Introduction

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Over the past two decades, the landscape of political theory has been transformed by the ecological challenge. A growing number of political theorists have chosen to engage systematically with the moral, political and institutional challenges raised by the environmental agenda. This specialised engagement has seen the emergence of green political theory (or environmental political theory, as it is known in North America) as a distinct sub-field of political theory. At the same time, many 'mainstream' political theorists have found it increasingly difficult to quarantine their enquiry from the various challenges raised by this new sub-discipline and by ecological problems in general. This book seeks to draw together the threads of this interconnecting enquiry and to assess its status and meaning.

The encounter between mainstream and 'green' theory has taken two principal forms. First, there has been a discussion and analysis of the role of environmental politics in the context of modern political ideologies. Thus there have been reflections on (for example) the relationship between liberalism, conservatism, socialism, feminism and the environment – sometimes organised around a debate as to whether 'ecologism' is parasitic on other ideologies or whether it is an ideology in its own right, and sometimes in terms of potential compatibilities between 'green' ideology and other ideologies. There are now very few textbooks on political ideologies that do not contain a chapter on ecologism (usually the last chapter – the position formerly occupied by feminism). The first part of this book reflects this ideological engagement, while also adding fresh perspectives and new layers to this ongoing debate. The addition of nationalism, and the more overarching approaches or 'meta-' ideologies of cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, to the standard list of political ideologies are further evidence of the increasing infiltration of ecological ideas into the various ways in which we orient ourselves politically.

Second, there has been an interrogation of traditional political concepts from an environmental point of view. Sophisticated reflections on (for example) democracy, freedom and rights, on distributive justice, on the state and political space, on security and citizenship have enriched these concepts by demonstrating unexpected possibilities within them. Related to this is the rereading of canonical political theorists from an environmental point of view: Locke (his 'proviso'), Marx ('nature as man's inorganic body'), Hobbes and others (states of 'nature'), Burke (his intergenerationalism) – the list could go on – all these take on a fresh look from an environmental point of view. The second part of this book reflects this conceptual engagement and provides a more general illustration of the exciting ways in which old political concepts can be reinterpreted or refashioned to serve new purposes. It is our intention that this part of the book, in particular, should contribute forcefully to the growing realisation that mainstream theory is not – at this historical juncture – complete without taking account of its ecological counterpart.

Students and teachers of political theory will be aware, of course, that the distinction between 'ideologies' and 'concepts' drawn here is often one of organisational convenience rather than intellectual substance. They cannot be so easily kept apart, and there will be debates about which ideologies might be better regarded as concepts (communitarianism?), and which concepts are in fact ideologies (democracy?). More prosaically but no less importantly, political ideologies – the subject of the first part of this book – are often 'spoken' in terms of the concepts that populate the second part. So one of the issues that distinguishes liberalism from socialism, for example, is its particular understanding of the content, meaning and relevance of freedom and rights for political society. The contestation that is political theory therefore builds in a fluid way on debates between the ideologies that are explored in Part I, and the language of that debate is often conducted through arguments over the meaning of the concepts in the second part. This implies, too, that concepts themselves are ideological, at the very least to the extent that the way we think about them is inflected (or infected?) by ideological considerations. This might be deliberate and self-conscious, as part of a project to appropriate a certain understanding of social justice on behalf of socialism, for instance. Or it might be a result of a process of historical sedimentation and ideological hegemony, in which the sway of a given ideology is so great that its articulation of a given concept comes to be the horizon within which practically all thinking about that concept takes place. Something like this might have happened with liberalism and (liberal) democracy.

Thus we have chosen to divide the book up into ideologies and concepts not because we have an intellectual stake in doing so, but to give it a look that we hope will be recognised by those for whom political theory is a relatively new area of enquiry – students, in particular. We have seen undergraduate courses in political theory divided up in this kind of way, and the textbooks used on these courses often follow a similar path. We say a little more about the implications of this, below.

One of the effects of the irruption of 'the environment' on to the political scene has been a palpable rise in interest in environmental political theory among mainstream political theorists – in part for what it might mean in itself, but also for the challenges and opportunities to which it gives rise within mainstream specialisms. Thus, for example, writers on social justice find it increasingly necessary to reflect on the issue of intergenerational justice – prompted in part by the way in which environmental 'goods' and 'bads' are self-evidently distributed across time as well as space. Theorists of democracy have found that a fresh take on 'representation' is required if the principle of affected interests is to take in future generations and even other species, as well as the usual category of 'present generation humans'. Communitarian thinkers criticise liberal thinkers for dealing in the currency of apparently context-less individuals, but it might be that the embeddedness of which they talk should itself have an ecological as well as a cultural-historical dimension. Similar examples could be offered from other conceptual and ideological specialisms.

There are clear parallels here with the effect feminism had (and still has) on mainstream theory. Feminism has had a profound impact on the study of modern political ideologies, and there is hardly a corner of political theory that has not been affected by its questioning of the public – private divide, or by the assertion that the 'personal is political'. Similarly, environmental themes such as intergenerationalism, anti-anthropocentrism, cross-boundary pollution, limits to growth, and ecological embeddedness all impact upon enduring topics in political theory and make us think about them in different ways. So the aim here is not so much to try to outline a 'green political theory' that might be used by activists, for example, but rather to examine the effect that thinking from the point of view of the environment has on these enduring themes. Of course, this thinking may eventually lead to a turning of the tables insofar as certain environmental ideas may be found wanting from the perspective of other traditions of political enquiry. So, for example, while the chapters in this volume use ecology as the cutting tool, the chapter on feminism also suggests why ecology needs feminism.

Environmentalism is a little behind feminism in terms of both its own development and its wider impact, and this makes it possible to aim the present book at two types of audience. On the one hand, it is a textbook aimed at students of either political theory or environmental politics. Students will be familiar enough with the structure of the book for it to provide the landmarks they need for effective orientation, and they will be able to make the comparisons and contrasts that they are used to making in mainstream political theory courses – between conservatism and nationalism, for example. As we remarked above, the structure here is therefore deliberately traditional, and the surprises will come from the content – indeed the surprises should be all the more noticeable precisely for having been generated within a traditional context. For example, concepts that were originally developed in the domestic context have been reinterpreted to perform 'ecological work' across traditional state boundaries. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of the ecological challenge is the way it has prompted political theorists to re-examine the boundaries between inside and outside, and domestic and international. On the other hand, the material presented here is so relatively new, and the advances made are still so relatively original, that professional researchers in political theory will also benefit from it. There is no distinction here between 'state of play' and 'cutting edge'.

We have been fortunate indeed to recruit a high quality group of authors to this project. Each contributor has an international reputation – either in mainstream or in 'green' theory, and in some cases in both. We asked them to write authoritative chapters, but lightly referenced. The priority was to draw out the effect that the environmental point of view has on the ideology or concept under consideration. How is it reshaped, distorted, transformed, even, from this new perspective? What was in the background may come to the foreground, and entire new lines of enquiry may open up. Authors were given no checklist as to what constitutes the 'environmental point of view', since different aspects of environmentalism/ecologism are relevant to different chapters. Our concern has been to draw out and showcase the diverse and creative ways in which political ideologies and political concepts have been re-examined, including the diverse ecological vantage points from which this re-examination has taken place. Our belief is that each chapter speaks eloquently for itself, so we have not felt the need to paraphrase and comment on them here. The general aim has been to encourage not merely critical overviews, but individual, spirited and creative contributions that may be provocative. We believe that is what we – and you – have got.

Part 1

Modern political ideologies and the ecological challenge

1 Conservatism

Roger Scruton

Environmentalism has recently tended to recruit from people on the left, offering ecological rectitude as part of a comprehensive call for 'social justice'. However, concern for the environment is shared by people of quite the opposite temperament, for whom constitutions and procedures are more important than social goals, and who regard the egalitarian project with scepticism. The appropriation of the environmental movement by the left is in fact a relatively new phenomenon. In Britain, the movement has its roots in the nineteenth-century reaction to the industrial revolution, in which Tories and radicals played an equal part; and the early opposition to industrial farming joins guild socialists like H.J. Massingham, Tories like Lady Eve Balfour, and eccentric radicals like Rolf Gardiner, who borrowed ideas from left and right and who has even been identified (by Patrick Wright) as a kind of fascist. Moreover, contemporary environmentalists are aware of the ecological damage done by revolutionary socialism – as in the forced collectivisation, frenzied industrialisation and gargantuan plans to shift populations, rivers and whole landscapes that we have witnessed in the Soviet Union and China. Left-wing thinkers will not regard those abuses as the inevitable result of their ideas. Nevertheless, they will recognise that more work is needed if the normal conscience is to be persuaded that socialism contains the answer to the growing ecological problem. At the same time, they seldom recognise any affinity with 'the right', and often seem to regard 'conservatism' as a dirty word, with no semantic connection to the 'conservation' that they favour.

The explanation, I believe, is that environmentalists have been habituated to see conservatism as the ideology of free enterprise, and free enterprise as an assault on the earth's resources, with no motive beyond the short-term gains that animate the market. Those who have called themselves conservatives in the political context are in part responsible for this misperception. For they have tended to see modern politics in terms of a simple dichotomy between individual freedom on the one hand, and state control on the other. Individual freedom means economic

freedom, and this, in turn, means the freedom to exploit natural resources for financial gain. The timber merchant who cuts down a rainforest, the mining corporation that ransacks the subsoil, the motor manufacturer who churns out an unending stream of cars, the cola merchant who sends out a million plastic bottles each day – all are obeying the laws of the market, and all, unless checked, are destroying some part of our collective environment. And because, in a market economy, the biggest actors do the most damage, environmentalists turn their hostility on big businesses, and on the free economies that produce them.

Abolish the market economy, however, and the normal result is enterprises that are just as large and just as destructive but which, because they are in the hands of the state, are usually answerable to no sovereign power that can limit their predations. It is a plausible conservative response, therefore, not to advocate economic freedom at all costs, but to recognise the costs of economic freedom, and to take all steps to reduce them, for example by legislation. We need free enterprise, but we also need the rule of law that limits it. When enterprise is the prerogative of the state, the entity that controls the law is identical with the entity that has the most powerful motive to evade it – a sufficient explanation, it seems to me, for the ecological catastrophe of socialist economies.

However, there is another and better reason for thinking that conservatism and environmentalism are natural bedfellows. Conservatism, as I understand it, means maintenance of the social ecology. It is true that individual freedom is a part of that ecology, since without it social organisms cannot adapt. But freedom is not the sole or the true goal of politics. Conservatism and conservation are in fact two aspects of a single long-term policy, which is that of husbanding resources. These resources include the social capital embodied in laws, customs and institutions; they also include the material capital contained in the environment, and the economic capital contained in a free but law-governed economy. The purpose of politics, on this view, is not to rearrange society in the interests of some overarching vision or ideal, such as equality, liberty or fraternity. It is to maintain a vigilant resistance to the entropic forces that erode our social and ecological inheritance. The goal is to pass on to future generations, and if possible to enhance, the order and equilibrium of which we are the temporary trustees.

This means that conservatism, in the eyes of its critics, will always seem to be doomed to failure, being no more than an attempt to escape the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Entropy is always increasing, and every system, every organism, every spontaneous order will, in the long term, be randomised. However, even if true, that does not make conservatism futile as a political practice, any more than medicine is

futile simply because 'in the long run we are all dead', as Keynes famously put it. Rather, we should recognise the wisdom of Lord Salisbury's terse summary of his philosophy, and accept that 'delay is life'. Conservatism is the politics of delay, the purpose of which is to maintain in being, for as long as possible, the life and health of a social organism.

Moreover, as thermodynamics also teaches us, entropy can be countered indefinitely at the local level by injecting energy and exporting randomness. Conservatism emphasises historical loyalties, local identities and the kind of long-term commitment that arises among people by virtue of their localised and limited affections. While socialism and liberalism are inherently global in their aims, conservatism is inherently local: a defence of some pocket of social capital against the forces of anarchic change.

The conservative understanding of political action is therefore formulated, as a rule, in terms of trusteeship rather than enterprise, of conversation rather than command, of friendship rather than solidarity.[1] Those ideas lend themselves readily to the environmental project, and it always surprises me that so few environmentalists seem to see this. It is as obvious to a conservative that our reckless pursuit of individual gratification jeopardises the social order as that it jeopardises the planet. And it is obvious, too, that the wisest policies are those that strive to protect and keep in place the institutions that place a brake on our appetites and that renew the sources of social contentment.

The major difficulty, from the environmental point of view, is that social equilibrium and ecological equilibrium are not the same idea, and not necessarily in harmony. Two examples illustrate the problem. Democracies seem to achieve equilibrium only in a condition of economic growth. Periods of stagnation, rapid inflation or impoverishment are also periods of radical discontent, in which envy, resentment and anger lead to instability. Hence the first concern of democratic governments is to encourage economic growth, regardless of the environmental costs of it. We see this in the present British government's attitude to airports, business parks and roads, the environmental impact of which is put out of mind once these things are seen as economic assets. We see it, too, in the American response to the Kyoto accords. It is not big business that puts the real pressure on the American House of Representatives not to ratify such agreements, but the desire of its members to be re-elected.

[1] Trusteeship is associated with Burke, Moser and Gierke; conversation with Oakeshott; friendship with Aristotle. All are trying to reconstruct political authority as something intrinsically welcome to those who are subject to it.

Nor is democracy the only problematic case. Other forms of social equilibrium may equally pose a threat to the environment, not because they depend on economic growth, but because they depend on population growth, or on the consumption of some finite resource like a rainforest. Consider traditional Islamic societies, of the kind to be observed in North Africa and Saudi Arabia. These achieve equilibrium only when families enjoy spheres of private sovereignty, under the tutelage of a patriarch whose social standing is constantly enhanced by his reproductive powers. Each family must be forever adding to its retinue of sons if it is to retain its position. The result, in modern conditions, is a population explosion that is rapidly destroying the environment of Muslim Arabia, and spilling over into a Europe whose institutions and traditions are profoundly incompatible with the Muslim conception of the moral life.

The conservative response to this kind of problem is to recognise that environmental equilibrium is a part of any durable social order. The conception put before us by Burke is in fact one that ought to appeal to environmentalists. Burke's response to Rousseau's theory of the social contract was to acknowledge that political order is like a contract, but to add that it is not a contract between the living only, but between the living, the unborn and the dead (Burke 1987). In other words, to speak plainly, not a contract at all, but a relation of trusteeship, in which inherited benefits are conserved and passed on. The living may have an interest in consuming the earth's resources, but it was not for this that the dead laboured. And the unborn depend upon our restraint. Long-term social equilibrium, therefore, must include ecological equilibrium.

This thesis, which environmentalists are apt to express in terms of 'sustainability', is better expressed in Burke's way. For Burke reminds us of a motive that arises naturally in human beings, and which can be exploited for the wider purpose of environmental and institutional conservation: namely, love. This motive leads people both to create good things and to destroy them. But it turns of its own accord in a direction that favours conservation, since human love extends to the dead and the unborn: we mourn the one and plan for the other out of a natural superfluity of gratitude and good will. True social equilibrium arises when the institutions are in place that encourage that superfluity and channel it towards the maintenance of the social organism. The principal danger is that those institutions might be destroyed in the name of present emergencies, present appetites and the egregious needs of the merely living.

This emphasis on small-scale, observable and believable human motives is one of the strong points of conservative political thinking. Socialists place before us ideals of equality and social justice. But they seldom trouble to ask whether anyone – still less whether everyone – is motivated to pursue those things. The same problem arises with the environmentalists' goal of sustainability. It may be my goal and yours: but what about Jill, John and Marianne? Liberals are on safer ground with their ruling concept of liberty: it can be assumed that rational beings will aim for liberty, since liberty is the precondition of aiming for anything. On the other hand, people often surrender part of their liberty, and the principal cause of their doing so is the emotion – namely love – on which durable societies are founded.

It seems to me that the greatest weakness in radical environmentalism has been its failure to explore the question of human motivation. There is one overwhelming reason for the degradation of the environment, and that is human appetite. In the wealthier parts of the world people are too many, too mobile, too keen to gratify their every desire, too unconcerned about the waste that builds up in their wake, too eager, in the jargon of economics, to externalise their costs. Most of our environmental problems are special cases of this general problem. And the problem can be more simply described as the triumph of desire over restraint. It can be solved only when restraint prevails over desire, in other words, only when people have relearned the habit of sacrifice. For what do people make sacrifices? For the things that they love. And when do these sacrifices benefit the unborn? When they are made for the dead. Such was the core sentiment to which Burke and de Maistre made appeal.

There is a tendency on the left to single out the big players in the market as the principal culprits: to pin environmental crime on those – like oil companies, motor manufacturers, logging corporations, agribusinesses, supermarkets – who make their profits by exporting their costs to future generations. But this is to mistake the effect for the cause. In a free market these ways of making money emerge by an invisible hand from choices made by all of us. It is the demand for cars, oil, cheap food and expendable luxuries that is the real cause of the industries that provide these things. Of course it is true that the big players externalise their costs whenever they can. But so do we. Whenever we travel by air, whenever we visit the supermarket, whenever we consume fossil fuels, we are exporting our costs to future generations. A free economy is one that is driven by individual demand. The solution is not the socialist one of abolishing the free economy, since this merely places massive economic power in the hands of unaccountable bureaucrats, who are