

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-107-19928-6 — Nature, Action and the Future  
Political Thought and the Environment  
Edited by Katrina Forrester , Sophie Smith  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

## Nature, Action and the Future

Climate change is the great challenge of modern politics. In this volume, leading political theorists and historians investigate how the history of political ideas can help us make sense of it. The contributors add a historical perspective to contemporary debates in political theory. They also show that the history of political thought offers new directions for thinking about the environment today. By situating the relationship between humans and nature within a wider history of ideas, the essays provide alternative ways of thinking about the most intractable problems of environmental politics: the status of science in modern democracies, problems of collective action and the challenges of fatalism.

This volume will create new avenues of research for scholars and students in political theory and the history of political thought. It is essential reading for undergraduate students interested in environmental challenges: both those in politics seeking a historical perspective and those in history who want to link their studies to the present.

KATRINA FORRESTER is Assistant Professor of Government and Social Studies at Harvard University.

SOPHIE SMITH is Associate Professor of Political Theory at the University of Oxford.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-107-19928-6 — Nature, Action and the Future  
Political Thought and the Environment  
Edited by Katrina Forrester , Sophie Smith  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

# Nature, Action and the Future

## *Political Thought and the Environment*

---

*Edited by*

**Katrina Forrester**

Harvard University

**Sophie Smith**

University of Oxford



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-107-19928-6 — Nature, Action and the Future  
Political Thought and the Environment  
Edited by Katrina Forrester, Sophie Smith  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107199286](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107199286)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108185509

© Cambridge University Press 2018

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2018

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-19928-6 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-107-19928-6 — Nature, Action and the Future  
Political Thought and the Environment  
Edited by Katrina Forrester , Sophie Smith  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

For our mothers,  
Lisa Appignanesi and Cindy Smith

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of Contributors</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
1 History, Theory and the Environment	1
KATRINA FORRESTER AND SOPHIE SMITH	
<b>Part I Time, Nature and the Land</b>	21
2 Is There Any Place for Environmental Thinking in Early Modern European Political Thought?	23
ANNABEL BRETT	
3 ‘Sustainability’, Resources and the Destiny of States in German Cameralist Thought	43
PAUL WARDE	
4 Abundance and Scarcity in Geological Time, 1784–1844	70
FREDRIK ALBRITTON JONSSON	
5 Slack	94
MALCOLM BULL	
<b>Part II Science, Agency and the Future</b>	113
6 The Nature of Fear and the Fear of Nature from Hobbes to the Hydrogen Bomb	115
DEBORAH R. COEN	
7 Between Frankfurt and Vienna: Two Traditions of Political Ecology	133
JOHN O’NEILL AND THOMAS UEBEL	
	vii

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-107-19928-6 — Nature, Action and the Future  
Political Thought and the Environment  
Edited by Katrina Forrester , Sophie Smith  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

viii	Contents	
8	Uncertainty, Action and Politics: The Problem of Negligibility MELISSA LANE	157
9	What Kind of Problem Is Negligibility? A Response to Melissa Lane RICHARD TUCK	180
10	Optimism, Pessimism and Fatalism DAVID RUNCIMAN	202
	Afterword: Climate Change in the Light of the Past QUENTIN SKINNER	221
	<i>Index</i>	231

# Figures

---

4.1 Thomas Sopwith, “The small Forest of Dean model.”	<i>page</i> 71
---	----------------

## Contributors

---

ANNABEL BRETT Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge

MALCOLM BULL The Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford

DEBORAH R. COEN Yale University

KATRINA FORRESTER Harvard University

FREDRIK ALBRITTON JONSSON The University of Chicago

MELISSA LANE Princeton University

JOHN O'NEILL The University of Manchester

DAVID RUNCIMAN Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge

QUENTIN SKINNER Queen Mary University of London

SOPHIE SMITH University College, University of Oxford

RICHARD TUCK Harvard University

THOMAS UEBEL The University of Manchester

PAUL WARDE Pembroke College, University of Cambridge



## Acknowledgements

---

We would like to thank the individuals and the institutions that helped us with this book. The essays were first delivered as papers at the Philomathia Conference on Political Thought and the Environment in May 2012 at the University of Cambridge's Faculty of History and Trinity Hall. For supporting that event, we are grateful above all to the Philomathia Foundation, particularly Wilfred Chung, without whom it would not have been possible, as well as to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Faculty of History's Graduate Training Fund, the George Macaulay Trevelyan Fund and to Trinity Hall.

For their guidance then and since, we are indebted to Annabel Brett and David Runciman, who helped to turn an idea into reality. Our further thanks are due to Duncan Bell, Christopher Brooke, Joel Isaac, Emma Jones, Duncan Kelly, Quentin Skinner and Greg Zucker for their help and advice, and to Dominic O'Mahony, who assisted in all kinds of ways in the lead-up to and during the conference itself. We are especially grateful to Jane Bennett, Simon Caney, Sarah Fine, Vincent Geoghegan, Bob Goodin and John Roemer for participating in the conference and for their parts in making it such a stimulating two days. Caroline Diepeveen provided the index and Alice Spawls designed the image we used on the cover; we owe them both a debt of gratitude. Thanks also to Jamie Martin and Amia Srinivasan for their support in this, as in everything. It is a pleasure, finally, to be able to thank our contributors for their patience and for such an excellent set of papers, and to John Haslam, Laura Blake and two anonymous reviewers at Cambridge University Press for their enthusiasm and feedback.