

A Retrospective of Northern Green Political Thought and Practice

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Piers H.G. Stephens, John Barry, and Andrew Dobson (eds.), *Contemporary Environmental Politics: From Margins to Mainstream*, Routledge, 2006.

This book is an edited collection of articles from the European journal *Environmental Politics*. It spans ten years of material, from the birth of the journal in 1992 until 2002, and is intended to showcase the development of environmental political thought and practice in the North during that period. To that end, the volume is divided into four sections, one each covering green theory, social movements, green political economy, and policy.

The first article published in the journal, Robert Goodin's "The High Ground is Green," opens the collection and the theory section. Goodin sets the tone by announcing the arrival of a new phase of environmentalism, as a central component of public policy and a legitimate topic of mainstream academic inquiry. In an effort to "rescue greens from themselves," as he puts it, Goodin separates himself (and tries to take green politics with him) from "counter-cultural hippie lifestyles," holistic medicine, and "wild-eyed faith in the powers of grassroots democracy." He pushes away from the green activist-prophets of doom and conservation groups who focus on warm and fuzzy animals, instead urging environmental political thinkers to identify and develop the substantive goals of green public policy.

By contrast, the next article by Ariel Salleh explores some of the radical ground that Goodin might have preferred to leave behind, mining the intersection of feminism and anarchism in environmental thought. Salleh suggests that there is a kind of proto-ecofeminism in Murray Bookchin's work, and she considers its relationship to the liberal ecofeminism of Janet Biehl, Bookchin's partner. While Salleh's sympathetic exploration of Bookchin and Biehl is compelling from a theoretical perspective, the piece is equally interesting for some of the details it gives of the fractious internal politics of radical green movements in the United States during in the 1980s and 1990s: split by east coast and west coast, separated by serious ideological gulfs, and often provincial in orientation.

Robert Brulle's contribution explores the use of critical theory (particularly Jurgen Habermas) in environmental ethics. The article engages with Robyn Eckersley's work, offering a mostly sympathetic critique of her use of Habermas to lay the groundwork for a kind of communicative politics that is inclusive of nature. Brulle usefully draws out the difficulties that ecocentric ethics faces in its encounter with deliberative democracy, particularly on the idea of intrinsic value and the pragmatics of translating ecocentric ethics into democratic political practice, given the inability of nonhuman life to represent itself.

The green political economy section of the book (Part III) includes Eckersley's own article on free market environmentalism. This article is particularly prescient, given the proliferation of initiatives claiming to marry environmentalism and the free market in recent years. Eckersley carefully and patiently analyzes what is at stake in using tradable property rights to create green outcomes, and the flaws she highlights remain in play today. For

example, although free market environmentalism claims to depoliticize environmental issues by transferring outcomes to the market, Eckersley argues that it “must be seen as a thinly disguised endorsement of the existing distribution of property rights and income” [p. 156], which values efficiency over social justice and sustainability.

Eric Laferrière’s contribution takes these questions over justice, sustainability, and markets to the international political level, focusing in particular on North-South relations. Rather than staying at the traditional inter-state level of analysis, Laferrière turns the discussion to transnational green movements (the theme of Part II) and the nature of cooperation between Northern and Southern NGOs. Joyce Gupta pursues similar issues in her analysis of the Global Environmental Facility,¹ where she puts North-South differences at the center of environmental politics. As has become increasingly clear with climate change in particular, it is not that we should see North-South inequalities as hindering abilities to find collective solutions; rather, addressing those inequalities should be seen as a prerequisite for meaningful action on global environmental problems.

Part IV of the volume engages with policy directly, though the articles here, too, are informed by theory. Andrew Blowers and Pieter LeRoy, for example, examine the politics and inequalities of siting environmentally hazardous “locally unwanted land-uses” (LULUs) in Europe through the lens of environmental justice. Hugh Ward’s article considers the use of citizen-juries in giving valuations of nature, in a deliberative democratic frame. Marcus Crepaz’s article on the impact of institutional factors on national variations in air pollution levels is the sole quantitative social scientific contribution in the volume, and sticks out slightly in a collection otherwise oriented to theoretical questions.

In sum, this book is a collection that fairly represents the journal’s history since 1992. Considering the time elapsed, the articles generally hold up well, and mostly remain interesting and relevant. Though the editors’ stated intent in arranging the book by subsection, and then chronologically within subsection, is to show how the field and environmental politics have developed over time, the fact that each subsection only has 3-4 articles that are mostly not in conversation with one another makes this a difficult goal to achieve. That said, the volume is successful in showing the range of contributions within environmental politics, from the deeply theoretical to the applied.

In political orientation, the articles collected here have a slight bias to the liberal and reformist, rather than the radical, but by no means excessively so. Readers of this journal might have hoped for more work engaging with the red-green dimensions of environment and especially political economy. The book is nonetheless successful overall in showcasing a diverse set of perspectives on environmental politics.

¹ The Global Environmental Facility, or GEF, is the largest funder of environmental projects around the world today. Established in 1991 as a pilot program in the World Bank, today the GEF is the funding mechanism for a number of United Nations conventions, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. It also funds numerous large and small environmental programs and works through ten UN and international agencies, having given \$8.8 billion for more than 2,400 projects in 165 developing countries or countries whose economies are considered in transition.

