

1 History, Theory and the Environment

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Climate change is the great challenge of modern politics. Much of its difficulty lies in its novelty: nothing quite like it has ever happened before. Though it seems certain that things will get bad, no one yet knows exactly how bad, and in which ways. Unprecedented global inequality, mass migration, instability, war and total social breakdown all seem possible. Without a historical precedent, climate change campaigners say, we must act now to avoid the worst.

Yet climate change can also be made to look familiar. Worries about dramatic changes in the natural world are certainly not new, and neither is the fear of natural disasters. Ancient earthquakes, biblical floods, millenarian visions of the end of days: there have always been ideas of an uncertain, unknowable ‘Nature’ capable of destroying cities and hastening the onset of the apocalypse. The more recent history of environmental politics is likewise filled with prophecies of doom – predictions of nuclear winters and population bombs that have not, so far, been proven right. Though such analogies are generally strained, they have been put to effective political use in dismissing and downplaying the importance of climate change.

There may be no straightforward historical analogy for climate change. But this does not mean that history cannot help. Contemporary environmental discourse is largely a product of the growth of environmental politics since the Second World War. But many of the concerns that now belong to ‘environmental’, ‘ecological’ or ‘green’ political thought have longer lineages, which sometimes have little to do with ‘environmental’ ways of thinking. Ideas that today are central to environmental politics in general and to climate change in particular – about resource use, collective action or expertise – often have their origins in debates that are not exclusively ecological or environmental but part of the broader history of social, political and economic thought.

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This book is about how that history can be used to help make sense of current environmental dilemmas. It both traces the history of political thinking about environmental problems and charts the history of specific ideas that are central to the politics of the particular environmental predicament that is climate change. It works in two temporal registers, addressing problems that have become important to politics only very recently, while also examining the deep roots of the ideas and assumptions that frame discussion of these problems today.

In this introductory chapter, we lay out some of the ways that the history of political thought can contribute to existing histories of environmental ideas on the one hand, and to current debates in environmental political theory on the other. Environmental history has flourished as a field in the last decades.¹ There is a vast literature that charts how the natural world has shaped, enabled and been moulded by the development of modern politics, political economy and culture, and there are now both regional and global histories of the environment and environmental histories of most parts of the globe.² Environmental historians

¹ For classic surveys of the field, see S. P. Hays, *Explorations in Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998); C. Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); J. R. McNeill, 'Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History', *History and Theory* 42 (2003), 5–43; J. D. Hughes, *What Is Environmental History?* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006). For climate history, see D. Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), 197–222.

² Influential regional studies include D. Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3–8; W. Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 19–20, 75–79, 165–170; W. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); D. Arnold and R. Guha (eds), *Nature, Culture and Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); J. McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500–2000* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); J. Tropp, *Natures of Colonial Change: Environmental Relations in the Making of the Transkei* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); D. Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006); J. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650–1900* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003). On scale in environmental history, see R. White, 'The Nationalization of Nature', *Journal of American History* 86 (1999), 976–986; S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). For surveys of and new directions in global environmental history, see J. R. McNeill, *Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000); P. Sutter, 'What Can U.S. Environmental Historians Learn from Non-U.S. Environmental Historiography?' *Environmental History* 8 (2003), 109–129. A. Hornborg, J. R. McNeill and J. Martinez-Alier (eds.), *Rethinking Environmental History: World-System History and Global Environmental Change* (Lanham, MD: Altamira, 2007); E. Burke III and K. Pomeranz (eds.), *Environment and World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); J. D. Hughes, *An Environmental History of the World* (London: Routledge, 2009); I. G. Simmons, *Global Environmental History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). For classic and more recent histories of the climate, see E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Times of Feast, Times of Famine: A History of Climate since the Year 1000* (Garden

have tended to treat the study of environmental thought as part of their broader efforts to understand the ways that humans relate to and are shaped by the land; related histories of environmental ideas have tended to focus on ideas of ecology or nature.³ As such, their engagement with political theory as a distinctive field of inquiry has often been limited.⁴ By contrast, ethicists and political theorists preoccupied by environmental problems rarely engage directly with the history of those problems. Only recently have intellectual histories begun to be written that bring together political theory with the history of environmental ideas.⁵ In what follows, we suggest how this project might continue.

The first section of this introduction looks at how environmental ideas are currently understood in history and theory. The second section introduces the approach taken in this book, which tries to place environmental ideas into a wider political, economic and philosophical context. We do so by identifying a number of themes that not only are key to environmental and climate politics today, but also have been central problems for much of the history of political thought: concerns about nature, economics, scientific knowledge, political action and the future.

I

The ideas that dominate environmental discourse today are the product of the dramatic rise of environmental politics in the twentieth century. ‘Environment’ is an old term that acquired its modern meaning in the

City, NY: Doubleday, 1971); G. Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

³ R. F. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); C. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); S. L. Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude toward Deer, Wolves and Forests* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974). D. Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977) and C. Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁴ On the place of theory in general within environmental history, see D. Worster, ‘Appendix: Doing Environmental History’, in D. Worster (ed.), *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 289–307; J. Donald Hughes, ‘Three Dimensions of Environmental History’, *Environment and History* 14 (2008), 319–330.

⁵ D. Winch, ‘Thinking Green, Nineteenth-Century Style: John Stuart Mill and John Ruskin’, in M. Bevir and F. Trentmann (eds.), *Markets in Historical Contexts: Ideas and Politics in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 105–128; M. Lane, *Eco-Republic: What the Ancients Can Teach Us about Ethics, Virtue, and Sustainable Living* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); E. Rothschild, ‘Introduction to Forum: The Idea of Sustainability’, *Modern Intellectual History* 8 (2011), 147–151; F. A. Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier: The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); J. Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

1940s, when it came to be used to ‘describe the human interface with the planet and nature and all its life-sustaining processes’.⁶ But the explosion of environmental politics – at the level of both social movements and government – was in large part a postwar phenomenon. In those years, concern with the environment in both Western Europe and the United States grew steadily, reaching a new height in the 1960s and early 1970s.⁷ An era in which the relationship of politics and nature had been characterized by ideas of conservation gave way to one underpinned by new holistic understandings of an interdependent nature, and the environment as a complex system to be protected and regulated.⁸ The publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the celebration of Earth Day in 1970 have long been understood as symbols of this new environmental consciousness, which itself underpinned local and international campaigns – around issues of pollution, pesticide abuse and resource exploitation – that issued in a new wave of environmental law-making and internationalist mobilization. The 1972 United Nations Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment marked the beginning of a period in which global environmental diplomacy had some success – most notably with chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) reduction and the protection of the ozone layer in the 1980s and 1990s.⁹

Even as environmental politics in general was met with increasing enthusiasm, the objects of its concern were changing. The 1972 Club

⁶ Chapter 3 in this volume; L. Robin, S. Sorlin and P. Warde, *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). For a pioneering use of ‘environment’ as a historical category, see the 1966 amendment to Fernand Braudel’s *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, ‘Has the Climate Changed since the Sixteenth Century?’, in F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), vol. I, 267–275.

⁷ For environmental politics in the United States, see N. M. Maher, *Nature’s New Deal: The Civil Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); A. Rome, ‘“Give Earth a Chance”: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties’, *The Journal of American History* 90 (2003), 525–554; in Europe, see C. Rootes (ed.), *Environmental Protest in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); S. Milder, ‘Thinking Globally, Acting (Trans-) Locally: Petra Kelly and the Transnational Roots of West German Green Politics’, *Central European History* 43 (2010), 301–326; H. Nehrin, ‘Genealogies of the Ecological Moment: Planning, Complexity and the Emergence of the “Environment” as Politics in West Germany, 1949–1982’, in S. Solin and P. Warde (eds.), *Nature’s End: History and the Environment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 115–138; and for a survey of ‘global’ environmentalism, see J. McCormick, *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

⁸ S. P. Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics since 1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

⁹ J. R. McNeill, ‘The Environment, Environmentalism, and International Society in the Long 1970s’, in N. Ferguson, C. S. Maier, E. Manela and D. J. Sargent (eds.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 263–278.

of Rome report *The Limits to Growth* marked a high point of anxieties about global overpopulation, but the neo-Malthusianism that had been a key feature of the new environmentalism faded from view by the decade's end.¹⁰ Worries about resource depletion became widespread following the famines and spiralling oil prices in the 1970s. The perceived energy crises in turn confirmed the belief that the postwar nation-state was suffering a crisis of legitimacy; the lasting consequences of that decade were mistrust in government, environmental deregulation and a further enabling of anti-statist strains of environmentalism.¹¹ When in the 1980s the radical, ecological politics of the previous decade was domesticated and fears of apocalyptic catastrophe waned (or were channelled into renewed anxieties about nuclear war), the language and paradigms of contemporary environmentalism were born. The idea of 'sustainability', for instance – a word that came into use in the 1970s – was enshrined by the report of the UN's Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*, in 1987.¹² Global warming became an object to be studied by the new 'global change' research community, and the idea of the 'Anthropocene' – a new era in which humans were the agents of geological change – was first proposed.¹³ Climate change became the new disaster to be feared.

¹⁰ D. H. Meadows, D. L. Meadows, J. Randers and W. W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972). See also the second report to the Club of Rome two years later, M. Mesarovic and E. Pestel, *Mankind at the Turning Point: The Second Report to the Club of Rome* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974). For the 'limits to growth' debate, see F. Sandbach, 'The Rise and Fall of the Limits to Growth Debate', *Social Studies of Science* 8 (1978), 495–520; M. Schoijet, 'Limits to Growth and the Rise of Catastrophism', *Environmental History* 4 (1999), 515–530. For international population politics and neo-Malthusianism, see A. Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); A. Bashford and J. Chaplin, *The New Worlds of Thomas Malthus: Rereading the Principle of Population* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), and its American incarnation, T. Robertson, *Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

¹¹ Ferguson et al., *The Shock of the Global*; M. Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2016); J. M. Turner, "'The Specter of Environmentalism': Wilderness, Environmental Politics and the Evolution of the New Right', *Journal of American History* 96 (2009), 123–149.

¹² P. Warde, 'The Invention of Sustainability', *Modern Intellectual History* 8 (2011), 153–170; The World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). For a critical view of the Brundtland report, see P. Anker, 'The Economic Fix: The Norwegian Approach to Climate Change' (unpublished paper presented at Workshop on Historicizing Climate Change, Princeton, May 2014).

¹³ Robin et al., *The Future of Nature*, 4–5; S. L. Lewis and M. A. Maslin, 'Defining the Anthropocene', *Nature* 519 (2015), 171–180; W. Steffen, J. Grinevald, P. Crutzen and J. McNeill, 'The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives', *Philosophical*

These transformations in environmental politics since the 1960s led to a corresponding increase in academic interest in environmental problems. Environmental history became a flourishing field. Its proponents tracked the role of nature in shaping human history, examined the blurred lines between nature and culture and explored how those categories were weaponized in imperial contexts.¹⁴ Gradually, many other historians – of science, economics or culture – came to take on board the insights of this new history.¹⁵ The intellectual histories that came out of this period of transformation tended, like the environmental politics which prompted them, to use an ecological lens. They drew on what became a familiar and canonical tradition of thinkers – first and foremost Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson – and historicized the conservationist and ecological strands of twentieth-century thought.¹⁶ Though environmental historians certainly challenged the idea at the heart of much popular environmentalism – that ‘nature’ and ‘wilderness’ are normative goods that stand apart from humanity – such ideas (in their newly historicized forms) still stood at the centre of histories of environmental ideas, which

Transaction of the Royal Society A 369 (2011), 842–867; J. McNeill and P. Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

- ¹⁴ D. Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); R. Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); P. Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); A. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); W. Beinart and L. Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean 1620–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); R. White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011). For a helpful recent discussion of two distinctive approaches within US environmental history, see J. Specht, ‘Finding Its Way: Thoughts on Environmental History’, www.processhistory.org/finding-its-way-thoughts-on-environmental-history (accessed 20 July 2016). For the foundational texts for a different interdisciplinary approach to climate history, see R. I. Rotberg and T. K. Rabb (eds.), *Climate and History: Studies in Interdisciplinary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), and T. M. L. Wigley, M. J. Ingram and G. Farmer (eds.), *Climate and History: Studies in Past Climates and Their Impact on Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- ¹⁵ For recent examples, see G. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); C. F. Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); A. Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016); T. Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011).
- ¹⁶ L. Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); Worster, *Nature's Economy*; C. Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

described the development of an ethos, a way of ethically relating to nature and appreciating the environment.¹⁷ Such narratives serve an aspirational purpose in environmental debates, where ecological ideas are invoked in models for a better ethical life. As such, they show more about how the history of ideas can be used in contemporary political argument than they do about the history of environmental political thought.

While it is likely that those concerned with ecology and the environment today care about climate change, the new politics of climate change does not necessarily require an ‘environmental’ or ‘ecological’ perspective of the kind these narratives provide. Climate change is not only an ecological issue. Debates about the intrinsic value of nature or the appropriate ethical relationship to it go only so far to answering the question of what is to be done in the face of our changing climate. Indeed, tying it exclusively to ecological concerns misses that climate and environmental politics in general, are – and will no doubt continue to be – a central part of modern politics. An exclusively ecological perspective masks the kinds of political puzzles climate change poses and the ways that it exacerbates existing problems within modern political systems. Climate change shapes considerations of social and distributive justice, and is intimately tied to questions about the fate of modern capitalism. It illuminates the dangers of the short-term thinking characteristic of democratic rulers who have their eye on the next election rather than the long-term future. It brings into sharp relief the conflict of interests between states, citizens and other non-governmental and supra-national organizations and associations. It aggravates ongoing problems of how to redress the legacies of colonialism and empire and it exacerbates global inequalities and injustices, and existing distributional conflicts.¹⁸ And it highlights the many prevailing – and today quickly worsening – tensions between experts and citizens, politics and markets, and the conflicts between democracies, technocracies and autocracies.

In an era where environmental politics are now inextricably bound not to ecology but to climate change, new resources that bridge the gap

¹⁷ For the classic critique of this tendency, see W. Cronon, ‘The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature’, in W. Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 69–90.

¹⁸ Examples of the vast literature on environmental justice, racism and anti-imperialism include A. H. Deming and L. E. Savoy (eds.), *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2011); R. Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); L. Westra and B. Lawson (eds.), *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

between histories of ecological ideas and these complex political problems are needed. For political theorists and philosophers, dealing with environmental issues has increasingly involved addressing these problems. Since the 1970s social and political theorists, much like historians, have turned to the host of issues we now group as environmental.¹⁹ Then, deep ecologists and radical environmentalists called for a total revaluation of the relationship between the human and non-human world.²⁰ A new field of environmental ethics, which examined questions about animal rights and whether the earth and nature has intrinsic value, attempted to decentre the place of humans in modern moral and political thought.²¹ Others went beyond the ecological, extending conventional philosophical ideas to address the new environmental politics.²² Responding to concerns with overpopulation and world famine, Anglo-American analytical philosophers developed theories of ‘global’ and

¹⁹ For surveys of environmental political theory, see the special issue of *Contemporary Political Theory* (2009), essays by M. Seward, A. Dobson, S. MacGregor and D. Torgerson; M. Humphrey, ‘Green Political Theory’, in D. Bell (ed.), *Ethics and World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 181–199. Key contributions to environmental political theory include A. Dobson, *Green Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Harper Collins, 1990); R. Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); R. Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); J. Barry, *Environment and Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1999); A. de-Shalit, *The Environment: Between Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For the question of whether political theory should deal with climate change as an isolated issue or as part of a theory of justice, see S. Caney, ‘Just Emissions’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 40 (2012), 255–300.

²⁰ A. Naess, ‘The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary’, *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 16 (1973), 95–100; B. Devall and G. Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as If Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1985); J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); B. Devall, ‘Deep Ecology and Radical Environmentalism’, *Society and Natural Resources* 4 (1991), 247–258; J. Davis (ed.), *The Earth First, Reader: Ten Years of Radical Environmentalism* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1991). For a survey, see B. Devall, ‘The Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: 1960–2000: A Review’, *Ethics and the Environment* 6 (2001), 18–41. For the eco-feminist extension of deep ecology, see G. Gaard (ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); M. Mellor, *Feminism and Ecology* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); and for the eco-Marxist extension, see J. O’Connor, ‘Introduction’, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 1 (1988), 1–38; J. B. Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); P. Burkett, *Marxism and Ecological Economics: Toward a Red and Green Political Economy* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

²¹ P. Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethic for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Harper Collins, 1975); S. R. L. Clarke, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); M. E. Zimmerman, J. Baird Callicott, G. Sessions, K. J. Warren and J. Clark (eds.), *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993).

²² A. Dobson and R. Eckersley (eds.), *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

‘intergenerational’ justice to ask whether and what obligations are owed to individuals far away, and to future generations, in a world of declining or limited resources. Economists and philosophers became increasingly concerned with how to manage ecological threats, like resource depletion, that occurred over long periods of time into the future.²³ By the 1980s, social theorists like Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens described this novel iteration of modernity – in which the threat of ecological disaster had forced all to look at the future through a managerial framework of risk, costs and benefits – as a new ‘risk society’.²⁴

Since then, environmental political theory has largely gone in two directions. On the one hand, it has furthered the decentring of the human world begun by earlier environmentalists and, by building on a tradition in the sociology of science – as environmental historians have also done – has sought to endow nature and non-humans with agency.²⁵ On the other, it has tended to downplay the agency or intrinsic value of nature, instead showing how existing theories of distributive, intergenerational and global justice developed in the 1970s can be ‘greened’, and how theories of deliberative democracy and ecological citizenship can be combined.²⁶

Contemporary political theorists therefore already take environmental issues seriously. Though some focus on ecological concerns alone, many recognize the importance of treating ecological problems as part of moral, political and economic thought more broadly. Many theories of distributive justice and citizenship, and accounts of ethical life now address the

²³ R. I. Sikora and B. Barry (eds.), *Obligations to Future Generations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); D. MacLean and P. G. Brown (eds.), *Energy and the Future* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983).

²⁴ U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992); U. Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* (London: Polity Press, 1995); A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

²⁵ B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. C. Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); L. Nash, ‘The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency’, *Environmental History* 10 (2005), 67–69; T. Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), esp. ch. 1, ‘Can the Mosquito Speak?’. Cf. C. Palmer, ‘Does Nature Matter? The Place of the Nonhuman in the Ethics of Climate Change’, in D. G. Arnold (ed.), *The Ethics of Global Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 272–291.

²⁶ S. Caney, ‘Global Distributive Justice and the Environment’, in R. Tinnevelt and G. Verschraegen (eds.), *Between Cosmopolitan Ideals and State Sovereignty: Studies on Global Justice* (London: Palgrave, 2006), 51–63; A. Dobson, *Justice and the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); A. Dobson and D. Bell (eds.), *Environmental Citizenship* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); M. I. Humphrey, *Ecological Politics and Democratic Theory: The Challenge to the Deliberative Ideal* (London: Routledge, 2007).

peculiar challenges of environmental problems, as well as the associated problems of cooperation, burden distribution and managing the future.²⁷ However, where political theorists look to history, they often rely on the same aspirational, ecological tradition of thought constructed in the first decades of the new environmental politics, and rarely connect their ideas to the history of political thought more broadly understood.²⁸ This makes it difficult to see beyond contemporary approaches to environmental problems, or to locate their intellectual roots. Addressing the climate threat requires answers to political problems – of coordination, political action, representation, distributive justice, the management of population and resources, even perhaps that of imagining the end of the world. These are deep-rooted problems of modern politics, which themselves have histories. We are unlikely to find solutions to them by simply looking at old ways of talking about nature in the history of ecological ideas alone.

This book begins the work of integrating historical treatments of these problems in political theory and contemporary politics into the history of environmental ideas. It offers some historical perspectives on contemporary environmental political thought, and brings the perspective of political theory to the history of environmental ideas. The aim is for a history of political thought that presents environmental questions as more than just problems of value and nature; one that does not take environmental issues as peripheral, but places them in the context of the political problems we routinely take as central – problems of states, markets, democracy and political action. Historians of political thought are used to thinking about problems often understood as environmental: in debates about land, settlement and empire, about what nature has been used to justify, and how its normative limits have been conceived.²⁹

²⁷ For the now vast field of intergenerational justice and climate ethics, see A. Gosseries and L. H. Meyer (eds.), *Intergenerational Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); S. M. Gardiner, S. Caney, D. Jamieson and H. Shue (eds.), *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); I. González-Ricoy and A. Gosseries (eds.), *Institutions for Future Generations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁸ For a recent survey of the use of the ‘canon’ by political theorists interested in environmental issues, see H. Wilson, ‘Environmental Political Theory and the History of Western Political Theory’, in T. Gabrielson, C. Hall, J. M. Meyer and D. Schlosberg (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 19–33.

²⁹ A. Brett, *Changes of State: Nature and the Limits of the City in Early Modern Natural Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); D. Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); A. Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property and Empire 1500–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); S. Muthu (ed.), *Empire and Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); A. Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).