words of the famous Dutch hermetic philosopher Johan Cruyff, ‘every disadvantage has its advantage’: pacification may in fact benefit environmentalism. Consider how in centuries past the issue of hygiene has been pacified. The battle to convince people of the dangers posed by nasty invisible little creatures called ‘bacteria’ has been won. We have stopped pooping out of windows and wiping snot on our sleeves, we get slightly sick from descriptions like these, we clean our food and wash ourselves religiously: we have become hygienic. And yet hygiene consciousness still exists, not to mention hygiene subconsciousness: most of our hygienic activities are performed without thinking.

By the same token, developments pointing to the pacification of the environmental issue should not be mistaken for signs of its solution; the term solution is out of place here. The ordinary technocratic causal interpretation of problems in terms of definition of ends, choice of means, action and results does not apply to environmentalism. Environmentalism is not about a problem that can be solved, like a wound that can be stitched, but about a condition with which (we hope) we can learn to live.

All in all, the apparent pacification of ‘the’ environmental issue signalled in the Introduction to this book does not necessarily imply that the environment has definitely moved off the political agenda, nor that environmental movements and ideas have become superfluous. In many respects, environmentalism has simply evolved from a non-recognized to a recognized valid issue, and room has been created and is being created to deal with it. By implication, there remains room for environmental movements to contribute ideas and experience and to advocate courses of action. However, two remarks are in order here.

First, the transformation of environmentalism from street politics to normal politics took place in ‘many respects’ – but not all. An important part of the environmental movement apparently still feels excluded and radicalizes (think of animal liberators, anti-globalizationists), and some of the ideas of environmentalists still seem to fall on deaf ears (think of the ‘intrinsic value of nature’).

Moreover, linked to this partial exclusion is the fact that what has been pacified is not ‘the environmental issue’ but only certain biological, economic, social and political problems to which the label ‘environment’ has been attached. To explain pacification, this label is superfluous – it belongs to one of the least threatened animal species on the planet, the red herring.

The normative future of the environment

In addition to scientific and social reasons for believing that the apparent pacification of the environmental battle is at best a ‘continuation of politics by other means’, there are other theoretical reasons, mostly of an ethical or normatively political nature, to distrust the pacification idea as such. Among these I include the excluded movements and ideas mentioned above, since the cause of their exclusion is fundamentally of a theoretical nature. Theoretical considerations

logically precede all other reasons to believe in a 'solution' to the environmental question. Without good reason to believe that environmental policies *should* meet certain goals, the scientific reasons mentioned before lose their social relevance, and the perceived pacification becomes, ultimately, either impossible or unfounded.

The normative reasons for questioning the success of our apparent pacification in and through liberal democracy can be divided into three groups. First, there is reason to suspect that liberal democratic institutions are unfit to represent the social *categories* that environmental ('green') political theorists feel ought to be represented in the political sphere. One such category is, obviously, that of animals; another future generations; yet another the non-represented foreigner (in the South or just across the border). More comprehensive versions of environmentalism ask us to include plants, ecosystems or 'nature'. There is, of course, a long series of epistemological problems (Wissenburg 1998) that face a potential representative of the non-represented – it is unclear exactly *what* to represent. In addition, democratic representation, no matter how much we like to think of it in terms of being ethically desirable or even obligatory, is based on considerations of power. Representatives have little incentive to represent or to wish to represent politically inconsequential entities.

Second, there is reason to suspect that liberal democratic institutions are unfit to represent the actual *interests* they would want to see represented. This is, at least in theory, a far more fundamental problem: in theory, after all, a man can represent a woman as long as he knows and can know what interests he represents.¹

Other problems, interesting from a philosophical point of view but disturbing from the environmentalist's point of view, concerning the representation of future generations are the 'Parfit people problem' (every choice we make causes different people to exist – so how can we be said to (dis)advantage anyone? – cf. Parfit 1984, Carter 2001) and the reiteration of existing interests and conflicts: for every future environmentalist, there will be a future consumer and producer to represent – so what does representing future humans add?

A third problem is this: can liberal democracy deliver the goods? Over the years, serious doubts have been raised as to the effectiveness of the means that liberal democratic institutions can legitimately use to enforce environmental policies (their *modi operandi*): free market solutions, financial (dis)incentives, legal regulations and so on. These solution strategies are suspected of favouring a continuation of existing environmentally unsound preferences and practices (the Enlightenment version of progress, or capitalism). Here also the problem of neutrality surfaces: the set of admissible 'green' lifestyles excludes much of what liberalism allows, and vice versa, liberalism does not seem to offer a healthy environment for the flourishing of green lifestyles.²

Overarching and uniting all these normative doubts are two controversies that are not limited to the context of liberal democracy. One, a classic, is that over environment (environmentalism) versus ecology (ecologism), or direct human needs versus the broader 'interests' of nature, as the preferable object of environmental policy. The controversy relates in particular to the question whether (1) duties regarding environment and ecology overlap or whether (2) ecological duties fully

include environmental duties. The latter view does, the former does not, support the idea that a complete pacification is possible. (For more on this discussion, see J. Barry 1999a; Dobson 1998, 1999; Wissenburg 1998.)

In addition, and in all likelihood partly in response to the first waves of environmental protest, technology has caught up with the environmental agenda, creating new possibilities and (thereby) problems that were literally unthinkable thirty years ago except as science fiction. We might call this the problem of new life, or better still, artificial life – life, Jim, but not life as we knew it. Some examples of these new developments and the dilemmas they create are: cloning; genetically modified food, plants, animals, humans (are we just speeding up evolution or is it ‘against nature’?); trans-species bit swapping; and stem cell research (opening vistas of not only re-growing lost body parts but also of in-vitro steaks and kidney trees – no animals were harmed in the making...); So far, environmentalism’s answers to these issues have been disturbingly weakly supported by theory.

Finally, at least two major aspects of environmental thought hardly manage to reach the public stage. Issues relating to the ideals of the deeper, ecological version of environmentalism require a change of heart that seems too fundamental to be communicable, not to mention ill-suited to be translated into political action (i.e., policy). It involves, after all (see De Geus’ chapter on this), one or more of the following elements: a rejection of progress as a goal; a modest lifestyle; controlling the instinct for self-protection and survival expressed in ‘gathering’ goods; ‘intrinsically’ or impersonally valuing nature where we cannot shed a tear about a million Tutsis viciously slaughtered, and so forth. Where once ‘environment’ served as a practical container concept, through which environmentalists (in the strict sense) and ecologists could join forces and make political progress, we now see that ecologist demands that do not fit into the container are being left behind (for a concurrent interpretation of this development, see Blühdorn’s chapter).

For animal liberators and many related nature-minded environmentalists, the win-win situation created by joining forces behind the green banner of ‘environment’ has also ceased to exist. Issues relating to artificial life seem to be discussed in terms of bioethics, if at all, and not in those of environmental ethics or animal ethics.

The victory of liberalism did not bring about the end of history or of ideology; in themselves, age-old conflicts of globalization and religious fundamentalism continue to haunt our idyllic world. Nor did it bring the end of environmentalism; it still has a future. There is on the one hand the similarity with hygiene: environmentalism has been transformed from a political into a social or psychological phenomenon. There is on the other hand the relatively neglected part of the environmental movement – particularly animal liberators and ecologists – who gained little and show a potential for radicalization as the appeasement process progresses.

Two questions therefore arise. One is whether pacification makes or has made more radical demands obsolete: do the pacification-type of solutions offered at the moment by liberal democratic institutions answer or in some way pre-empt the radical green demands in a logically sound, consistent and sensible way – and

is the continued existence of the ideas behind ecologism and animal liberation therefore unreasonable? The other is its mirror image: was the (once) unifying concept of environment ever a legitimate object of political thought and action? Is it reasonable to conceive of ‘environment’?

Ockham Razors, Inc.

In the preceding sections, I sometimes compared environmentalism to a very old social movement, the movement for hygiene. This comparison helped us understand how on the one hand some environmental issues could be politically pacified without disappearing from politics, while on the other the function of various environmental movements changed from political (mass) mobilization to advocacy and (or: in) policy-making. The comparison also helped us understand why ‘environment’ has a future in normal politics: like hygiene, it is not a ‘problem’ that can be ‘solved’ but a ‘condition’ that can be ‘managed’. Many environmental problems can be presented as such ‘conditions’: the management of depletable natural resources, of nature for recreational purposes, of animal and plant species, of waste and pollution, and so on. Many – but not all. Seeing environment as a condition of human society leaves out the extension of our moral ‘circle of concern’ to animals and other aspects of our non-human environment, for which other environmentalist movements campaigned.

In this and the following section, it is more appropriate to draw comparisons with the women’s movement (although similar arguments can be made with reference to the workers’ movement). The environment does not ‘really’ exist; neither, as we know, do the male or female genders. Environment is a concept conceptualized by different people in different ways. Where consensus or overlap between conceptions ends, some conceptions turn out to be more politically viable than others. This raises both a strategic and an epistemological question: is it wise to voice ideas on a conception under the banner of a unifying concept, and is the concept itself sensible? It is the latter question that I shall address in this section.

Remember that the existence of ‘environment’ as a unifying concept for environmentalists (activists and theorists) is not universally accepted: empirical political scientists often distinguish between the environmental New Social Movement and the historically far older animal protection and nature (reserve) protection movements. They study such movements the way a therapist ‘listens’ to his clients: the patient’s construction of reality is recognized not as real-existing nor as unreal (judgement on that is postponed) but as real-existing to the patient. It is this intellectual distance that we need to analyse the failures and successes of ‘the’ environmental movement and of environmentalist thought.

William of Ockham formulated his famous guideline, Ockham’s razor, in terms of ‘entities’: we should not multiply entities needlessly. To understand why blood is red and why some flowers are, we do not need to invent an *entity* called redness existing independently of red things. Perhaps the same applies to environment: perhaps it is a redundant concept, and perhaps there already are alternative concepts that can replace it – I, for one, argue that there are.

Unfortunately, there is no conclusive argument to prove or disprove the redundancy of a concept – there is probably no conclusive argument in philosophy at all (although this argument is, of course, open to debate). What we can do is try to see if either hypothesis is plausible. I shall do so by looking at three standard categories of arguments in favour of a concept, categories covering the greater part of philosophical sub-disciplines (aesthetics, for instance, is not included): epistemology, ethics and ontology.

We construct a concept, in this case environment, either for a conscious or subconscious reason, or it (magically or Bergsonianly or Jamesily) presents itself to us, forces itself onto us – we perceive it more or less directly, without intellectual mediation. Which view is correct is a moot point. In the end, assent is needed – even if a concept forces itself onto us, we need to consciously re-design it and describe it in terms of a shared vocabulary, if we wish it to be intersubjectively communicable and if we wish to be intellectually honest to ourselves. So for all practical purposes, we may assume that we really *construct* environment. But why do we?

First, consider an *ontological* argument. We can construct a concept *X* or assent to its construction because *X* is ‘natural’, because it undeniably exists in the world outside of our minds. This will be difficult to maintain when applied to environment. The ecologist will not accept environment as ‘distinct’ from what it ‘environs’ (since it reeks of Cartesianism and spells the exploitation of objects by a subject, and so forth), the animal liberator and the environmentalist in the strict sense will not accept ecology: it is not subtle enough to allow distinctions between the entities for which they care more and less. If environment is ‘natural’, it is unclear what it exactly is that makes it ‘natural’ since all the parties involved have more distinct, different and to a degree incompatible conceptions that to them seem undeniably real-existing. This is not to say that existing environmental conceptions cannot be reduced to other (distinct, not encompassing) concepts – we could see ecologism, strict environmentalism and animal liberation as practical conceptualizations of ethical concepts like harmony, frugality and humaneness, for instance. The point is, however, that the concept environment adds nothing to (our understanding of) the worldview of different environmental movements and theorists.

We could also argue that there is an *ethical* reason to construct environment: *X* should exist; therefore it must be made to exist. One can imagine for instance a roughly Sidgwickian argument in favour of environment along these lines: given our existence as humans with reason and freedom of choice, thus commanded to make ethical decisions, there must be an ‘environment’ on, with or in which we act, ethically or unethically. Now it *may* be true that we cannot imagine our world without an environment in this abstract sense, but it is too abstract to imply the necessary existence of any or all of our three environmentalist conceptions.

Finally, we could try to argue that the environment must be conceived for purely *epistemological* reasons, that is, because it allows us to better understand the world than other concepts do – or at least better than the three environmental conceptions distinguished here. This would lead us to ask whether and in what sense environment is more verifiable or falsifiable than other concepts, or whether it

helps build a stronger core for a (socio-political, not necessarily scientific) theory. Unfortunately, this also demands that we operationalize the concept (i.e., formulate conceptions) and design testable hypotheses – which brings us back to square one, to the ontological incompatibility of environmental worldviews.

Excluding for a moment outright irrationality, the conclusion is simple: environment is a political not philosophical concept. There seem to be no sound reasons internal to the make-up of our intellectual universe to support its construction; instead, it is constructed, with all its vagueness and ambiguity, because it serves strategic aims. The concept helps people, possibly including ourselves, act on it *as if* it existed, just like women or workers or even the state.

From the point of view of the political theorist, this removes all but one possible argument for the use of environment: the sociological (or therapist's) argument that the concept seems to belong to the vocabulary of the 'environmentalists', and as such helps us understand their ideologies. We cannot ascribe more reliability and validity to it than in this respect. However, its strategic use by environmentalists is, from a normative point of view, disturbing. Since we know that environment is not 'really' real-existing, whoever pretends that it is and knows better appears to consciously construct an incorrect rendering of truth – that is, a lie. Can lying about the environment be justified?

Little green lies

In the previous section I made what seems to be a wild and serious accusation. An alternative interpretation of the deliberate use of the concept of environment when no such thing exists would say that the concept is a 'representation' – and whether the representation is correct or incorrect is another matter. But before we try to seek the high moral ground and try to take cover there, let us note, first of all, that the rose still smells the same, and that lying in the sense used here, as a consciously constructed but incorrect rendering of truth, is not necessarily or in all respects bad – nor can it always be avoided. Speaking the truth, the whole and nothing but, is not always wise.

This sad Machiavellian truth also applies to the concept of environment itself. Note that the man on the Arriva shuttle to Clapham has no concrete idea of environment or of any one particular conception of it – just a vague idea of the concept as such, most often an association with non-human life. One can be truthful and explain in detail that 'environment' is short for (say) an overlapping consensus meeting standards of public rationality and the burdens of reason (Rawls 1993), thereby uniting the worldviews of animal liberators, deep green ecologists, shallow green environmentalists and others. One can then go on to explain how these separate worldviews define their distinct objects of concern, by which time our man has either fallen asleep or stepped off the bus. The only practical alternative for both environmental activist and political theorist is to abbreviate, to model, to represent – to consciously construct an incorrect rendering of truth, that is: to lie.

Obviously not every lie is a good lie – neither technically nor in any other sense. Whether a lie is admissible (can be justified) depends on the type of lie, on

the reasons for using it, and on the quality of those reasons. Reasons for lying may be political – it can strategically support an effective strategy aimed at some goal, it can (as in our case) help to support strategic co-operation, or it can help create a mass movement. Lies can also serve scientific purposes: models can help us understand the basics of phenomena and contribute to the development of more subtle hypotheses. Or, finally, we lie out of irrationality: out of a fear to question our ideas, out of a faith that overrules rationality, out of a psychological incapacity to deal with uncomfortable truths (classical cases of cognitive dissociation), or due to mental illness.

Now medieval philosophy, since it had to deal with both the most abstract epistemological questions of truth versus faith, and utterly mundane questions of guilt and personal salvation, has given us a wonderful typology of lies, quite suitable to apply to the admissibility of using the concept environment. It distinguishes:

- The direct lie, as in “‘Did you betray your Lord?’ ‘No,’ said Judas.’
- Deception (misleading; most logical fallacies fall into this category), as in ‘‘Of course I want peace,’’ Hitler said.’
- Half-truths (deliberate incompleteness), as in ‘‘Have you been true to me?’’ ‘‘I never slept with another woman’’, he replied.’
- White lies, as in ‘this will cure you – it won’t hurt a bit.’

We can immediately exclude the direct lie as a form in which use of the concept environment might be admissible. Unless it is supposed to serve a greater good (in which case it would be a white lie), a straightforward lie is a deliberate attempt to further one’s own good at the expense of others, knowing full well that there is no sound justification. The direct lie is by definition inadmissible.

Whether deceptions, half-truths and white lies are inadmissible is another matter entirely. Consider deception in the case of an animal liberation group that manages to get gory pictures on TV of vivisection allegedly taking place in an animal lab, and let us assume that this particular allegation is wrong, though other distasteful types of experiment are taking place – the group just cannot prove it. Or consider half-truths, a ubiquitously present category in environmental discourse: the exact mechanisms that cause global warming, rising sea levels, desertification, the extinction of species or the degradation of the ozone layer are still unknown, yet environmental activists and thinkers continuously call for action against ‘the’ cause – which for some is overpopulation, for others PCBs, cars, our inflated energy consumption, capitalism, democracy, Descartes, Abrahamic faiths or the Enlightenment. Or consider finally a white lie: the use of ‘environment’ to unite activists’ elites and environmental mass movements, to bring environmental issues onto the political agenda, and to finally address them through policy.

All of these distorted versions of the truth (let us call them little green lies) can be admissible if they serve a greater good. From the consequentialist point of view, this is self-evident, but a Kantian deontologist will have problems with it. Kant for instance acknowledges that ‘[...] the proposition: Honesty is the best politics, implies a theory that practice unfortunately! often contradicts’, but he

immediately adds that ‘Honesty is better than all politics’ (Kant 1919: 37, my translation). Yet even he concludes that politics is inevitable in a real world of undereducated and irrational humans, and subsequently gives politics the mission of emancipating humankind, a mission that makes lying (as an instrument to ultimately end lying) difficult but not impossible.

The question therefore is: is there a greater good served by posing the existence of environment? At this point, the paths of environmentalism as practice and ideology on the one hand, and academic green political theory on the other, split.

For environmental activists and ideologues, environment definitely serves a greater good – or, as I would argue, it once served greater goods but no longer. With the pacification of the environmental question (to the degree that it has occurred), the strategic reasons to adhere to an overarching concept environment have disappeared. Persevering in its use may indeed become an obstacle for the expression of ‘deviant’ green ideas, ideas that do not directly relate to, or are at odds with, human welfare and resource management (e.g. several animal issues), or ideas that cannot be translated into a framework of environmental hygiene (e.g. ecocentrism). In addition, a new agenda of artificial life issues is evolving on which the as yet underdeveloped positions of all three parties promise to clash.

The future of environmentalism is a future of environmentalisms: the greater goods of animal liberators, ecologists and environmentalists do not coincide, despite rumours (and hopes) to the contrary (Norton 1991). This is not to say that the interests of environmentalists (in the broad sense) cannot be and will not in the future remain *compatible* (cf. Wissenburg 1998) – they just do not fully *coincide*. Nor does this imply that there can be such a thing as an honest environmentalist. Environmentalism is politics and it is as dirty as politics can be; clean hands and a clear conscience are utopian *desiderata*. The issues with which environmentalists (broad sense) deal often are and remain too complicated to grasp without either sufficient education or ample clarification; moreover, in bringing them to the attention of the greater public they have to compete for precious time with equally pressing issues like the economy, defence, security, recreation and day to day survival. Simplification (half-truths), pre-emptive action (deception) and slogans (white lies) will have to remain part of the environmentalist’s strategy given the Kantian real world of undereducated, overburdened and irrational humans. It is the use of little green lies that will make the difference between environmentalisms devoted to the consequentialist cause of saving the environment/ecology/whale and environmentalisms that also heed the deontological cause of enlightening humankind.

For academic political theory, however, the environment should serve an *epistemological* greater purpose – if it does not, then there’s something biodegrading in the kingdom of knowledge. Whatever the theorist’s motivations (context of discovery-wise) may be, green political theory suffers when, in the context of justification, green ideologies are represented as something they are not, that is, as intrinsically or necessarily related. From the consequentialist point of view, the result is inadequate and incorrect information that can lead to poor policy when used in the real world of politics. From the Kantian point of view moreover it is

professionally unethical in not contributing to the liberation of humankind – although one could perhaps give a Leninist twist to this again by distinguishing between the objective and subjective role an academic plays in the history of the world.

Conclusion

In the preceding sections I argued that ‘the’ environmental issue has indeed been pacified: in historicist terms, environmentalism has ended. Yet not all environmental issues have been solved, addressed or even admitted to the political agenda – from the points of view of teleology and humanism, the end is still far away. In political terms, the concept environment may not only have become redundant but may in fact obstruct the politicization of both new and more radical green issues. In this sense, there is a future not for environmentalism but for environmentalisms.

In political theoretical terms, the concept was and remains redundant except perhaps (using the simile of the therapist) that belief in it may be one of the patient’s symptoms. We cannot take the patient at his word here – we must reject a realist interpretation of environment, of environmentalism and of its ‘end’. I have argued, in fact, for a return to clear distinctions like the one Dobson made between ecologism and environmentalism. When we talk about the future of environmentalism we should not focus too much on existing organizations, on existing (1970s) ‘new’ social movements, or on existing or past issues (Dobson 2000b). Doing so would mean closing our eyes both to the increasing dissolution of ‘the’ environmental movement and the emergence of new issues, and to the fact that there is life after politics: post-decisional politics (i.e., in the field of environmental hygiene) are not the exclusive hunting grounds of public administration, sociology and social psychology. Worse, it would imply ignoring one of the classical problems of the human sciences: the object adapts to research and to the results of research – a process in which the observer bears responsibility. Political theory does not just create or reflect real-existing conceptions; it also makes them and thereby changes the world.

Notes

- 1 The distinction between represented categories and represented interests is derived from Pitkin (1967).
- 2 Yet liberalism *can* recognize deep green ideas as reasonable implications of liberalism itself – *pace* Dobson (2001) but cf. e.g. J. Barry (1999a); Beekman (2001); de-Shalit (2000); Hailwood (1999); Vincent (1998); Wissenburg (1998), and Yoram Levy’s chapter (Chapter 4) in this volume.

Part II

**Democracy and
environmentalism**

6 The end of deep ecology? – Not quite

Mike Mills and Fraser King

Introduction

While the Introduction to this book suggested that one of the reasons why the question of ‘endism’ arises at all is the apparent pacification of the green movement more generally, there is another sense in which pacification may be a problem. If it is the case, as we argue below, that much recent work of green political theory looks to accommodate green ideas within a more conventional literature, then there is the possibility not only of political pacification but, perhaps more importantly, theoretical pacification as well. Here, the very terms of debate become absorbed within a paradigm not designed to accommodate them.

We argue, then, that the ‘endism’ referred to in this chapter is not an ‘end’ in terms of a solution (for it would be rash to make such a claim about any political theory), but rather ‘end’ in this context may mean an attempt to shift back towards a conception of human–nature relations which it is felt (for reasons made clear below) is more defensible. In this sense, it is the *principles* of green political theory which are the concern of this chapter rather than the *concepts* or *policy norms* (as outlined, again, in the Introduction to the book).

So, we have suggested that there is a shift within the current literature and this shift, amongst other things, is concerned to distance itself from many of the principles of deep ecology and towards an accommodation within more conventional political theory. As a consequence, the literature presents itself with two tasks – one is to provide an adequate critique of deep ecology and the other to provide a plausible alternative. Within this chapter we shall be concerned, in particular, to consider the former for it is here that we may assess whether anything has, indeed, ‘ended’.

However, it is clear that we must also justify our contention that there is, indeed, a common thread which binds works together. We shall do this by looking at three recent works on green political theory – John Barry’s *Rethinking Green Politics* (1999a), Tim Hayward’s *Political Theory and Ecological Values* (1998) and Avner de-Shalit’s *The Environment: Between Theory and Practice* (2000). These titles are each engaged on a project of reconstructing green political theory along lines which owe much to deliberative or discursive forms of democracy but which see the interests of humans and non-humans as having far more in common than the ‘conventional’ (non-green)

literature suggests. So, there is sufficient overlap between these works for us to take them as representing a similar critique of deep ecology despite the differences in the models. In this sense, this chapter will seek to argue both for the similarities between these current works, and the differences between them and deep ecology. It is not, however, a concern of ours to present a model of deep ecology itself – there is not space for this and we refer readers to the literature¹ if more detail is required.

Re-assessing deep ecology

It is striking that in the case of each of the titles we have chosen, they have begun, to a greater or lesser extent, with a critique of deep ecology and, in particular, a conscious rejection of ecocentrism² and a re-assertion of an anthropocentric³ ontology which is variously described as ‘enlightened’ (Hayward 1998: 67) or weak (J. Barry 1999a: 59–60). Barry is typical in this respect when he says that ‘the defining feature of green moral theory should be not the acceptance of ecocentrism but a critical attitude to anthropocentrism’ (J. Barry 1999a: 27).

Thus, the suggestion is not that human centred ethics (or politics) will provide a satisfactory conception of the good regardless of how they are constructed, but rather that ecocentrism has inherent problems which prevents such a conception materializing at all. Indeed, Hayward talks of the two ‘dogmas’ of deep ecology (the intrinsic value of nature and the rejection of anthropocentrism – both of which are central to ecocentrism) and works to reconstruct an ‘enlightened’ anthropocentrism (Hayward 1998: 12).

But why should they do this? First, they argue, ecocentrism implies a strong metaphysical position which, like all metaphysics, then limits any universal appeal it may have. In short, if we do not believe that we have such a symbiotic relationship with nature and if we do not perceive of ourselves in such a relationship then we shall not sign up for the model. De-Shalit is clear, for example, that relying on a shared moral intuition on the basis of our experience of nature is not a strong basis upon which to ground a moral theory (de-Shalit 2000: 34).

On the other hand, we are humans and we perceive ourselves as existing primarily in human communities – thus, our sense of ourselves as part of such a (anthropocentric) community has two advantages, one metaphysical, the other political. The metaphysical advantage is that there need not be any metaphysics at all in suggesting that people belong to human communities (see also Levy and Horstkötter in this volume). The political advantage is that green political theory begins to make more sense to those who are not political philosophers: ‘Hence an environmental philosophy theory should derive from extended sources, i.e. not only from the laid-back philosopher or anthropological explorer, but from the general public as well’ (de-Shalit 2000: 29).

But this position should also be employed not only to criticize ecocentrism, but also anthropocentrism as well. As Barry writes, ‘an immanent critique of anthropocentrism ought therefore to be a strategy adopted in order to achieve public support for the more normative ends of green politics’ (J. Barry 1999a: 42).

This is a critique which would be generally understood whereas a simple assertion of biospherical egalitarianism might mean less in most homes, schools, pubs and department stores, to say nothing of parliaments. This practical or pragmatic aspect is, therefore, central to recent work and appears to emanate in large part from the wish to avoid unnecessary metaphysical conflicts. However, as we said earlier, it also attempts to avoid arguments of legitimacy as well.

The 'colour' of legitimacy is not conventionally Green. Outside of deep ecology, legitimacy is seldom seen to rest on the intrinsic value of nature, non-human interests and so on. Clearly, this is less of a problem from anthropocentrism because, while there are ontological disputes, these are at least confined to the species which disagrees, and hence some sense of shared meaning might be possible. Some (enlightened, weak) version of anthropocentrism, which qualifies our treatment of the environment (as it, too, may have interests) but which cannot be justified without reference to human interests, has the political advantage not only of being understood, but also of being able to draw on the western political canon – something which was explicitly rejected by deep ecologists.

But how, then, do we replace the metaphysics of humans as an interconnected, interdependent part of nature? Again, there is agreement that science provides an adequate description (and explanation) of the relationship between humans and their environment (for an account of some of the problems here, see also Bäckstrand and Hanson in this volume). Science can both de-bunk the harsh anthropocentric view that humans are at the centre of the universe, and/or provide an alternative way of characterizing our relationship with nature:

The developments in modern science which have led to this cognitive displacement of human beings from centre stage in the greater scheme of things have been made possible by just that kind of objectivating knowledge which some proponents of ecologism hold to lie at the root of an attitude toward the natural world to be condemned as anthropocentric.

(Hayward 1998: 43–4)

Hayward is arguing that if we need an account of the relations between things, then we need not talk metaphysically, but may use science as some form of objective description of those relations – both Barry ('If green politics is to base itself upon some metaphysical footing, then science rather than earth-centred spirituality may be a much better way of going about it' (J. Barry 1999a: 29) and de-Shalit ('And yet, it seems to me that we can still try to point to the core of the scientific, non-normative notion of the environment') seem to concur that science provides a stronger basis for describing human-environment relations than those provided elsewhere (de-Shalit 2000: 42).⁴ While it is made clear, particularly by de-Shalit, that science as 'objective knowledge' is not without its conceptual and empirical problems, nevertheless, arguments are forwarded (the details of which are not terribly important here) in defence of the idea that it is unnecessary to go down the road of 're-enchanting the earth' in order to find an account of the relationships between people and their environments which avoid strong ontological claims

regarding humans as part of nature and so on. Clearly, then, it is the account of human–nature relations which is of fundamental concern to our titles, for once this has been re-constructed other, political and ethical, consequences are bound to follow.

Unsurprisingly, given what we know so far, the tendency is to emphasize not so much the similarities between humans and nature (as deep ecology tends to do), but the differences. This is not to say that nature (or the environment) is dismissed as unimportant but, rather, that human experience and perception is argued to be qualitatively different from that of non-human nature. Barry, for example, talks of our ‘co-evolutionary character’ in which humans evolve not only biologically but also culturally and this, in turn, suggests that human cultural considerations are simply unavoidable in any meaningful account of ourselves and our relationship to nature (J. Barry 1999a: 54). De-Shalit rejects the model he calls ‘The Multi-Species Community’ – one in which the human community is defined very expansively to include the environment in general – in favour of a communitarian-based view in which human community is seen (again, unavoidably) as the starting point for any account of human reasoning and purpose (de-Shalit 2000: 95). Hayward, while arguing that humanity remains ‘natural’ is nevertheless at pains to show, as do the others, that ethics cannot be gleaned from nature (Hayward 1998: 9). Consequently, ethics must be a human activity and must be established and implemented at that (appropriate, human) level. The outcome, for Hayward, is that the human realm takes on a significance of its own and has to be considered as the site of ethical and political discourse. Of course, if Wissenburg (in this volume) is correct in suggesting that concepts such as community, nature and environment are, in fact, open to manipulation (a point also made by Blühdorn in this volume) then resolution of these issues is a little problematic.

Nevertheless, it is this, the hunt for a sound ethical and political basis on which to go forward, which draws each back towards the human for, as we have said, the hunt is for a legitimacy which cannot be found, it is argued, without privileging human interests at least to some extent.⁵ Interests, then, seem core to each account of how we establish the good, as it is the interests of individual humans which provide the primary legitimizing basis for both ethical and political decisions. This position is perhaps less clear with de-Shalit than it is with Barry and Hayward simply because of the nature of the argument de-Shalit is giving, but at one point he does say: ‘[...] a democracy that is both participatory and deliberative, through its effect on human beings, is more likely to cater for human interests through the medium of environment-friendly policies’ (de-Shalit 2000: 142).

It is human interests that serve to legitimize the proposed structural changes in the first instance. Interests, though, cannot be equated with mere preferences although the extent to which the nature of those interests will involve a broader more expansive sense of ‘self’, is more evident in Barry and Hayward than it is in de-Shalit. Hayward, for example, describes his view of ‘enlightened self-interest’ in this way:

This is a term I use to refer to motivations based on the recognition not only that in pursuing one's interests one needs, contingently and strategically, to heed the interests of others, but also that others' interests play a part in shaping one's own interests and indeed that others are partly constitutive of them.

(Hayward 1998: 67)

He further says 'In the ascription of an interest there is thus an element of assertion which includes a normative claim that the good merits protection or promotion' (Hayward 1998: 109). There are, then, two points to be made here both of which also apply to a greater or lesser extent to Barry and de-Shalit. The first is that to the extent that we, for example, harm the environment we may well be displaying a lack of awareness of what our own interests really are; hence, knowing what our interests are is not taken as given – our interests are something we 'find' or 'discover'. Barry makes a similar point when he says that promoting ecological virtues will help us to see what our interests are (because we may overcome certain character traits which prevent us seeing them at present), and help us to avoid being overtaken with 'immediate self-interest' (J. Barry 1999a: 35).

Second, and unsurprisingly, human interests, at least legitimate ones, will constitute some part of the good, but unlike a harsh anthropocentric position, it is assumed (and occasionally insisted) that a care and consideration for the environment will constitute a central aspect of those interests. This is not an account of a single, monolithic good, however. As Barry says, the good is plural, not singular in these accounts, nor could it be singular if one of the reasons for reconstructing green political theory was to avoid what were seen as some of the authoritarian tendencies in deep ecology (see Barry 1999a: 259; de-Shalit 2000: 133).

How, then, is this supposed to come about? How are we to decide what interests are legitimate or what guiding values are reasonable? The answer from all three titles is some form of public, inclusive, deliberation.

Deliberation is the way in which we establish what our collective interests are – de-Shalit calls this public reflexive equilibrium (following Rawls) whereby on-going debates refine ideas but also, importantly, public morality itself. Ideally, this would mean that those who had previously been excluded from the 'collective formation of morality' would now be included (de-Shalit 2000: 32). Hayward (following Habermas) makes a similar point when he argues that: '[...] the moral values arrived at through discourse are not necessarily identical with those inherited within the community; rather they are those which can be agreed by participants in discourse' (Hayward 1998: 103).

Similarly, Barry talks of an 'intersubjective negotiation and discourse, premised on the shared activities of human beings', and (following Dryzek 1990a: 54) how 'communicative rationality' (which sets the ethical parameters of deliberation) should always be prior to 'instrumental rationality' (J. Barry 1999a: 23–4). It seems, then, that the deliberative forum is key in terms of providing a place in which the collective aspect of morality may find a voice and, in particular, where humans in communities can establish what their interests and values actually are. It is not

entirely clear whether, in turn, this will guarantee that we save the planet, but nevertheless, a legitimate and useful process has been established (a heavily qualified acceptance is given in Smith's chapter). But it is clear from our three titles that deliberation is expected to do more than this. Here, though, we need to be careful, and to tell the story more fully.

Deep ecology, with its metaphysics and its belief in the transformative potential of experiencing nature, has little time for politics as such. Deep ecology, it is argued, rests upon the idea that psychological transformation will take place when our experience of nature is more profound. Consequently, once a change of consciousness is achieved, politics is either more or less unnecessary (because no conflicts or differences will exist) or, to the extent that it exists at all, it is pretty harmonious.

This, and much other environmental thinking, presents a problem. On the one hand it is clear that the deep ecologists are right to the extent that we will not save the planet if people continue to think as they do (e.g. I am a consumer, I have a right to consume, it is in my interests to consume, that which allows me to consume is good ... and so on). On the other hand, the possibility that there might be a collective transformation of consciousness so profound that it changes human dispositions towards their environment (as deep ecology suggests) seems just a little implausible.

So, the problem is this: how can we argue that, on the one hand, people change their thinking while, on the other hand, say that they have an experience which is plausible, rational and, in fact, desirable? The answer has to begin not with the psychological, but with the political. Here we return to deliberation – it is the deliberative, political experience which changes our minds, not the metaphysical one. So, the transformative aspect of deliberation, though subdued and quiet, is very loudly implicit in all other respects. De-Shalit is, perhaps, the most explicit on this when he argues for the raising of an environmental consciousness.⁶

As he argues:

[it] represents a deeper level of concern, where one understands that environmental matters constitute a *political* issue which should be treated not merely as a technological case, but rather as a *political one*, if it is to be resolved.
(de-Shalit 2000: 64, emphasis added)

Similarly, Hayward argues that he would expect discursive democracy to transform interests but he is keen to point out that it should also protect those existing interests which are legitimate (hence his concern for rights and constitutional provision) (Hayward 1998: 164). Barry follows our main point when he quotes Jacobs:

'Attitude formation towards public goods is [...] essentially a public not a private activity' (Jacobs, 1996: 217), it follows that a public and deliberative procedure is required in order that these attitudes/preferences towards environmental goods be created.

(J. Barry 1999a: 217)

So, the role of deliberation, or discursive democracy, should, if nothing else, provide a space in which interests can be shared and, perhaps, new more enlightened interests come about (see, also, Barry's critique in this volume). Each title is at pains to point out that the change in consciousness suggested by deep ecologists as a personal matter of our relationship with nature (and other deep ecologists) must, in fact, be a public process in which we collectively establish a new and broader sense of our own self-interest.⁷

We do need to be careful, however, not to over-emphasize the role that deliberation is expected to play. While de-Shalit is very enthusiastic, all three titles leave us in little doubt that such fora are not a panacea which will resolve human relations with their environment, nor is deliberation the only form that democracy can take. There are no guarantees given that deliberation will in all, or in any, instances promote more environment-friendly policy to the extent that once deliberation has occurred certain environmental outcomes are inevitable. However, there is a recognition that if deliberation is properly constructed it will provide a more inclusive, transformative and legitimate process. Hence, in line with other recent work in green political theory (O'Neill 1993; Saward 1993; Mills 1996), process is generally favoured over outcome.⁸

In addition, however, there is always something else going on. Each of our titles is clear that institutional change will not be sufficient to provide the cultural change necessary to secure a deeper acceptance of ecological values. There is always another, personal, process going on which is developmental in character. Hayward speaks in terms of reflexivity at both the political and personal level from which a more universal sense of self-interest arises (Hayward 1998: 79). Indeed, he suggests that enlightened self-interest has two aspects – one relating to social justice, and the other to self-development (Hayward 1998: 113). Barry argues similarly that the development and practice of ecological virtues are constitutive of a green conception of citizenship (J. Barry 1999a: 65), and de-Shalit, while framing his argument in a more public context, clearly believes that community is a matter of 'consciousness' (de-Shalit 2000: 113) or 'state of mind' (ibid.: 131) to be achieved by personal reflection. As we will argue later, there are some difficulties with taking positions like this, for although it seems sensible to argue that to change minds we need both a public and a personal process to take place, it is not clear how these two processes are linked together. We shall return to this point in a later section.

Within all our titles, then, there is a more or less explicit model of how the levels of institutional structure might link together and how they should affect broader cultural change. Such a model tends to look like this – that we create new institutional provisions to promote both environmental well-being (rights, constitutional reform, economic management, educational provision and so on) and to frame subsequent debates (Hayward 1998: 152–6; J. Barry 1999a: 210; de-Shalit 2000: 172–213); that we then construct deliberative fora in which we may publicly discuss what our broader interests are and develop some collective sense of the good (Hayward 1998: 100; J. Barry 1999a: 252; de-Shalit 2000: 134); this in turn will provide part, though not all, of the impetus necessary to create, variously,

a sense of community (de-Shalit 2000: 109); a sense of solidarity (Hayward 1998: 77); or a sense of green citizenship (J. Barry 1999a: 226–36).

The current work we have considered, then, appear to approach ‘endism’ in two of the ways outlined in the Introduction to this volume. In the first place, they are looking (as does much other work in green political theory) to safeguard the green perspective from the damaging challenges of liberals, particularly concerning the ambivalent attitude of some greens to democracy and personal choice (see Humphrey, in this volume, for a detailed account of some of the problems here). On the other hand, there is an explicit critique of deep ecology, its account of human–nature relations and, as a consequence, its political and ethical form. Of course, the veracity of this critique rests to a large extent upon its ability to present a model which can, indeed, avoid the problems it identifies in deep ecology. It is to this we now turn.

The problem of metaphysics

Deep ecology, it has been argued, posits a metaphysical view of the relations between humans and their environment in which these relations may be harmonized largely through a deliberate transformation of personal consciousness based upon personal experience of nature. In turn, this experience will prompt or re-awaken an intuitive sense of right and wrong, good and bad, and so provides the basis for a new ethic.

There are three important points here, not two. The first is that the metaphysic itself is mystical, spiritual, enchanted and so on. The second is that experience of it is transformative, and the third that ethics will arise as a consequence of the first two. In contrast, it has been argued, recent work manages to avoid the obvious difficulties of such a position because it is not metaphysical, but it is transformative and ethics do arise as a consequence of it. The contrast rests, then, on metaphysics. So, the question is – does recent work avoid metaphysics?

On one level, the answer to this question has to be yes, to the extent that each of our titles explicitly refutes the position taken by deep ecologists and makes no mention of any overt appeal to ‘metaphysical beings’ or to any shared intuitive sense of the meaning and depth of experiences with nature. It is clear, as we said earlier, that to the extent that it wishes to characterize these relationships, it does so through a descriptive scientific paradigm.

On another level, the answer has to be more qualified. It is true that such claims are avoided in terms of the relationship between humans and nature, but it is much less good at avoiding them when it speaks of the relations between people. The point we make here is very similar to one made by O’Neil when she argues that it is often the case that those who look to avoid metaphysics tend to re-introduce it at some point or another without calling it such (O’Neil 1996: 9).⁹ This, we believe, is what has happened in our titles. Let us give some examples.

Hayward says:

[...] the more one appreciates how one’s own well-being is bound up with others, the more one has occasion to pursue paths other than one’s immediate

gratification. [...] One's own personal interests cease to be a sole primary datum. With the realization that the very substance of one's interests is at least in part the product of one's interdependence with others, self-interest itself is, quite literally, thrown into a critical condition. [...] One actually finds oneself with a new interest – a sort of meta-interest, perhaps – namely, that of discovering what one's real interests actually are.

(Hayward 1998: 66–7)

Then, again, we have this from Barry:

This view of democracy (deliberative) as a process within which we recognize that we are, to a greater or lesser extent, each other's keeper is clearly compatible with the ecological view which holds that the determination of social-environmental relations within a human society has effects which transcend that society and the species.

(J. Barry 1999a: 229)

And, finally, this from de-Shalit, who, it should be said, is much less prone to this than the others.

[...] people become so alienated from themselves as creative individuals [...] and from their fellow human beings (since they are alienated from the creative self, they fail to see the creative self in the other, and eventually lose their sense of humanity) that they become indifferent and careless about their surroundings, i.e. the environment. How can they care about it if they lose their sense of subscribing to something greater than themselves?

(de-Shalit 2000: 192)

While there are clearly good reasons for arguing in this way, we would suggest that none of them avoids metaphysics as such, they simply avoid a metaphysical account of our relations with nature – not, however, with each other. We might anticipate the defence that our titles do little more than posit the possibility that humans are simply displaying normal, emotional behaviours towards one another (love, empathy, compassion and so on) which can hardly be metaphysical in any meaningful sense. We accept that such an explanation is entirely compatible with everything our titles suggest and we expect this is just the defence most would give.

But, there is more than the simple description of normal (or naturalistic) emotions going on here. There is an appeal to something indeterminate which exists, or may be brought into existence, between human beings and a faith that should the correct conditions (normally institutional) be propagated, then this 'indeterminate' will come into being. Furthermore, these are not the feelings that, say, a parent might have for a child or that friends have for one another, because this is a pervasive, potentially intra-species disposition which is well beyond the bounds of most human experience most of the time (this is what Hayward calls 'solidarity'). Again, we want to make it clear that we are not saying that such a thing is not possible, but we are simply pointing out that this is not what our titles

told us they were trying to do. Indeed, it is a position which they explicitly criticized in deep ecology. Now, admittedly, there may be a difference between an ‘indeterminate’ existing between humans, and a similar (or perhaps it is an entirely different?) ‘indeterminate’ existing between humans and nature, but that cannot be defended with the argument that the ‘indeterminate’ does not exist at all, or that it will not be used in explanation even if it does exist.

This is an important point in terms of the arguments given, because it is either assumed that once institutional change has occurred other changes will also come about as a consequence and will be central to a more general cultural change or, that the arising of this ‘indeterminate’ will be instrumental in cultural or institutional change. Importantly, it seems that the development of the ‘indeterminate’ explains, in part at least, why we should begin to perceive the interests of others as similar to, and as valid as, our own. Indeed, the entire deliberative project (and the social practices associated with it) rests to some degree or another on the assumption that such a thing arises – for a general cultural change it may well be indispensable.

So, our first point, then, is that the problem of metaphysics has not been fully overcome and, if nothing else, its political role and, indeed, its coming into being at all, is a kind of ‘secret weapon’ which may be used at those points when it seems that all explanation will necessarily be restricted to the political. More than this, though, even for those who do not deliberate, such a feeling is expected to come into being, for how can we argue for more general cultural changes without it? Such a position rests not just on a (metaphysical) connectedness between individuals themselves, but also on a view of individuals who will engage in processes which will develop and change them. We continue this point in the following section.

The problem of the self

So, to self-development. There exist criticisms of deep ecology at the level of the ‘self’ because too little attention is paid to broader political conditions and too much faith put in the process that deep ecologists tend to call ‘self-realization’. It is the engagement in this process which deep ecologists believe promotes basic intuitions, ethics and so on. Yet in each of our titles, the ‘reflexivity’ necessary for us to change or develop as individuals is pretty much taken as given once broader structural changes have taken place. Indeed, it appears at times that either value change has already taken place when structural changes are proposed (a problem explicitly conceded by Hayward), or that personal self-development is a process that inevitably has a ‘public’ or ‘other-regarding’ aspect to it. While we would like to believe this is so, we are not yet convinced that it is (or, perhaps, could ever) be true to the extent that our titles suggest. It may be that with a stronger account of the ‘metaphysical’ aspect of humans’ concern for each other, then the other-regarding aspect of self-development becomes more plausible; but as presented, it is not at all clear to us why this should happen. Barry, for example, uses the concept of ecological virtues as constitutive of green citizenship, but does not, as far as we can tell, say how these virtues arise or why they should be engaged with, although he does give a good account of how useful they would be once they have arisen (J. Barry 1999a: 35). In short, it is a large assumption, in our view, to suggest a

willingness to engage in a developmental process given that most people, most of the time, do not live in an overtly political way.

It may be argued, of course, that structural changes will 're-orient' societies quite profoundly in terms of economic and political deliberation, education, constitutional provisions and so on, and it is these changes which will eventually promote reflexivity and other-regardingness. This may well be true, but as we have already mentioned, such profound changes should be based upon other-regardingness rather than the promotion of it. Similarly, if all citizens do not deliberate but are, nevertheless, subject to structural change, to what extent are those changes legitimate and to what extent can they reflect some sense of the public good?

So, the problem of self-development is not unimportant for it carries with it a concern for the legitimacy of structural changes and a caution over the transformative effects of those changes. If either of these concerns are valid, then we cannot confidently predict a future more democratic than the one we expect at present; and, further, we still do not avoid similar problems evident in deep ecology.

Conclusion: the end of environmentalism?

We have argued that although recent work in green political theory sets out to solve the problems of deep ecology, many of those problems still remain. Metaphysics are still there although in a subdued form; it is not clear that a reconstructed model will, in fact, make more sense to the public than deep ecology; at some point minds still have to be transformed though the proposals for doing this tend to be institutional rather than ecological; a sense of community or belonging still needs to be created, it is just that these communities are more narrowly defined; the self is, as a consequence, still constituted by its surroundings.

So, have we established either an 'end' of deep ecology in the sense outlined in the Introduction to this volume or the pacification of green political theory more generally? Our answer to this would be a qualified 'no' to both questions in the sense that the problems of deep ecology appear to remain unresolved, particularly in terms of how we characterize human–nature relations, how we avoid metaphysics and how we account for our wish for individuals to transform themselves politically and ethically. Moreover, theoretical pacification rests not only upon a characterization of human–nature relations but also on the broader sense of how, regardless of this characterization, political and ethical forms are imagined. In this sense, the titles we have considered here can hardly be seen as pacified. However, it is reasonable to argue that they have not managed to break the back of deep ecological positions which they considered untenable – rather, they have displaced them – in short, nothing has ended as such.

Perhaps these are endemic problems which environmentalism will always struggle with and which even our best efforts may not overcome. But, without committing ourselves to one position over another, there are other possibilities which may be explored. Perhaps we should look for an environmentalism which is not based upon community at all, or which questions the possibility of creating it, but neither is it the child of possessive individualism with all the horrors such a childhood infers. In this way, we might consider how the 'private', rather than

‘public’ aspects of citizenship might provide a fruitful avenue to explore in terms of the politicization of individuals. Perhaps we should approach environmentalism by presuming that minds will not change greatly, that transformation is unlikely and difficult but that it may be unreasonable to think otherwise. In this way we might accept that, for the moment, citizens are leading lives they cannot change, but they could be doing very much worse – they are already citizens, just not the ones that we want. Perhaps, also, we should acknowledge that the success of political projects are generally inversely related to their size and that, just as we rightly criticize scientists, politicians and corporations for epistemological recklessness, so we should also try to avoid becoming vulnerable to the same accusation. For it is clear that fundamental questions remain concerning what motivates us to act politically; what we actually can imagine caring for; who we are concerned for; what we are prepared to sacrifice for the environment and so on; and this, it seems to us, are questions which need re-considering if the ‘end’ of environmentalism is to be avoided.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Devall and Sessions (1985); Naess (1989); Dobson (1990); Fox (1990) or Mathews (1991).
- 2 By ecocentrism we mean a view which argues that, metaphysically, humans are simply one member amongst many of a broader ecological community which individually and collectively has intrinsic value and, as a consequence, is entitled to moral considerability.
- 3 Anthropocentrism is generally taken to mean a position which is largely justified in human terms alone. As the titles will reveal, there is a very wide range of opinions which could be called anthropocentric and so few assumptions can be made about such arguments solely on the basis of knowing that they display anthropocentric dispositions.
- 4 This is only true as long as the ‘politics of knowledge’ are properly constructed – more on this below. Whether, in fact, they are able to completely avoid mysticism is open to question – a point we return to later.
- 5 The qualification was made earlier, but it is worth repeating, that none of the titles suggest that human interests necessarily trump non-human interests – such decisions have to be made *in situ*, so to speak. However, they require a legitimizing basis which prioritizes, as Barry puts it, ‘serious’ human interests.
- 6 We should be careful to note that, in general, de-Shalit is very practical and so little that is mystical can be inferred by his use of the concept ‘environmental consciousness’.
- 7 Again, we need to qualify this to the extent that deliberation is not necessarily seen as the only way in which consciousness is transformed but it seems to be the primary ‘public’ way and, to be honest, the most plausible of the methods offered.
- 8 Important qualifications here are the ways in which the debates within deliberation may well be constrained by other considerations such as the needs of discursive democracy itself (e.g. rationality); constitutional provision; environmental rights; the collective pursuit or establishment of virtue; what a ‘thin’ sense of the good amounts to and so on. It is clear that while process provides legitimacy, deliberation is not the only aspect of process.
- 9 We should say that O’Neil does not suggest this is a deliberate deception – and nor do we.

7 **The environment versus individual freedom and convenience**

Marius de Geus

Introduction

Over the last three decades environmental policy has become ‘institutionalized’ in the western world. Environmental issues are now primarily approached as technical problems which can be tackled by elaborate governmental policies and strategies. New environmental legislation has been introduced and innovative legal, economic and social policy instruments have been accepted. However, in many areas there still remains a world of difference between official governmental objectives and actual developments in the environmental field. From a green perspective, it seems that the policies and strategies of western liberal democracies have not been able to effectively cope with the environmental crisis.

In this chapter I want first to investigate the most important implications of these developments for environmental philosophical inquiry. Has environmentalism come to an end, or do we have to draw a different conclusion? In the second section I analyse the ways in which western liberal democracies have tried to pacify the environmental issue and have tried to render environmentalism harmless. In the third section Robyn Eckersley’s proposition ‘that the environmental problematic is a crisis of culture and character’ is explored (Eckersley 1992: 17). In the fourth section the trends and developments that increase the need for lifestyle changes are examined. The fifth section deals with the question why western liberal democracies have been reluctant to design policies that might restrict citizens’ freedom of choice and reduce individual consumption levels. In the sixth section the main arguments for and against the need to deliberately steer consumer behaviour and to strive for fundamental changes in consumption patterns in the nearby future are discussed. The seventh section explores the ways to realize cultural breakthroughs in the field of attitudes towards nature, lifestyles and levels of consumption. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

The pacification of the environmental issue

In the 1970s and 1980s a high degree of environmental activism could be found in western liberal democracies. There was widespread public concern over worldwide environmental degradation and many green action groups and political parties emerged. At the end of the millennium, however, there was a general decline in

the growth of public concern and gradually green action groups and political parties lost support. It can be argued that nowadays environmentalism is less radical and that environmental problems have become absorbed within the overall framework of the planning and policy processes of western liberal democracies. Does this imply the end of environmentalism, or do we have to draw a different conclusion? In order to find answers to this question we need to understand the ways in which western liberal democracies have tried to pacify the environmental issue and have tried to render environmentalism harmless. I shall consider three particular explanations.

First, western governments have reacted to environmental problems by developing new policies and legislation in order to combat the most extreme forms of pollution and degradation of nature. Under the general guideline of 'sustainable development' new environmental laws have restricted air pollution and the deterioration of forests, rivers and seas. Gradually pollution control has become a standard part of the planning and policy process. However, the more the environmental issues were integrated by western states, the more they have become a standard part of democratic and strategic planning, transforming 'environmental issues from intrinsically controversial, normative political issues into technical, policy issues', as Marcel Wissenburg rightly argues in this volume (see also Blühdorn's chapter).

Since then environmental questions have become less open to public scrutiny and fundamental normative debate. In this way in many western countries environmental issues have become a part of everyday political struggles and have been absorbed into the framework of societal decision-making. The consequence of these processes has been that nowadays less attention is paid to the underlying normative and moral questions of the environmental crisis. Western governments have, to a large degree, succeeded in pacifying the ecological critique by turning environmental problems into one of the many 'day-to-day' technical policy issues that can be solved by bureaucratic management approaches.¹

Second, in the last two decades western liberal democracies have opted for a general environmental strategy which would yield a profit for all the parties involved: citizens, trade and industry, nature and environment. The basic assumption was that environmental policy has to contribute to sustainable economic development in which economic growth, strengthening of competitiveness and an increase of employment can be combined with better conservation of nature, biodiversity and a decrease of pressure on the environment. The overall aim of environmental policy has been to relieve the tension between the economy and ecology in 'creative and sophisticated ways' that will lead to so-called 'win-win situations', from which both the economy and the environment will benefit – this has become known as 'ecological modernization' (Ministerie van VROM 1996: 1).

By this strategy the need for fundamental changes in the economy and society could be avoided. However, in the meantime, this win-win policy has taken on the character of a new political ideology. It is assumed that the unlimited economic growth can continue without resulting in a depletion of resources, an increase in industrial pollution or a degradation of nature. The fact that in the real world

almost every promise of the so-called ‘uncoupling’ of economic growth and pollution levels, and win–win strategies have turned out to be untenable does not seem to change the opinions of politicians, bureaucrats, corporations and citizens: they are all too eager to continue believing in the profoundly optimistic assumptions of modern win–win/technocratic policy-making.

Third, western liberal democracies have been able to absorb most of the radical environmental interest groups into the general framework of policy-making, in this way tempering their critical views and reducing political activism. As a consequence, the green movement has decided not to follow the path of direct action and confrontation, but has chosen participation and negotiation. In the Netherlands, for instance, the radical ‘Vereniging Milieudedefensie’, ‘Stichting Natuur en Milieu’ and ‘Natuurmonumenten’, the largest and most influential environmental interest groups in the country, have actively participated in many official decision-making platforms initiated by the Dutch government, such as committees studying the expansion of Schiphol airport and the extension of Rotterdam harbour. By absorbing green interest groups into the official decision-making process the Dutch government has generated a nation-wide pacification of environmental concern, taking the sting out of the green protest movement (for a different explanation see Blühdorn in this volume).

All in all, western liberal democracies have generally been successful in pacifying the environmental issue, preventing a new wave of radical activism, and reassuring their citizens that far-reaching changes in individual consumption levels and lifestyles are neither necessary nor desirable. The problem with this strategy, however, is that it relies heavily on the basic assumption that the environmental problem is essentially a problem of technology and planning, and not one that involves our culture and character. Yet this is an assumption that can be questioned in many ways.

The green case for a new culture

In the professional literature many hypotheses can be found on the deeper causes of the ecological crisis. In the eco-political writings of the last three decades there has been a general focus on economic, scientific and technological factors that may explain the origins of the environmental problem.

In economic analyses, the capitalist system is viewed as the main driving force behind the degradation of nature and environmental pollution. In pre-capitalist societies human co-operation could still flourish, and endless growth and accumulation were not seen as the ultimate goals. With the introduction of the capitalist system this radically changed and competition, expansion of the free market system, and accumulation of capital became the new principles. Henceforth, trade and industry had to adapt to the capitalist market with the imperative of ‘grow or die’. From then onwards society was ruled by ‘production for the sake of production’ and the natural world was reduced to a resource that could be exploited at will by humans. The result was an anti-ecological society that destroyed valuable forms of life, exhausted nature and reduced complex ecosystems to simplified forms.²

Eco-political thinkers, such as Lynn White Jr., Langdon Winner and Ulrich Beck, have emphasized the role of science and technology. According to these critics, the deeper roots of the ecological crisis lie in the ongoing progress of science, the development of new attitudes toward technology and the longer-term consequences of innovative technologies. From the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onwards the natural sciences have contributed to the invention of new machinery and production techniques that have disrupted the delicate balance with nature and thereby contributed to massive environmental destruction. The combination of an attitude hostile to nature on one hand with a generally technology-friendly attitude on the other has caused irreversible global environmental risks and dangers to society, such as radioactivity and toxins and pollutants in the air, water and our food, which generally remain invisible (Beck 1992: Chs 1, 2 and 7).

However, as Robyn Eckersley has convincingly pointed out in *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, a basic message of a growing number of eco-political writers has been to regard the environmental problem 'not only as a crisis of participation and survival, but as a crisis of culture in the broadest sense of the term, that is, the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge, which constitute the shared basis of social action' (Eckersley 1992: 19–20). She approaches environmental problems as consequences of our western culture and character, especially with respect to attitudes towards nature, lifestyles and ways of consumption (Eckersley 1992: 17–21). In this alternative approach the overall structure of needs and lifestyles are questioned and the acquisitive values of today's consumer society are fundamentally challenged.³

For instance, in *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt has also noted that we live today essentially in a mass culture society of consumers. The goal of human activities (*vita activa*) is no longer to be found in sustaining a public space for political action or in creative work, but in routine toil and labour, growing economic welfare, abundance and consumption. In her view, modern animal laborans (humans as labouring animals) use their leisure time for nothing but consumption and the satisfaction of needs. The more free time the labouring citizens have, the more acquisitive and possessive they become (Arendt 1958: 133).

In a different way, deep ecology philosophers such as Arne Naess, Bill Devall and George Sessions have also noted that our environmental dislocations are inherent to our culture of limitless expansion and our materialist and consumerist lifestyles (Devall and Sessions 1985; Naess 1989). However, if it is true that our deeply rooted norms, values, beliefs and aspirations are at the basis of the environmental problem, our basic problems seem irremediable by single-issue economic reforms, scientific optimism and technological progress, or mere changes in rationality in order to prevent free rider behaviour leading to social dilemmas. It may therefore be concluded that the most urgent task for the future will be to concentrate on cultural renewal, looking critically and creatively at human needs, overcoming excess consumerism, and formulating an ideal of 'limit' (also see de Geus 2003: Chs 8 and 9).

Trends and developments that increase the need for lifestyle changes

As early as 1968, Garret Hardin signalled that an implicit and almost universal assumption of environmental debates is that the problem under discussion has a technical solution: 'A technical solution may be defined as one that requires a change only in the techniques of the natural sciences, demanding little or nothing in the way of change in human values or ideas of morality' (Hardin 1968 [1973: 133–4]). Nowadays western liberal democracies not only implicitly but even explicitly approach environmental problems as essentially technical problems that can be solved by science and technology in relatively simple ways.

Politicians claim that innovative capacity and technology development have become the central concepts of environmental policy and that new technologies are the key to finding solutions to pollution problems. Solar and fuel cell technology, improved electronic communication systems that will reduce the need for mobility, ultra-light trains, highly efficient production processes will reduce energy use and will contribute to meeting environmental goals (Ministerie van VROM 2001: Chapters 4 and 5). Green critics, however, seriously doubt whether all these spectacular new technologies will be available in time, whether they will be affordable to the general public, and whether they will actually produce the required results.

Again and again it has become evident that governments are insufficiently convinced by or aware of the fact that the environmental problem is indeed primarily a cultural problem, despite the growing eco-philosophical critique that what is needed is a change in human behaviour, affecting deeply value systems and belief patterns (see also Thoenes 1990: 256). A lasting improvement in the state of the environment and the quality of our natural habitat will undoubtedly require stringent measures by producers of goods and services, but also by consumers who – by internalizing alternative consumption values and applying more self-sufficient consumption patterns – will give direction to sustainable ways of living. What trends and developments are causing the consumer to increasingly be the key figure in reducing environmental pollution and achieving sustainability?

The scenarios of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) show that there will be a continuing growth of the world population to 9–11 billion by the year 2050. This will lead to growing environmental pollution and the danger of the depletion of scarce natural resources. In combination with growing consumption demand this will encourage economic growth, an increase of energy use in production and transport, and an accumulation of the pressure on biodiversity (RIVM 2000: 44, 237).

Western cultural patterns, with their emphasis on individualism, their focus on property, luxury, and convenience, become more and more dispersed over the whole planet. The desires, aspirations, wants and needs of affluent western citizens are transmitted by mass media (TV, radio, internet) to all regions of the earth and increase the demand for energy-intensive consumer goods, services and lifestyles.

In the western world there has been an overall increase in family incomes because of a general growth in welfare and also because of second incomes resulting

from women participating in the labour market. Because of this growth in income, consumption spending per person has increased considerably: it is expected that, in particular, energy-intensive spending in the fields of housing, leisure and holidays will increase strongly in the future (RIVM 2000: 56). In developed countries, especially, air traffic and high-speed rail traffic will increase, while in lower-income countries there will be an increase in the use of cars (RIVM 2000: 46).

Paradoxically, although individual consumer spending is increasing, human needs and desires have not decreased. As Thomas Hobbes explained in *Leviathan*, a fundamental dilemma of modern liberal society is that the satisfaction of one need only leads to the creation of other desires and wants among consumers. Because of the apparently insatiable needs of modern humans, a situation of abundance is unattainable, and again and again this produces new forms of 'scarcity' (Hobbes 1962; Achterhuis 1988: Chs 1–4).

Taking these trends and developments into consideration, it will be clear that, more than ever before, profound attention to the contribution of individual consumers to environmental pollution and the degradation of nature is needed.⁴

Liberal democracy and the reduction of consumption

Why have western liberal democracies been reluctant to design policies that might restrict the citizens' freedom of choice and reduce individual consumption levels? It is striking that despite the fact that western consumption patterns are often seen as the main cause of environmental pollution and degradation, governments have not given priority to reduction of individuals' levels of material affluence. In my opinion the refusal of western liberal democracies to initiate a reduction of individual consumption levels and approach the environmental issue from the 'demand' side, can be related to the inherent addiction to growth of modern welfare states, the culture of contentment, the desire for status and identity through consumption, and the general confidence in the 'free market'.

A growth-addicted welfare state

It will be clear that governments that are themselves addicted to a constant economic growth and expansion will not be inclined to induce their citizens to reduce their spending and consumption levels. In many ways economic growth has become a necessary condition for the flourishing of the modern welfare state. Continuous growth has become necessary to facilitate improvement in the material prosperity of citizens, to keep social expenditure affordable, and to solve distribution conflicts between the more and less affluent sections of society. In order to keep the wheels of the economy turning, an adjustment in the consumption patterns of the western citizens is often seen as undesirable and even dangerous to the stability of society. Indeed, it is the relentless rise in consumer demand that stimulates the economy and that makes our welfare state prosper, albeit in a restricted material sense.

The culture of contentment

Politicians understand better than ever before that the majority of the population is primarily interested in a secure, comfortable and convenient existence. John Kenneth Galbraith has signalled this tendency in *The Culture of Contentment*: '[...] the fortunate and the favoured, it is more than evident, do not contemplate and respond to their own longer-run well-being. Rather, they respond, and powerfully, to immediate comfort and contentment' (Galbraith 1992: 6). It is the large middle class that is content with the present situation and that tries to secure the status quo of convenient lifestyles and high levels of consumption. Environmental degradation, resource scarcity and endangered biodiversity may – according to green critics – create a real need for changes in production and consumption levels, yet governments remain essentially accommodating the desires of the contented (Galbraith 1992: 10).

Status and identity by consumption

In western liberal democracies status and identity are basically looked for in property. In order to distinguish oneself from others, we long for possessions and conspicuous forms of consumption. Until recently, a lifestyle of abundance was only within reach of an elite, but nowadays ever larger groups in society owe their sense of identity and self-respect to material affluence and consumerism (see also Thoenes 1990: 259–60). In the western world personal self-restraint and moderation are no longer core values in times of wealth, luxury and plenty. Ideology transmitters like MTV teach our children that spending more can be a 'liberating experience' and the luxurious lifestyle of pop stars and other idols becomes the central goal to strive for in life.

According to Juliet Schor in *The Overworked American* and *The Overspent American* many middle-class and upper-middle class people are victims of 'the insidious cycle of work-and-spend'. For them there is a very strong incentive to work longer and earn more in order to consume more resources and increase their possessions (Schor 1991: 107–12; 1999). People are increasingly prepared to work more since work has become the vital instrument that will make it possible to consume their way to happiness. Western liberal democracies have always stressed that the freedom to consume keeps the capitalist economic system going and constitutes an inalienable right of the individual citizen: the freedom to consume can be seen as the basic expression of the Lockean creed of valuing 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'. In this liberal ideology the role of the government is certainly not to restrict consumer behaviour or to re-evaluate personal lifestyle choices in the light of sustainable development.

General confidence in the 'free market'

Apart from this, it is obvious that in our modern era the 'market' is considered the most efficient and reliable steering mechanism within liberal democratic society.

In a market-oriented society the scenario of governments stimulating and implementing ecologically friendly consumer behaviour and lifestyles is easily rejected. In combination with ongoing economic and ecological globalization, the role and influence of central government have tended to diminish in the western world. In today's global world governments have less opportunity to influence investment decisions of enterprises, and are to lose control over technological developments as well (RIVM: 2000: 247–52). However, none of these new developments has changed the deeply rooted confidence of both governments and corporations in market-style solutions. It is still professed that governments have to assume a restrained attitude and are not required to place great emphasis on moderation and self-restraint on the side of producers *and* consumers.

Arguments for and against changing consumer behaviour

The fundamental dilemma of sustainable development is that, on a world scale, there are persistent environmental problems (climate change by the emission of greenhouse gases, a deterioration of natural areas and biodiversity, pollution of water, air and ground by chemicals), while western liberal democracies still continue to assume that these problems can be solved by a strategy of purely technological innovations that will not infringe upon the citizens' free choice to consume or on their comfortable and convenient lifestyles. On the one hand, in some countries various symbolic or cosmetic changes in consumer behaviour have been brought about, such as a more economic use of appliances, economizing on water use, reduction and separation of garbage, etc. On the other hand, on a world scale, citizens have been unable to accept 'limits to consumption' in areas that will have real consequences for both the environment and their lifestyles, for example daily car use or air travel by tourists to exotic places. Interviews and data research have shown that an overwhelming majority of respondents perceive car usage and air travel as 'private' activities that do not belong in the public domain of morals and should not to be subject to social regulation: in practice, environmental considerations have no priority in decisions about car use or holidays (Aarts *et al.* 1995: 175–7; Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP) 1999: 115–24).

What are the main arguments for and against the need to deliberately steer consumer behaviour and to strive for fundamental changes in consumption patterns in the near future?

The most important argument in favour of an interventionist strategy of governments is that – as we mentioned earlier – a large number of the effects of current environmental policy have, despite technological progress, up to now been undone by relentless population growth and a seemingly autonomous increase in energy consumption and mobility. It is now apparent that the possibilities of clean technology are not without limits. What is gained on the one side (in the case of cars: better aerodynamics, more efficient engines) is again lost on the other (heavier car bodies because of new safety features, airbags, air conditioning, etc.) and of

course the recurrent fact that the citizens use their freedom to act by driving their cars more often and over longer distances.

It can further be argued that, even from a liberal point of view, it must be admitted that the highly valued right to 'freely act and consume' cannot be completely unlimited. Comfortable living, convenience and luxury are not legitimate in circumstances when they inevitably lead to the damaging of the natural surroundings of others. In *On Liberty* John Stuart Mill analysed the limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual. For good reasons he argues against a social tyranny and argues for the formation of freedom and individuality, but not at all costs (also see J. Barry 2001: 67–79).⁵ According to Mill, the individual's freedom to act is not completely unrestricted, but is to be constrained by the so-called 'harm principle':

Whenever, in short, there is a definite damage, or a definite risk of damage, either to an individual or to the public, the case is taken out of the province of liberty and placed in that of morality or law.

(Mill 1976: 149).

A common argument against an interventionist strategy by government is that in a liberal democratic state the citizens are autonomous and have the right to live by their own preferences, wants, consumption desires. This means that the state must be freedom-oriented and must leave consumption patterns and lifestyle choices to the individual citizens themselves. Consumption and lifestyle choices are seen as belonging to the domain of the individual in which the state must, in principle, not be involved. For this reason, in a world with an ever more individualistic and materialist culture, society's support for restrictive consumption measures will not be impressive. In these circumstances the individual's freedom to act will generally be preferred in importance to an unpolluted environment.

A further argument against governments actively intervening has to do with a fact already mentioned in the preceding section: the increasing tendency in western liberal democracies to put their faith in the market mechanism. A market-oriented world is at odds with the idea of governments deciding to interfere with consumer behaviour and wanting to influence our acquisitive values, norms and beliefs. Moreover, in modern society government and producers are often more worried about the 'economic' risks of free market capitalism than about the 'ecological' risks.

As Ulrich Beck argued in *Risk Society*, governments and producers have been willing to run ecological risks rather than risk the danger of reducing consumer expenditure and decreasing GNP. In his view the profit and property interests that advance the industrialization process and wealth production have been in contradiction with a political regulation of consumption and a general reduction in material affluence. What governments seem to fear most are not the ecological risks and hazards of mass consumption, but mainly the possible side-effects of a radical limitation of consumption levels: a decrease in demand, the effects of market collapse, and a devaluation of capital (Beck 1992: Chapters 1 and 2).

All in all, these arguments for and against have led to a situation of indecision. It seems as if, for politicians, trade and industry and the majority of citizens, the logic of inaction cannot be avoided. Although there is a real concern about environmental problems, western liberal states have mainly initiated limited, often ‘cosmetic’ action or have deliberately tried to postpone stringent measures as long as possible, in particular in case of long-term environmental dangers (Galbraith 1992: 20–1). It may be true that western liberal democracies are becoming increasingly aware of the dangers of inaction and the many difficult choices that have to be made in this field, yet up to now they have not been able to cut the Gordian knot and to rank the protection of nature and our environment ‘above’ the liberty of citizens in their role as hedonistic consumers.

Towards an ecological culture

My starting point is that western liberal democracies not only have responsibilities towards the present generation, but also towards highly vulnerable future generations. Taking this into account, we can defend the argument that governments have the right *and* obligation to ask for some kind of ‘sacrifices’ from today’s consumers and, to be precise, that they decrease their levels of material consumption. Indeed, it seems evident that western liberal democracies have the task of ‘proving’ the necessity of these sacrifices to their citizens by giving plausible arguments and providing reliable information on environmentally unfriendly and friendly behaviour in order to convince consumers. Generally speaking, citizens must know at least roughly what the ecological costs of specific forms of behaviour and lifestyles actually are, so that they can no longer hide behind the argument that they are unaware or uninformed.

However, environmental policy research has shown clearly that the mere provision of information will never be sufficient to bring about decisive change. Governments will have to initiate reflexive and broad social debates in which they critically address their citizens on their roles as ‘responsible’ consumers. It may be expected that when citizens are actively involved in these open and multi-level social discussions on the overall reduction of consumption levels and the value of earth-friendly lifestyles, they will recognize the advantages of a different attitude towards wasting resources and treating nature with greater care.

A demanding programme of action and a policy of implementing changes in ecological culture and individual character in order to achieve sustainable development cannot be effective without financial incentives and disincentives. It is difficult to underestimate the crucial importance of the need to make international agreements over the transfer of ecological costs through price mechanisms. In the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Germany the results of the introduction in recent years of eco-taxes on, for example, domestic gas consumption – by which a reduction in the growth of emission levels in this sector was achieved – have been promising. In some areas considerable progress has been made, but it is remarkable that there are still no eco-taxes on, for instance, kerosene and aeroplane tickets, in

flagrant contravention of the 'polluter pays' principle. The fact also remains that, up to now, western governments have refused to introduce clear disincentives so to discourage car use. Increases in petrol prices have been relatively limited and have had few consequences for car mobility.

Even though critics have reservations about the speed and effectiveness of incentives in influencing consumer behaviour, it seems likely that large-scale introduction of eco-taxes will – in the end – have unexpected and unthought-of direct and indirect 'cultural' consequences. It is plausible that consumers will gradually make different cost–benefit analyses, will become far more conscious of the ecological consequences of specific products and services, and will consequently adapt their lifestyles. Citizens will eventually 'internalize' these new and less materialistic ways of living and – by small steps – will adjust to more frugal values, norms and belief systems.

In a similar vein the little-known strategy of introducing tradable emission rights can be used to initiate 'economic and cultural' renewal in western liberal societies. In the last decade this strategy has been introduced in a number of industrial sectors in the United States to provide boundary conditions and to reduce energy use and emissions. At present Denmark, England and the Netherlands are making preparations for a system in which enterprises and corporations will have to buy emission rights from government from 2008. More significantly, however, this system can also be applied to individuals. In this case individual citizens would have to buy emission rights and would be able to sell these rights to other parties. Citizens who by their frugal lifestyles produce low levels of pollution and emission are permitted to sell their emission rights to those who live less moderate lives. If governments reduce the total amount of emission rights available each year, the pressure on citizens to choose more sustainable lifestyles and less acquisitive values increases (Aan de Brugh 2002: 14).

From a liberal point of view, the clear advantage of both eco-taxes and tradable emission rights is that they will be helpful in reducing industrial and individual pollution levels while, in principle, the freedom of choice in consumption remains unaffected. The final result would not be a Hobbesian central power, nor the much-feared eco-dictatorship, nor strict and direct coercion of citizens as consumers by means of 'prohibitions and commands', but a liberal democratic state that stimulates responsible citizenship by giving clear and discernible economic and moral incentives in order to overcome a potential escalation of environmental degradation.

Alongside the strategies mentioned above, it will be necessary to promote a general process of education and character building, in order to cause a direct and perceptible change in today's materialistic and hedonistic culture and to promote ecological virtues. In his *Ethics*, an eloquent defence of civic virtues, Aristotle develops a highly interesting theory of justice, modesty, and moderation. For Aristotle, excellence of character is dependent on striking a balance between two extremes and keeping the wish for pleasure in harmony with reason (Aristotle 1975: 68–75). According to him 'moral excellence is a mean between two forms

of badness, one of excess and the other of defect, and is so described because it aims at hitting the mean point in feelings and action' (Aristotle 1975: 73).

In his vision, abundance, luxury and an opulent lifestyle are not prerequisites for the good life: on the contrary, they often obstruct human happiness. Moderate possessions are sufficient to live autonomously and to enjoy a life of happiness. For Aristotle, the central role of the Greek city-state was to stimulate civic virtues and in particular to create good and enduring 'habits' among the citizenry by the art of education and legislation. In a modern version of these ideas, Joe Dominguez and Vicky Robin argue along the same lines in favour of the Greek notion of the 'golden mean': creative forms of frugality in response to today's excessive consumption. They assert that what is needed is a new critique of 'the more is better and it's never enough' consumer culture in the Western world, not only to prevent environmental degradation, but also to increase the enjoyment of what we already have and to stimulate prudent self-restraint and civic responsibility among citizens (Dominguez and Robin 1999: 166–70). All these themes can have a significant bearing on the evolution of a new ecological culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the thesis that in our modern era environmentalism has come to an end. My central conclusion is that, despite of the fact that nowadays ecological issues have become a standard part of democratic planning and policy-making, environmentalism is here to stay, albeit in another form. It has become evident that western liberal democracies have tried to pacify the environmental issue by developing new planning and legislation, opting for 'win-win' strategies and absorbing most of the radical environmental interest groups into the general framework of policy-making. However, their policy instruments have not been able to cope effectively with the environmental crisis, because they rely uncritically on scientific optimism and technological progress. In addition, many of the effects of modern environmental policy are counteracted by unanticipated social developments, such as population growth and increases in energy use and mobility.

The chapter has shown that some eco-political writers argue that the environmental question is not primarily a 'technical' problem, but is a consequence of the structure of our culture and character. This creates a need for governments to concentrate not on bureaucratic rule-making, planning and technical policies, but on more profound changes in culture and lifestyle, thus addressing individual consumption levels and material affluence in society. I have argued that there are several trends and developments which make the consumer a key figure in achieving sustainability. It was also noted that western liberal democracies have been reluctant to approach the environmental question by influencing demand, or by developing policies that might restrict the citizens' freedom of choice or reduce individual consumption levels. Yet there are good reasons to deliberately influence consumer behaviour and reduce individual consumption levels on a larger scale than at present.

My argument has been that cultural breakthroughs in attitudes to nature, lifestyles and levels of consumption are needed. This will require a pro-active role by western liberal democracies in providing reliable information, organizing open and reflexive social debates on the reduction of consumption by effectively using price signals and other market instruments, and by promoting a general process of education to change modern materialistic and hedonistic attitudes. It seems of crucial importance that in the future governments will – by democratic means – decide to formulate the concept of ‘limit’ as an ideal and consistently argue for moderation and prudent self-restraint by citizens.

I have to conclude that a fundamental shift in the eco-political dialogue is imminent. The old type of environmentalism which used to be directed at goal-setting, technical planning and general policy design will be replaced by a new form which will have to balance ecological considerations against arguments in favour of freedom of action, individual desire for pleasure and craving for luxury. Contrary to the liberal critique, a good case can be made in support of the government’s right to ‘regulate’ so as to achieve moderation and restraint among citizens, where their ‘excessive demand and behaviour’ is clearly at odds with the overall quality of life. This will imply a cultural shift and renewal that will certainly meet resistance from many citizens, but which, from a perspective of sustainability and intra- and intergenerational justice, will be inevitable in the longer run.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

- 1 In ‘Sustainability, liberal democracy, liberalism’ I have already analysed how governments have ‘used’ the concept of ‘sustainability’ as a cloak under which the most varied political compromises could be achieved. This abstract formula and open political concept was used effectively to pacify the environmental issue and nowadays no longer induces radical and stringent political measures (de Geus 2001: 20–8, also de Geus 1999).
- 2 Here I follow, in essence, the analysis of Murray Bookchin (1987: 200–4).
- 3 For different accounts of environmentalism and alternative interpretations of the underlying causes of the ecological crisis see Eckersley (1992), Goodin (1992) and Dobson (2000b).
- 4 This highly important question has also been raised explicitly in the recent TNO report *Milieu en Gezondheid* (TNO 2001: 177) and in a short paragraph more or less implicitly by the Dutch environmental minister in the Fourth National Environmental Policy Plan (Ministerie van VROM 2001: 168–70).
- 5 It was John Barry in his ‘Greening liberal democracy: practice, theory and economy’ who drew my attention to Mill’s harm principle (J. Barry 2001: 59–80). I fully agree with Barry that both the harm principle and the closely related precautionary principle can be relevant to environmental preservation and can be used to ‘justify legitimate state intervention in ostensibly ‘private’ matters’ (J. Barry 2001: 68).

8 Precaution, scientization or deliberation?

Prospects for greening and democratizing science

Karin Bäckstrand

Introduction

A recurrent green critique is that the dominant mode of employing scientific expertise in modern society has propelled both the scientization and depoliticization of environmental politics, which ultimately signify the ‘end’ of environmentalism. The rise of regulatory environmental science has paved the way for the pacification, co-optation and marginalization of radical ecological politics. The scientization of environmental politics has prompted the relationship between science, nature and society to be framed into technical narratives. Stretching the argument further, science and technology have accelerated the environmental crisis, consolidated technocracy and diminished democracy. Hence, the issue of scientization versus increased participation by civil society in environmental policy-making brings us squarely to the problem of taming and pacification of environmentalism. The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, does science remain a site for the ‘end’ of the environmentalism, and if so how? Second, what is the response of green political theory, i.e. can the institution of science be reformed to absorb the ‘green’ agenda, such as participation, precaution, decentralization and promotion of ecological values? Third, what model of science does green political theory need to adopt in order to resist the ‘end’ of environmentalism? A central argument is that, in order to challenge the ‘end’ of environmentalism, green political theory needs to adopt a post-positivist account of science that redefines the scientific endeavour as participatory and reflexive. This entails questioning predominant positivist models of science that perpetuate the privileges of scientific experts in solving environmental problems.

In order to examine the response in green political theory, I present three principal strategies for coupling science and policy – precaution, scientization and deliberation. I juxtapose these strategies with current proposals to ‘green’ and ‘democratize’ science, ecologism and environmentalism. *Precaution* points to the inherent limitation and incompleteness of scientific knowledge in representing indeterminate and complex ecosystems. Consequently, by evoking the precautionary principle, action should be taken in advance of scientific certainty. In contrast, a central tenet of *scientization* is to assign a central role to ecologically enlightened scientific and technical experts to steer a course toward sustainable development. *Deliberation* responds to unavoidable scientific uncertainties by

prompting a democratizing of science and by enrolling the citizenry in environmental decision making.

In the first section I explore the connection between the dominant modes of regulatory science and the purported end of environmentalism, and spell out the challenges to green political theory in the light of the primacy of scientific expertise in liberal democracies. What does a 'green' science-policy nexus entail, and can it challenge dominant technocratic approaches in environmental decision making? The second section charts the contested representations of science in ecologism and environmentalism. In the third section I argue that a post-positivist account of science can reverse the end of environmentalism and re-politicize scientific expertise by recognizing the cultural, political and normative context for modern advisory science. The fourth, fifth and sixth sections outline three frameworks for coupling science, namely precaution, scientization and the deliberation. With respect to these strategies to 'green up' science, I examine the tension between a substantive and procedural approach in green political theory that underpins demands for an ecologically enlightened science. The seventh section summarizes the challenges to green political theory in re-orienting modern science toward ecological values.

Science, green political theory and the end of environmentalism

Do the current approaches toward employing science for environmental problem-solving signify the end of environmentalism? It is rather difficult to assess the argument that 'global regulatory science' can be held accountable for precipitating the end of environmentalism in terms of pacification of the green critique, depoliticization of environmental politics and the instrumentalization of nature. However, the proliferation of scientific practices and techniques tend to turn environmental problems into questions of facts rather than questions of values. I take one possible 'end' of environmentalism to mean the predominance of technocratic, managerial, top-down environmental policy-making that excludes participatory and deliberative notions of expertise (see Barry's contribution to this volume). The reliance of regulatory science is at the heart of 'win-win' discourses such as ecological modernization and sustainable development, which reinforce the primacy of scientific progress and economic development at the expense of cultural transformation and ecological enlightenment (see de Geus in this volume). Scientization as one type of 'end' of environmentalism implies that social and political issues are better resolved by technical expert system than by democratic deliberation. This position is linked to a larger context outside science, i.e. the 'governmentalization' of social, human and natural life. Modern science has co-evolved with institutions of liberal democracy (Ezrahi 1991). Both liberal democracy and science are united by a mind-set of 'governmentality', i.e. an art of liberal governance that expands into more domains of societal problem solving, such as the regulation of welfare, economics, environment and the regulation of life itself (Darier 1999a). In this vein, environmental problems are largely framed in technical narratives overshadowing the normative and moral issues at stake.

There are three critical questions tied to how green political theory responds to the rise of regulatory science and the concomitant end of environmentalism. First, what conception of science and environmental risks underpin green political thought? Rather than exploring the preoccupation in green political theory with how nature is (mis)represented by science, I suggest that we should pay more attention to how science is represented and employed in ecological thought. Second, what is the criterion for a green science-policy culture? Should we assess green science in terms of procedures or outcomes? Is it defined by a science-policy communication that delivers strong ecological outcomes? Or does a green science policy interplay an open-ended process that institutionalizes participation, reflexivity and precaution? While green critics are unified in their critique of the destructive impacts of science and technology on environment, they are divided on how, and by what means, an ecologically enlightened science-policy nexus can be put into practice. These questions reflect the tension between the green commitment to end-state reasoning and the procedural demands of democracy. Third, what are the prospects for re-orienting science toward ecological values? The next section addresses the first question, namely conflicting representations of science in green political thought.

Green representations of science

Green political thought exhibits an ‘uneasy’ relationship to science (Yearley 1991). There are diverging positions on the role of science in the various shades of green thought from radical deep ecology to reformist light environmentalism. The basic divide between the contested green representations of science goes roughly between ecocentric ecology and anthropocentric environmentalism (Dobson 2000b). In line with Dobson’s argument, ecology can be conceived as an ideology, i.e. an interpretation of the root of the environmental crisis. In contrast, environmentalism is more defined as a collection of managerial approaches to solve the environmental problems. However, from the pragmatic approach of environmentalism, an ideological position of the relationship between human, nature and society can be retrieved (Barry 1999a).

Ecology takes a critical posture to the mind-set of science and the nature of scientific inquiry, which are seen as the roots to the exploitation of natural resources. In contrast, in environmentalism ecological science is regarded as an ally in combating environmental problems. Green political theory oscillates between these contrasting views, namely whether science is part of the problem or whether it can provide solutions to the contemporary environmental crisis. The dividing line between the sceptical and optimistic account of science largely coincides with the distinction between ecology and environmentalism.

Science: enemy or ally?

A core theme in ecology is that the scientific representations of nature propel an instrumental or even exploitative mindset to nature. The radical ecological

claim is that the scientific endeavour reinforces a mastery of nature in terms of how it represents nature as an object and resource. In this perspective, instrumental rationality, which incorporates ideals of reductionism, distance, control and prediction, is at the core of the scientific enterprise. Eco-feminist thinkers have articulated the links between the instrumental rationality of science and the exploitation of environment and patriarchy (Shiva 1989; Plumwood 1993). This critique echoes prominent narratives in ecologism on replacing the whole mindset and attitude of instrumental and reductionist science with a holistic green science.

In this perspective, science and technology are defined by instrumental rationality and reductionism, i.e. the mindset that is the very root of environmental problems. Instrumental rationality has been defined as 'the capacity to devise, select, and effect good means to clarified and consistent ends' (Dryzek 1995: 19). The reductionist imperative inherent in scientific methods and practices, i.e. the disaggregation of complex natural systems into smaller pieces, is at odds with the advocated holistic view of nature and society. The commitment to holism underpins the disbelief in the science (Wissensburg 1998: 50–1). The objectivist, reductionist, compartmentalized nature of scientific knowledge is not apt to represent the fluid boundaries, interdependence, and holism that are defining properties of ecosystems. The 'mindset' of science precludes it to play any constructive role in environmental protection.

In contrast, environmentalism presents a more optimistic account of science. Environmental science tapped in a more holistic and integrative version is regarded as a cornerstone of environmental protection (Caldwell 1990; Lee 1993; O'Riordan 1995). Scientific knowledge is also a crucial resource for the environmental advocacy. Environmental NGOs and civil society have used scientific findings to place the destruction of the environment on the political agenda. The scientific community has often been the 'alarm-clock' by bringing attention to serious problems such as pesticides, ozone depletion and acidification. Along with media and environmental NGOs, science is one of the most important actors in the process of environmental claims-making, i.e. the elevation of the environment into a political and social problem.

A common theme underpinning ecological thought as well as environmentalist practice is that the celebrated green values – diversity, interdependence, holism, complexity – can be grounded in, and given authority by and through science. The naturalism or 'reading off nature' is apparent in the modelling of society after ecological values affirmed and legitimized by means of the ecological sciences (Dobson 2000b: 21–5). The extrapolation from nature, via science, to society, is at odds with constructivist accounts of science, which will be explored in the next section.

Post-positivism and the beginning of environmentalism

However, both these diverging green positions fail to conceptualize the new reflexive role for science that can reinvent environmental politics as a participatory and

deliberative exercise. Green political theory needs to embrace a post-positivist constructivist conception of science, even at the risk of losing the possibility to ground ecological utopia in the authority of science. There is clearly a tension in green political thought that straddles between modernist and postmodernist impulses. Science is garnered to reinforce the ontological reality of environmental problems while at the same time science is debunked for its objectivist epistemology that reinforces instrumental and anthropocentric narratives of nature (see Talshir's contribution to this volume). The strategic use of science among greens to solidify the case for the environmental crisis evokes the problem of misrepresentation or lying for a good cause (see Wissenburg's contribution). Instead, by highlighting the social and cultural context of scientific representation of the environment, the scientization of politics can be resisted (Fischer 2000). A post-positivist account of science entails recognition of the larger normative and ethical framework in science-based environmental policymaking. This notion of science recognizes that the production of scientific knowledge is a culturally and socially mediated process. Hence, scientific knowledge of the environment is inherently provisional, incomplete, and 'situated'. There are 'no facts outside the relativizing influence of interpretations' based on context, position, perspective, interest and the power to define and colour interpretation (Adam and Van Loon 2000: 4). Consequently, there is no innocent knowledge and all knowledge has a social location (Haraway 1996). Without denying the physical realities of environmental problems, this perspective focuses on the power and authority of science in constructing environmental problems and risks.

What does the paradox of incalculability, uncertainty and even undecidability of environmental risks (Adam and Van Loon 2000: 13) mean for green politics? Ultimately, it entails a re-conceptualization of the conventional model of science. The concept of post-normal science captures issues defined by high decision stakes, large system uncertainties and intense value disputes (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1992: 267). The traditional strategies for problem solving and established scientific practices cannot provide the final answers to post-normal problems. In a situation involving large complexity and radical uncertainty – maybe even on the border of ignorance – and high costs for society, new scientific practices to ensure quality control have to be established.

Recent work in green political theory articulates a conception of science–policy interplay that is compatible with the post-positivist view of science (J. Barry 1999a: 202ff.). The notion of civic science as participatory expertise is a central building block in enacting a green science–policy nexus (Lee 1993; Bäckstrand 2002). This participatory turn to scientific expert advice can be interpreted as a resistance to the scientization of politics. Drawing on work in green democracy, the focus is on the procedures for science–policy communication rather than securing an ecologically benign outcome. How does green political theory position itself toward existing frameworks for mediating between science and policy, to what extent can they secure ecological values and install a 'green' science–policy nexus? In the following three sections the assumptions and consequences of precaution, scientization and deliberation are discussed.

Precaution

Precaution represents a sceptical stance toward science and its capacity to resolve environmental problems. In this perspective, the permanent dilemmas of uncertainty, complexity and irreversibility in environmental policy cannot be avoided. The solution is an ethical position to forestall disasters by requiring action before there is proof of environmental harm. The precautionary principle aspires to be a procedural principle under conditions of scientific uncertainty, large decision stakes, controversy and risk for ecological irreversibility. The normative force and moral appeal of the precautionary principle are manifest both in the vocabulary of the environmental movement and in green political theory. The elevation, institutionalization or even constitutionalization of the precautionary approach has been regarded as the marker of ecological rationality (Eckersley 2000; Mills and King 2000). There are multiple meanings of the precautionary principle and no concise definition can be given. It can be seen as an 'overarching framework of thinking that governs the use of foresight in situations characterized by uncertainty and ignorance and where there are potentially large costs to both regulatory action and inaction' (EEA 2001: 193). The core of the precautionary principle is anticipatory action, the shift of the onus of proof on those proposing projects entailing ecological hazardous activities, and extending science to include broader civic participation (O'Riordan and Cameron 1994: 14–16).

As a procedural standard, the precautionary principle embodies the idea of prudence in decision-making under uncertainty. Decision-makers should act in advance of scientific uncertainties in environmental issues characterized by large-scale change and irreversibility. If there is scientific uncertainty with regard to environment risks and hazards, policy-makers should 'err on the side of caution'. The rationale is to avoid the traditional reluctance of governments to act before environmental harm occurs.

What kind of science–policy communication does the precautionary principle embody? The implication is that science should play a role as an eye-opener or early warning in early phases of environmental policy process, rather than formulating cost-effective targets and solutions (Boehmer-Christiansen 1994: 29). A central assumption is that scientific knowledge about the complex dynamics of natural systems is inherently incomplete. The precautionary principle is an ethical imperative based on the idea that knowledge of nature is inherently indeterminate. Hence, it responds to the problem of scientific uncertainty by assuming that science cannot, and should not, be mobilized to establish the true state of environmental problems, or determine the tolerance limits for the ecosystem. Science cannot and should not act as an ombudsman and represent nature.

In this vein, the precautionary principle institutionalizes the ecological virtue of prudence and precaution, and a self-limited aspect that is central to ideals of ecological democracy, ecological stewardship and collective ecological management (J. Barry 1999a: 225). The application of the precautionary principle may lead to the enrolment of a broader segment of actors in environmental policy-making under conditions of uncertainty, and increasing public scrutiny. This ties into the

idea of ‘extended science’ or civic science (Lee 1993) with a broader knowledge base than more narrowly defined technical expertise.

The main criticism of the precautionary principle is its practical utility. The criticism contends that the principle is too vague, too general and too difficult to implement (Bodansky 1994; Dovers and Handmer 1995). While being a desirable ideal, the precautionary principle is difficult to use in a policy context as it does not give any practical guidance on what levels of environmental risk and harm that are ‘reasonable or tolerable’. The strong (read: radical green) version of the precautionary principle advocates zero pollution, discharges and emissions even at the expense of halting industrial development. This leads critics to doubt if the principle can be useful in resolving the difficult problems of international environmental risk regulation.

A more fundamental critique states that the precautionary principle is incompatible with liberal democracy (Wissensburg 1998: 184–5) as well as anti-science. The evocation of the precautionary principle reframes the debate on the liberal neutrality as well the scope for neutrality in science (see Hanson in this volume). The strong endorsement of the precautionary principle in green thought and practice is connected to a position that argues that the realities of ecological destruction will ultimately force humanity toward precaution. While risk assessment is neutral toward scientific uncertainty, the precautionary principle is biased in favour of safety (Bodansky 1994: 209). There is a recurrent charge that the precautionary principle is anti-science as it reduces the role of science in environmental problem-solving. A consequence could be a dilution and dethroning of science. However, the defenders of the precautionary principle argue that rather than being anti-science it acknowledges the possibility for radical uncertainty. It rejects a reductionist, a neutral and a narrow conception of science in favour of a more inclusive, more rigorous and more robust science.

Scientization

Scientization is a radically different approach to mediate between science and policy. Despite the acknowledgement of the insufficiency of scientific knowledge, science is assigned a crucial role in identifying, depicting, representing and solving environmental problems. Symbolically, science gives a voice to nature or acts as its *ombudsman*. There is a broadening mandate for scientific expertise as scientists are engaged to formulate policy proposals, and assist in devising optimal policy instrument as part of a ‘decision framework’ encompassing innovations such as system analysis, integrated assessment and scenario analysis. One risk is that scientization may lead to the reign of technocracy, excessive reliance of expert systems and proliferation of ultra-expertise. A top-down decision process governed by networks of scientific and bureaucratic elites runs counter to core central green ideals such as decentralization, public access and participation. This may ultimately result in limited public participation and lack of accountability.

A more optimistic interpretation contends that an ecologically enlightened scientization is the cornerstone in creating more environmentally stringent and

efficient agreements (Caldwell 1990). The advent of environmental science will 'green up' science, and scientists will act as a forceful environmental advisory. Hence, the mobilization of advisory science is crucial to the improvement of environmental policy-making. The international co-ordination, standardization and harmonization of scientific assessment signify the emerging earth systems science (Jasanoff and Wynne 1998: 58). This is epitomized by the expansion of global models of atmospheric, hydrological and terrestrial systems in international negotiations, research programmes and international organizations. The evolving field of ecological science, which involves stakeholders crossing public/private and national/international domains, has spurred on a proliferation of practices interfacing science with policy. Scientific innovations, such as environmental modelling, computer simulations, technology assessment, cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis, environmental impact assessment, and scenario analysis are a standard part of the advisory science used in negotiation and decision-making in liberal-democratic societies and global environmental diplomacy. The broader scope for science in the policy-making has been made possible by the methods found in the trans-disciplinary field of environmental science. In the 'new' production of science (Gibbons *et al.* 1994), scientists participate directly in the context of application.

The top-down model of environmental problem-solving that allocates networks of scientific experts, specialists and bureaucrats in ecological science echoes eco-authoritarian green thought underlining the need for an enlightened scientific establishment (Heilbrunner 1974; Ophuls 1977). This is also congruent with the technocratic and state-centric version of ecological modernization. The key agents to join forces in environmental innovation in this model are state-sponsored scientific experts and bureaucrats trained in environmental science. The dangers of bringing ecological regulatory science to the forefront of environmental policy-making have been highlighted. This will pave the way for a scientization of politics, the rise of technocracy, administrative rationalism, or green governmentality (Luke 1999b, Rutherford 1999: 60). The managerial mindset of global environmental modelling and geo-engineering privilege narrows forms of scientific expertise (Sachs 1995; Fischer and Hajer 1999).

Deliberation

The third model for science-policy communication promotes participation, dialogue and deliberation. Under the banner of the 'democratization of science', science should be opened up to public deliberation and active citizen participation. This ties into the idea of a 'democracy-of-the-affected' that affirms a bottom-up approach for mediating between science and policy. The green commitment to participatory democracy is extended to a commitment to participatory science. Hence, the underlying rationale is the promotion of dialogue, participation, accountability, transparency and decentralization in scientific assessment. Central notions flowing from this model are stakeholder communication and participatory, civic or citizen science. The notions of 'extended science' and 'extended peer

communities' signify a more deliberative account of scientific assessment processes. The institutionalization of participation in science is justified by an epistemological argument. Collective decision-making in the global environmental arena is fraught with uncertainty since scientific knowledge of environmental risks is inherently limited, provisional and incomplete, and value-laden. Many of today's environmental and health risks are invisible and immaterial, thus beyond the capacity of humans to perceive. An implication of adopting the post-positivist model of science and risk is that no knowledge can be privileged, that all knowledge is inevitably coloured, biased and socially located. This permanent condition of uncertainty, contingency, and even ignorance and indeterminacy prompts a need for a more pragmatic and open-ended decision process. Politics is in this respect a substitute for certainty (Saward 1993: 77). In the light of the non-remedial scientific uncertainties, ecological vulnerability and irreversibility, the policy process should be open, transparent and institutionalize self-reflection.

The idea of participatory science is fuelled primarily from three lines of thought – science studies, deliberative democracy and risk society. First, the influential work in science studies as previously referred to, argues that we witness a transition from normal to post-normal science. The urgency, complexity and high decision stakes associated with global environmental problems prompts a re-orientation of science to incorporate multiple views and stakeholders. Peer review should be extended beyond the scientific community to include an open dialogue between stakeholders such as the NGOs, industry, public and the media. This is in line with a call for a 'democratization of science', i.e. to involve a wider spectrum of actors in scientific decision making beyond the narrow scientific elite. However, the proponents for increasing citizen and public accountability in scientific endeavour do not propose democracy as a goal in itself, but rather to make science more effective (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1992: 273). The incorporation of lay knowledge in science does not rest on the assumption that lay or public knowledge is necessarily truer, better or greener (Wynne 1994). However, in a political process defined by uncertainty of future environmental outcomes, possible surprises and ecological catastrophes, a multiplicity of perspectives is an antidote to narrowing down alternatives.

Second, the notion of participatory science is consistent with the effort to link deliberative democracy, environmental politics and ecological citizenry (see Smith in this volume). At large, the idea of participatory science has been framed in terms of increased dialogue, deliberation and learning among participants rather than in the representation and institutionalization of environmental rights. However, the greening of representation, i.e. to include the community-of-fate by incorporating the interests of non-humans and future generations, is a nascent discussion. Deliberative democracy has been seen as a superior alternative to a process based on preference aggregation only. Central is the idea of equal citizens' participation in an open-ended process of discussion, dialogue, learning and (possibly) altered preferences in line with ecological values. The concept of discursive democracy further reinforces the need to incorporate civil society in an open-ended political process also beyond boundaries of human/non-human, nature/society and national/international (Dryzek 1990a; 1995). The core of

discursive democracy is communicative rationality that is more likely to produce a more ecologically sensitive stance. In sum, the promise of deliberative, communicative and discursive democracy lies in the revitalization of civil society, the decentralization of decision-making and the restructuring of the state. The idea of deliberative science is largely congruent with a green science–policy communication entailing decentralization, reflexivity and precaution. While some claim that this model of democracy is more likely to promote green ideas and practice, others are more sceptical (Eckersley 1995). However, can insights from the participatory, deliberative and communicative versions of ecological democracy be extended to science-based policymaking, and even to the processes and institutions of scientific knowledge production? The extension of democracy to the heart of scientific sphere (with its own procedures and mechanism for the production, verification, control of authoritative knowledge) raises difficult issues.

Third, another impetus for the democratization of science is the risk society and reflexive modernization literature (Beck 1992). The transition from industrial society (with its calculable risks) to risk society (with its incalculable mega-hazards) requires a redefinition of the rules, principles and institutions of decision-making. The reality of the new environmental risks will force the redesign of the basic norms and institutions of societies. This includes the discourses and practices of science that are at the heart of theories of risk society and reflexive modernization. The de-monopolization and democratization of science imply that authoritative decisions should not be made by narrow groups of experts, but have to include a wider spectrum of stakeholders (Beck 1992: 163). NGOs, the public and the business should become active co-producers in the social process of constructing knowledge, thereby revitalizing ‘sub-politics’ in the risk society thesis. The whole argument rests on the assumption that we face qualitatively new types of global ecological threats and techno-hazards. Beck’s notion of *reflexive scientization* captures the idea that scientific decision-making on environmental risks should open up for social rationality. A modernization of modernity and science is needed. Hence, the traditional objectivist account of science has to be replaced by a more inclusive science that institutionalizes self-doubt, self-interrogation and self-reflexivity.

What are some of the challenges with deliberative science? First, an unsettled issue is whether the rules for production of scientific knowledge will have to change to enact a deliberative vision of science. The question of whether the basic norms, processes, institutions and operation of science should be reformed in order to effectively incorporate citizens, NGOs and other stakeholders is left unanswered. Neither science studies nor democracy and risk society literature provides any clear guidance as to whether the practices tied to scientific knowledge production, such as peer review, should be reformed or replaced. Participatory science can be conceived as an instrument to dethrone science or to deprive scientific knowledge of its authority and legitimacy conferred by modern society. If the democratization of science is conceived as a project of overthrowing science, sceptics are quick to rally and argue that this will endanger the quality of scientific knowledge and, finally, environmental policy process that relies on ‘sound’ science. Hence, this may ultimately endanger the design of sound environmental policies.

Second, a more general question is if deliberation and broader participation in science will deliver greener policy and secure ecological values. Can deliberation effectively deal with global environmental risk management relying on global modelling and ‘big science’? The question taps into the tension between the green demand for substantive outcomes and the procedural demands for democracy. The green imperative, i.e. to strongly advocate certain policy outcomes, is at tension with the procedural demands of democracy. In an open-ended decision process and scientific assessment process there can be no guaranteed (ecological) outcomes. Sceptical voices argue that citizen deliberation in science will be cumbersome, time-consuming, ineffective and slow. Furthermore, even an educated citizenry would have problems in grasping the complexity of the knowledge of environmental risks.

Third, the advent of global environmental problem-solving may limit the scope for participatory science. How can local action be co-ordinated and geared to combat transboundary or global problems? Deliberative scientific assessment forums are global in scope with multi-disciplinary and multi-national collaborative research networks.

Ecologizing and democratizing science

In the light of the rise of regulatory science and technocratic discourses about the society and environment, I argue that green political theory should re-conceptualize science – as knowledge, as practice and as institution. The green engagement with science needs to move beyond the existing dichotomous representations of science as either the enemy or the ally. A post-positivist notion of scientific expertise is a cornerstone in re-inventing scientific and technological decision making as a deliberation between science, citizens and civil society. In recent years the common ground between green concerns and democracy has been expanded (Doherty and de Geus 1996). Green political theory today accepts that the struggle for ecological values should take place within institutions of the liberal democracy. Similarly, there is a need for a reconciliation of green political theory with the institution and operation of modern science.

How can science be more ecologically sensitive and democratically responsive, i.e. how can a ‘green’ science–policy culture be realized? This brings us to the question what kind of model for science–policy interaction is most consistent with green values. At face value, the calls for the incorporation of the precautionary principle as an overarching decision rule in international environmental conventions and declarations may seem the most straightforward strategy to enact a green science–policy culture. The constitutional entrenchment of the precautionary principle entails making it mandatory in all decision-making involving ecological risk and irreversibility (Eckersley 2000: 129–30). The introduction of a constraint on democracy in order to prevent negative environmental outcome is a remedy for the absence of guarantees that green deliberative democracy will foster ecological commitment. The precautionary principle is clearly useful as procedural norm in post-normal science areas defined by large scientific uncertainties at the

borders of ignorance, societal controversy and high stakes. However, its usefulness depends on the kind of uncertainties and risks we face and these vary between different environmental problems. The precautionary principle is biased on the side of caution and is therefore conceived as more likely to generate strong ecological outcomes. Hence, the widespread celebration of the precautionary principle reflects the legacy of end-state reasoning and substantive outcomes in ecological thought. The promotion of the precautionary principle among green political thinkers can also be conceived as strategy, or a last resort, to articulate the sceptical stance toward modern science that defines ecologism.

The participatory and deliberative vision of science–policy communication is largely compatible with the preference for deliberative democracy in green political theory. Furthermore, the deliberation model for science–policy communication is more congruent with recent constructivist accounts of scientific expertise. It recognizes the contingency and open-ended process of regulation of hazards. The policy process relies on principles and procedures such as precaution, reflexivity and openness. However, there are no guarantees that deliberative science will promote radical green change.

The top-down perspective of scientization, which is more likely to prompt an expert proliferation by giving a greater mandate to science, seems at odds with ecologism's call for decentralization, holism and grassroots participation. However, under certain conditions the scientization model – a process that institutionalizes instrumental rationality – may produce more environmentally stringent policies compared to policy processes relying on the precautionary principle. In this context, techniques such as risk assessment and environmental modelling may promote greener policies.

A central argument is that the ecological commitment of the different models of coupling science and policy is not straightforward. There is a clear tension between communicative and instrumental rationality in science-intensive environmental policy processes, manifested by the rift between precaution and 'sound science'. The precautionary principle is generally more favoured as a decision rule in green political theory. The prospect for 'greening' science–policy interaction evokes the trade-off between substantive goals or proceduralist ethic, between environmental efficiency and democracy. Hence, green consequentialism is at odds with democratic proceduralism when spelling out a role for science in the struggle for sustainability. A more pragmatic attitude in choosing whether the model for scientization, deliberation or precaution should be adopted is called for. As proposed by Barry, in dealing with environmental problems there is a need for both instrumental and communicative rationality, for both technical expert knowledge and ethical judgements (J. Barry 1999a: 215).

Conclusion

Can we talk about an 'end' of the environmentalism manifest in the expanded role of science and technology in environmental governance? Links have been made with the entrenchment of technocratic science and the marginalization,

pacification and co-optation of radical ecological ideas and practices. However, I have argued that green political theory needs a more sophisticated representation of, and engagement with science in order to enhance the prospects for securing ecological change and reversing the end of environmentalism. This entails engaging with the wider post-positivist scholarship that critically evaluates the status of expert knowledge in modern societies. What are the boundaries between scientific and non-scientific, expert and lay, global and local, and indigenous and 'western' knowledge? The radical ecological critique of science as a container of instrumental rationality, dominance and control towards nature precludes any constructive role for science in environmental decision-making. The tendency to legitimize environmental values and goals with reference to the authority of science is likewise problematic. Science will not deliver the final truths about the nature and magnitude of the 'environmental crisis'. A permanent critical posture toward science and technology implies a recognition of the cultural and ideological factors at play in the manufacture of scientific knowledge. The scientific and technological endeavour inhabits a significant power and authority to depict, represent and intervene in the natural world. A reflexive and post-positivist notion of science, risk and uncertainty is at the heart of the endeavour of making scientific expertise more inclusive and participatory. Clearly, the institution of science, like liberal democracy, needs to be amended in the light of challenges posed by global environmental risks. The idea of deliberative science is one proposal in the direction to 'green up' and democratize science as well as inventing environmentalism.

Part III

**The good and green
society**

9 Ecology, democracy and autonomy

A problem of wishful thinking

Mathew Humphrey

Introduction

Green politics has been understood as a radical challenge to the status quo of western liberal-democratic political practice, contesting what has been seen as an overarching ideology of ‘industrialism’ and the ‘grey’ politics of sectional bargaining and the bureaucratic centralized management of public life.¹ If, as suggested in the introduction to this volume, a pacification of environmentalism has taken place from the perspective of political theory, this challenge will have been at least partially dissipated (perhaps in the manner suggested by Blühdorn, this volume). One mode by which there may be an ‘end’ to green politics, in this sense, is the extent to which liberal democracy itself is now taken as the *only* appropriate vehicle for delivering ecological goods, which may rule out in principle other forms of political agency in green politics. There has been considerable work from green political theorists in recent years on the relationship between ecology and democracy.² This seems as it should be: clear thinking about how the demands of green political thought (in its various forms) relate to democratic procedures (in their various forms, both realized and theoretical) constitutes a crucial element of any comprehensive green politics. Generalizing somewhat extravagantly, one can say that green thinking about this relationship has moved from an endorsement of eco-authoritarianism, through eco-agnosticism, to a belief in an eco-democracy.³ That is, from a belief that authoritarian forms of government would be necessary in order to achieve green ends, through a position that radically separates green values and green processes, to a belief in a necessary connection between ecologism and democracy. The latter argument has been based on either the preconditions for democracy, or a defence of freedom and autonomy, or the interests of nature, or out of respect for nature’s communicative ability.⁴ If liberal democracy is the only appropriate mode of articulation for environmental politics, then environmentalists no longer have a *reason* to be (radical) environmentalists (in the sense of the introduction to this volume) as a fundamental challenge to liberal democratic norms is no longer necessary (see also Mills and King, this volume, on the accommodation of green political thought with ‘conventional’ political theory).

I will argue in this chapter that the positing of a necessary relationship between green politics and democracy is mistaken, and constitutes an example of wishful thinking on the part of ecological political theorists. By this I mean that an understandable desire to pursue two political goods simultaneously has resulted in an attempt to forge a non-contingent link between these two goods when such a link is neither necessary nor plausible. In that sense it constitutes an example of (attempted) wish fulfilment, placing the cart of substantive outcome before the horse of analytical enquiry. Ultimately, that there may be both good reasons to be green and good reasons to be a democrat does not entail a necessary connection between green politics and democracy. It does not help the cause of thinking clearly about the demands of ecologism, nor the nature of democracy, to imagine that there is.

In the process certain political concepts are made to lie on a procrustean bed where they are stretched or truncated in order that they will support an ‘appropriate’ answer. In relation to eco-democracy, this fate has particularly befallen the concepts of autonomy and the argument for a rights-based defence of democracy for which it is taken to be a foundation. In order that they can be used to bolster an argument for a non-contingent relationship between ecology and democracy, these concepts have to be decontested in new ways. This is not in itself necessarily problematic, but it can be when, as a result, concepts are denuded of the very elements that enable them to support the overarching argument of which they are part.

There is a methodological point to make at this early stage. I am not here mounting a defence of an essentialist understanding of political concepts, such that there is a core intension of the concept of, say, autonomy that, by definition, denies usage of the concept lacking that core intension authenticity. Concepts are contested constantly (and they are contested whether or not they are also ‘essentially contestable’) and normally lack settled meanings. Particular ideologies or discourses will look to ‘decontest’ these meanings and to cement a word–meaning relationship, but such semantic closure can never be fully achieved.⁵ What I will be suggesting, however, is that there are certain elements to the intensions of these concepts that are responsible for, or at least carry much of the weight of, their argumentative appeal. To the extent that new decontestations of these concepts remove these elements of the concept’s intensions, they remove also the reasons that we have for finding these concepts to carry moral force. This is the case with the necessary connection argument for the relationship between ecology and democracy, whereby the notion of autonomy (and the notion of rights to basic liberties dependent on it) is robbed of much of its moral force when pressed into service for the necessary connection argument. It is also thereby rendered in a form that leaves the connections between autonomy and democracy unclear. This leaves the necessary connection argument itself exposed as conceptually incoherent.

The argument will proceed as follows. First, we will note some of the salient features of the history of thinking about the ecology–democracy relationship. The next two sections analyse elements of the ‘necessary connection’ argument. The first of these examines the ‘argument from preconditions’ – this is a relatively

short section as I have nothing original or controversial to say about this argument; it exists rather for the sake of completeness. The other examines the 'argument from principle' and seeks to show that the use of the concept of autonomy for according rights to the natural world is counter-productive. The final section concludes.

A partial defence of things past

There is a tradition of analysis of ecological politics in which democracies are characterized by short-term time horizons, strategic interaction between self-interested bargainers and where environmental dilemmas take the form of tragedy of the commons-type collective action problems. These elements combine to render the institutions of democracy unable to cope with what was taken to be a looming ecological catastrophe (see, for example, Heilbroner 1974; Ophuls 1977). This tradition is usually taken to be discredited by contemporary green theorists, for its misunderstanding of the nature of ecological problems and/or for its inadequate conception of democracy⁶ (see also Barry's chapter in this volume on the 'diminishing marginal utility' of 'crisis talk' and the 'doom and gloom Malthusian legacy' in motivating political action). However, the *n*-person's prisoner's dilemma and other models of strategic interaction remain useful tools for understanding some environmental problems, and we should beware of throwing out the analytical baby with the authoritarian bath water. If we did then we would suffer the tragedy of not understanding the tragedy of the commons. Second, although this literature tended to a naïve view of what authoritarian regimes would be able to achieve, the *empirical* rebuttal of the claim that green authoritarianism is needed, i.e. that no heretofore existing authoritarian regime has a good environmental record ('ecocide' in the USSR for example⁷) is rather beside the point (for this type of response see Paelkhe 1996). The only appropriate counter-example would be a failed authoritarian regime that had prioritized environmental goals. After all, authoritarian regimes do tend to achieve those things to which they accord highest priority, even if inefficiently and often with great cruelty. The USSR did achieve rapid industrialization and beat America into space, for example. It is at least open to question as to whether an authoritarian regime with high-level environmental priorities could achieve its (high priority) goals. None of this is intended to imply support on my part for an eco-authoritarian approach, but merely to suggest that the case against is not as neatly victorious as is often assumed.

Goodin (1992) posits a hard distinction between green values and forms of green agency. Given their values, his argument runs, greens should select from the menu of possible forms of agency that which is most likely to enable them to realize those values. The relevant form of agency may be democratic, it may not be, and any ends-means relationship could only ever be contingent. This is a distinction to which, despite much criticism, Goodin *et al.* still cleaves (2001: 86) despite his own (1996) attempt to deliver an argument for such a non-contingent link. This is the position that I refer to in the introduction as 'eco-agnosticism'.

The argument from preconditions

As noted above I have little new to offer in respect to the argument from preconditions, but I will nonetheless discuss it briefly because it provides one of the supporting pillars of the necessary connection claim, and because it has been explicitly run with the argument from principle in order to substantiate that claim (Dobson 1996a).

The argument from preconditions runs as follows. As Dryzek rightly notes, any claim that democracy is *purely* procedural would be incoherent. Democracy is self-binding, it must insist on certain preconditions for its own existence if it is to protect itself from self-destruction. This is what allows liberalism and democracy (despite the obvious tensions that have been felt acutely between liberals and democrats historically) to claim some necessary connection. Arguably democracy requires the set of liberal political rights to freedom of speech, conscience, assembly and so on in order to persist. Thus the (liberal) removal of these rights from the democratic sphere into a constitutional sphere is acceptable as a guarantee of the preconditions of democracy's continued existence. The 'argument from preconditions' merely wants to add a sustainable, well-functioning natural life-support system to that set of prerequisites. Democratic communication and politics is dependent upon sufficiently good environmental conditions to allow its own continuation, and as Dryzek says this is the generalizable interest *par excellence*.

As has been widely pointed out (e.g. Dobson 1996a) this interest is so generalizable that it applies equally to authoritarian, non-democratic forms of communication and politics as it does to democratic forms. It is no more or less than an anthropocentric argument for sustainability, and is as much a precondition for business, sport, scholarship and tiddlywinks as it is for democratic politics. The argument from preconditions does tell democrats, in a compelling manner, why they should be green (to a limited point – anthropocentric sustainability) but does nothing to tell greens why they should be democrats.

The argument from principle

The argument from principle diverges from the argument from preconditions in that it does explicitly claim that it is logically necessary for greens to be democrats due to their attachment to certain moral positions. The main proponent of this argument is Robyn Eckersley (1996a; 1996b), and her argument has been endorsed by Andrew Dobson (1996a). Eckersley suggests that it is possible to forge a necessary connection between ecology and democracy 'in the same way' that there has traditionally been considered to be a necessary link between liberalism and democracy, as discussed briefly above. Eckersley wants to 'refashion' the notion of rights 'for ecological purposes' in order to offer a less contingent mode of reasoning than standard utilitarian arguments for environmentalism (Eckersley 1996b: 213). This contingency can be challenged if green values are grounded in a defence of autonomy and non-domination.

This ecological defence of autonomy is framed as the right of non-human

nature as well as humans to develop autonomously, i.e. to be free to 'live and blossom' in their own way, undominated by other agents. The instrumental and contingent green attachment to democracy espoused by Goodin can be avoided:

[...] if green values were to be grounded in a broader defence of autonomy (let us say, for a moment, the freedom of human and non-human beings to unfold in their own ways and live according to their 'species-life') and, by association, a broader critique of domination (of humans and other species). If we are to give moral priority to the autonomy and integrity of members of both the human and non-human community, then we must afford the same moral priority to the material conditions (including bodily and ecological conditions) that enable that autonomy to be exercised. ... humans, both individually and collectively, have a moral responsibility to live their lives in ways that permit the flourishing and well-being of both human and non-human life.

(Eckersley 1996b: 223)

Eckersley accepts that a difficulty arises in using the language of autonomy here as non-humans cannot choose their own destiny 'in a political sense' (1996a: 180); however 'if the general moral premise of respect for the autonomy of *all* beings is accepted ... then humans (as the only moral *agents*) must collectively acknowledge that human choices need to be constrained by a recognition of the interests of non-human beings' (1996a: 180). Furthermore:

[...] the rights of individual organisms would need to be framed in the context of the requirement of larger autopoietic entities, such as ecosystems, in ways that maximize the opportunities for ecosystems and individuals (on which individual organisms are dependent) to flourish.

(Eckersley 1996a: 189)

Despite the initially transient nature of these arguments ('for a moment') Eckersley holds to the ideas of flourishing, freedom and autonomy expressed here in both papers under close consideration.

The first sentence offers the new decontestation of autonomy. It posits, in general terms, the idea that there are forms of life particular to species, and as such it is an empirical rather than normative claim, for which evidence would presumably be provided from zoological and similar studies, as well as anthropology for any claim that humans also have a 'species-life' (reminiscent, of course, of Marx's writing on 'species-being'). Given that regularities of behaviour by members of the same species occur across time and space I see no reason to challenge the empirical claim, although establishing the nature of the 'species-life' of human beings presents some unique difficulties, given millennia of cultural accretions to human behaviour. Elephants in the wild behave differently to elephants in a circus, with the addition of an anthropogenic element distinguishing the latter. The normative element enters at the point where we are told that such autonomous lives are to be given

‘moral priority’. We have to be wary of a circularity of argument here. We shouldn’t interfere with autonomous nature, because it is autonomous, which it is by virtue of the fact that we do not interfere with it. We need independent reasons for valuing autonomous nature (i.e. for accepting the normative implications) for this argument to work.

The ensuing claim that following a species-life permits flourishing and well-being is also empirical but with strong normative overtones in the language used. Who wouldn’t rather ‘flourish’ and possess ‘well-being’ than not? Again a sympathetic reconstruction can show the plausibility of the empirical claim – life lived in accord with the evolutionary fit between a species and its environment that has evolved over millennia is likely by some magnitude of probability to be a life for which that organism is well suited. Complications certainly arise when we ask what conditions must hold for an organism to be said to ‘follow its species-life’. A claim that all natural entities thrive and possess well-being when they lead their species-life would clearly be false. We do not live in a world where that description could ever be accurate. Natural entities prey upon one another, they get sick, injured, suffer starvation and meet untimely ends in a whole variety of ways. This is not controversial or surprising to environmental philosophers, and clearly a denial of this is not what Eckersley is suggesting. She holds that autonomy is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for such flourishing and well-being.

Yet there is a question here of what drives the claimed ‘moral priority’ of the autonomous life. Is it autonomy *per se*, or the flourishing and well-being for which it is a condition? The latter clearly matters, and yet if the well-being aspect of the claim is to be maintained, then a distinction can be made between those entities that do achieve their ‘species-life’ and those that do not, and humans as moral agents may have responsibilities to ensure that entities are not denied this outcome. As noted, ‘flourishing’ invokes welfare considerations, as does of course ‘well-being’ and another of Eckersley’s preferred terms, ‘blossoming’. Furnishing both the necessary and sufficient conditions for flourishing would presumably place human beings under a rather fulsome and rigorous moral code with respect to non-human entities. Eckersley claims that, on the contrary, our duties to wild animals are clearly limited:

Unlike domestic and captive animals, *individual* wild animals are not *directly* dependent on humans for their well-being and sustenance. Accordingly, humans do not have the same direct moral obligation toward individual wild animals as they do towards captive and domestic animals, and individual wild animals do not have the same kind of rights in relation to humans.

(Eckersley 1996a: 192)

She goes on to suggest, following Wenz, that we might consider domestic animals to have ‘positive rights’ against us and wild animals to have only ‘negative rights’ to non-harm. Claims for rights come with a high degree of moral seriousness,⁸ however, which is one of the reasons why liberals have found them to be a powerful form of argument. A valid rights claim places human beings as moral agents under

a duty to provide for the conditions of the right to be fulfilled. A right for entities to both 'live' and 'blossom' suggests a world in which human beings do a lot more than leave some ecosystems relatively undisturbed. We touch here of course on a familiar preservationist objection to the animal rights discourse, that, if taken seriously, it invokes an ethic of constant interference in the natural world in order to ensure animal well-being, flourishing, or blossoming (ditto in this case for plants and ecosystems). There are many examples of natural non-flourishing, non-blossoming and absence of well-being that do not invoke the vital needs of any creature bar the victim. Animals and plants killed in floods and forest fires, animals and plants that succumb to disease, for example. In short there are a whole catalogue of ways in which entities can suffer large welfare losses (or at least fail to flourish) as a result of natural processes that have nothing whatever to do with the vital needs of any other organism. If it is well-being that matters, morally, then the concept of autonomy appears to be redundant. The plants in the Palm House of Kew Gardens could hardly survive without almost constant human care and attention; does this entail that they do not flourish? If so, why? If they do flourish even though they are not autonomous, why should we care about autonomy rather than flourishing? If autonomy is only a necessary condition of flourishing why are we not under an obligation to provide the sufficient conditions?

There are a number of possible objections to this critique. Firstly it might be suggested that this focus on individual organisms is misplaced. What matters is the continued flourishing of species and ecosystems, and of course individual carriers of any particular genotype may not flourish. This would, however, be a misplaced argument, and I should add is not one Robyn Eckersley seems inclined towards, recognizing as she does that an autonomy-based rights discourse is by its very nature individualistic. How, anyway, could a species be said to possess well-being? If numbers of a species rise sharply, it may be said, metaphorically, to 'flourish', but then such increases can be signs of ecological imbalance and are not necessarily good for a species in the long term.

A more likely objection comes from the proposition that it is not well-being that is normatively crucial here, but autonomy *per se*. Autonomy may only be a necessary and not sufficient condition for flourishing, but it confers dignity on existence in and of itself. Natural entities possess the capacity for autonomy and the reason why it is wrong to constantly interfere in natural processes and their existence in order to ensure their well-being is because this impinges upon that. The right being claimed is a right to such an autonomous existence, which is a capacity or precondition for well-being although not well-being itself, nor any guarantee that well-being will be achieved. An additional advantage of autonomy over well-being is that it can be stretched to cover collective entities such as species and ecosystems.

This in turn brings us to the more substantive objection concerning what is entailed in this particular decontestation of the concept of autonomy. Eckersley claims that the fundamental area of normative disagreement between greens and liberals is 'the meaning and scope of autonomy and justice' (Eckersley 1996b: 222), and it is autonomy that she invokes in the argument from principle. We are

to give ‘moral priority’ to the ‘autonomy and integrity of members of both the human and non-human community’, but our notion of ‘autonomy’ has to become ‘more inclusive’ and ‘socially and ecologically contextualized’ to reflect the fact that autonomy is only ever partial as certain ‘basic ecological conditions’ are necessary ‘*preconditions* [...] for [...] humans to practice democracy’ (Eckersley 1996b: 223–4, my emphasis).

But here we have to be careful to maintain the distinction between the argument from preconditions and the argument from principle. We have seen that the argument from preconditions is valid, but is too general to form a non-contingent link between green political theory and democracy. The argument from principle is supposed to achieve more, but if this is so it has to avoid a collapse back into the preconditions argument. The argument from principle is in itself a defence of autonomy, interpreted (ecologically) as a freedom to develop according to one’s own species-life, and this itself has now to become an intrinsic part of the democratic theory that is being defended. Dobson makes this point clearly – ‘democratic and green thinking are (for Eckersley) linked by a common core notion of autonomy, in that the defence and extension of autonomy are what green thinking is about, while a belief in autonomy underpins defences of democracy’ (Dobson 1996a: 143). This is a view that Dobson endorses, claiming that the ‘attribute of autonomy crosses the species divide rather than being confined to one side of it’ (whilst noting some of the problems that follow from such a conception), although he indicates later that he, unlike Eckersley, might restrict notions of autonomy to higher animals (Dobson 1996a: 145). Indeed, and this shows clearly the difference between the old and the new (ecological) conceptions of autonomy, in a paper published in the same year Dobson says that attempts to extend autonomy across the species boundary ‘must founder’ – employing here the ‘old’ Kantian conception of the self-legislating subject (Dobson 1996b: 137). Michael Mason, on the other hand, resists the green extension of the notion of autonomy beyond human subjects, and suggests that green ends would be best pursued on the grounds of ecological human rights (Mason 1999: 62). John Dryzek, for his part, notes, in light of Dobson’s resistance to the extension of the notion of communicative ability to non-human nature, that ‘the capacity for autonomy is as controversial as the capacity for communication when applied to non-human entities’ (Dryzek 2000: 151).

Autonomy has, like most concepts in politics and philosophy, been employed in a variety of ways (see, for example, Dworkin 1988: 5), and as I have stressed already I am not seeking to defend an essentialist ‘correct’ definition of autonomy, nor do I see any in-principle objection to conceptual innovation and the development of new decontestations of concepts. Nonetheless conceptual innovation has to be tested against our existing usage, and if we believe that something morally important is lost in the innovative usage we may have reason to object to that innovation. Etymological appeals to foundational use are of course not in themselves indicative of the most appropriate conceptualization; they can nonetheless provide a useful place to start, indicating the point from whence current usage develops. In the case of autonomy the ancient Greeks used the terms ‘autos’ (self) and ‘nomos’ (rule) in relation to city-states, ‘A city had *autonomia* when its citizens made their

own laws, as opposed to being under the control of some conquering power' (Dworkin 1988: 12–13). This immediately enlists the notion of an entity making laws for itself, of following a self-chosen path, which has remained a constant element in the manner in which the concept has been used subsequently. It is thus an empirical assertion that uses of the concept of autonomy have consistently invoked the idea of self-legislating subjects, and it then becomes a normative question as to whether a new decontestation of the concept that dispenses with that notion can be morally appealing.

In the invocation of the argument from principle, the question at issue is not autonomous acts but the nature of autonomous agents. As Dworkin puts it, crucial to being autonomous is the 'capacity to raise the question of whether I will identify with or reject the reasons for which I now act' (Dworkin 1988: 15). Only in the presence of this capacity can it make sense to think of giving laws to oneself, and clearly this capacity is something we expect to find in human beings alone.⁹ Now, we have to allow Eckersley the privilege of conceptual innovation, and she now wants to employ a conception of autonomy that looks very different to the traditional concept. However, a decontestation of autonomy as 'living out a species-life' still leaves us requiring a method to distinguish the reflective life from the non-reflective life, and these two things must remain morally different, unless we want to see no difference between, say, a tiger or a shark killing a human being and a human doing the same thing.

There are at least two related, but slightly different responses that could be made to this line of reasoning from someone committed to the argument from principle. The first would be to claim that the ideal of the traditional conception of autonomy was always misplaced, as autonomy is only ever partial and is always constrained by ecological considerations. The second would be to suggest that this account of autonomy is not the most morally appealing one, and that a morally better account of autonomy would encompass not only humans but non-human nature as well.

That there are ecological constraints on autonomy is, I assume, uncontroversial. As Edward Goldsmith (1992) has pointed out, humans living in industrial society cannot will themselves to be able to live by breathing polluted air and drinking contaminated water; beyond certain limits these things just will disable us. Autonomy is always a matter of degree and always partial. Ecological limits do not, however, prevent us from conceptualizing autonomy in terms of self-legislating subjects; we merely have to accept that this capacity operates within ecological constraints. The ecological reconceptualization of autonomy has instead to offer an account of autonomy that 'lets in' non-human nature by granting it the relevant capacity (which of course will be different to the one above). This brings us back to the idea of 'species-life'. An entity possesses autonomy when it has the capacity to live according to its species' natural proclivities. The right to be free to 'live and blossom' in your own way is justified in terms of the protection of this capacity.

Casting the argument in terms of capacity to live a species-life rather than in terms of an outcome (*actually* 'flourishing or blossoming') could solve certain problems encountered above. If the right is clearly framed as a defence of the

capacity rather than as an actual right to ‘flourish’ and this capacity is operative under the sorts of conditions that have evolved in the absence of human agency, then we can construct an argument for the protection of (say) wilderness areas because of the need to protect this capacity. There is no reason then to suppose that this would entail the protection of individual entities from natural cycles of predation and disease, for any entity may possess a capacity and at the same time fail to exercise it.

However, I would suggest that what we lose by thinking about autonomy in this way is greater than what we gain, in that we relinquish the very intension of the concept of autonomy that makes for a morally powerful connection with liberal democracy. Autonomy as self-legislation is indicative of a capacity of reflection that enables human beings to transcend instinctual forms of behaviour, and this capacity has been what (most) liberal theorists have held to be of sufficient value to be worthy of rights-based protection. Furthermore it is this capacity which is taken to demarcate the human from the non-human realms. It can be conceded that non-human nature has an independence from humanity: it existed before us and it will presumably continue to exist after we cease to, but entities in non-human nature do not reflect upon how to live their lives. Why would a conception of autonomy that dispensed with the notion of reflection and instead referred only to independence lose moral appeal? Imagine the ‘capacity to live a species-life’ argument turned back upon human beings. What is our ‘species-life’? It is empirically almost certain that as a society we would not agree a definitive answer to this (which is precisely where liberalism made its entrance). Other species do not have to face these questions, nor ecosystems. In the absence of such a definitive answer we may endorse a liberal approach and allow people to choose a mode of life for themselves – but this entails a capacity to, in Rawlsian language, frame, revise and pursue a conception of the good; or a ‘capacity to identify with or reject [...] reasons’ (Dworkin 1988: 15). There is something distinctive about the human form of life that traditional conceptions of autonomy appeal to. Here the defender of the argument from principle might suggest that autonomy consists in the capacity to lead a species-life, and it just so happens that the species-life of the human is one in which humans possess what would previously be described as autonomy (a capacity to accept or reject reasons for acting), whereas for other species it does not.

But this is no more than a conceptual sleight of hand, which robs autonomy of its intrinsic connection to liberal democratic theory. If the capacity to choose a life ceases to be an element of autonomy then we will need a set of reasons to be morally concerned about it that appeal to *that* conception of autonomy rather than the one described above. If living a ‘species-life’ is what somehow is important to the welfare of non-human species, then it has to be defended in those terms – the living of a species-life. This new version of autonomy would cease to distinguish between a human capacity to live a life reflectively according to a chosen conception of the good and one in which one did no more than follow one’s instincts. Stretching autonomy to cover the non-human world robs the concept of the ability to carve this distinction. It is, however, precisely this distinction which has allowed liberals

to draw the intrinsic connection between democracy and the protection of autonomy. Autonomous entities have to be free to choose their form of life. That is the crux of the problem, democracy has been justified with reference to a particular conception of autonomy. If we decontest the notion of autonomy in a new way, then justifications for democracy do not rest on *that* conception of autonomy, they rest on something else, call it *X*. Eckersley would then have to show, in a way she has not even attempted, why it is that we should now believe that democracy rests on not-*X*. Stretching the concept of autonomy to cover non-human entities disables that concept as a grounding for democratic theory.

Facing up to contingency

The introduction to this volume raises as one of its central questions whether the normative foundations of liberal democracy have absorbed the most fundamental green ideals. If it has then some of the radical elements of the green challenge to conventional forms of politics appear to stand dissipated. This relationship can, however, work in both directions, and there is no doubt Eckersley seeks first and foremost to 'green' liberal democracy. However, the question 'how can we forge a non-contingent conceptual relationship between ecology and democracy?' has an unfortunate effect when used as a substitute for 'how can we best understand the relationship between ecology and democracy?' What this produces is precisely what Eckersley denies, a 'case of rigging the (democratic) system in favour of the environment' (Eckersley 2000: 131) which is symptomatic of a slightly worrying more general trend in some green political thought, the attempt to eliminate contingency. This is true both of ecocentric environmental ethics, which seeks to render environmental protection non-contingent as an ethical demand (for a critique of this approach see Humphrey (2002)) and ecocentric political theory, which seeks to render a non-contingent relationship between ecological outcomes and democratic processes. If one sees the field of politics as ineliminably contingent (as I do, see also John Barry (1999a)), then the attempt to achieve non-contingency can be seen as misguided. If we accept that there are good reasons to hold green values (on, say, justice-based grounds) and also good reasons to be a democrat (such as holding to the epistemological argument for democracy and not believing your green beliefs to be infallible) then the search for a non-contingent, watertight and necessary connection between ecology and democracy becomes redundant. Better that one grasps the nettle of contingency and argue in the public sphere for your values and beliefs. If we believe that green arguments are good arguments, and we believe in the power of the best argument to ultimately convince,¹⁰ then environmentalists can embrace liberal democratic decision-making processes, contingency and all, and continue to make the case for green values. That said, if elements of liberal democratic practice seem inherently inimitable to environmental norms, there seems no good a priori reason why environmentalists should bind themselves to a set of political procedures in stark conflict with their axiology, and this is where the radical challenge remains.

Notes

- 1 See for example Porritt (1984); Dobson (2000a); Bookchin (1991).
- 2 For example, Barry and Wissenburg (2001); Eckersley (1996a; 1996b; 1999; 2000); Dobson (1996a); Goodin (1992; 1996); Dryzek (1990a; 1996; 2000); de-Shalit (2000, Ch. 5); Doherty and de Geus (1996); Mathews (1996); Lafferty and Meadowcroft (1996); Mason (1999); Saward (1993).
- 3 The most appropriate form of democracy for ecological compatibility is generally taken to be deliberative or discursive (Dryzek 1996; 2000, Ch. 6; de-Shalit 2000, Ch. 5). However the 'argument from principle' under consideration in this paper seeks to tie ecological politics to a liberal form of democracy.
- 4 On this last see Dryzek (2000). Although the focus of this paper is specifically on Eckersley's argument, I believe the problems that exist with it are also applicable to other versions of the necessary connection argument. This is something I intend to demonstrate in a future work.
- 5 For more on this approach to conceptual argument, see Freeden (1996).
- 6 See, for example, the opening lines of Paelkhe (1996).
- 7 See Feshbach and Friendly (1992).
- 8 Here I agree with Lynch and Wells that ecocentric claims should be treated with appropriate moral seriousness, but disagree with their tactic of presenting highly constrained immediate moral choices as appropriately illustrative. Eckersley is right to contend that even if our course of action in such tightly constrained circumstances will be *prima facie* anthropocentric, we need to think about the moral requirements of less constrained long-term collective choices when discussing political morality.
- 9 As a capacity this is also something that will be manifested in different people to different degrees. It is an empirical question as to whether such qualities could be found in the 'highest' of the non-human species, such as the great apes, who may show an ability to think conceptually. It is unlikely that many other non-human creatures would demonstrate this capacity to any extent. Wissenburg (1998: 109–13) makes the point that an entity can lack autonomy yet still be a subject, and be entitled to moral consideration on that ground.
- 10 Here I agree with most writers on ecology and democracy that a model of democratic deliberation should serve as a regulatory ideal of our actual democratic practices. The massive power differentials of actually existing democracies do render naïve the idea that the best argument will triumph.

10 A precautionary approach

Meira Hanson

Introduction

While some may perceive it as integration and accommodation, and others as co-optation and pacification, many would agree that liberalism can and has taken on issues raised by environmentalists and environmentalism, and that it has done so in a form consistent with a revised, but still liberal, outlook. Does this portend the end of environmentalism? Only if environmentalism is perceived as an exhaustible set of policy goals, value positions and agendas for political change, and even then only to the extent that the success of the 'greener' liberal outlook has made demands for more radical change effectively redundant.

I contend that this is not yet the case. First, because new issues are continuously rising on the environmental agenda, as noted by other contributors to this book (cf. Wissenburg's and Barry's chapters), thus perpetuating the process of integration or pacification. Second, because liberal democracies, and hence liberal theory, are also in flux, precisely because they are constantly accommodating new ideas. In what follows, I shall try to demonstrate this contention with regard to the particular case of the precautionary principle.

The precautionary principle is a guiding norm for the protection of human health and the environment in the face of scientific uncertainty. Its current prominence in international, EU and, increasingly, national legislation would seem to indicate that policy-making in liberal democracies has internalized a commitment to the protection of human health and the environment: one which goes beyond preventing 'clear and present', and even probable, danger to the anticipation (in some form) of yet uncertain threats.

It is arguable to what degree some of the more widely endorsed formulations of the principle actually commit governments to taking precautionary measures. For example, Principle 15 in the Rio Declaration only requires that:

In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

(UNEP 1992)

In this, probably the least demanding, formulation of the precautionary principle, a threat of serious or irreversible damage is a *necessary but not sufficient* condition for precautionary action (Hanson 2003). However, even in the above formulation, invoking the principle implies that one cannot always wait for full proof of harm. Furthermore, it requires that inaction be justified on grounds other than uncertain scientific evidence: no simple requirement for liberal policy-makers, as we shall see later.

As I argue elsewhere (see Hanson 2003), while the principle lacks a single definition acceptable to all, the crux of the debate is over its interpretation, i.e. what taking precautionary measures means. The question of the principle's meaning and application has become particularly controversial following disputes between the EU and the US over growth hormones in beef, genetically modified organisms and global warming, in which the precautionary principle has been invoked (EEA 2001: 12). However, due to limits of space, I shall not address the various interpretations of the principle here, except in so far as they relate to the issues discussed in this chapter.

In the first part of the chapter I shall address the controversy over the precautionary principle, drawing out two main lines of debate – on science and the precautionary principle and on the political regulation of risks – as they have been introduced in the literature. In the second part of the chapter I will show how the debate on the principle elucidates its potentially radical implications for central tenets of liberal democracy.

The politics of the precautionary principle

As noted above, the growing prominence of the precautionary principle on international and national levels has brought it into an increasingly politicized context of competing agendas and interests among states, corporations and non-governmental organizations. As a consequence, the debate about the precautionary principle encompasses a wide range of issues and cases – as well as rhetoric. Due to limits of space, I have chosen to focus on two main lines of debate, which I believe capture some of its central themes.

Science and the precautionary principle

Despite going on for more than a decade, the debate on science and the precautionary principle is still pervaded by a contrast set up between 'precaution' and 'science-based' policy or regulation. Since the latter concept and the more vague 'sound science' are increasingly being employed to buttress positions against precautionary measures, they are often considered by proponents of the precautionary principle to be little more than rhetoric.

Casting the debate in such a form, however, does little to explain the prevailing concern among scientists and policy-makers that the principle be considered an exclusively political issue rather than influencing the assessment of scientific evidence. This concern has been brought to bear, for example, on the EU inter-

pretation of the principle, as introduced in the Commission's communication (CEC 2000). The communication makes a distinction between 'risk assessment' and 'risk management': the former is to be informed by scientists and must precede the latter, which is to be the realm of the precautionary principle. This approach disappointed environmental groups who disputed the clear separation. According to Jordan, they rightly detected the influence of the US opinion that the precautionary principle is not a scientific principle and the US concern that science is being politicized (Jordan 2001: 158).

There is another dimension to this debate, though, which proceeds from the observation that for the environmental sciences, issues of 'proof' come to bear on the interpretation of statistics, and addresses a bias in the statistical method used. Because scientists are required to add only reasonably certain information to the body of knowledge, in order to prove, say, that a discharge has an effect, scientific method requires that the null hypothesis (i.e. discharge has no effect) be falsified. Following from this, there is also a greater emphasis on avoiding 'false positives' (or Type I errors) than 'false negatives' (Type II errors)¹ and a greater burden of proof is placed on the scientist who argues that there is reason to reject the null hypothesis (Lemons *et al.* 1997: 227). At the same time, there is a trade-off (for a given experimental design) between the probability of making false positives and negatives: so by trying to minimize the chance of making the former error, scientists are increasing the chances of making the latter (cf. Peterman and M'Gonigle 1992; Lemons *et al.* 1997).

By making explicit this bias in the method, proponents of the precautionary principle address the implicit policy decisions being made simply by the act of designing research to minimize one type of error rather than another. Some take this further, and make an ethical case for trying to minimize the chance of making 'false negatives', as a false negative could mean the loss of lives or damage to the environment (cf. Buhl-Mortensen 1996; Lemons *et al.* 1997).

Note though, that all the above examples address the issue of science or science for policy, as it is currently being conducted, i.e. the use of risk assessment to identify evidence of detrimental environmental threats. There is a large (and growing) contingent of proponents of the precautionary principle that criticize the current use of risk assessment, in view of what we can actually know about environmental systems. As McGarvin, for one, observes, it is ignorance and indeterminacy (rather than uncertainty)² that 'lie at the heart of the precautionary predicament' (McGarvin 2001: 43). Risk assessment fails to account for these limits on our knowledge, since by practising risk assessment one cannot help but proceed by reducing the complexity of environmental systems (cf. Santillo *et al.* 1998).

As argued, for example, by Stirling (2001), a precautionary approach (unlike risk assessment) is entirely consistent with sound scientific practice, dealing, as it does, with ignorance and indeterminacy. What a precautionary approach to science would imply in practice is less clear, though proponents have made a multitude of suggestions such as a 'greener science' (Wynne and Mayer 1993), 'post-normal science' (Santillo *et al.* 1998) and a 'precautionary model' of science (Barret and Raffensperger 1999). One main feature these approaches have in common, is a

demand for more lay involvement from a wide range of potential stakeholders in the consideration of evidence and/or the choice of methods (this ‘participatory turn’ in science is addressed by Bäckstrand in her chapter of this volume).

For the above proponents of the precautionary principle, ‘what is at issue is the kind of science that is used to support the Precautionary Principle, and consequently the way in which “sound science” is characterized for the purposes of environmental regulation’ (Barret and Raffensperger 1999: 107). The implications of their critique are that the choice of method used is not predetermined and thus cannot be detached from other choices about policy. By requiring that risk assessment precede any decision about taking precautionary measures, one is not making a value-neutral decision. Note, though, that this is not a critique of the objectivity of science and scientists as such but, rather, a critique of the notion that an appeal to science to reinforce a certain position is necessarily value-neutral. As we shall see, this critique has implications for the relationship between science and liberal democracy.

What the debate on science and the precautionary principle has shown, is that positing ‘precautionary’ and ‘scientific’ approaches as polarized simply caricaturizes the debate (Stirling, 2001: 61). At the same time, in recognizing the pervasiveness of uncertainty, and particularly ignorance and indeterminacy, with regard to what science can tell us about complex environmental systems, proponents of the precautionary principle have demonstrated that science can take us only so far. As a consequence, the debate reverts to the political question of what institutions can best protect us against potential threats, an issue to which we shall turn now.

The political regulation of environmental risks

As in the case above, it is necessary to plough through the rhetoric to uncover the crux of the debate. In particular, a recurring critique concerning the ‘counter-intuitive’ and ‘counterproductive’ effects of the precautionary principle deserves attention. The ‘counterintuitive’ argument is raised, for example, by Adams, who argues that people compensate for externally imposed safety measures by offsetting risks to another area of their life (or to other people), thereby limiting the efficacy of intervention (Adams 1995). The ‘counterproductive’ argument can be associated, for example, with Cross’s claim that proponents of the precautionary principle ignore the fact that actions aimed at public health could have negative effects on public health. These ‘paradoxical perils’ of the precautionary principle may be caused directly by precautionary regulations as in the case of risks from alternatives to regulated products (e.g. the replacement of organochlorines by organophosphates), or indirectly, when resources are focused on regulating a particular risk or set of risks, shifting them away from the regulation of other risks or from investment in increasing health overall (Cross 1996).

The latter claim is captured neatly in the maxim that ‘richer is safer and poorer is sicker’, which is central to Wildavsky’s oft-cited case against precautionary measures. According to Wildavsky, collective efforts at anticipating and reducing future low-probability events are doomed to failure, due to the inherent uncertainty

of future events and the possibility of surprises (i.e. the condition of ‘ignorance’). What is more, by investing resources in trying to make society safer, we are decreasing wealth overall and with it the means to deal with any unexpected adverse events (Wildavsky 1988: 58).

While the potential high costs of regulatory action is not an issue to be dismissed, one cannot but be sceptical in light of an across-the-board condemnation of precautionary measures as subject to perverse effects. Not surprisingly, as Hirschman aptly notes, the ‘perverse effect’ is widely appealed to by reactionary rhetoric and has been one of its central features for at least two centuries. According to Hirschman, the perverse effect is a special and extreme case of the concept of the unintended consequence, as it suggests that human foresight is subject to almost total failure (Hirschman 1991: 35–6). One is, however, justified in asking how, in light of such lack of foresight in general, these critics can see so clearly how regulation is ultimately perverse. Furthermore, if the underlying assumption of the unintended consequence is the unavoidable uncertainty and open-endedness in social thought, how is it that one set of consequences, i.e. the perverse ones, are predictable (Hirschman 1991: 36–7)? One is bound to ask why precautionary measures should be singled out for attack from other forms of human activity.

One possible reason for distinguishing precautionary measures is that they constitute a form of government intervention in social and economic life. Thus, for example, reflecting on the German interpretation of precaution, O’Riordan and Cameron note that it is ‘an interventionist measure, a justification of state involvement in the day to day lives of its Länder and its citizenry in the name of good government’ (O’Riordan and Cameron 1994a: 16).

Why this would be problematic from the point of view of some critics, can be surmised if we consider Wildavsky’s prescription for dealing with ignorance. This approach

[...] lies in what ecologists call resilience, whereby robust species adapt to and surmount newly arising adversities. Resilience in human societies requires growth in knowledge, communication, wealth, and organizational capacity, the resources that enable us to craft what we need when we need it, even though we previously had no idea we would need it.

(Wildavsky 1995: 433)

‘Resilience’, according to Wildavsky, can be juxtaposed to the anticipation of risks as two contrasting approaches to the management of risk. ‘Anticipation’ is a position that seeks safety by avoiding risks and can be associated with government regulation. ‘Resilience’, on the other hand, is a position that seeks safety by taking risks, that is, making incremental progress by ‘trial and error’ to build up the human capital and resources to deal with future adverse events. It can be associated with the private market and risk taking (Wildavsky 1988: 107).

Wildavsky opts for ‘resilience’ and is not alone in favouring this approach (cf. Adams 1995; Goklany 2000). Generally, what these critics of the precautionary principle are arguing for is that we let things be. By preventing people from making

mistakes through the regulation of risky activities, we are also preventing them from learning from these mistakes and overcoming them (Morris 2000a: 12). This approach is characterized by a confidence ‘that the benefits of successful trials will outweigh the failures’ (Adams 1995: 212) and that a reliance on the market mechanisms will do the trick. This optimism about the success of the market, left to itself, to achieve safety stands in contrast to their general pessimism about the success of precautionary measures, i.e. the ability of governments to successfully regulate environmental risks. Proponents of the precautionary principle, on the other hand, are optimistic with regard to the success of regulatory intervention, and pessimistic about leaving problems for the market to bring to a solution.

A caveat is in place at this point. Not all proponents of the precautionary principle are optimistic about state intervention. In fact, according to M’Gonigle, implementing precaution requires ‘a reconsideration of the very nature and function of the state’, its function becoming one of constraining incautious economic behaviours and facilitating precautionary ones (M’Gonigle 1999: 139–40). This shift should incorporate a range of measures associated with the precautionary principle by its proponents: for example, that the burden of proof be shifted to the potential polluters, that the public should have a substantive input into decision-making procedures on risk and that rather than risk assessment, which is focused on what level of contamination is safe, we should practise ‘alternatives assessment’, which questions whether or not a suggested project should be undertaken (M’Gonigle 1999: 140). These changes should engineer a shift in what Beck terms ‘the relations of definition’ in society, that is, ‘the rules, institutions and capacities that structure the identification and assessment of risks’ (Beck 1998: 18). It would, therefore, be more precise to characterize the debate more broadly as one about the ‘political’, rather than the ‘governmental’ regulation of risks.

To conclude, the discussion so far has shown that despite (or perhaps because of) the increasing prominence of the precautionary principle, the debate about it, both between proponents and critics, and among proponents, is rife. Furthermore, while a case can be made for a precautionary approach to science, one cannot reduce the debate on the precautionary principle to one about science: it is also, though not only, about the political regulation of risks. Both lines of debate, though, have a bearing on central tenets of liberal democracy, as we shall see next.

The challenge to liberal democracy

In this section, I shall address three areas where the precautionary principle poses a challenge to liberal democracy. While the discussion has interrelating themes, I will focus on each sub-section separately.

Liberalism and the limits of science

As we saw above, even if there is nothing about the precautionary principle that posits it against science as such, proponents of the precautionary principle have raised a pertinent critique as to how ignorance and indeterminacy affect what

science can tell us about the world and about how ‘science for policy’ is currently being conducted. To what degree does this critique of science affect the role science performs in liberal democracies?

To answer this question, we should first take issue with the way science is associated with liberal democracy. According to Hiskes, there is a historically intimate association between science and liberal ideas. Liberalism as a political theory has its roots in the scientific revolution and rationalist philosophy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with science and rationalism providing a dual justification for liberal democracy. According to this vision,

Liberal society would be a model of Newton’s harmonious universe governed by natural laws divine in origin but discoverable through science, a society populated by rational individuals whose sure knowledge of their own interests could provide an efficacious foundation for collective political decisions.

(Hiskes 1998: 71)

A slightly different picture is portrayed by Holmes, who suggests that:

The Enlightenment was a limits-of-reason and limits-of-knowledge tradition, teaching humility before the facts. Writing in this tradition, the classical liberals believed that man is a limited being, subject to ignorance and error. The scientific method, like the formalities of liberal proceduralism, was designed, in part, to compensate for the weaknesses and imperfections of the mind.

(Holmes 1993: 252)

In view of the above, it would probably be more accurate to claim, that liberalism is inspired at one and the same time by the Enlightenment’s faith in reason and by a more cautious attitude to the faith in the powers of human reason (Gaus 2001: 20), this being, perhaps, one of its many internal tensions.

Conceived as such, the degree to which proponents of the precautionary principle challenge the liberal attitude to science is debatable. They may be challenging the more optimistic approach to the power of human reason to understand, and intervene in, complex natural processes, by arguing the case for ‘a culture of humility about the sufficiency and accuracy of existing knowledge’ (Stirling 2001: 66). At the same time, their position could be perceived as consistent with the more sceptic view that Holmes associates with classical liberalism. It is interesting to note that they share this position with some of their critics, since ignorance about the outcome of purposeful social action also underlies the case for ‘resilience’. This aspect will be taken up in the following section.

There is, however, a different sense in which one can consider the science–liberalism connection. It, too, stems from the common Enlightenment heritage drawing, as it does, on the Enlightenment confidence in the human ability to understand the natural world. According to Waldron, this confidence was matched by optimism about the possibility of understanding society and is the basis of distinctively liberal normative attitudes towards political and social justification.

‘Like his empiricist counterparts in science,’ Waldron notes, ‘the liberal insists that intelligible justifications in social and political life must be available in principle for everyone’ (Waldron 1987: 135). The key requirement here is transparency: ‘society should be a *transparent* order, in the sense that its workings and principles should be well-known and available for public apprehension and scrutiny’ (Waldron 1987: 146, italics in original).

It is in providing transparency that science plays a central role in liberal democracies. According to Ezrahi (1990), science performs a political function by depersonalizing the grounds of public actions and the exercise of power. It does this both by providing scientific (or social scientific) explanations for actions and, more broadly, by introducing a logic of instrumental reasoning that makes the relationship between actions (as causes) and consequences more transparent to the outside observer. By doing this, science makes actions accountable in a way that abstracts from the personal interests and values of the political actor but, at the same time, does not deny the latter’s autonomy. This is because ‘causal relations revealed and established by (natural or social) science are not used to replace or subordinate voluntary action’ but, rather, ‘to add an “objective” observable dimension to voluntary action and to define it within a system of impersonal constraints which exposes it to continual public tests of adequacy’ (Ezrahi 1990: 31).

If science performs a central function by making decisions transparent (and decision-makers accountable) in liberal democracies, this is reflected in the role played by experts who, as Ezrahi notes, ‘are often trusted as reliable, politically neutral representatives of the “public interest”’ (Ezrahi 1990: 38). It is at this juncture, though, that the science–liberalism association is challenged by the critique of scientific method raised by proponents of the precautionary principle. As noted above, it is not the objectivity of science which is under attack, but the perceived neutrality of science and scientific expertise. However, by calling attention to the way value judgements are not excluded when conducting ‘science for policy’ (e.g. choice of what type of error to try to avoid and what method to use), proponents of the precautionary principle are calling into doubt the transparency of scientific expertise. Thus questioned, one cannot easily uphold the role of science and scientists in liberal democracy.

Precaution, constructivism and market liberalism

As we saw in the above discussion, Wildavsky and his followers set up the debate on the precautionary principle as one between those who attempt to anticipate and ‘plan for safety’ and those who believe in building up resilience to face any future adversity. I suggest that the optimism of the former, and the scepticism of the latter, with regard to the efficacy of government intervention to regulate risks, relates to an ongoing debate within liberal thought.

According to Gaus, ‘throughout the outgoing century liberals defended two opposing views of the nature of liberal order – one stressing the spontaneous, unplanned order of a market society, the other stressing the crucial role for intentional design’ (Gaus 2001: 21). This contrast between views of society has at its

core the differing perceptions regarding Enlightenment's faith in the powers of human reason noted above. The crux of the debate in this case is whether, as Holmes puts it, 'human reason is powerful enough to construct a workable blueprint for the best possible social order' (Holmes 1993: 247).

Following Gaus, the first of the two opposing views can be associated with classical liberalism and primarily with the writings of Hayek (Gaus 2001: 21). Hayek criticizes what he terms 'constructivism', that is, the view that humans can purposefully design social institutions (Hayek 1973: 8–9). He warns us of the 'synoptic delusion' that constructivists are apt to succumb to, that is, 'the fiction that all the relevant facts are known to some one mind, and that it is possible to construct from this knowledge of the particulars a desirable social order' (Hayek 1973: 14). Rather than purposeful development, social institutions are a product of evolutionary progress, with rules of conduct evolving 'because the groups who practiced them were more successful and displaced others' (Hayek 1973: 18).

There are some distinct similarities between this world view and that of Wildavsky. Like Wildavsky who argues that surprises are inevitable, Hayek requires that we acknowledge 'the fact of the necessary and irremediable ignorance on everyone's part of most of the particular facts which determine the actions of all the several members of human society' (Hayek 1973: 12). In addition, one can detect common elements in the way Hayek describes the spontaneous progress by mutual adjustment between individuals and Wildavsky's progress by 'trial and error'. According to Hayek, the knowledge necessary for the evolution of social order, i.e. knowledge of (other) people's circumstances, is dispersed (Hayek 1960: 160). It is the competitive market that allows the co-ordination of dispersed agents based upon information of individualized experience – a form of co-ordination, which is beyond the reach of any centralized government organization (Meadowcroft 1999: 19).

For Wildavsky 'trial and error' represents 'a form of social spontaneity' rather than social control. It is a means to achieving resilience via many, decentralized, attempts at probing the unknown, and it is improved the more people participate in the exploration and the more widespread the search (Wildavsky 1988: 93). Like Hayek, Wildavsky considers the market to be the best mechanism for the job considering how 'markets are based on the principle of incessant search' (Wildavsky 1988: 227). Furthermore, like Hayek, Wildavsky is deeply sceptical about co-ordinated human intervention,

[...] for it is precisely the lack of central control and command that permits the testing of a wide variety of hypotheses that vigorously sample the unknown, and bring us into contact with events about which we would otherwise have been ignorant.

(Wildavsky 1988: 94)

So at the risk of simplifying, one could place the 'resilience' school in the debate on the precautionary principle in a liberal tradition that emphasizes 'the importance of spontaneous orders for commodious human social life' (Meadowcroft 1999:

27). Can one, however, place the ‘precautionary’ contingent on the ‘constructivist’ side of this divide?

M’Gonigle, for example, sees precaution as part of a shift to a ‘circular’ (rather than a linear) system and as directing action toward the development of a renewables economy (M’Gonigle 1999: 136). The type of economic planning he sees associated with the precautionary principle can be identified in approaches such as ‘clean production’, which has at its core the idea of redesigning production processes so as to embed them within the limits of ecological function (M’Gonigle 1999: 137). A similar approach to planning is argued for by Barry within the context of what he terms ‘ecological governance’ (a notion to which he also subsumes the precautionary principle). Environmental planning according to Barry, does not involve ‘social reorganization in accordance with some state-imposed blueprint’ but, rather ‘a process of “ecological restructuring”, altering and reintegrating the relationships between state, society, economy and environment on ecologically altered principles’ (J. Barry 1999a: 131).

While stretching Hayek’s notion of ‘constructivism’ to fit the proponents of the precautionary principle may be difficult, for our purpose the difference between ‘redesign’ and ‘design’ does not change the crux of the debate, which is more about the efficacy of intentional human intervention in the economy and less about its scale. The debate itself may seem a moot point when considering contemporary liberalism, which has abandoned earlier visions of social and economic planning and embraced market liberalism (Gaus 2001: 21). However, as Meadowcroft (1999), for example, shows, the tensions in liberalism with regard to planning are still both relevant and prevalent, particularly in the context of sustainable development.

While the above tension in liberal theory has yet to be resolved, instances of planning can be found in practice even in the most market-oriented liberal democracies: a classic example being monetary policy. However, while planning is not necessarily excluded in liberal democracies, it does have to be justified. As I shall argue next, it is with regard to the *justification* of intervention that the precautionary principle poses its main challenge to liberal democratic polities: specifically those polities who believe the state should be neutral between theories of the good.

The precautionary principle and liberal neutrality

The type of liberalism that is sceptical about the association of the state with a robust theory of what is good for individuals cannot justify policies by appeal to some correct value (Gaus 2001: 23–5; Michael 2000: 40).³ That this might be a cause of tension between liberalism and environmentalism is an issue that many have addressed, including Levy and Horstkötter in their chapters in this book. I limit my contribution to this discussion to the challenge posed by the precautionary principle for the neutral justification of policy.

John Barry (2001: 70) argues that the precautionary principle challenges the neutrality of the liberal state by requiring that it distribute the onus of argument

in such a way that it is biased in favour of protecting human health and the environment. If this were the case, though, a similar argument could be made about the onus of argument being distributed in such a way that it is biased in favour of the 'presumption of environmental innocence'. Either way the justification for the state's position would appear biased: the relevant difference is *how* the position is justified. I suggest that the fact that inaction is justified by evidence provided by scientists (even if the 'evidence' is that there is still no conclusive evidence) makes the justification for inaction more acceptable to liberals: this is because it is perceived as a value-neutral justification.

To illustrate my point, let us take the example of monetary policy. Considering that such a policy aims at guiding the economy in a particular direction, it is unlikely to be consistent with all theories of the good. The reason why this policy is acceptable from a liberal point of view is that the decision-making process is not based on a political choice between different value positions but, rather, made by expert officials who are perceived to be value-neutral. This, I contend, is indicative of the way liberal democracies use technical arguments and expertise to provide a neutral justification for policy. To an extent, this reiterates the above discussion of the function performed by science and scientists in liberal democracies, though what I emphasize in the current context is the (perceived) political neutrality of experts and expert advice.

Yet the precautionary principle is, if nothing else, a challenge to technical decision-making and hence to technical justifications for policy. First, at the very least the precautionary principle requires that reasons other than 'scientific uncertainty' be provided for government inaction. In other words, governments cannot just rationalize decisions based on scientific evidence (or the lack of it), but must provide other reasons if they wish to justify inaction.

Second, due to the nature of the threats and the limits of determining the consequences of a particular action, it has been argued that precautionary measures cannot be decided by means of assessing their costs and benefits. According to O'Riordan and Jordan, cost benefit analysis will be skewed depending on the position of the person doing the analysis with regard to the perceived resilience or vulnerability of the adaptive capabilities of both natural and human systems (O'Riordan and Jordan 1995: 202). The dominance of economic thinking in liberal democratic polities has been discussed elsewhere in this volume (see Barry's chapter), so it will suffice to say that the nature of the precautionary principle, or more precisely, of the context in which it is invoked, prevents decision-makers turning to economics to justify policy measures (precautionary or otherwise).

To conclude, I agree with Bäckstrand's contention in her chapter that the precautionary principle poses a problem for liberal neutrality, but I differ in my reasoning as to why this is so. According to Bäckstrand, the problem is the principle's bias toward safety. I, on the other hand, contend that a bias in the principle, or in the precautionary measures it condones, is not a problem in itself, so long as the policy is justified on grounds that are neutral with regard to ideas of the good. The problem is that by effectively ruling out an appeal to science or economics as a rationale for policy, the principle 'blocks an escape route' for liberal democracies.

This is not to say that precautionary measures cannot be justified on neutral grounds, but that there is a lacuna here that needs filling.

Conclusion

That liberal democracies should take on new ideas is not in itself surprising: openness, after all, is what liberalism is about. At the same time, the tendency to accommodate various ideological positions has left liberal theory rife with internal tensions (Gaus 2001: 26). As the discussion in this chapter has shown, integrating the precautionary principle into the theory and practice of liberal democracy has the potential of exacerbating existing tensions (e.g. between ‘constructivists’ and ‘anti-constructivists’ and between neutral and perfectionist liberalism) and introducing new ones (e.g. with regard to the role of science and expertise in liberal democracies). In addition, the debate on the meaning of the principle and what constitutes a precautionary approach are yet to be resolved, and considering the proliferation of cases in which the principle is being invoked, the debate is unlikely to be resolved in the near future.

If any general conclusion may be inferred from this case, it is that it may be too early to pronounce the end of environmentalism. This is assuming that environmentalism does not have one particular ‘end’ or ‘goal’ but, rather, is an ‘open system’ in constant interaction with its environment and continuously taking on new issues. However, if one thing is clear it is that the institutions of liberal democracies form part of this environment. The future evolution of environmentalism must also take account of this institutional context.

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Notes

- 1 If we err in rejecting the null hypothesis, we have a Type I error, or a ‘false positive’; if we err in not rejecting H_0 we have a Type II error, or a ‘false negative’.
- 2 By ‘uncertainty’ one usually means the lack of complete scientific evidence about the likelihood of a threat. A case of ‘ignorance’ usually implies that the outcomes of processes (the *de facto* effects) simply cannot be predicted by science. The condition of indeterminacy is one in which causal chains or networks are open-ended (O’Riordan *et al.* 2001: 24).
- 3 I use neutrality here in the sense characterized by Kymlicka as ‘justificatory neutrality’, that is, neutrality in the justification of government policy (Kymlicka 1989: 884).

11 Liberal democracy and the shaping of environmentally enlightened citizens

Graham Smith

Introduction

One of the fundamental questions raised in one form or another by the majority of the authors within this volume is whether the ‘end’ of environmentalism – understood in general terms as the realization of environmental sustainability – can be achieved within the institutional framework of contemporary liberal democracies. As the different chapters clearly demonstrate, there are a variety of ways that we might begin to answer this broad and challenging question. This chapter focuses particular attention on the practices of citizens: the achievement of environmental sustainability will require the emergence of more environmentally enlightened attitudes and forms of behaviour. Earlier in the volume, Marius de Geus discussed the problem of balancing the different preferences (not all ‘environmental’) of citizens. This chapter offers a tentative evaluation of the extent to which liberal democratic states have the capacity to encourage the emergence of a more environmentally enlightened citizenry. This should not be read as a claim that the practice of environmental citizenship is simply the product of state activity. Rather the argument is much less ambitious: the broad institutional context constructed by states can be more or less supportive of the types of citizen practices essential for the emergence of environmentally sustainable polities. Can citizenship be shaped in order to promote the end of environmental sustainability within liberal democracies?

Citizenship and green political theory

Only relatively recently have green political theorists begun paying serious attention to the role of citizens in the development of more environmentally sustainable polities. For example, John Barry (1999a) suggests that revitalized practices of citizenship are a necessary element of the political and cultural change required to achieve environmental sustainability. The development of the practice of ecological stewardship on the part of citizens is at the heart of his idea of collective ecological management. Peter Christoff contends that the environmental imperative requires citizenship to be reshaped beyond the confines of the nation state to encompass ‘additional and occasionally alternative transnational allegiances ranging from the bio-regional through to the global, as well as to other species and

the survival of ecosystems' (Christoff 1996a: 159). However, Andrew Dobson claims:

[...] no systematic attempt has been made to relate the themes of ecological politics to those of citizenship. This is surprising, given that since its contemporary re-emergence ecological politics has been habitually associated with citizenship-sounding issues such as the reinvigoration of the public sphere, the commitment to political participation and the sense that individuals can make a political difference.

(Dobson 2000a: 40)

Arguably, to date the most sustained analysis of citizenship from within green political thought is Dobson's 'Ecological citizenship: a disruptive influence?' (2000a). As the title of the piece suggests, Dobson argues that the notion of ecological citizenship disrupts the traditional 'architecture' of citizenship expressed in 'binary oppositions' such as public/private, active/passive, rights/duties and territorialized/deterritorialized. He sees a new configuration of ecological citizenship as a key element in the development of an environmentally sustainable polity. Towards the end of his study of the formal characteristics of ecological citizenship, Dobson makes a significant comment about the need to analyse the actual practices and context of citizens' behaviour and activity: 'Citizenships are not created *ex nihilo*; they are rooted in particular times, places and experiences. [...] As a political project, then, ecological citizenship must attend to the conditions under which and the mechanisms through which it might be promoted' (Dobson 2000a: 57). This is an important point – much theorizing on the role of citizens (whether in green or more mainstream political theory) remains somewhat abstract, focusing on, for example, the formal definition of environmental rights and duties of citizens. Taking our cue from Dobson's comment, to what extent are liberal democratic states able to promote the emergence of a more environmentally enlightened citizenry?

Liberal democracies and the use of environmental policy instruments

Although the term liberal democracy remains a contested concept, a minimal definition is a political community based on the rule of law, guaranteeing citizens' rights to freedom of speech, association, personal property and political participation. In this minimal sense a number of states can be classified as actually-existing liberal democracies. To a varying degree, these liberal democracies have developed and adopted a range of policy instruments – each with their own logic – that shape the environmental activities of their citizens, most obviously legal regulation, environmental taxation, and public education and information campaigns.

Legal regulations affect the behaviour of citizens through forms of hierarchical command and control. Environmentally harmful activities and behaviour are

simply made illegal. An obvious strength of legal regulation is that it is easily understood. Examples include banning the use of polluting toxic chemicals and fuels, restricting private car access in urban areas, the requirement to recycle certain products, etc.

The second type of policy instrument used by the state is environmental taxation and charges. In this case, the incentive is not the avoidance of legal punishment, but rather economic gain. Citizens are given an economic incentive to cause less environmental damage. The range of environmental taxation is increasing within liberal democracies, including the use of carbon taxes on vehicle and household fuels, congestion charging, deposit refund and take-back schemes on goods such as batteries and containers, household waste and water charges. The use of environmental taxes and charges has (at least) three advantages. First, the economic incentive at the heart of environmental taxation encourages continual reduction in environmentally harmful practices. Second, where citizens ignore the price incentive, income is generated to ameliorate the effects of environmental damage. And third, the extension of environmental taxation could make the taxation system as a whole more efficient, shifting the burden of taxation from 'goods' (such as taxation on income and employment) to 'bads' (environmental pollution and damage). A number of liberal democracies have committed themselves to such a shift in taxation policy.

The third (and sometimes overlooked) policy instrument is public education, whether through schools, eco-labelling or broader media campaigns. Here the state provides environmental information and attempts to persuade citizens to alter environmentally harmful activities and behaviour. Such education campaigns are common in liberal democracies: the inclusion of the environment as a core theme within the national curriculum and the public awareness campaign *Are You Doing Your Bit?* are just two examples from the UK. Unlike legislation and economic instruments, the primary objective of education is to change citizens' attitudes and values.

Through the use of these three instruments, the state is attempting to shape the behaviour and attitudes of citizens by either requiring or encouraging the internalization of environmental considerations. However, existing liberal democracies remain far from environmentally sustainable polities, and the actions and attitudes of citizens are far from the vision of environmental citizenship within contemporary green theory.

Research evidence suggests that in liberal democracies there is a distance between the environmental attitudes of citizens and their actual behaviour (Witherspoon 1996). Although there is a relatively significant level of environmental awareness and concern amongst the public and general expressions of support for environmental policies, this tends to remain somewhat abstract. Apart from those engaged in collective environmental activities (e.g. protests, demonstrations, and support and membership of environmental organizations), there appears to be a gap between concern and behaviour. Reflecting on this evidence from western Europe, Sharon Witherspoon argues that:

Support for environmental policies drops off when citizens are asked if they are willing to make personal sacrifices for the sake of the environment, and becomes a minority interest when it relates to cutting back on car usage [...] much public opinion relevant to environmentalism in western European democracies is confused; much is expressive, with little import for behavioural change.

(Witherspoon 1996: 54–65)

One obvious response is that the use of environmental policy instruments is still in its relative infancy – they could be used much more effectively. If there is a gap between public opinion and behavioural change, then the use of instruments that directly affect behaviour should be intensified – legal regulation and economic instruments will ensure environmentally sensitive actions or at least generate income to ameliorate the effects of environmental problems. From this perspective, the actual attitudes or character of citizens is not important beyond the recognition that they will act *strategically* within the incentive structure created by the use of different policy instruments. The role of the state is to construct an incentive structure to ensure environmentally sensitive behaviour.

However several questions need to be asked about the ability of the state to create such an incentive structure. First, can it be successfully achieved within our current socio-economic system? As other authors in this volume have asked (see, for example, the contributions by Barry and de Geus), can such an environmental incentive structure overcome the numerous counter-incentives generated within the capitalist system? One line of argument here is that of ecological modernization – the thesis that ‘recognizes the structural character of the environmental problematique but none the less assumes that existing political, economic, and social institutions can internalize the care for the environment’ (Hajer 1995: 25). Studies of ‘pioneer’ liberal democratic states (such as Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavian nations), where legal and economic instruments have been used in a relatively systematic fashion, suggest that there is evidence of the decoupling of environmental damage from economic growth (Christoff 1996b; Gouldson and Murphy 1997). The more extensive and systematic application of these different instruments can alter the broad incentive framework of citizens, guiding them towards less damaging forms of consumption. However, as critics have pointed out, in practice decoupling is far from systematic and is typically occurring per unit of GNP, which itself is still increasing. Thus environmental damage continues at unsustainable levels.

It remains an interesting question whether the extensive use of legal and economic policy instruments might be the basis of restructuring the economic system in the way that ecological modernization theorists have suggested. This would require the construction of a complex architecture of instruments that structured all areas of life to ensure environmentally sensitive behaviour. In many ways this does seem to be an appropriate characterization of the ecological modernization thesis which stresses the role of policy instruments (particularly

economic) and has little to say about the actions and character of citizens. The strategic orientation of citizens appears to be assumed.

An important question still remains, however; is it desirable for a liberal democratic regime to construct such an intensive architecture of policy instruments? In particular, would such an intensive use of environmental policy instruments be accepted by citizens? Would it be seen as legitimate? Evidence is far from promising.

If we look at evidence from one of the pioneer states, the Netherlands, we find that its much-celebrated National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP) and follow-up plans have faced strong political and public resistance 'to the idea of imposing measures to achieve radical changes in consumption and production patterns. The consumer may be conscious of environmental burdens in theory, but this does not mean he or she is willing to act according to this awareness in daily practice! High prices and restrictions on car use appear to be too much of a barrier' (van Muijen 2000: 160). Although a significant minority appear willing to pay more taxes or settle for a lower standard of living for the sake of the environment, Marie-Louise van Muijen also notes that there has been a recent decline in public attention to and care for the environment (van Muijen 2000: 168–9). Such public sentiments have been one of the factors slowing the implementation of the NEPP (see the chapter by de Geus on the tensions between environmental and other preferences and values).

Again, in the mid-1990s, research was commissioned by Lancashire County Council to investigate the attitude of its citizens to environmental issues. Even though the local authority is widely perceived as one of the fore-runners of Local Agenda 21 in the UK, the research uncovered rather disturbing attitudes amongst the public towards their governing institutions:

People display a pronounced degree of fatalism and even cynicism towards the country's public institutions, including national and local government. This is reflected in an apparently pervasive lack of trust in the goodwill and integrity of national government, and in doubts about the ability or willingness of local government to achieve positive improvements in the quality of people's lives. [...] There is a danger that, because of people's largely negative attitudes towards (and apparent recent experience of) such official bodies, proposals by the latter for specific measures to advance sustainability will be interpreted as self-interested, and even more likely to marginalize people further (particularly those in lower income groups). [...] Overall, whilst there is substantial latent public support for the aims and aspirations of sustainability, there is also substantial and pervasive scepticism about the goodwill of government and other corporate interests towards its achievement.

(Macnaghten *et al.* 1995: 3–5)

Here then, our concern is not just with the relationship between public awareness and environmental behaviour, but rather the distrust and political alienation engendered by liberal democratic institutions. This problem has become a common concern within contemporary political theory – when citizens perceive that there

is a growing difference and distance between their subjectivity, motives and intentions and the political decisions made in their name, it should be no surprise that they become cynical of public affairs (Offe and Preuss 1991; Barber 1984). And there is no reason why environmental policy should be an exception. In such a context, government-led environmental information and education campaigns are unlikely to be effective in persuading citizens to alter their attitudes and behaviour; political support for the enhanced use of policy instruments is potentially undone by political alienation, distrust and apathy.

What is the liberal democratic state to do? How is it to overcome the gap between environmental awareness and behaviour without further alienating citizens? One possible answer lies in the emerging arguments for increased opportunities for citizen engagement in environmental policy-making: an argument for enhancing the political aspect of environmental citizenship.

Squaring the circle? Enhancing *political* citizenship

To a certain extent, the policy instruments we have discussed so far treat the citizen as a *passive* agent; in particular, through the use of legal regulation and economic instruments, the state shapes citizens' environmental behaviour and practices by altering their incentive structures. The citizen acts strategically in relation to the existing architecture of policy instruments.

However there is a growing literature on the nature of democratic deliberation that is having a substantial impact on green political thought and which rests on the development of a more *active* notion of citizenship, particularly *political* citizenship. Typically such theories argue for increased participation within political decision making, specifically participation that fosters democratic deliberation (see Bäckstrand, and Mills and King in this volume). Thus, liberal democratic states may have a further mechanism through which the attitudes and behaviour of citizens might be shaped: the development of institutions that encourage public participation and deliberation.¹

Political participation and the enhancement of political citizenship are underdeveloped within liberal democracies, particularly in the environmental realm. Although periodic elections act as 'a continuous discipline on the elected to take constant notice of public opinion' (Beetham 1992: 47), environmental policy is rarely the primary concern of voters. The mandate that representatives enjoy extends over a period within which citizens have very little impact on decisions made in their name. There is little or no link between citizens' environmental values and preferences and the agglomeration of policy commitments in party manifestos.

Clearly political activity and influence within liberal democracies extends beyond voting, and contemporary liberal societies are marked by a plurality of interest groups and associations. However the democratic nature of this pluralism is undermined by the social and economic imbalances inherent within society. Expressions of economic power and social influence undermine, to a large extent, the assumption of political equality on which representative forms are frequently

defended (Arblaster 1987: 76). As David Beetham argues: 'The freedoms of speech and association not only provide the guarantee of a more extensive political activity than the vote; they are also the means whereby the inequalities of civil society are transmitted to the political domain' (Beetham 1992: 48). One such inequality is between the resources and influence of environmental organizations and groups bent on watering down the effectiveness of environmental policy instruments.

Theories of deliberative democracy view increased deliberation between citizens and between citizens and political elites as a way of realizing more fully the idea of political citizenship and political equality. At their most ambitious such theories offer the possibility of overcoming political alienation and restoring trust and legitimacy in political institutions.² Given our interest in the role of citizens and the problems that we have raised about the functioning of contemporary liberal democracies, the promotion of democratic deliberation has two potentially significant effects. The first relates to the question of legitimacy and trust in political authorities, which for deliberative democrats is generated by an on-going context of critical scrutiny and opportunities to challenge decisions (Warren 1996a: 55). As Amy Gutmann argues, 'the legitimate exercise of political authority requires justification to those people who are bound by it, and decision-making by deliberation among free and equal citizens is the most defensible justification anyone has to offer for provisionally settling controversial issues' (Gutmann 1996: 344). Environmental policy that may well require sacrifice on the part of citizens is more likely to be seen as legitimate if it has been created in a context of dialogue involving those who are to be subject to its requirements.

Second, theories of deliberative democracy suggest that deliberation will have an effect on the orientation of citizens (and political elites) towards environmental issues. First, deliberation rests on improved information flows: citizens will be able to draw on a range of environmental information and experiences when making judgements.³ Second, it is argued that democratic deliberation provides motivation and encouragement to articulate preferences and justifications which are orientated towards the common good – the reciprocal requirement to put forward reasons and to respond to challenges makes it difficult to sustain preferences held on purely self-interested grounds (Miller 1992: 61–2). The moralizing effect of deliberation offers the opportunity to emphasize the public good character of many environmental problems and expose and challenge the narrowly self-interested grounds of many environmentally degrading and unsustainable practices. For a number of green theorists this is an important element in the development of an active green conception of citizenship that is fundamental to political and cultural change, the development of an ecological ethos (Torgerson, 1999) and the practice of ecological stewardship (J. Barry 1999a). It is not simply participation *per se* that is important to an expression of such democratic citizenship, rather a particular form of civic engagement that encourages the public articulation, defence and revision of judgements (Warren 1996b: 242). Democratic deliberation offers conditions under which citizens will encounter and reflect upon ecological knowledge and values and are more likely to internalize these in their judgements and practices (J. Barry 1999a). Robert Goodin has argued that deliberative

democratic arrangements offer the most likely mechanism through which people can be induced to internalize nature's interests. Greens (who have already incorporated nature's interests) will have a voice to challenge environmentally insensitive decisions and offer alternative proposals. Further, the public-spirited character of deliberation means that there is also likely to be 'anticipatory internalization' of green ethical arguments by participants: 'discursive democracy [...] creates a situation in which interests other than your own are called to mind' (Goodin 1996: 847). Deliberative processes provide a conducive arena in which citizens can be exposed to alternative ways of conceptualizing relations between human and non-human worlds. As Robyn Eckersley argues: 'Public spirited deliberation is the process by which we learn of our dependence on others (and the environment) and the process by which we learn to recognize and respect differently situated others (including non-human others and future generations)' (Eckersley 2000: 120).

Theoretically, then, enhanced deliberation in environmental policy-making (and policy-making more broadly) offers an ingenious way of overcoming the current limitations of liberal democracies. Trust and legitimacy can be restored and political alienation lessened through opening up channels of deliberation between citizens and political authorities. Environmental policy instruments that emerge from such a process would be viewed with less scepticism. And the role of deliberation in promoting a more enlightened (rather than purely strategic) orientation on the part of citizens – an internalization of environmental considerations – promises a shift in behaviour patterns (see Mills and King in this volume for sceptical comments on the connection between democratic deliberation and environmental sustainability).

But does the promise go beyond theory? Can mechanisms for deliberation be established within a liberal democratic framework? Is there any evidence of the effect of deliberation on the attitudes and behaviour of citizens? Does participation and deliberation produce more environmentally enlightened results?

The institutional question

The belief that political participation and the development of environmental consciousness are related is a touchstone of much green political theory. However, the idea that effective forms of participation can be established within the structures and institutions of contemporary liberal democracies is viewed with some suspicion. The idea of radical decentralization dominates much writing within green political ideology. Small-scale, autonomous and self-sufficient political units are to be preferred which are typically defined by ecological (or bioregional) boundaries. There are a number of good reasons why deliberative democrats might also support such local political control: for example, regular face-to-face participation in decision making is made possible and increased knowledge and sensitivity to ecological conditions is likely if the political community is dependent on local environmental resources. However, a number of problems arise with such a blanket commitment to local autonomy and participation. Three will concern us here.

First, there has been a lack of detailed work on institutional design within green politics. It is simply assumed that face-to-face participation is more democratic. However, studies of face-to-face assemblies have shown that they are not necessarily democratic panaceas and are easily manipulated by powerful and experienced citizens (Mansbridge 1983; Sanders 1997). Democratic deliberation will not necessarily emerge 'naturally' in face-to-face environments. The detailed structure of institutions needs to be attended to. Second, the local level is not always the most suitable for dealing with the scale and complexity of many environmental problems which require higher levels of political co-ordination – at the level of the state for example. Some decisions can be taken at local level; others will require a higher level response ('appropriate scale' becomes the mantra for institutional design). Third, under present conditions, radical decentralization remains a utopian vision. We live in liberal democracies – the most obvious strategy is surely to work with the materials that are here.

Although much of the literature on deliberative democracy remains highly abstract, a number of studies are beginning to emerge that offer thoughts on how citizens might engage in environmental policy-making processes (e.g. Renn *et al.* 1995; Fischer 2000; G. Smith 2001; 2003).⁴ We can perhaps see the emergence of a continuum of types of institutions that range from highly structured citizen forums, often involving small numbers of citizens chosen at random (e.g. citizens juries, consensus conferences, deliberative opinion polls), through to the use of referendums and citizen initiatives that potentially involve all citizens in the decision-making process. Different types of institutions will have different strengths and weaknesses and approximate the deliberative ideal in different ways.

So, for example, the strength of citizen juries, consensus conferences and deliberative opinion polls is that they provide a highly structured space within which a cross-section of the population is brought together for a number of days to deliberate on a pressing policy issue. The citizens are exposed to a variety of information and hear a range of views from witnesses who they are able to cross-examine. The fairness of the proceedings is entrusted to an independent facilitating organization. The main weakness is that the quality of deliberations is protected by limiting the number of citizens involved. Deliberative opinion polls have involved between 200 and 500 citizens; consensus conferences and citizen juries (which require participants to come to a collective decision in the form of a report) typically only involve between 12 and 25 citizens.⁵ This is not to suggest however that the deliberations of citizen forums could not be the subject and catalyst of wider debates within civil society.

All three models of citizen forums have been used on a small number of occasions to engage in deliberations over environmental policy issues. The most established procedure is probably in Denmark: consensus conferences have been run regularly since the 1980s by the Danish Board of Technology as a means of incorporating the perspectives of the lay public within the assessment of new and often controversial scientific and technological developments which raise serious social and ethical concerns. The lay panel's recommendations have no statutory

authority, but have sometimes had direct impact on the legislative process in the Danish parliament. For example, the recommendations of the panel on genetic engineering in industry and agriculture led to the exclusion of transgenic animals from the first governmental biotechnology research and development programme (Klüver 1995: 44).

At the other end of the institutional continuum is the use of referendums and citizen initiatives whose strength lies in the realization of political equality (Saward 1998): all citizens have the right to vote in a referendum and collect the requisite number of signatures to place an issue on the ballot. Where referendums are held on controversial policy issues, they typically become the subject of widespread debate and deliberation across civil society, although the quality of deliberation suffers from the effects of material and social inequality. Studies of American and Swiss use of referendums highlight that middle-aged males with higher incomes and levels of education are more likely to vote (Cronin 1989; Linder 1994). The recent history of initiatives and referendums also shows the growing influence of money, paid petition circulators, direct mail deception and deceptive advertising campaigns. Given that the deliberative potential of direct voting rests on access to balanced information, the educational and civic claims of advocates is under threat because 'the side with more money too often gets to define the issues and structure the debate in an unbalanced way' (Cronin 1989: 226). Media manipulation is rife particularly when business interests are threatened. Referendums and initiatives on environmental measures have been affected and defeated by large-scale spending by opponents and often the issues at stake have been grossly misrepresented within the media. However this is a criticism of the existing practice of initiatives and referendums, not of their potential. It means that we need to spend time investigating possible 'imaginative safeguards' to ensure that information is balanced and that the influence of money and media interests does not continue to grow (Cronin 1989; Saward 1998).

But even with the imbalance of resources, greens have had some success. Evidence from both the United States and Switzerland suggests that a significant percentage of ballots have been on environmental questions and that initiatives have been used to place environmental issues firmly on the political agenda (Cronin 1989; Kobach 1994). Reflecting on past ballots, Ian Budge argues that greens should be in favour of increased use of initiatives and referendums on the grounds that they widen the political agenda and are 'more likely to overturn established pro-business policy than normal parliamentary proceedings' (Budge 1996: 87). The initiative is a mechanism by which groups within civil society can 'repeatedly challenge the government to defend the status-quo' (Kobach 1994: 149).

Although this is not a detailed analysis of the different types of institutions and their use to date in environmental decision-making,⁶ the point is that there are ways that citizen engagement and deliberation could be enhanced. Liberal democracies could create mechanisms to more effectively engage citizens. The question remains though: would it have the desired effect in shaping more environmentally enlightened attitudes and behaviour?

On shaky ground? Empirical evidence of the effect of deliberation

It is probably fair to say that much of the commitment to deliberative democracy is a matter of faith. The theoretical case is, for many, compelling – empirical evidence appears unnecessary. But, is there any evidence as to the impact of enhanced deliberation and citizen participation?

In *The Environmental Promise of Democratic Deliberation* (1995), Adolf Gundersen offers some initial evidence that deliberation on environmental issues has a transformative effect on citizens' worldviews. Gundersen's research, based on one-to-one interviews, seems to support the theoretical conviction that deliberation tends to enhance participants' views of collective action (including support for the extended use of environmental policy instruments), as well as leading to more holistic and long-term thinking – all central to the realization of a more ecologically rational politics. Further, and in line with the theoretical arguments, the deliberative process allowed Gundersen's interviewees to follow through the implications of, and in many cases challenge, their own existing values, beliefs and interests. However, although the study offers some interesting evidence, the intimacy and supportiveness of one-to-one discussions does not adequately reflect the potential anxieties and fears inherent in full-scale political dialogue and there is no follow-up investigation to see if the discussions had any lasting effect on behaviour.

There is some interesting evidence emerging from the experimentation with citizen forums that indicates that citizens take their role seriously and are willing and able to reflect on different evidence and experiences. Citizens become better informed and many of their preferences and judgements change (Stewart *et al.* 1994; Fishkin 1997; Mayer *et al.* 1995). James Fishkin, for example, cites evidence from a series of deliberative opinion polls run by public utilities in the state of Texas to suggest that preferences for environmentally rational policies increase significantly after a period of deliberation and reflection. Presented with four 'first choice' options for the provision of additional electric power to the service territory (renewable energy; new fossil fuel plants; investment in energy conservation; or buying and transporting energy from outside the service territory), significant changes in opinion occurred over the period of the deliberations. Before deliberation, renewable energy had been the first choice, but this dropped considerably as support shifted to energy conservation. Interest in renewable energy was not abandoned – in all cases there was a dramatic rise in the number of citizens who were willing to pay extra for more investment in renewables; rather, conservation was seen as a more cost-effective solution. Reflecting on the results of the utility polls, Fishkin argues that they

[...] highlight the fact that on issues where the public has not invested a lot of time and attention, the changes are likely to be large because the public is arriving at a considered judgement where previous responses would have represented only 'top of the head' views or even 'nonattitudes' or non-existent opinions.

(Fishkin 1997: 202; also Fishkin 2001)

There is also some indication that citizens are more civically minded and active well after the deliberative process has ended (Coote and Lenaghan 1997; Diemel 1989; McIver 1997; Mayer *et al.* 1995). Empirical backing is beginning to emerge for the theoretical claims made for the transformative and educative power of democratic deliberation, although limited work has been done on the long-term effect of participation on behaviour.

Unfortunately, evidence from referendums and citizen initiatives is partly clouded by the impact of money, although in his study of referendums in the United States, Thomas Cronin suggests that citizens generally ‘exercise shrewd judgement [...] and take their responsibility seriously’ (Cronin 1989: 197; also Budge 1996: 89). He adds that ‘the record suggests that the public can [...] act responsibly. Indeed, on environmental matters the public appears to be more responsible than state legislatures. [...] The fear that populist democracy via initiative, referendum, and recall would lead to irresponsible, mercurial, or even bizarre decision making has not been borne out’ (Cronin 1989: 231–2).

Conclusion

If contemporary polities are to move towards (the end of) environmental sustainability, the liberal democratic state needs to pay close attention to the effective shaping of environmentally enlightened forms of citizenship. However, states face the problem that although citizens appear to have an abstract commitment to environmental values, this does not translate into sustained environmentally sensitive behaviour. Unfortunately, the answer is not simply that the liberal democratic state should intensify its use of environmental policy instruments, whether mandatory regulation, economic incentives or public education. Citizens are sceptical of the intentions of political authorities. Thus it is not only a question of using environmental policy instruments more effectively, it is also a question of restoring legitimacy and trust in liberal democratic institutions themselves.

The institutionalization of democratic deliberation offers a possible solution to this particular problem. The state is engaged in shaping the practices of citizens: this time in enhancing the political practice of citizenship. The argument is simple and beguiling: citizens who engage in deliberation will develop more environmentally enlightened preferences and will legitimate the application of a more effective architecture of policy instruments. All well and good in theory. However, if we are looking for decisive evidence that the institutionalization of deliberation will lead to the end of environmentalism – the greening of liberal democracies and, in particular, the emergence of an environmentally enlightened citizenry – we will be disappointed. The evidence to date is no more than suggestive.

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Notes

- 1 Recent work on constitutional environmentalism offers another approach to the shaping of citizens' environmental attitudes and behaviour. Typically, constitutional environmentalists not only argue for substantive environmental rights, but also for procedural rights to participate in environmental decision-making (Hayward 2000; Eckersley 1996b). In this way, constitutional environmentalism and deliberative democratic theory can be seen as complementary (G. Smith 2003). The potential impact of substantive and procedural environmental rights will not be discussed in this chapter.
- 2 For a more fully developed analysis of the relationship between deliberative democracy and green political theory, see G. Smith (2003).
- 3 This relates to the weak epistemological defence of deliberative democracy: better policy decisions are likely to emerge because of improved information flows (G. Smith 2001: 72–3).
- 4 It should be noted that some green democrats, for example John Dryzek, would likely balk at the suggestions being offered here and the way that deliberative democratic theory is being used. Dryzek's theory of discursive democracy is highly suspicious of the motives of the state: he celebrates the public sphere of civil society and in particular new social movements as exemplary sites of authentic deliberation (Dryzek 2000).
- 5 The exception here is the German practice of running a number of juries (or 'planning cells') concurrently and/or in series. To date the largest project involved 500 citizens.
- 6 For a more systematic analysis of these and other institutional designs, see G. Smith (2001, 2003).

Part IV

**Perspectives and
possibilities**

12 Sustainability and plurality

From the moderate end of the
liberal equilibrium to the open end
of a situated liberal neutrality

Dorothee Horstkötter

Introduction

Although environmental politics and activism have a history of more than thirty years, the goal of a sustainable society seems as far away as ever, with only some issues remedied and many successes undone by other developments. First, in practical terms, the parallel trends of increasing material welfare in industrialized nations, increasing poverty in developing countries and a growing population worldwide make any efforts to develop ecologically sounder modes of production and consumption little more than a Quixotic struggle. Second, the widespread use of the concept of ‘environment’ (sometimes interpreted as ‘sustainability’) as a capitalist marketing strategy to sell almost any product and as a populist slogan by almost every political party is in fact undermining this struggle, and appears to be a concerted attempt to end the history of environmentalism by trying to render it superfluous.¹

Over and above this kind of analysis of a ‘pacification’ that merely seeks to absorb or assimilate more radical goals into the established order, I want to argue that the slow, and perhaps even negative, progress achieved thus far seems to be the result of a dominant political culture which lacks the right intentions and the appropriate means, and which is rooted moreover in a political theory and philosophy that has fundamental difficulties in articulating the complex structures of modern pluralistic society. What we need in its place is a political culture which tries to integrate contemporary social structures and which therefore not only implements the strong ideals of sustainability and of inter- and intragenerational justice, but also does justice to pluralism. Rather than idealizing an absolutist, hyper-rational ecological ideal, such a culture must integrate a diversity of voices ‘from below’ – some of which may be contradictory – about environmental strategies and ethics to be adopted. Accepting a certain diversity within environmentalism is an essential prerequisite if ecological policy is to be both just and sustainable, both socially and ecologically. As western political culture is infused mainly with liberal democratic thought, so there still appears to be a gap between liberal democratic thought, and thought in the service of a green *and* plural society. In this chapter I shall try to build another pillar of the bridge connecting these two concepts.²

John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* explores, in fact, exactly those areas which will interest us in this regard: it seeks to combine the aim of guaranteeing liberal and individual freedom to all, i.e. plurality, with the need to provide for the idea of a common good between free individuals and between their (voluntary) associations. As a political theory it is thus especially concerned with achieving consensus between particular points of view. The political framework envisaged is, furthermore, designed to be transferable to particular social aims (Rawls 1993: xxix), in our case ecological goals. I therefore think it may be useful to critically analyse Rawls' theory from an environmentalist perspective so as to identify aspects which are convincing as well as any serious shortcomings. The concepts of 'overlapping consensus', 'reflective equilibrium' and the 'inclusive view' will be of special interest in this respect. Do they avoid the dichotomy which is often assumed to exist between greater freedom and greater (ecological) consensus and, if they do not, how might they be modified and improved? Moreover, the notion of liberal neutrality will prove to be of interest to the proposed green and pluralistic society. I will try to show how an interpretation that supports the situatedness of neutrality can both maintain its egalitarian character and at the same time avoid its biased and oppressive potential.

Following Rawls' long-standing position that social justice is an issue that 'arises between generations as well as within them' (Rawls 1971: 137; 1999b: 118), I shall start by briefly considering his stance on intergenerational justice and on intragenerational justice,³ then moving on to critically examine the status of 'neutrality' and the role of 'non-political' values within and beyond political liberalism. This discussion is designed not only to bridge the gap referred to earlier, but also to clarify whether an (ideally operating) green version of political liberalism includes the end of environmentalism. If so, where in the wide range of possible 'ends' will we have to place it? Finally, if we introduce the modifications and improvements to Rawls' theory suggested here, does this bring any 'end' into sight? Here I shall explicitly refer to the elaboration of the different kinds of 'ends' we must take into consideration, as set out in the introduction to this volume.

Against this background my aim is to show how the assumed gap between sustainability and plurality might be bridged, and how both be brought into fruitful co-existence – with plurality supporting sustainability and sustainability limiting plurality. This bridge will, hopefully, enable us at the same time to steer clear of the two simplified views that either see plurality as the arch-enemy of ecology and sustainability (e.g. eco-dictatorianism or eco-authoritarianism), or at the other extreme believe that plurality works as some kind of ecological *perpetuum mobile* (e.g. some versions of eco-anarchism or eco-libertarianism).⁴

Presenting the future

Since Rawls did not have that much to say about principles for a green society, it would seem a good idea to start with those considerations that can most obviously be transferred to green concepts of justice. Intergenerational justice is an issue of political liberalism and is also generally considered to be a basic precondition of a

sustainable society. Nevertheless, there are general doubts as to whether a liberal political notion of justice could do (parts of) the job. Within the liberal cultural marketplace, where the state intervention is not permitted to encourage or discourage any particular way of life (whether probably sustainable or obviously unsustainable), there is no guarantee that society will not in the end undermine itself. More specifically, in no way can it be said that liberalism necessarily requires that the natural environment be sustained for future generations (Kymlicka 1990: 217–8), although a sustainable society *necessarily* requires exactly this.

Although this criticism is obviously serious, it is not the end of the liberal story as told by Rawls. His principles of justice – the difference principle and the maximin strategy – can be rendered valid for the interests of future generations. In order to develop and justify the principle of just savings, Rawls changes the conditions of the ‘original position’ to leave representatives ignorant as to which of an endless stream of generations they will belong to, knowing only that they will belong to the same generation.⁵ Rawls assumes that representatives of the adapted original position adopt the just savings principle, i.e. they not only preserve their cultural and civic gains, but will also set aside real capital accumulation (Rawls 1971: 285; 1999b: 252) – to which can be added, without contradiction, the saving of natural capital or of the natural world (see above; Achterberg 1993). However, Rawls needs to introduce another abstraction to provide a rational motive for agreeing to this principle.

Members of any generation (and so all generations) would adopt [it] as the one their generation is to follow and as the principles they would want preceding generations to have followed (and later generations to follow), no matter how far back (or forward) in time.

(Rawls 1993: 274)

Unfortunately this leaves us still in doubt as to exactly what to do, as to what each generation should want others to have done or subsequently do, and how to decide about these issues given not only uncertainty about many of the future generations’ interests, but also reasonable pluralism in the present time. An ecological interpretation needs and deserves more than a merely hypothetical ideal. Despite his good intentions, Rawls seems to ask too little of the just savings principle. Rather than becoming involved in problems of vagueness and lack of concreteness by only posing the question ‘*why* save?’, we can put this principle to fruitful use by also asking ‘*what* to save?’ and, more particularly, ‘*who* from each generation is to save *what*?’ If we can provide a just answer to these questions then the just savings principle can not only be used to regulate intergenerational relationships, it means that questions of intragenerational justice should be included as well. Interpreted in this way, it allows social and ecological justice to be combined and it transcends the misplaced notion that the two are somehow antagonistic. It requires decisions to be made as to *what* (social) goods are to be saved and *to what degree*: material welfare, scope for personal development, technological progress, individual freedom, a healthy environment, extensive areas of natural wilderness, and so on.

The *minimum irreversible harm principle* developed by Wallack in his chapter might provide fruitful answers in this regard. I, for my part, will leave this area of discussion and focus on yet another: that of the feasibility and legitimacy of a green consensus in a plural society.

Including the overlapping consensus

The assumption that all western modern societies are pluralistic societies, and its theoretical implications, are the focus of *Political Liberalism*. A pluralistic society with divergent and sometimes contradictory and incompatible opinions, convictions and ways of life is permanently subject to tensions between different social groups, even between different equally reasonable groups: this is what is meant by reasonable pluralism. Of course this holds not only for cultural, religious or philosophical issues; we have good reason to extend it to the sphere of environmentalism. Within green political thought or environmental ethical concepts of human–nature relations, too, reasonable and yet reasonable disagreement is vividly present, but, as will become clear below, this may prove to be more of a support than a hindrance to the progress of such thought. In order to balance or, better, make constructive use of these differences and tensions, it is necessary to have, in addition, a common foundation on which all reasonable people can agree. Rawls' term for such a largest possible common denominator is an overlapping consensus: 'a consensus of all the reasonable opposing [...] doctrines likely to persist over generations and to gain a sizeable body of adherents in a more or less just constitutional regime' (Rawls 1993: 15). The overlapping consensus is, then, not just another principle of justice upon which a society can decide how it wishes to live, what it wants to save for the future and who bears which responsibilities. It is, primarily, an agreement among the fundamentally divergent, comprehensive conceptions of the good that co-exist within a given pluralistic society. This unavoidably implies that a way must be found to bring this common political sphere into being and so ensure that the society is viable, in the sense of being stable and peaceful. As all these conceptions of the common good are equally reasonable and are mutually accepted as such, this common sphere can only be achieved by consensus. This is a question not only of justice but also of the legitimacy of the basic structures of society. Moreover, such a consensus can be valued as an expression of tolerance, an acknowledgement of the reasonableness of positions that are not one's own and an abandonment of the idea that there is but a single truth (Rawls 1993: 64).

So far, this sounds convincing, but in fact this is what is implied: that a consensus is not only overlapping but, in the first instance, a genuinely political conception of justice. It means that this consensus must not be understood to be itself a comprehensive doctrine, but also that it developed *independently* of comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral doctrines which already existed (Rawls 1993: 144; 1999a: 143). It can be part of them, but may not be a consequence of their thought and values. As these are non-political, their general implementation would reduce others' freedom, and that would contradict their equality and therefore threaten the legitimacy and stability of the consensus achieved. The political

consensus must be free-standing. Principles that are part of it could, therefore, in principle remain the same in all societies of reasonable pluralism.

At this point Rawls not only engages a strict dichotomy between the one political sphere and several non-political spheres, but, in holding that a free-standing view of this political conception of justice is thinkable and feasible, he also gives us the impression that the one political consensus could be a final point in the history of political thought. If that consensus included environmental considerations or were transferred to them, this could also mean that it brings forth the 'end of environmentalism' in the teleological sense. But if we now refocus on the notion of 'overlapping', Rawls at the same time defends the idea that the order of values that fits the consensus is the result not only of practical abstract reason but also of political constructivism and that it represents a reflective equilibrium of the best option here and now (Rawls 1993: 89 ff). Speaking of 'endisms', quite the opposite seems to be true, for the idea of reflective equilibrium does not exactly support the teleological view, but is far more allied to the position of the anti-realist, who tries to achieve self-defined goals. The reason for this is that the actually existing doctrines and the persons who hold them are genuinely responsible for the creation of their common consensus and for implementing it in their plural society. The content of this consensus is thus not teleological but constructed. Obviously a tension has arisen between the ideas of 'overlapping' and 'political'. This tension can be reduced either by identifying reasons that are actually independent of comprehensive green conceptions, or by easing the dichotomy between the political and the non-political, or by both. I shall restrict myself in the following to the second of these options. How a genuinely political sphere, in the sense of neutral but not yet independent, can still be rescued will hopefully become clear in the next section.⁶

Let me argue against the dichotomy cited above by considering some of its inconsistencies. A purely political and abstract conception of justice once achieved and in equilibrium would give rise to not only the stable and legitimate society intended (if all goes well) but if it forgets its historical roots and considers itself to be independent of real situations or developments, it can all too easily also turn into a conception of a static and immutable society. However, the sources not only of liberal democracy, but of all non-dictatorial policy, all democratic changes and all reasonable decision-making are primarily and necessarily located outside the common political sphere in the ideas and reasons formulated by one or more associations or persons, and these ideas must also come 'little by little' if change is not to be grounded in a blueprint for a new society. The notion of reflective equilibrium and its inherent steady dynamic could have supported this vision, but unfortunately, because of the abstract political nature of the overlapping consensus Rawls thwarts his own good intentions. His irreconcilable dichotomy between the political and the social sphere makes it impossible both to instigate and to adapt politics by means of reasonable arguments grounded in social doctrines, though this is what we need.

In a society differentiated by social groups, occupations, political positions, differences of privilege and oppression, regions, and so on, the perception of

anything like a common good can only be an outcome of public interaction that expresses rather than submerges particularities.

(I.M. Young 1990: 119, my emphasis)

Further, bearing in mind that, by definition, ‘we are all officials in a democracy’ (Waldron 1993: 829), it is hard to divorce the democratic political sphere from the participants in democracy. Thus, the greater the claim of politics to abstract rationality, neutrality and independence, the less scope there will be for democratic participation and the more static the political sphere will become: a reflective equilibrium needs reflecting humans, an overlapping consensus needs ideas to be voiced that overlap and evolve. A political concept cannot stand free.

Crucially, ‘static’ is not the same as ‘stable’. A static society can all too readily become unstable – when there is a circumstances change, for example, or when the current political ideal (ideology) represents a non-ideal public reason. Luckily this second problem is acknowledged by Rawls, too. To avoid the perpetuation of a non-ideal public reason, he defines limits to public reason and introduces the ‘inclusive view’ (Rawls 1993: 247). This inclusive view now makes it possible and obligatory for forces of civil society to have a legitimate influence on the political reason of the overlapping consensus. In Rawls’ own words, it allows ‘citizens, in certain situations, to present what they regard as the basis of political values *rooted in their comprehensive doctrine*’ (Rawls 1993: 247, my emphasis). If the status of the natural world and our relationship to it is considered to be non-ideal, then environmental groups and others keen to improve that relationship would have not only the freedom but also the obligation to ‘politicize’ their social doctrine, it being their duty to demonstrate why it is of political, thus general interest, although it might be not in the interest of all. With this extension Rawls starts to relax the dichotomy between the political and non-political. However, there is still no self-evident opening for the green thinker. She will first have to show that the limits of public reason apply equally to environmental normative concepts and that therefore (parts of) the green comprehensive world view should be included in the society-wide consensus. Within the scope of *Political Liberalism* Rawls denies categorically that this is the case (Rawls 1993: 246) and only sees such scope *after* his ideal theory is extended towards the green issue. In his words, ‘these questions *may* become ones of constitutional essentials and basic justice once our duties and obligations to future generations and to other societies are involved’ (Rawls 1993: 246n35, my emphasis). I would phrase it more starkly and say simply that no serious notion of justice can *ever* be pursued by a society unless the interests of future generations and other societies (let alone nature) are taken into proper account. To do otherwise would presuppose that a society is, or could be assumed to be, a closed system (Rawls 1971: 4–8; 1999b: 4–7). But contrary to Rawls’ arguments our duties to others are always embedded in a global perspective and are part and parcel of the social justice of each society (Pogge 1989) and something similar holds for future generations (see above). Questions of ecological sustainability must therefore be constitutional essentials, even in an ideal theory. A theory of justice does not work without an environmentalist perspective of one kind or another.

Interpreted in this way, neither the ‘public reason’ nor any ‘overlapping consensus’ are ever free-standing, but always depend on input from a diversity of comprehensive social doctrines. This is true not only in ‘non-ideal’ situations or ‘less good’ times, as Rawls intends (Rawls 1993: 251–2); if the situation is to become ideal, such input is, precisely, necessary. Therefore a green version of the overlapping consensus could not lead to the end of environmentalism in the historical sense and, if in any sense, then to no more than the provisional end of the reflective equilibrium between best arguments in the here and now. Going beyond Rawls’ standpoint and taking seriously the idea that the political sphere is rooted in the social sphere and thus depends on it, it remains doubtful whether – with the diverse and pluralistic ‘here’ and ever-changing ‘now’ that are included in the common green consensus – we cannot be led to any end other than an open end.

To be as reasonable as possible, every society-wide consensus should integrate ‘private’ comprehensive reasonable doctrines and strengthen the position of the interests, associations or communities of civil society, rather than seeing them as a mere accompaniment. This confronts us with the two remaining questions. First, how can domination and perfectionism be avoided in this inclusive society? In this context the notion of ‘neutrality’ will play a crucial role because it must take over the role of abstract public reason and help us decide when social positions are generally applicable, and to what degree and why. Second, which institutional setting might give body to neutrality in a just, transformative and decent way? The first question will be elaborated in more detail below, while the second goes beyond the scope of this paper and will have to remain unexplored.⁷

Neutralizing the common good

All societies, particularly those explicitly regarding themselves as pluralistic must hold certain shared concepts if they are to live peacefully together or at least alongside one another within a given territory. Common concepts are also required if a society is to tackle problems concerning everyone. The traditional liberal ideal sees political neutrality as being a prerequisite for arriving at just formulations of such concepts. ‘Liberal neutrality is the most likely principle to secure public assent in societies like ours, which are diverse and historically exclusionary’ (Kymlicka 1990: 229). But listen also to the warning given by the same author. Liberal neutrality understood this way cannot justify excluding any particular way of life. It cannot forbid or hinder activities seeking to undermine the basic structures of liberal pluralism, nor can it increase the likelihood of the chosen ways of life leaving enough material welfare and ecological integrity for others now and in the future. It cannot escape a situation in which ‘the wear and tear caused by the everyday use of these things [historical artefacts and sites, natural wilderness areas] would prevent future generations from experiencing them, *were it not for state protection*’ (Kymlicka 1990: 217–18, my emphasis and explanatory comment). Liberal neutrality is thus an ambiguous ideal: as a principle fostering freedom and equality in pluralistic societies it is admirable, but it is at the same time a principle that is self- and environment-defeating and one that fosters injustice.

The ideal of neutrality seems to reflect only the assumption of a genuinely political consensus. Opposing this position, I have argued that within a pluralistic society special attention should be given to those associations or social groups that try to influence common concepts, and who thus claim that (parts of) their comprehensive doctrines should be rendered generally valid, although they originate merely in particular points of view. I have cast doubt on the idea that the political sphere of a pluralistic society can be divorced from its social sphere(s), arguing, rather, that it can only grow out of the latter. Does this necessarily mean, however, that the ideal of neutral justification of generally valid political principles is in fact impossible? If this were the case, then an arbitrary social perfectionism would be the only option left and the freedom-enhancing advantages of the idea of a political sphere would be lost. Levy does in fact state something like this in his chapter, when he says that ‘such an independent, or absolute environmentalist moral standard [...] is exactly what we cannot have [...] *therefore* the choice between those alternatives would be arbitrary’ (Levy: in this volume, my emphasis). But are we here really confronted with an irreconcilable difference between mutually exclusive ideals? Is the establishment of a society that pursues a green ‘common good’, that does intervene in the freedom and lifestyles of its citizens and that at the same time tries to support their freedom, diversity and equality, doomed in advance to failure? I do not think so. De Geus in his chapter suggests something similar, when he tries to cut the Gordian knot of what he calls the ‘logic of inaction’ or ‘situation of indecision’ that seem to lie between endless arguments for and against an interventionist strategy of governments, by introducing an ‘ecological culture’. Obviously, there is a tension between the imperatives of sustainability and a freedom-enhancing neutrality, and this makes the mere alternative of ‘more neutrality’ and ‘more sustainability’ impossible. If we want to ensure the best of both worlds, we should try to answer the following question: ‘What kind of neutrality can be married with sustainability?’

According to Rawls, the ‘overlapping consensus’ means to ‘seek [...] common ground – or if one prefers neutral ground – given the fact of pluralism’ (Rawls 1993: 192). But his core principles such as ‘justice as fairness’ or the ‘overlapping consensus’ are not only supposed to be generally agreed on, and thus to be neutral, but also to integrate specific political virtues and values of fair social cooperation such as civility, tolerance, reasonableness and a sense of fairness. However, Rawls denies that the focus of the overlapping consensus would consequently itself comprise any perfectionist state of a comprehensive doctrine (Rawls 1993: 194). Unfortunately, put in this way his argument once again revolves round the distinction between common, and thus neutral, political values and specific, comprehensive, and therefore private and non-neutral, values and virtues. If we now accept that this dichotomy has its limits, as I have argued in the previous section, we must also revisit the status of, first, justice as fairness and, second, the overlapping consensus. Are they really neutral in this abstract sense or do they comprise a comprehensive doctrine in themselves, a liberal comprehensive doctrine in their case? At least for ‘justice as fairness’ it is quite easy to see that the latter is the case (Achterberg 2000); and Rawls, too, admits this in a very late stage of his

thought (Rawls 1999a: 179). But also for the common good represented in the overlapping consensus this cannot be too far wrong. We do not even have to go that far to find a hint supporting this view, for Rawls actually situates his core principles against the background of western, liberal, pluralistic and democratic societies,⁸ which have taken centuries to develop into the modern states they are today and embrace a very special history of thought (Rawls 1993: xxii ff.). *Political Liberalism* is embedded in this specific history and background culture and cannot be applied to all possible forms of a reasonable society *independently of this fact*. But this is not necessarily a structural disadvantage: it needs neither weaken the status of common concepts nor undermine their moral standing – quite the opposite in fact. As every relevant political theory has a background culture, and indeed must have one, it is precisely necessary to detect it, to lay it bare, for only then can it be used as a supporting argument, thus ensuring that the theory does not have to build on some mysterious *a priori*. ‘Neutrality’ requires not abstract, but embedded aims and principles. If we want to integrate plurality and sustainability, what we need is a differentiated interpretation of the meaning(s) of neutrality: meaning(s) that avoid the inherent danger of abstract, remote, biased or hierarchical political conceptions and that embrace situated and critical reasons (Bader 2000; Carens 2000; Williams 2000). This is what is meant by ‘situated impartiality’, the acknowledgement that we all are always entangled in a specific situation, history or culture, and we all have interests, from which, although we cannot escape entirely, we are not completely pinned down by. Taken seriously, any neutral common good must depend on the background and interests at stake in the particular situation. But by sticking too narrowly to an abstract interpretation of neutrality or impartiality, then we would indeed easily be tempted to declare the overall impossibility of unbiased neutrality (I.M. Young 1990) but by doing so would throw the baby out with the bath water. We have good reasons to retain its positive aspects.

Impartiality need not be a synonym for ‘view from nowhere’ or represent biased and oppressive hidden ideologies. It can include its non-perfectionist advantages while at the same time excluding some of the serious disadvantages of partiality. Partiality is by definition concerned only with parts, thus remaining incomplete (Williams 2000) and has great difficulty establishing just relationships among these parts. While partiality can at best take parts as such and then leave them alone, different and equal, impartiality can embrace additional standards of commonness and define just relations among competing social groups. An impartial decision thus understood is a decision taken ‘in the best interest of all equally’ (Benhabib, in Williams 2000: 129). A pluralist idea of impartiality does include various perspectives and must demonstrate openness towards Otherness. Yet such an inclusion implies neither relativism nor a new kind of indecision because at the same time it must also provide thin but strong normative guidance to political life and differentiate between different forms of Otherness, i.e. be able to decide when they ‘are to be fostered and when they are to be constrained’ (White 1991: 133). Impartiality is then not the enemy of differentiated group representation, but in fact a precondition for generally excluded perspectives and marginalized social

groups to gain a position of strength within a pluralistic society, a position from which they can understand society and society can understand them. Taken seriously, impartiality even goes beyond the requirement of not structurally favouring certain groups over others. It must also be transformative, 'it must *correct* the past biases of social arrangements' (Williams 2000: 142). Not only should it correct all pseudo-impartial biases, it also has *the capacity to do so*.

As a final step, let me again realign the discussion more closely with the green issue. As an example of what this might mean in the field of environmentalism, let me make use of Val Plumwood's concept of 'eco-rationality', which embraces just such a differentiation.⁹ Taking remoteness, and its reduction, as the key issue, she first of all rejects the idea of a hyper-rational 'ecological guardian'. Whatever its underlying principles, 'THE WAY' (read: *any* blueprint) is by definition abstract, static and insensitive with regard to social as well as ecological issues. It would therefore be unable to defend its legitimacy and would, even more importantly, lack not only the self-critical attitude that is indispensable for responding to complex, diverse and ever-changing challenges but, even worse, could not 'encourage speech from below and deep forms of democracy where communicativeness and redistributive equality are found across a range of social spheres' (Plumwood 1998: 561). The hyper-rational ideal is vulnerable to the well-known accusations of over-abstractness and hidden 'ideologism'. However, again this need not constitute grounds for rejecting the ideal of rationality altogether. Plumwood reformulates it by referring to the possibility and necessity of an explicitly ecological rationality. This is a form of concrete rationality that is able to combine general universal principles with concrete and self-reflective considerations. Being rational, 'ecological rationality' lays claims to general validity, while at the same time it can be applied to the specific situation and perspective of those people least remote from specific social and ecological problems and therefore it can serve as an illustration of situated impartiality.¹⁰ Ecological rationality is therefore well-equipped to handle both, structural inequalities and the ecological problems accruing from these inequalities. It is better than abstract rationality and it is certainly better than no rationality at all. Plumwood's demand for group representation could be taken as a suitable way to fill in Rawls' rather empty inclusive view. If, in particular, the disadvantaged groups are those suffering the greatest ecological damage, it is of vital interest to society as a whole that it affords particular relevance to their perspective.

My argument implies not only that the inegalitarian power structure of liberalism is ecologically irrational, *but also that the political and communicative empowerment of those least remote from ecological harms must form an important part of strategies for ecological rationality.*

(Plumwood 1998: 573, my emphasis)

Plumwood criticizes all forms of 'disengaged reason' but at the same time makes constructive use of the positive sides of the concept of rationality, which she regards as the rationality arising in the concrete situation of marginalized and

disadvantaged social groups. Rationality thus redefined can help us to formulate principles, measures and attitudes that promise more success and less ‘lip-services’,¹¹ not despite but because of its situatedness. Although rational (and, if you will, therefore neutral) they need not be captured in any transcendental or ideologically privileged position, nor suffer from unlimited and self-defeating relativism. In short: ‘There are sensible positions in-between an impossible and unachievable view from nowhere and relativistic “anything goes”’ (Bader 2000). Small is neither just beautiful nor just stupid.

Ending the end

A society bridging the gap between plurality and sustainability takes twofold action (at least): it includes diverse social groups or associations and it furthers a neutral common good. In green terms, it envisages sustainable modes of production and consumption and listens carefully (at least) to the full spectrum of associations, communities and organizations involved in the issue of ecological sustainability.

We are now in a position to decide whether the bridge built in this chapter represents in any way the end of environmentalism. Rawls’ political liberalism suggests that there could indeed be an end and that it is represented by the reflective equilibrium. Therefore he neither aims at any teleological end of thought nor does he think that we construct our goals more or less arbitrarily ourselves and that the end is achieved when we reach them successfully. But even this moderate end, between the extremes of the range of ‘endisms’, deals with a problematic kind of abstraction. Instead, we need concepts that embrace concrete situations and concrete social groups, as well as the commonness between them, in a differentiated way; this means concepts that are neither merely abstract nor purely relativistic. Such a concrete reality is not only difficult to grasp; it is also difficult to interpret adequately within any one single perspective, no matter which. In real life and real societies the most appropriate courses of both ecological and social action differ from situation to situation, from place to place, and from time to time. They cannot be prescribed in advance, nor explained *post factum* by any one particular theory. ‘Muddling through’ – which can nonetheless be courageous, far-reaching and effective – appears to be the most adequate strategy for addressing a problem whose solution not only requires that the course adopted be reversible but must also be open to social input from outside or below. But this is the opposite of any end. Bridging the gap is an ongoing process. Let’s continue with it.

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Notes

- 1 Blühdorn in his chapter elaborates this more carefully in his theories of ‘post-ecologism’ and of ‘politics of simulation’.
- 2 There are already several other pillars of course, for example Doherty and de Geus (1996).
- 3 Although I am fully aware that this is not the whole story, I shall limit myself here to the more anthropocentric version of environmentalism.
- 4 For an extensive critique of both, see Achterberg (1994).
- 5 For a non-contemporary adaptation of the ‘original position’, see Luper-Foy (1995).
- 6 For an identification of such independent reasons with regard to future generations, see Achterberg (2000).
- 7 For a more extended discussion of the institutional turn, see the chapter by Smith in this volume. See also a variety of authors who all try to describe progressive institutional improvements (in quite different versions, I admit) Selznick (1992); Putnam (1993); Hirst (1994); Hetherington (1998); Wapner (1998); Bader and Hirst (2001).
- 8 The extent to which western societies are indeed liberal and democratic is a different matter. Although it is an important issue (and many doubts could be listed on this point), for our present purpose it suffices to assume that they are indeed organized according to this ideal.
- 9 Of course, rationality is not the same as impartiality or neutrality, but they are part of the same family of concepts. For my purposes here, I do not need to differentiate clearly between these ‘subfamilies’ and *what* they each refer to, claims of truth, moral valuations or political and social institutions; but rather I must differentiate between *how* they refer to relevant decisions, abstract and oriented to effects or situated and in a justificatory manner.
- 10 For a situated or contextualized concept of a pluralistic justice that could perfectly fit such a situated and diversified rationality, see Carens’ concepts of ‘justice as evenhandedness’ and the ‘universability test’ (Carens 2000).
- 11 Also called ‘cosmetics’ (de Geus) or ‘simulation’ (Blühdorn), by my fellow authors.

13 The minimum irreversible harm principle

Green inter-generational liberalism

Michael Wallack

Introduction

A key element in the problem of justice between generations is the discontinuity between the benefits received by present generations from some technologies and the costs of the unintended consequences of these technologies for future generations. Are the liberal or utilitarian theories of distributive justice which form the basis for most analysis of the justice between generations problem sufficient for the problems posed by technological change?

John Barry, in this volume, thinks not. In his view, the attempt to include environmental values in a utilitarian cost–benefit analysis framework co-opts the environmentalist critique of capitalism and is a ‘category mistake’. He believes that the result is nothing less than the exclusion of green ethical commitments from politics, the crowding out of a potentially more democratic and participatory society by the all too attractive consumerism of late capitalism. Cost–benefit-analysis-driven ecological policy is the end of critical environmentalism. In its place Barry hopes for a communist or socialist yet pluralist ecological politics, one which has not been pacified by liberal economism and does not take a neutral stance toward the domination by large corporations over the state or the ‘food chain, the media, medicine, education, public transport, commodification, privatization etc.’.

But the substitution of socialist or community green political decision-making for the market, and the abandonment of cost–benefit analysis for citizen environmental management, does not make the justice between generations problem go away. Command economies and the planning that went on within them made decisions that affected future generations as must any planning and regulatory regime. Rulers often claimed that the present generation needed to sacrifice its welfare for the sake of generations to come. Liberal democratic governments and corporations make such decisions, albeit in a largely present-tense mode of justification, with the temporal preferences reversed. Is there a principle that liberal democratic, socialist, deep green, and utilitarian ideas could follow that would identify a decision as inter-generationally impartial? Or is long-term inter-temporal impartiality a chimera?

The contemporary consensus in liberal democracies that includes environmentalism as part of normal politics requires political decisions which weigh the

costs of environmental protection against the benefits of such protection to future generations. But if we assume that the welfare of present-generation citizens is incorporated into the decision-making process by means of democratic politics and the market price of goods and services, the welfare of future generations must be derived at least in part by the transformation of present values by the application of some normative criteria of distributive justice. The effort to characterize inter-generational criteria for justice in a convincing way has thus far proved difficult despite a great deal of effort by some of the most influential economists and political theorists. If the end of environmentalism as a purely critical ideal is to be followed by a normatively based green politics, some such criteria will have to become part of the overlapping consensus of democratic pluralism. I propose the minimum irreversible harm (MIH) principle as an alternative to utilitarian and Rawlsian inter-generational allocation criteria – but not as the entire content of a theory of justice between generations. If appended to a Rawlsian difference principle, it replaces the ‘zero pure time discount’ as a constraint on the degree of equality mandated by that principle. In a utilitarian theory, it serves as a constraint on possible Pareto optimum distributions, picking out those that are inter-temporally impartial, within the limits of a given generation’s knowledge and technological capabilities.

Because harms are to be specified within any set of comprehensive theories, as Rawls puts it, the MIH principle is compatible with reasonable pluralism, which is a goal of both Wissenburg (1998) and Levy (in this volume). Whether agreement on this principle can lead to something more than a *modus vivendi* by being reflected in the basic political arrangements of society, whether it can be recognized as part of an overlapping consensus is, of course, an open question (Rawls 1993: 147).

I shall argue that the normative foundations of Rawlsian liberalism and liberal utilitarianism can incorporate an ideal of intertemporal impartiality and, with the MIH principle added, reflect green ideals (doing the work of the principle of caution and the goal of sustainability) without ‘looking green’. To the extent that the proposal is persuasive, the MIH principle can be taken as either a withering away of a specifically environmentalist pluralist democracy (compare Wissenburg, this volume) or as its incorporation into the conceptual foundations of liberalism.

Criteria for inter-generational justice

An allocation problem?

For both utilitarian and Rawlsian liberal theorists, the problem of justice between generations is viewed as a problem of distributive justice. What is the just saving rate for projects with consequences that span several lifetimes? Economists writing at the end of the nineteenth century were concerned with the distant future primarily in order to understand how to provide a steady increase in national income. The stock of physical capital and the human capacity for work needed to be constantly replenished and enlarged through saving if welfare was to increase along with population. Natural resources had to be found at least as fast as they

were being used up human capacities had to be enlarged through education to improve the productivity of labour. All these goals required some consumption to be deferred so that capital and labour beyond that necessary for consumption could be used to add to existing stocks of capital. But would the market always produce the right amount of capital to support continued consumption as population increased? If governments acted to augment individual saving, for example by providing public education using the taxing power, how could they do so without discouraging private saving? How much better off must we make our successors? How much current consumption should be given up for the sake of how much growth?

As a greater understanding of the limits of market allocation of resources began to take hold, the problem of externalities of costs and benefits led to the idea of public goods, and the savings issue began to be considered as a problem in welfare economics – the part of economics that provides criteria for efficient investment in the kinds of goods which cannot be sold to individual buyers. Because such public goods projects impose costs in the present but benefits over the long run, and because the benefits spill over beyond the immediate users, they are not the kind of projects that capital and equity markets fund at optimal levels. (Pigou 1912: 160; Sen 1967). For this reason governments cannot fund the projects by selling what is produced and must use political judgement and normative criteria as well as economic analysis in deciding which projects to undertake. These conclusions have become the conventional wisdom of liberal economics. If we assume that debt and equity markets allocate private investment efficiently and thus provide for a just rate of saving through time for present and future generations (a Pareto optimum) as liberal economist do, the just savings rate remains undetermined: debt and equity markets cannot provide Pareto optimum distributive justice for public projects even in the present and thus cannot supply a just saving rate for justice between generations (Mueller 1974).

The philosophical forbears of contemporary utilitarians acknowledged these problems before the economists of our own era such as Samuelson and Sen demonstrated them. J.S. Mill proposed that we should take into account not only our own interests but the long-run interests of mankind. Sidgwick and Pigou reminded their readers to avoid the natural human tendency to overvalue present concerns and to reject the mistaken assumption that narrowly construed self-interest will maximize individual well-being.

Later economists have attempted to work out just what rate of saving would produce greatest welfare for an economy assuming a degree of altruism. Sen and other economists he cites (Bauman, Vickrey, Marglin; cf. Sen 1967: 103) all assume an altruistic concern for the welfare of at least some others in the next generation. Yet despite this augmentation of self-interest by altruism, Sen comes to the conclusion that for strategic reasons (lack of assurance that one person's altruism will not be undone by another's stinginess), a less than optimum rate of investment will be produced from this series of individual decisions. Individual altruism is insufficient to produce maximum benefit in a pure market allocation scheme.

But if a market doesn't automatically produce a rate of saving that everyone would choose, how can we know what that rate should be? Typically, economists answer that this 'just saving rate' would be the rate of savings which would produce a Pareto optimum level of utility through time for every generation – a maximum sustainable yield of utility (Dobson 1999). The goal of government decisions, on this account, should be to translate their citizens' demand for public goods and their demand for altruistic investment into public expenditure. The market allocates the remainder of savings and investment. The public choice approach to political institutions and processes is an attempt to address this problem. However, neither rational choice theory nor the market can provide a means to determine how each of us should value present against future welfare. Preferences and preference ranks are taken as a given in both of these theories. Each in its way is concerned with rational aggregation of preferences which are assumed to be exogenous to the theories.

At least since the early part of the twentieth century, some influential economists have concluded that this problem could best be resolved by treating present and future utility as equivalent. This conclusion is often stated as the contention that the 'pure time preference' should be set at zero, and that the entire amount of the discount applied to future benefits should be that derived from uncertainty and from opportunity costs (Rawls 1971; 1999b: 259 ff). Collard (1996) identifies this view in the writings of Marshall, Sidgwick, Pigou (1912), and Ramsey (1928). Collard quotes Pigou,

[...] our telescopic faculty is defective [...] and we see future pleasures, as it were, on a diminished scale [...] people distribute their resources between the present, the near future and the remote future on the basis of a wholly irrational preference.

(Pigou 1912: 25)

The quote echoes Hobbes, the first true utilitarian,

[...] all men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses – that is, their passions and self-love – through which every little payment appears a great grievance, but are destitute of those prospective glasses – namely moral and civil science – to see afar off the miseries that hang over them and cannot without such payments be avoided.

(Hobbes 1962: 141)

Zero pure time discount as a standard of inter-temporal justice

The view that inter-temporal distributive justice requires absolute impartiality between present and future understood as a zero pure time discount is the most broadly accepted approach to the problem of setting a just saving rate for justice

between generations among liberal economists. It is echoed in John Rawls' view that we should be temporally impartial in our choice of a just savings rate – that we should base our choice of such a rate on a principle that we would want every previous and every future generation to follow. Unfortunately, it does not provide the basis for a green liberalism, as I will show.

Since the *Theory of Justice*, Rawls has understood this impartiality for saving and investment to imply a zero pure time discount together with some interest-rate choice compatible with the economic circumstances of the time. He has stressed that the goal should be to preserve the value of social co-operation in the context of just institutions, including those that see to it that the difference principle has practical effect. While his more recent formulation of the just saving principle has changed somewhat, its core content has not. Utilitarians prefer some alternative to the difference principle such as a Pareto optimal distribution of utility, welfare or resources.

Suppose, then, we accept this proposal shared by both early utilitarians and Rawls: *set pure time preference to zero*. Economists calculate the value of a future item at a present time by taking its value and reducing it by the value that is given up to obtain it. The amount of that reduction is the opportunity cost of that good. Setting a pure time discount to zero does not mean setting opportunity costs to zero it only means starting the discount of the future benefit at the full present value of that benefit – the value we would pay to have it now. The implication of these assumptions is that when future benefits and harms are assumed to have a present value discounted for opportunity costs, many very large future benefits and harms will be reduced to zero (Peterson 1993). Adding a pure time discount reduces the future value still further and is said to reflect 'impatience' or (sometimes) an expectation of growth in productivity.

For example, as Farber and Hemmersbaugh (1993) report, the United States Office of Management and Budget used a discount of ten per cent to convert future costs and benefits into a present value. At this rate a one million dollar benefit that arrives in twenty years is worth one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in the present. They believe this undervalues future benefits. They imply that the rate selected includes a pure time preference greater than zero and is inflated. They suggest environmental impacts of current activities be assigned pure time preference of zero but a social discount rate equal to or not much greater than that assigned to a risk free investment, whatever rate that happens to be. Typically, government long-term bonds have a rate lower than five per cent, so their suggestion would result in a dramatically different distribution between present and future than the rate used by the US Office of Management and Budget.

But even risk-free investment rate of discount will all but eliminate any investment at a distant future time – say beyond 100 years. They suggest that a discount of one or two per cent above risk-free investment may be acceptable on the grounds that very remote harms may start to appear in the next generation – and so would not need to be discounted over the full extent of time that is to be taken into account. By a chain connection between each generation and its successors, distant future harms would be addressed provided the benefit

(augmented by altruism) and costs are balanced for the next generation. Their proposal then is to interpret the impartiality rule for a just saving rate to be to *set pure time preference to zero for one generation and calculate present value using opportunity costs about equal to risk-free investment.*

By counting on individual altruism to reach each next generation, social altruism (a stewardship ethic for example) can reduce the impatience to consume in present generations to a zero pure time discount for at least one generation. They recognize that they have not entirely addressed the problem of very remote effects, however, and express doubts that a time horizon beyond the next generation is workable.

The implications of the ‘single generation discount’ approach need to be recognized. If the willingness to limit next generation harms only justifies a small outlay, then remote harms will not be adequately addressed. For example, the short-term effects of some greenhouse gases may warrant efforts to constrain them on account of their near-term effects while not warranting a shift away from hydrocarbon fuels even if hydrocarbons eventually produce disaster. This view is reflected in the support for so-called ‘no regrets’ policies – policies which are cost-effective in the present and so do not raise generational equity problems on the cost side.

Most cost–benefit analysis attempts to discover a discount rate appropriate for a stream of costs beginning now, offset by a benefit appearing at a remote time. But if we assume that benefits and costs begin now and continue into that future it may not be appropriate to discount benefits using the present value method. Rabl (1995) suggests that even using a social discount equal to a risk-free investment sets the rate too high. His contention is that a risk-free investment rate includes a pure time discount component and an opportunity cost component. He argues that the pure time component should be zero beyond the point where financial instruments are available to give effect to it (Rabl 1995: 140), and that the opportunity cost component should be understood as the result of (expected) long-term economic growth. He suggests that the benefits of many long-term projects contribute to growth and so counterbalance and offset the long-term costs after about thirty years. Rabl proposes that we *set pure time discount to zero and the present value discount to the long bond rate for thirty years, zero thereafter.* He does not address the implications of these proposals for public spending. Its effect would be to require present generations to value benefits they never receive at a higher rate than those they do receive. For example, some present needs – say, better health care – would be unfulfilled so that resources can be used to avert harms that occur after everyone now living is dead. Is this proposal really impartiality with respect to the time of a benefit? It hasn’t been followed up to now. Do we regard this as an injustice? If we follow it, what assurance do we have that it will be followed in the future? Its attractiveness stems mainly from the fact that it seems to be a closer approximation to the impartiality principle than does the simpler rule requiring a zero pure time discount. Time most definitely matters in calculating opportunity costs. Setting opportunity costs to zero after thirty years as Rabl suggests gives practical effect to the injunction to pay less attention to time in our thinking about justice. But does justice require anyone to do this? Even if it would be preferred by future people, is it fair to those in the present? *If we overvalue our obligation not to do*

(future) harm we undervalue our obligation not to allow (present) harm to be done. Awareness of this problem drives socialist criticisms of environmentalism, non-compliance with environmental norms in the Third World, and the Rawlsian dilemma in which the just savings rate is to be adjusted to the requirements of the least well-off by the difference principle.

In 1991, William Nordhaus declined to make the distinction between opportunity costs and pure time preference in his discussion of climate change (Nordhaus 1991). He recognized that carbon dioxide emissions have a very long-term effect, remaining in the atmosphere from 200–500 years. But he suggested that present generations should only be responsible for effects that appear in the near term. Efforts to reduce climate change need to be weighed against other projects that have high rates of return. He stated, ‘[...] the social rate of return to investment in education in poor countries is estimated to be around 26 per cent for primary education. The efficient policy would be to invest heavily in high return capital now and then use the fruits of those investments to slow climate change in the future’ (p. 57). The Nordhaus (1991) proposal is: *set the present value discount to the best rate of return available for public expenditures in poor countries.*

Nordhaus does recognize that uncertainties may cloud estimates of the harms associated with climate change. He acknowledges the non-linear and threshold effects that may be expected. He suggests that uncertainties are apt to mask unforeseen calamities. Yet he concludes that the best investment is in research rather than direct reduction of carbon emissions. His proposals include government support for research and development of new technologies such as solar, safe nuclear and energy conservation, which are not undertaken now because they provide greenhouse gas reductions that are ‘currently worth nothing in the market’. For reasons that are unclear, he does not propose a social discount rate of ten per cent for these types of investments. Apparently research and development benefits are to be considered to have zero cost rather than an opportunity cost equal to ten per cent, which is the threshold to be applied to greenhouse gas emissions. Perhaps this is because they are assumed to produce a stream of benefits for the present generation – an assumption that we saw working in Rabl’s proposal. Such investments, together with ‘no-regret policies’ – those that have no net cost – are the only ones he favours. Nordhaus is perhaps one of the few economists who doesn’t assume inter-generational altruism, although he does seem to presume altruism among the members of present generations. The result is that his just savings rate is lowest, and his present value discount rate is the highest of those I have examined. Tellingly, it is a rate that is closest to that actually used by the United States Office of Management and Budget at the time he proposed it.

In his recent work, Nordhaus has used economic models in which pure time preference and opportunity costs are assigned separate and variable values. Interest rates (and thus present value discounts) are estimated to be about five per cent in the near term, and assumed to decline over the long term; a pure time discount of about three per cent declining in the long term to about 1.25 per cent is also assumed. (These are rates for Europe and differ between regions; cf. Nordhaus and Boyer 2000.)

The Nordhaus (2000) proposal is: *set pure time discount to a small non-zero number, declining to zero after about fifty years, and the present value discount to the long bond rate assuming a long-run decline in that rate.*

To sum up, economists tend to propose a discount for future benefits equal to the risk-free bond rate, the long-term growth rate for a thirty-year initial rate, or the much higher rate of the highest available alternative social investment depending on the extent of altruism they presuppose in their analysis. At the lowest rate some, but not all, long-term benefits would be accepted as better than current benefits and worth being produced, at the highest rate only cost-free future benefits would be available. *The most important result of this survey is the fact that each proposal could plausibly be made within the bounds of inter-generational impartiality as suggested by Sidgwick and Rawls.* Even Nordhaus, whose 1991 proposal is essentially to maximize current returns, suggests that this policy is really best for the future since it will provide the most future capital and thus best enable future people to deal with environmental problems in their own way. For this reason it can be seen as his version of impartiality. Yet the proposals lead to dramatically different consequences for inter-generational allocation problems. Impartiality interpreted as continuous Pareto optimality in saving and investment requires Pareto optimality in the present (efficient investment) to be used as the standard for future benefits, which as has been shown, substantially discounts distant benefits.

It may very well be that despite the attractions of utilitarianism and of Rawls' views on inter-generational impartiality, there is no principle that every generation can follow to determine its just allocation for distant future generations. Many plausible savings rates follow from the combination of a Pareto optimum savings rate, zero time preference, and some altruism. If distributive justice is the effort to provide standards for settling conflicts of interest (B. Barry 1999: 96), the impartiality criteria has not proven to be such a standard when taken as a starting point for distributive justice. For this reason I suggest that justice for distant generations cannot be made environmentally aware when viewed as an allocation problem.

Not an allocation problem: a matter of rights?

An alternative to this utilitarian approach to impartiality can be found in the work of those theorists who suggest that justice between generations should not be expected to supply a principle for the determination of a just saving rate, but should offer a constraint on distribution principles, whatever they may be. This approach removes the obligation on the present generation to anticipate future distributions (as end states of present distributive practice) and rests on the contention that justice to future generations is achieved along with justice in the present by establishing and maintaining non-distributional rights. I'd like to consider two such proposals.

The restraint principle

A recent reformulation of Rawlsian impartiality, framed as a property rights constraint, is suggested by Wissenburg, who proposes that:

[...] no goods shall be destroyed unless unavoidable and unless they are replaced by identical goods. If that is physically impossible, they should be replaced by equivalent goods resembling the original as closely as possible. If that is impossible a proper compensation should be provided. But these conditions can be overridden if they make a life worth living in the present impossible.

(Wissenburg 1999b: 193)

This principle, if adopted, would seem to protect endangered species, the climate, and all distinct items of value, and require that each generation leave the planet no worse off than it was when that generation began its rule. He calls such items ‘objects of conditional rights’ and suggests that existing overlapping generations will have an interest in their preservation or replacement into the indefinite future.

Like Rawls, but unlike the utilitarians, Wissenburg believes that only existing generations can have rights and therefore generate obligations for distributional justice. He thinks that it ‘doesn’t make sense’ to ascribe rights to non-existent individuals, and that only individuals can have rights (Wissenburg 1999b: 148, 151). (If potentially immortal entities, say institutions, clubs or ‘family lines’, or eco-systems could have rights his argument would fail at this point.) But he argues that in theory ‘[...] we should not destroy *anything* [emphasis in original] that could be owned by anyone else’, but in practice we may use and destroy things provided the harm is either necessary for self-preservation or is undone or compensated for by those that do it (Wissenburg 1999b: 171; also 1998: 125).

At first glance, it may appear that the restraint principle reduces to the utilitarian Pareto optimum with a guaranteed minimum account if the market is taken as the guide to what is counted as equivalent or identical goods and what is to be regarded as compensation. But this is not Wissenburg’s intention. He suggests that a liberal theory must take the differences between individuals seriously, which means that the value of an object to a particular individual and the distinctness of an object to an individual is what must be considered in the decision of whether to destroy an object. My particular spruce tree may not be destroyed (even if there are many similar to it) if it has played a role in my biography (even though careful landscaping will make the loss difficult to detect) unless that destruction is required for someone’s self-preservation. If we have reason to believe that an as yet undetected distinct species of insect will become extinct by clear-cutting a part of the rainforest, then that may not be done, since it would turn the conditional right to use that part of nature (if there is one) into an unconditional right. Wissenburg (1998: 106) thinks that the only unconditional rights are rights to one’s own natural endowments and to bare necessities – Locke’s core self-preservation rights.

The account of what is to count as ‘identical replacement’ and ‘compensation’ is evidently much too strong to be of use as a guide to social decisions. In practice, contentious cases would reduce to questions of what should be regarded as just compensation – and the background standards of valuation provided by the market would, as with the utilitarian account, shape the outcome.

Another problem with this view is that Wissenburg assumes that the issue of who is to be compensated is not contentious. Remembering that only individuals can have rights, we must conclude that only individuals can be compensated. What shall we say of collections of owners with different views about compensation, different life spans and different needs? But when some existing people are compensated for the destruction of old growth forests (which cannot be replaced in the present time period) then the compensation may very well come in the form of something that then can be used up entirely. And so, despite compensation, a conditional right will have been converted into an unconditional right, admittedly a right enjoyed by a different set of people. Does the entire world's population need to be compensated for an extinction? Just nearby people? Is a widely distributed but nearly infinitesimal compensation just recompense for a narrowly distributed but intense harm? Species are continually becoming extinct, often in a chain effect begun by the destruction of habitat. How do we reckon the value of such extinction processes? If there is a beginning in a particular act, and the responsible party is now dead or can be expected to be dead before the end of the process, at what stage is the compensation to begin and when is it to end? These questions suggest that the compensation model cannot do the work assigned to it in Wissenburg's restraint principle.

What is going on here is that Wissenburg has provided us with an updated version of the Lockean proviso that we may extract anything from nature provided it is not wasted and that there is as much and as good left for others (cf. Nozick 1974: 178 ff). No one needs to be compensated when the proviso holds because there is no harm being done. But while Locke supposed that there would be no special preference for nature itself, and that in using it, it would not be used up, Wissenburg and many others have to assume something different (Palumbi 2001). For this reason Wissenburg suggests that we can use nature up, but must compensate its co-owners when we do. But by his liberal principles (ones that Locke did not share) he has to admit that in transforming nature, we limit the value left to others, and therefore are bound by impartiality to compensate the losers. And by his (post-romantic) liberal principles, he agrees that the market does not provide an appropriate measure of the value of what is used up, since that depends on individual values for each individual. While Rousseau remarked that the rich have feelings in every part of their property, Wissenburg assumes that we all do. Thus whereas Locke argued that rational people would agree to having nature transformed into conventional property for the sake of the increase in goods that the institutions of property and money provide, Wissenburg suggests that the unconditional ownership implied by market values is apt to be unjust. On his account every transformation of nature (even the creation of unique cultural products) that leaves nature irreversibly changed is a harm that requires prevention or compensation. The idea of compensation for harm seems to run counter to the presumption that there are unique goods (goods with incommensurable value). And a restraint principle without compensation is too strong to be plausible.

A revised restraint principle: minimum irreversible harm

I suggest a revised restraint principle, one that does not depend on compensation for plausibility, and I shall refer to it as the minimum irreversible harm (MIH) principle (cf. Rawls 1971; 1999b: 261; Peterson 1993: 114; Norton 1995: 119).

Minimum irreversible harm

- a) irreversible harm must be minimized, and
- b) uncertainty about the irreversibility of harm must be offset by greater limits on the extent of that harm in space and time.

Utilitarians might want to substitute ‘costs’ for ‘harm’ in the above principle, while rights theorists might prefer to add the principle to the list of rights that disinterested rational proto-citizens ought to be willing to accept as a starting point for a hypothetical social contract. I am not going to attempt a detailed defence of the revised restraint principle here, but I would like to discuss a few objections to the proposal.

I admit that the MIH principle depends on agreement on what is to be considered harm but in this, it does not differ from Wissenburg’s restraint principle, utilitarian Pareto optimum standards, or Rawls’ theory. It is intended as a neutral and so pluralist principle. It is not a utility-based constraint since it proposes a constraint on what may be distributed rather than compensation for a reduction of an individual’s welfare. It is not stated as a characterization of resources, ‘natural capital’ or primary goods, and is perhaps less useful for that reason as a self-standing constraint on inter-generational effects – the idea of harm is vague compared to Rawlsian primary goods or the identification of a specific list of entities to be preserved. If one were a believer in primary goods, then one might wish to define the harms considered in terms of primary goods. One could simply replace the ‘zero pure time discount’ just saving proviso in Rawls’ second principle with the MIH principle.

It is possible that the MIH principle might be seen as smuggling in compensations for harms in the requirement that uncertainty as to harms must be ‘offset’ by greater certainty in the scope of effects. I hope that this is not the case. The limitation of harm is not compensation. It is true that by limiting the effects of some new technology the costs of the use of that technology may increase even to the point of making the practice uneconomic. But that outcome is not a simple re-pricing of the technology, since the impossibility of reversing a harmful effect of a technology or practice would, on my account, eliminate it as an option or limit its use in time or space or its scope of application. In this respect, my proposal differs from Wissenburg in the same way as the view that no amount of a new cancer-causing agent should be permitted in food differs from the view that only a little should be permitted, with the product taxed to pay for cancer prevention or treatment.

It may be objected that it would be irrational to reject a very small harm and give up a greater benefit simply because the harm is irreversible. I admit that we

would need to establish a threshold of harm (provided in the rest of one's theory of justice) that would have to be expected before the MIH principle could be taken to veto a benefit. But, in my view, that threshold would have to be an impartial one both in respect to place and time; if it is to be considered as a principle all could be expected to follow. For example, an irreversible harm to one or a few could not be offset by a small but general and continuous benefit according to this MIH principle. And an irreversible harm that starts in the future would not be discounted by the principle.

It may also be objected that what is to count as irreversible is dependent on scientific knowledge, technology, chance, and willingness to pay: all contingent and uncertain. My intention is to depend on the loosest version of irreversibility: a process is reversible when it is regularly and reliably reversed. The MIH principle calls for uncertainty in reversibility to be counterbalanced by limited application of the new practice, not elimination of it. We have the often-used practice that is required for regulatory approval of new drugs – the controlled trial – as an example of what is already done.

Conclusion

The failure of the Rawlsian intertemporal impartiality criteria does not signal the end of green liberalism or condemn it to forced service in the army of simulative politics. Nor is cost–benefit analysis an acid that melts everything green into the air. But having a criterion, and making use of it to minimize irreversible harms are quite different states of affairs.

While the minimum irreversible harm principle is not intended as a self-standing criterion of justice between generations, it may be a workable alternative to the just saving rate approach which seems to lead to blind alleys, and it may be a liberal alternative to the restraint principle that is in reflective equilibrium with the best of contemporary liberal democratic environmental policy-making. We need not ignore environmental values to use cost–benefit analysis as an aid to political decision making nor rely on an ad hoc power balancing coping strategy. Green liberal democracy is not ruled out by the requirement of pluralist intertemporal impartiality and does not require a precommitment to environmentalist communitarianism.

14 From environmental politics to the politics of the environment

The pacification and normalization of environmentalism?

John Barry

Introduction

Surveying contemporary environmental politics in liberal democracies, at first glance it seems as if the ‘environmental problem’ has been solved or sufficient advances have been and continue to be made, such that the destabilizing effects of both green political demands on the state and market and actual environmental problems of resource depletion and pollution have been integrated and transformed into the ‘coping strategies’ of the state and market economy. Environmentalism (by which I mean radical green politics), on the face of it, has become if not redundant, then a shadowy (sometimes irritating, in terms of the smooth integration of environmental problems into the logics of the market and liberal democratic state) reminder (or remainder) of less environmentally enlightened times. In short, environmentalism has achieved its main aims and any continuing radicalism on behalf of the green movement will only undermine its hard-won gains and concessions. Faced with the ‘politics of the environment’ there is no need for ‘environmental politics’, as it were.

The aim of this chapter is primarily diagnostic, to examine and analyse some of the main dynamics, developments and debates that can explain the claim that environmentalism has ended.

We see the proliferation of environmental institutions at all levels of political life, from the international and global, to the regional, the national, and local, as well as an increase in environmental legislation and policy. All of which together make up the supervisory and regulatory regimes, codes, ‘best practice’, environmental auditing, environmental management systems (EMS), ISO certification etc. which together constitute the liberal state’s public commitment (together with key economic and corporate actors) to ‘environmental governance’ and to be seen to ‘do something’ about the environment to assuage citizens’ concerns and respond to political pressures. So, on a cursory view of the environment problem, it would seem that the liberal state has responded to both environmental political pressure from the green movement and green political parties and has recognized the real and objective (read: scientifically verified) character of existing environmental problems.

In another sense than the one previously discussed, the ‘end of environmentalism’ asks whether the radical, transformative aims of the green movement are still possible and are a continuing viable core of green politics, given the progress that has been made on meeting the environmental challenge. Under the relentless and all-pervasive logic of electoral competition within liberal democracy, and the need to win votes, open lines of communication with state bureaucracies and agencies – that is to become an ‘insider’ as opposed to an ‘outsider’ pressure group within the environmental policy network – as well as internal ideological debates, much the same process that happened to the socialist movement (of its division into ‘reformist’ social democracy and ‘revolutionary’ socialism) would appear to have happened to green politics. That is, the price for participating in the various processes of policy-making, agenda setting, legislation-making and so on, has been the necessity of downplaying or indeed eroding its radical demands, and also, as will be pointed out below, the necessity of translating green political demands into the economic-cum-technical language of the liberal democratic state.

Just as the liberal democratic state was able to ‘co-opt’, integrate or otherwise pacify socialist challenges to its legitimacy and authority by becoming a ‘welfare state’, the modern welfare state has simply added the environmental problematique to its ‘crisis management’ functions and logic (Offe 1981). In short, the putative emergence (one is almost tempted to say ‘evolution’) of a ‘green/ecological state’ (together with the greening of business) has eroded the conditions for radical green politics.¹

The normalization of the environmental crisis

According to Frederick Buell,

Something happened to strip environmental crisis of what, in the 1970s, seemed to be its self-evident inevitability. Something happened to allow environmentalism’s antagonists to stigmatize its erstwhile stewards as unstable alarmists and bad-faith prophets – and to call their warnings at best hysterical, at worst crafted lies. Indeed, something happened to allow some even to question (without appearing ridiculous) the apparently commonsensical assumption that environmentalists were the environment’s best stewards.

(Buell 2003: 3)

The ‘environmental crisis’ has been transformed into ‘controversy’ and in this way ‘normalized’. Buell eloquently demonstrates how the ‘ecological crisis’ has not gone away or been solved, but despite this, state and especially market institutions and powerful actors have successfully emasculated the green critique by normalizing it as controversy.

The powerful anti-environmental backlash cannot be over-estimated in terms of its effect on normalizing and marginalizing, to a great extent, green claims and analyses. From the infamous and very public case of the ‘Global Climate Coalition’ (representing fossil fuel industries and car manufacturers) denying and contesting

the reality and severity of climate change, to a whole host of corporate led and backed anti- or 'pseudo' environmental propaganda and information, attempts to galvanize democratic publics behind environmental change has been blocked, delayed, watered down and otherwise prevented by an increasingly organized, concerted and well-resourced corporate (and state) anti-environmental opposition. From Tony Blair's identification of the UK green movement as part of the 'forces of conservatism', to more vicious and polemical characterizations and demonizations of environmentalists as 'the new communism' and threatening the very fabric of the American way, everywhere the green message is under attack. As one of the most vociferous and popular right-wing advocates of this anti-environmental movement in the US, the radio 'shock jock' Rush Limbaugh, put it, 'environmentalists fall into two categories, socialists and enviro-religious fanatics [...] With the collapse of Marxism, environmentalism has become the new refuge of socialist thinking. [...] What better way to control someone's property than to subordinate one's private property rights to environmental concerns' (quoted in Helverg 1994: 284). This view of green politics as 'watermelon politics' – green on the outside, but pure communist red on the inside, is one that has been relentlessly pushed by right-wing conservatives both in America and Britain.²

Beull (2003) details the emergence of a right-wing conservative anti-environmental rhetoric in the US whose sole aim is 'check-mating environmentalism', an analysis that can also be extended to other countries, especially in Europe and other parts of the world. In the US case however, what was unique is that the anti-environmentalist political position was based on the simple premise, expressed in the words of the arch anti-environmentalism Ron Arnold, 'in an activist society such as ours the only way to defeat a social movement is with another social movement' (in Helverg 1994: 137). Thus the right-wing 'populist', anti-environmental 'movement' in the US was born – pro-hunting, anti-animal rights, protectionist – and institutionalized in such groups the 'Wise Use Movement', and was supported by a growing array of corporate well-funded right-wing 'think tanks' (Beder 1997: Chs 5, 6). But corporate anti-environmentalism also includes public relations (Beder 1997; 2001a), the corporate domination of the media which misrepresents or marginalizes environmental groups and issues (Rucht 2001), and the phenomena of 'astro-turf' grass-roots movements (corporate-created pseudo-environmental groups to counter genuine local environmental groups) to enable them to get their message across in environmental debates and influence public opinion (Beder 2001a; 2001b), and the use of corporate law-suits to stifle environmental opposition, as well as the labelling of environmentalists as 'terrorists'.

So, as Paterson notes (1999: 185),³ the 'end of environmentalism', understood as its 'normalization' and marginalization, is a story that needs to take account of the tremendous power, resources and influence of the corporate forces ranged against and threatened by radical green politics, and the success of these forces in blunting, obstructing, challenging, co-opting and side-tracking the green political message, and state environmental policy and regulation. It is also the case that corporations and industrial interests have used 'free market' arguments to press for more environmental deregulation, privatization of environmental resources,

voluntary environmental compliance, industrial self-regulation and the use of market instruments, and generally promote a ‘free market environmentalist’ alternative to state (or suprastate) regulation and environmental law enforcement in achieving sustainable development or environmental protection.

The marginalization of the environmental crisis and green politics

In part as a result of the failure of some of the more populist and alarmist ‘eco-catastrophic’ prophecies and predictions of the green movement – especially those of the ‘Limits to Growth’ sort, it is little wonder that the failure of the environmental crisis to result in the types of crises as predicted by greens has meant that the environmental crisis and green politics have become both:

- a) part of the ‘normal’ cultural and political context of life in modern societies; and
- b) plagued by a lack of support for green politics/policies motivated by impending ecological breakdown.

In short, contemporary green politics is still suffering from the legacy of ‘the boy who cried (ecological) wolf’; some of its main predictions have patently failed to come true. And yet while this has not led to a complete lack of support for green movements and parties and reduction in the ‘credibility’ of and trust in them, it is clearly a legacy which has been and is used by opponents to ridicule and belittle the green message.⁴

There is also the issue of the diminishing utility of ‘crisis talk’ and the ‘doom and gloom’, Malthusian legacy and rhetoric as a motivational basis (even if analytically still useful) in communicating green political aims. Here one might suggest the need to express green politics as a positive politics in terms of the (especially economic) alternatives it proposes. One could argue that the ‘doom and gloom’ discursive frame within which green politics was ‘packaged’ as it were, does not motivate people beyond the already committed, and there was a need for a more ‘positive’ and ‘attractive’ articulation of green politics, which in some ways (and despite all its failings), the discourse of ‘sustainable development’ provided. And here, while again replete with problems, currently fashionable notions associated with the recent projects of *Factor Four* (von Weizsäcker *et al.* 1998) and *Natural Capitalism* (Hawken *et al.* 1999) with its claims of ‘doubling production and halving resource use’, need to be examined carefully rather than simply rejected as ‘reformist’ and inadequate, especially in the context of questioning the dominant path of technological innovation, i.e. simply leaving it to industrial and corporate interests (D.F. White 2002). What I mean here is that the positive and ‘emancipatory’ potentials of technological development and innovation need to be reclaimed by green politics. Also important here is the recasting of green politics in terms of enhancing ‘quality of life’ and a new understanding of progress, politically powerful if linked to demonstrating the disparity between ‘economic growth’ measures of

improvement over time when plotted and compared with declining or static measures or indices of quality of life.

The end of the environmental crisis: post-ecologist fantasies

While the ‘normalization of the environmental crisis’ focuses on the various ways in which environmental degradation continues apace without resulting in any great social or political upheaval or ‘mass movement’ against this destruction, there is another recent argument which suggests that we’ve now reached a ‘post-ecologist’ stage of environmental politics, in part based on the idea that there is no ‘environmental crisis’ (at least in the sense that this is usually taken to mean). Ingolfur Blühdorn’s recent book, *Post-Ecologist Politics: Social Theory and The Abdication of the Ecological Paradigm* (2000b), and his chapter in this volume, is the clearest and most provocative expression of this strand of thinking.

As I read him, Blühdorn’s aim is to criticize normative ‘green political theory’ or ‘eco-politics’ (which he views as problematic on account of its prescriptive normative character – building castles in the air, ‘greenprints’ for a future sustainable society etc.) and suggest a more ‘realistic’, sociologically-based constructivist theory (based on explaining actual social responses to the ‘so-called’ environmental crisis). Based in large part on Luhmann’s systems approach, Blühdorn’s provocative claim is that there is no ‘ecological crisis’ (Blühdorn 2000b: 152). That is, the ‘ecological problem’ is only a problem as a result of the activities of green activists and the green movement, not of anything that is ‘going wrong’ with nature or the metabolism between human societies and the natural world. From his constructivist perspective, he points out that the real issue is not the independent reality of the environmental crisis but the origins of social and individual feelings, views, opinions and perceptions about it (Blühdorn 2000b: 48).⁵ So in place of ‘solving’ the ecological crisis, we have its ‘dissolving’ through discursively created and maintained ecological communication. So we may ask the question, in what ways does his ‘dissolution’ of the environmental crisis/problem differ from US President George W. Bush’s denial of global warming?

This leads him to hold that, ‘The important question is not the reality of ecological damage, degradation, human-induced health problems etc.’, but rather ‘for what reasons and to what extent such phenomena [...] can be conceptualised as problems and crises’ (Blühdorn 2000b: 14). Now this ‘post-ecologist’ constructivism may be an interesting and intellectually stimulating approach, but it has absolutely nothing to say, either by way of explanation or analysis or directly, to those involved or concerned with real and ‘real-world’ environmental struggles and politics. While of course here I am revealing my resolutely ‘realist’ perspective on these matters, it seems to me that your average slum dweller in the developing world whose child is sick as a result of poor air quality, or an Indian peasant faced with water shortages, or indeed a mother concerned about the effects on her baby of the levels of dioxin in her breast milk, will rightly look elsewhere than social constructivism for support, insight and help for their understanding of their

environmental situation and in advancing their political struggles. The cool detached, sociological analysis offered by Blühdorn erodes the environmental critique of its normative and mobilizing force.

The logic of the argument seems to be the following:

- 1 the dynamics of development of modern society are anti-ecological;
- 2 ecologically-committed thinkers are therefore naïve and unrealistic in trying to change this;
- 3 they should abandon normative ‘castle-building’ and get ‘sociologically real’; which means
- 4 confining themselves to ‘greening’ as far as possible these exogenous and unchangeable social dynamics.

One way of reading this is that in the face of continuing and increased ecological destruction, environmental injustice, global economic and environmental inequality, green thinkers and activists should abandon their critical stance, simply adopt a sociological viewpoint, explore and discover the dynamics of modern social development, and try to see where they can fit or attach their ecological aims as best they can onto this exogenous ‘given’ social development, so that social development is ‘greened’ without upsetting the underlying dynamics of consumer capitalism.

In short, it is a profoundly conservative, reformist agenda, where we are forced to limit ourselves to what is currently politically and culturally possible, so that:

- a) the boundaries of critical normative theory are set not by normative theory itself, but the contours of what is possible within current social development; and
- b) there is a presumption that the over-riding criterion for judging normative/critical thought is whether it is possible to implement within the current social order, with a further assumption that the present social order is given and cannot be changed.

The profound conservatism of Blühdorn’s view can be seen (like a lost of post-structuralism) in his positive endorsement of Hegel’s view that ‘human rationality is more suitable for interpreting *that which is* than for issuing instructions on how the world *ought to be*’ (Blühdorn 2000b: 5). If this particular instruction on how we ought to think is taken seriously, then all normative political theory should be abandoned since it transgresses this Hegelian logic. Attempts at critically analysing society, and proposing alternatives and attempts at creating a ‘progressive’ politics are a waste of time on this view, and we should resign ourselves to another Hegelian dictum, ‘freedom is the recognition of necessity’, which can be spelt out to mean ‘accept and reconcile yourself to what “is”, your current position, the current organization of society etc.; indeed, you cannot change the world, so change yourself’. In short, greens should simply give up trying to change social, political and economic structures, dynamics and institutions. They should, ‘get with the programme’, and work with capitalism, globalization etc., not against it.

Blühdorn's proposals are a counsel of despair ('realistic' in his view). His form of sociological constructivism is certainly not constructive for green political action and struggles, suggesting as it does that all of it is just so much wasted energy. In some respects in adopting a view of social development and change as 'exogenous', given and beyond intentional human action to alter, Blühdorn 'naturalizes' social change, rendering the organization and reorganization of the economic, political, social and cultural dynamics, institutions, etc. as 'forces of nature', to which we can and ought to 'adapt' our behaviour and thinking, rather than seek to try to change or transform.⁶ In the end there seems to be little difference, in terms of effects, between Blühdorn's 'post-ecologist' politics and conservative critiques of environmentalism.

The suggestion that the main obstacle to the achievement of ecological demands (which are not specified) is a lack of proper (i.e. Blühdorn's sociologically realistic) understanding of the ecological problem is, to say the least, problematic. Naively perhaps, most greens (and non-green accounts of ecological degradation) would suggest that the real problem is some combination of the dominant political, cultural and economic forces underpinning the 'ecologically hazardous dynamic' (Carter 1993) of modern societies (in the west) and the effects of this dynamic on the world as a whole within the current intentional organization of 'economic globalization'.⁷

The crucial issue, it seems to me, in criticizing Blühdorn's argument is to focus on the strict distinction he makes between (sociological) analysis and explanation, and ideological-prescriptive political theory and strategy (basically all other forms of green political theory, from Dobson, Eckersley, Dryzek, myself, Hayward etc.). It is particularly the normative weakness of his theory that is perhaps most noticeable, not just in the sense that I am not sure of his normative stance (see his contribution to this volume), or that by not being explicit about his own normative position allows him to be interpreted as a conservative, but also that he radically misrepresents or misunderstands the normative core of green politics.

Blühdorn's critique is in fact not of the 'green movement' or green politics, but a particular sub-set that associated with ecocentrism, deep ecology and those variants of green politics which privilege some ahistorical 'nature' and 'the natural' as their central animating and organizing principle, or those schools of green political theory and action which have a central place for 'reading off' normative and political prescriptions from nature or the natural (see J. Barry 1999b: Ch. 1). But what may be true of deep ecology and like-minded 'fundamentalist' green perspectives is not true of other schools and modes of green thinking and action, nor of the green movement as a whole. Yet, Blühdorn's analysis insists on reducing all green politics to such fundamentalist forms. As he argues: 'this reliance (on an idealist notion of identity) is most explicit in the fundamentalist arguments of radical ecologists. But beyond this, it also backs up the rationalizations offered by other currents' (Blühdorn, this volume).

Yet at no point does Blühdorn demonstrate this link, the essential 'eco-fundamentalism' of all green politics. In the case of sustainability and sustainable development, the place of 'nature' is of course central in terms of these concepts and associated interpretations and institutionalized practices being related to

rendering human–environmental interaction to be symbiotic rather than parasitic. But this human–nature concern is posited alongside a range of ‘non-environmental’ concerns and proposals at the heart of sustainable development, which range from: more open, participative, democratic decision-making systems, the defence of human rights, concern for future generations, the integration as opposed to the domination of economic modes of valuation, judgement and knowledge within the decision-making system, to name but a few. None of these depend for their justification on the preservation or achievement or compatibility with some putative ‘green’ notion of ‘the natural’, and indeed if the concept of ‘nature’ is problematic, then why not replace it with ‘environment’ or ‘environmental conditions necessary for social life’, though here Wissenburg (this volume) would doubtless disagree.

The idea that ‘consciousness changing’ or the cultivation of a ‘completely new attitude to the natural environment’ as the ‘standard’ way greens approach the issue of how societies should respond to environmental problems is simply wrong and misleading. That this approach is employed and foolishly suggested by some members of the green movement and some green thinkers should not be used to characterize all green political thought and action. But perhaps the most misleading and disingenuous characterization of green politics is the following:

[...] ecologists were obsessed with – and tied by – the ideas of stability, security and rational controllability. They felt committed to the past and wanted to foresee and manage even the distant future. They believed they could halt, or at least control, evolution and plan for eternity.

(Blühdorn 2000b: 171)

While of course this may be true of some within what we can call ‘green politics’ in making *all* greens out as ‘really’ control freaks wanting to authoritatively keep social and natural development fixed in a particularly (normatively derived) place or state, Blühdorn misses out on green perspectives which resolutely reject this ‘static-authoritarian’ view, and which characterize green politics as a whole more than the caricature he has outlined in his book. Against the caricature presented above by Blühdorn, the idea of a multiplicity of ‘sustainable’ metabolisms or relations between human society and the environment which have to be consciously chosen, negotiated and maintained is closer to the green position

Hence the absolute centrality of normative, political claims and suggestions within green politics. If there is no ‘natural’ or ‘given’ relationship (sustainable or otherwise) we as a species or a society ought to be striving for, then the creation of such relations/metabolisms has to be consciously, intentionally, collectively and deliberately made, not ‘given’ or ‘read off’ from (some ideologically constructed) ‘nature’ or ‘natural order’.

For those concerned about the environment and social-environmental relations, Blühdorn’s view that his

[...] theory of post-ecologism clearly distinguish[es] between material conditions and empirically measurable environmental *change* on the one hand,

and environmental *problems* on the other. Whilst the former are undoubtedly physical phenomena which exist irrespective of their societal perception and any communication about them, the latter are social constructions which have only discursive reality.

(Blühdorn 2000b: 182)

provides no comfort or indeed plausibility. This post-ecologist view seems to suggest that simply by discursively re-describing ‘problems’ as (neutral) ‘change’, the ‘problem’ and all the messy normative and political struggles and negotiations that follow in the search for some (agreeable and provisional) ‘solution’ or, more accurately for me, some appropriate ‘coping mechanism’ or strategy (J. Barry 1999a) simply go away. Change, environmental or other, is never neutral – that is, there is a normative stance that is (and ought to be) taken in looking at and analysing any environmental change. Attempting to ‘abdicate’ or ‘abandon’ a normative stance and to simply take up a cool, detached, objective, explanatory perspective is not an option. Abandoning any normative stance is itself a normative commitment after all, and one which despite his protestations to the contrary, can only support the status quo.

Pacification of the environment by technical-economic means

One of the ways in which the liberal democracy state and market has attempted to blunt the radical edge of the green critique has been by forcing green demands, claims and alternatives to be expressed as technical-economic demands which the state and market ‘system’ can understand and ‘deal with’. So, rather than one’s ethical concern about the destruction of much-loved and culturally significant landscape or ecosystem, for example, being expressed in those ethical terms, one must engage in the ubiquitous, utilitarian calculus of ‘cost-benefit analysis’. This is to force people to make a category mistake; that is to force ethical concerns to be misrepresented as monetary ones. This problem is widespread within liberal democracy’s current frame of reference and preference for non-discursive or deliberative, and distinctly *political* fora and institutions for debating and making environmental (and other) policy, and its preference for ‘quasi market’, ‘economic’, ‘individualistic’ and ‘monetary’ forms of policy-making. That is, state policy-making by quasi-economic means, and the reduction of distinctly political and ethical commitments to a ‘technical’ level, easily understood by the state system, making the environmental critique and position ‘intelligible’ to the state system and therefore (more) easily co-opted.

In this case we can see the relevance of Habermas’ model of ‘system’ and ‘lifeworld’, with green lifeworld interests and claims being forced into being represented in the language of the ‘system’, and thus being corrupted in the process. Yet this is the dilemma of all radical political movements and perspectives: does it stay ‘pure’ and ‘uncorrupted’ by remaining outside the official parliamentary, political and state system, and therefore unable to influence state policy and

governance, or engage with and in the political system (e.g. through participating in elections or joining policy networks and attempting to influence policy) at the risk of necessarily having to compromise and come under the logic of liberal democratic politics? This is an issue of political strategy that I don't have time to go into here. What I want to focus on is the way in which economic modes of rationality and justification operate as the dominant 'grammar' of state and market (systemic) decision-making and governance.

Alongside, scientific and technological innovation (with which it is closely associated), economic thought and practice (whether it be the 'positive' economics of this century, or the political economy of the last three), has largely created the modern social world, shaped its view of the natural world and focused attention on 'worldly' affairs. Its importance as a dominant and dominating form of discourse, social theory, justification and institutional practice cannot be underestimated.

Economics and the environment: from environmental politics to the politics of the environment

In keeping with the general dominance of orthodox economic thought over public policy-making in liberal democracies, it comes as no surprise to see its centrality in environmental policy-making, and its key role in shifting the focus of public debate and about the environment from 'environmental/green politics' to the 'politics and political economy of the environment'. Of all forms of human thought, it is economics which almost since its birth as 'political economy', its later transformation into 'positive economics' at the end of the last century, and its current manifestation as 'neo-classical economics', that has had the most lasting effect and hold upon political decision-making.

In the privilege accorded to science and the 'scientific method' within modern societies, we can find roots of the dominance of economic forms of reasoning and thinking within contemporary capitalist liberal democratic nation-states. Its predominance as the central form of knowledge (along with natural science) used by state actors, bureaucracies and leaders to make decisions, implement policies and propose reforms, while of course not eliminating other forms of knowledge and bases for making political judgement, has had a profound effect on the environment and social-environmental relations. As Francis Bacon, one of the founders of the modern scientific method and worldview, noted, 'knowledge is power', and this is particularly true in respect to the natural sciences and economic science. At the same time, economic forms of thinking do not simply express themselves within state policy-making, but can also seep into 'ordinary' or 'common sense' modes of thinking. While the powerful effect of economic reasoning on modern perceptions of the environment and its official (and unofficial) influence on state decision-making which affects the environment, cannot be overestimated, I will limit my discussion to a few salient points.

Economic forms of reasoning and argumentation heavily influence political debate over environmental issues within public policy. Precisely because of the dominance of economic considerations in public policy-making, environmental

issues are often translated into 'economic' problems and courses of action pursued on the basis of the economic costs or benefits of the environmental issue in question. There is a lot of strategic advantage in using economic forms of argumentation in advancing the case for environmental protection, since one is speaking a language politicians and policy-makers understand (see, for example, Pearce 1992: 8).

This is not to deny the importance of economic considerations, but simply to note how an economic approach to and understanding of social-environmental problems can (and does) 'crowd out' non-economic forms of environmental valuation and argumentation. The privileged position occupied by economics in environmental policy-making has the effect of drowning out other 'voices', other forms of reasoning, valuing and thinking about the environment. This economicist monologue (as opposed to a genuine dialogue), holds *a fortiori*, if as noted in the case above, that environmental decision-making is made in non-deliberative or discursive institutional settings.

Economic reasoning, methodology, rationality and forms of valuing the natural environment can be regarded as not simply the *language of power* in policy-making, but the *grammar of power*. What is meant by this is that economic theory functions as the dominant way in which environmental policy-making is debated, thought about and ultimately decided. In this sense it constitutes the very 'rules of the game' in the same way as grammar has rules for the correct use of language. Thus, those who either do not know or refuse to accept this particular grammar (such as non-economic arguments for environmental preservation) are at a severe disadvantage in trying to influence environmental policy-making within the current institutional framework.

As Holland has pointed out, 'insofar as there is a distinctively *environmental* crisis, it lies in the fact that the natural *world* is disappearing, not in the fact that natural *capital* [...] is disappearing' (Holland 1997: 127). Thus the preservation of 'natural capital' will not necessarily lead to the preservation of particular parts of nature, ecosystems, species and landscapes. Hence if one wishes to preserve the natural environment, then arguing for it in terms of 'natural capital' may not be the best way to do this.

Economics as power/knowledge

Of all the social sciences, economics, from its origins in political economy, has perhaps had the most effect on how the natural environment has been viewed, valued and treated in western societies. As a form of social theory and ideological power, it has had widespread and far-reaching consequences for how the relationship between society (and the economy in particular) and the natural environment has been thought about and analysed. At the same time the 'economic' view of the natural environment is one which has commonsensical appeal, and has travelled from the academy into popular culture and consciousness as a 'common-sense' form of knowledge. Most people would go along with the economic view of the natural environment, i.e., that it has (only) instrumental value to humans and that this instrumental value is of an economic form. This

economic value of the natural environment is in terms of its functions as a ‘resource’ or ‘input’ to the human economy. Economics is thus a major form of social theory and practice, which upholds an anthropocentric or human-centred view of nature and human relations to it. The economy is where nature and society meet, hence the central place and role of economics as a form of power/knowledge has always had in ‘modern’ societies, and especially now in an ‘environmental era’.

In this way economics represents, in Foucauldian terms, an important instance of ‘power/knowledge’, not in the sense of ‘power’ in the form of exploitation or ‘power over’ *per se*, but rather also as a ‘productive’ power within society. In Foucauldian terms, the power of economics as a form of power/knowledge ‘needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression’ (Foucault 1980: 119). Economic modes of thinking, rationality, valuing and acting are pervasive within modern advanced societies, transforming, when the ‘economic gaze’ is focused on the environment, ‘nature’ into an economically (and politically) valuable source of ‘geo-power’ and ‘ecosystem infrastructure’ of the growing economy (Luke 1999a), which needs to be expertly managed, maintained and conserved. Indeed, the logic of economic power/knowledge is to see the earth/nature/environment as surrounded by and subordinate to the global and globalizing economy and free flow of capital, and the overarching imperative of economic growth at any cost, rather than the economy as a sub-system of the larger global ecosystem.

The corrosive effects of economic discourse, the seemingly all-pervasive logic of the utilitarian calculus which underpins it as a power/knowledge construct for the state and market, can perhaps be best seen in how economic readings of environmental demands cannot be ‘pacified’ or domesticated/neutralized as ‘technical problems’ that can be dealt with without upsetting the underlying structure of either the state or market system, nor upset or challenge its organizing imperatives. Alongside the pacification danger is an equally if not more serious problem that the radical environmental critique can be used to support the very dynamics it seeks to resist. Here the ability of the capitalist market system to appropriate symbols, icons, ideas and discourses of the green movement and put them to its own ends through their use in marketing and advertizing campaigns, corporate publicity and so on is remarkable.

As Sachs suggests,

As governments, business and international agencies raise the banner of global ecology, environmentalism changes its face. In part, ecology – understood as the philosophy of a social movement – is about to transform itself from a knowledge of opposition to a knowledge of domination. [...] In the process, environmentalism [...] becomes sanitized of its radical content and reshaped as expert neutral knowledge, until it can be wedded to the dominating worldview.

(Sachs 1995: xv)

Conclusion

There is no doubt that environmentalism, understood as radical green politics, does face serious challenges, especially from the dangers attendant upon its insertion as a 'normal and mundane' aspect of (bureaucratized/administrative) liberal democratic politics, aided by a corporate-based anti-environmentalist backlash, and the pervasive dominance of economic power/knowledge. However, rumours of its death are, to paraphrase Mark Twain, greatly exaggerated. As can be seen in practical political struggles from the anti-globalization and anti-war movements, to the continuing vibrancy of the environmental movement (including green political parties), as well as academic and activist writing and thinking on the ecological or green implications of democracy, citizenship etc., radical environmentalism is alive and well, and set to become more relevant to the shaping of the politics of the twenty-first century.

Notes

- 1 For an excellent analysis of the 'ecological state' which makes explicit reference to the emergence of the welfare state, see Meadowcroft (forthcoming).
- 2 While personally and ideologically having no particular qualms about green politics being socialist or communist, the point is rather that in the American political context, the branding of someone or some idea as 'communist' or 'socialist' (or even social democratic or 'left-wing' – these terms are all lumped together in popular political discourse in the US as far as I can tell), is to demonize and marginalize them.
- 3 In terms of Paterson's first point, think of the recent corporate 'makeover' of British Petroleum now re-branded as 'BP – Beyond Petroleum'.
- 4 Not least, here is the controversy caused by Lomborg's book *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, and the recent judgement by the Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty (DCSD) that Lomborg's book had distorted and misused statistical evidence. According to the director of the Danish Research Agency, 'In Bjørn Lomborg's case [...] the DCSD thus acknowledges Lomborg's critics in as much as he has made a severely biased selection of sources favouring his theories. [...] The conclusion, then, is that there is evidence of objective, though scarcely subjective, dishonesty and this conclusion is a general indictment of his use of sources' (Morten Hansen 2003).
- 5 In so doing he is ceding Benton's 'critical realist' critique he dismissed previously, namely that it is a matter of indifference to the social constructivist position whether these feelings are based on any independent reality of what is happening in and to the natural world, or induced as a result of the fevered imaginations of ecologists.
- 6 In many respects this 'naturalizing' impulse chimes well with the 'spirit of the age' we find in official 'pro-globalization' arguments, that globalization cannot be stopped, it is happening and 'there is no alternative', such as statements made by Giddens and Tony Blair and 'New Labour'. As Jacques (1999: 1) correctly points out, for New Labour, economic globalization is 'a force of nature'.
- 7 The issue is persuading enough people of the correctness or plausibility of their assessment of the ecological crisis and proposed alternatives, not necessarily that their analysis is mistaken. Even if mistaken, the main issue (from the point of view of democracy) is persuading and convincing enough people of the sorts of changes required (all of which do not necessarily have to come from within the ecological critique – here there is more work needed on how to achieve sustainability and other

green political ends while respecting pluralism). Pluralism as an inescapable feature of modern society (one of its key dynamics indeed), is a more plausible and convincing example of the unchangeable or given 'social conditions' which any political programme or theory (sociological or otherwise) must take into account. Moral pluralism, the fact of incommensurable and often incompatible views of the good life, is both a limiting condition on any proposal for social change, but also is normatively a good thing; that is, something that we should maintain, even if it were possible for it to be transcended or otherwise eroded. This same normative status does not extend to other features of contemporary advanced societies, such as capitalism, globalization, the power of large corporations over the food chain, the media, medicine, education, public transport, commodification, privatization etc.

15 Conclusion

Yoram Levy and Marcel Wissenburg

We opened this book with the suggestion that environmentalism may have become superfluous. Environmental issues have become part of liberal democratic thought and political practice, and environmentalism and its more radical cousin ecologism have found a place in academic political thought. In the preceding chapters, we have tried to examine the validity of this ‘end of environmentalism’ hypothesis in various respects, ranging from political practice and the guiding principles used there, to the deepest foundations of green political thought. It is time to draw an overall conclusion.

At first sight, one must conclude that *in practice*, there are or can be (areas of) reconciliation and pacification. Most of the chapters discussing policy norms and the principles behind them indicate this – or at least, one could read them that way (perhaps against the intentions of the authors).

Thus, for instance, Michael Wallack shows that the question of inter-generational justice is one that can be fruitfully *discussed* from various perspectives that are popular within mainstream (liberal democratic) political philosophy. In fact, he implies that our obligations towards future generations *must* be discussed within a framework that, like liberal democratic thought, is geared towards neutrality. Likewise, Hanson in her discussion of the precautionary principle and Bäckstrand in her analysis of science and technology in environmental governance, both argue for a reinforcement of liberal democracy through increased transparency of scientific expertise. Graham Smith completes this line of argument by determining that democratic deliberation at least makes it *possible* for liberal democratic states to overcome lack of trust and cynicism towards authorities. Dorothee Horstkötter makes a similar point when she argues that a Rawlsian detached, ‘neutral’ rationality needs to be – and can be – supplemented by a more situated form of rational deliberation.

Here the distinction between ecologism and environmentalism (in a strict sense) also becomes relevant. Environmentalism perceives ‘the environment’ as resources for a constituency of usually humans, sometimes including future humans, and sometimes adding other sentient creatures. Environmentalism can be accommodated, pacified and neutralized, generally because it addresses the environmental issue in terms of concepts and values, such as knowledge, judgement, interests, welfare, beauty, sustainability and justice, which are part of the common human understanding of, and dealing with, the world. Ecologism can not, as Mills

and King, Levy, Humphrey and Wissenburg pointed out. Ecologism claims to transcend the human point of view, setting virtually unreachable 'ends' that one cannot (or at the very least not easily) come to grips with rationally.

At the same time most contributors to this book – in one way or another – express the view that a humanist environmentalism cannot or should not imply the kind of crude anthropocentric instrumentalism associated with the traditional – or say, 'modernist' – versions of liberal democracy. In general terms there seems to be a common emphasis on forms of *reasonable* politics, as opposed to *rationalist* politics where the 'ends' of environmentalism are, in a way, beyond politics. This view is visible, among others, in the central role given to 'democracy' and 'politics' as opposed to 'the market' and 'scientism' (Barry, Smith, Bäckstrand, Hanson); in treating environmentalism in terms of political argument as opposed to abstract rationalism (Mills and King, Horstkötter, Levy, Blühdorn); and in insisting on substantial environmental outcomes as opposed to liberal democratic proceduralism (Humphrey, de Geus).

So progress has been made. Progress has been made, in empirical terms, in protecting the environment as natural resources against overexploitation and degradation, and progress has been made in political theoretical terms. There seems to be not only room to *discuss* the accommodation of environmentalism within liberal democracy, and the 'liberalization' of environmentalism, there also seem to be perspectives for an actual *solution* of the debate, at least in some respects. Environmentalism as a counter-movement and counter-ideology, as a critique and alternative to capitalism, liberalism, the Enlightenment and anthropocentrism, it would then seem, is at an end. And yet it still exists, as John Barry vehemently maintains. Environmentalism has become part of the anti-globalization and anti-war movements, green social movements and parties themselves still flourish, green thinking flourishes like never before (as this book witnesses).

As Mills and King nicely show, despite recent efforts to bring ecologism down to earth, it has not yet shaken off its radical metaphysical feathers. It is still in need of a framework within which normative argument can proceed on reasonable grounds – that is, without appealing to any arbitrary metaphysics. But as Levy warns us, trying to substitute ecologist metaphysics by 'politics' – that is, by an unqualified commitment to the here and now – leads to a dead end. As Horstkötter is in a way already trying, the next step is to show how environmentalism can be both 'here and now' and universally defensible.

Hanson and Bäckstrand argue that sound environmental policy needs to be backed by science, but they also claim that the conceptions of science that are best capable of capturing the nature of environmental problems may have important implications for central liberal democratic values such as transparency and neutrality. Both Hanson and Bäckstrand believe that sound environmental policy and liberal democracy are not incompatible, but their scientific perspective does suggest that there is some work to be done in finding the right balance between scientifically sound environmentalism and liberal democratic values. In this respect the end of environmentalism very much remains an open question.

Humphrey reminds us that even if Smith, Wallack, Hanson and Bäckstrand are all right as to their claims, there is no logically *necessary* link between procedural, neutral democracy (liberal or other) and substantive green ideals. Although from a totally different perspective, Marius de Geus draws attention to this same problem. Liberal democratic governments cannot guarantee a green future if they do not actively address *substantive* issues like individual consumption levels and the role of material affluence in society – and if they do not accept sacrifices in terms of freedom of action and the unrestrained lust for pleasure and luxury. So the serious, even disturbing, question whether and how environmentalism and liberal democracy are compatible at a theoretical level is still wide open.

Horstkötter perceives the risks of a too-enthusiastic embracing of liberal democratic proceduralism as well, but she believes that there may be ways out of this dilemma. Generally she suggests that the abstract liberal notion of neutrality should be extended to the actual claims of individuals and/or groups with their own moral outlook or way of life. This, she argues, would allow the ‘voices from below’ to enter and enrich public deliberation and so to make neutral outcomes possible, outcomes that at the same time have environmental substance.

Levy, on the other hand, argues that we should reject the ideological fantasy that liberal democracy is neutral, accept that a humanist, substantive conception of environmentalism is necessary – and that it has a place within liberal democracy (like other substantive ideals), if grounded in a moderate realistic notion of reasonable judgement. In addition to Levy’s argument for a more sincere understanding of liberal democracy, Wissenburg argues for a similar self-critical renewal of environmentalism. But even if this perspective is adopted there is still a long way to go in interpreting its implications for the shape of liberal democracy.

Finally, noble environmentalist ideals need to be realized. But, as Barry shows, the ideological foes of the green society never sleep, and as both Smith and de Geus remark, at the end of the day we are all just humans who sometimes need a kick-start. Therefore those noble environmentalist ideals, whether they concern democratic deliberation or individual lifestyle, need to be backed up by sound political strategies.

In sum, then, the alleged pacification of environmentalism is, for the greater part, not skin-deep but quite deep – and yet not deep enough. As to the *normative foundations* of both liberal democracy and environmentalism, there are good grounds to believe that environmental and liberal democratic values can cohere within a pluralist conception of a reasonable, just and green society. Yet before the ‘end of environmentalism’ can be declared, much work needs to be done in repairing inconsistencies and uncovering further conceptual blind spots in both normative frameworks. In terms of *policy norms* and *principles* and in terms of *institutions*, parts – major parts, but still only parts – of the environmentalist agenda have been successfully absorbed. Before environmentalism can become a page in the history of political thought, the apparent successes however need to be consolidated, and other parts of the green agenda still wait to be addressed. Related questions of political agency and strategy, institutional design, and policy standards are still far from solved; some of them may never be.

Green normative and practical concerns are being redefined: we have noticed adaptation to and integration in the framework of liberal democratic thought, as well as a reconsideration and revision of 'deep green' (ecological) goals and ends. We expect that this process will go on and bear fruit. Yet there is a risk that some parts of the green agenda are left behind. For one, liberal democracy's original commitment to a hard-boiled anthropocentric ethics can be mitigated but attempts to make it fully compatible with a bio- or ecocentric perspective still fail, and probably fail on grounds of principle. In this respect, liberal democracy may not live up to its promise of offering room to all reasonable theories of the good life. One practical implication is that some groups (like animal liberators and defenders of the intrinsic value of nature) may become marginalized and may in the end radicalize. In addition, even non-radical versions of environmentalism argue that an environmentally sound liberal democracy requires important changes in the lives and behaviour of *individuals* rather than politics alone: the plea for de Geus' lifestyle of modesty is reflected to some degree at least in all contributions to this volume. Even though liberal democratic thought and liberal democratic *institutions* can accommodate this demand, a real end to environmentalism is possible only when *practice* conforms.

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