Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices
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Ecologism and Politics

Let us go on to our second lecture, actually, I should say our third lecture on ecologism. In the first lecture, we looked at the background to the term ecology. We looked at what ecologism would mean. We looked at deep and shallow ecology. In the second lecture, we looked at the main ideas running through the whole of ecologism, the different forms of ecologism, and we looked at things like, ideas like sustainability, self-actualization and environmental ethics.

How might these connect with the political world as we know it? Ecologism does cut across all existing ideologies. We saw this with feminism as well. So - many ecologists reject conventional ideologies, but others draw upon existing ideologies or embody some of those, in order to devise ideas of how to treat the natural environment better.

Remember, the focus is how to treat the natural environment better, how to live better in it. That is, if we treat the natural environment better, we'll create better lives for all of us. The question is, how do we draw upon existing ideologies, or one question is, how do we draw upon existing ideologies in order to treat the natural environment better and improve our own lives?

It hardly needs saying that existing ideologies express very different kinds of concerns and policies over or in relation to the environment. They do, as we shall see throughout this ideologies course, embody and express different senses of humanity, what it is to be human and how it is to relate to the rest of the world and to other people. But that's the reason existing ideologies express, that's part and parcel of, how and why existing ideologies express different kinds of concerns and policies over the environment.

We'll start with fascist and right-wing ecologism. It's no surprise, we shouldn't be the least bit surprised, that fascist movements have often asserted a form of explicit ecologism. We saw in chapter 1 that early 20th-century ecologists were disturbed by the rapid industrialization that had taken place in the preceding century, particularly the second half of the 19th century. That process had caused huge social upheaval and had transformed entire societies. It had created very large industrial cities, and had caused terrible pollution. It had also abolished what fascists saw as the stabilities of the earlier agricultural order.

You'll be familiar with literature arising from a sense of loss of the apparent calmness and stillness and spaciousness and quietness of the agricultural world, you'll be familiar with the romantic and Lakeland poets writing in English, and no doubt in other languages.

We also know, I draw this, if I'm not mistaken, from Joshua Freeman's book *Behemoth*, a history of the factory. We also know, and we know from other writings as well, that - that factories in the late 19th century - enormously - led to the enormous expansion of cities that also went together with the expulsion of farmers and peasants from the land - in the United Kingdom by Act of Parliament; but great cities such as Manchester, great industrial cities were visible from many, many miles away because of the permanent, thick clouds of smog, that is smoke with fog, and hanging clouds of pollution over them throughout the year. They were known by these columns of toxic air, which covered whole cities and no doubt, went many thousands of metres into the atmosphere. You can see them from miles away = that's Manchester, if you're going to Manchester that's the direction to go in. See that column of smoke over there, that's where you need to go.

In response to the upheaval of the industrial revolution, former peasant leaders - like Walther Darré, one of the ministers in Hitler's Nazi government, Walther Darré strongly supported the German Youth Movement in the 1930s. Darré was Hitler's Minister of Agriculture from 1933 to 1942, and he combined a Nazi theory of Nordic racial superiority with an idealized vision of rural life.

The result was a form of blood and soil theory which was thoroughly fascist. I have mentioned that phrase, blood and soil before, that was in the lecture on fascism. It was Walther Darré who coined the phrase 'blood and soil', in German, *Blut und Boden*. Similar ideas of closeness to nature and the land have reappeared in contemporary environmentalist movements, though most of the people involved in those today would probably try to ensure that their thinking was free of fascistic implications or undertones.

But nevertheless, certain recent, relatively recent, agricultural or ecological thinking or environmentalist thinking has at times come quite close to, to fascist conceptions, even if these were not intended. I have certainly listened to various environmentalist campaigning groups, have listened to campaigners, who seem perhaps not to have been aware that some of the implications and even some of the ideas, [they were,] some of the implications of their ideas and some of the ideas themselves, were troublingly close to fascist conceptions.

For example, great anxieties about population growth around the world have often been put in terms close to fascism. So, it can be attractive, fascist thinking can be very attractive to certain kinds of environmentalist movements or campaigners. Today, it's not very likely that, that environmentalist campaigns would, would explicitly articulate such fascist conceptions. But therefore, if we are environmentalist campaigners, we need to be careful that we do not articulate fascist conceptions, or that what we say does not involve fascistic implications or raise fascistic implications. We would be called out very fast for those if we did.

What about conservative ecologism? Now in many ways a conservative outlook goes well with a commitment to ecologism. What does a conservative outlook mean in relation to ecologism? Conservatism involves caution about rapid change, caution about change based on grand theories, and there are good reasons for that; the apparent solution to a problem may well turn out to be worse than the problem itself.

Rapid industrialization is an obvious example. It created pollution, degraded the environment, and it caused social rootlessness when it occurred in Europe. It may well have done that in many other parts of the world as well. Conservative ecologism, therefore, requires that we literally conserve rather than destroy. For example, new techniques in mechanized farming may give rise to much greater short term yields, but it also needs larger fields. And that means farmers need to destroy existing hedgerows and existing bodies of woods, copses and similar. But destroying hedgerows or hedges can in turn accelerate the loss of topsoil through wind erosion. Wheel tracks in fields can also contribute to erosion by turning the earth, which means it's easier to, which means the wind removes it more easily.

If I'm not mistaken, if I remember rightly, this kind of concern was being raised over substantially large mechanized farms in, in the English area of East Anglia. And I've drawn my material here for this exposition from a paper by, a paper by Boardman published in 2013. So the connection between mechanized farming and environmental damage caused by the loss of topsoil through wind erosion is well documented.

But conservative ecologism faces the same problems we've seen in conservatism as a whole, in particular, the question of reconciling the operation of market forces with the desire to conserve. For example, tax reductions for ecologically sound or sustainable methods would be typically conservative methods, measures. We wouldn't be interfering significantly with the, with the free

market, but we would be offering, as conservative thinkers might put it, incentives for ecologically sound or sustainable methods.

Some capitalist businesses are starting to recognize that their long-term profitability itself can only be ensured in the context of environmentally sound practice. I draw that point from Andrew Heywood. And there are examples of that kind of recognition, occasionally stated by, by larger global businesses. But eco-conservative economics gives us no yardstick for deciding which market-driven changes to accept and which to reject or resist. We could only do that if we were sure about the sources and origins of our traditional practices and institutions of our existing businesses and existing patterns of consumption and so on. That would involve the kind of close examination of social and political history, and social and political theory, that conservatism generally eschews and even rejects. It means looking closely, even theorizing closely as a result, at our social and political history and the philosophies that we have espoused and embodied. That is something which conservatism, as we have already seen, rejects - grand theories are suspect and closely theorizing society is also suspect.

There's a further issue for eco-conservatism. Market-type solutions have their own problems. We'll see some of these in our worked example later. For example, emissions trading schemes, such as those agreed in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, or carbon trading schemes, enable wealthy countries to buy poorer or less industrialized countries' pollution quotas and then to carry on polluting. We've bought your permits to pollute because you're not going to use them, we can carry on as we are because we now have a higher limit, a higher pollution limit.

Similarly, imposing fines or countries on businesses, countries and businesses which damage the environment is called the polluter pays principle; you, you do the damage, you pay for it - sounds very reasonable. It's consistent with eco-conservative philosophy. Remember, conservatism believes in tough law and order. Punishment is the deterrent, according to conservatism. So the polluter pays principle is consistent with eco-onservatism.

But the first problem here is that such damage can take a long or even a very long time to emerge. How are we to punish somebody who is already dead when we see the results 70 years or 80 years later, for the environmental damage, for what they did, many decades later? And the second issue, it is [a result of] the first issue, is that environmental damage can take a long time to emerge, perhaps even a very long time. The second problem is that the damage itself can continue for a long time before we see it. [That time with a great deal.] There are times

when we suddenly realize to our shock that particular practices, particular forms of production and consumption, even particular medicines, cause long-term damage to the whole environment and indeed to many forms of life.

So, we've got three, two problems already. One is that damage can take a long time to emerge. The activity can continue before we even see it. There is a third problem and that is that some if not most environmental damage is irreversible. We simply do not know if we can completely clean up many of the forms of pollution and the other environmental damage we have caused.

In any case, it would be impossible to revive animal or plant species which we have rendered extinct. I don't know the exact figure, it is frightening. We are rendering extinct thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of animal and plant species, all the time, every year; the figures are published.

But beyond that, there's another issue. Market competition can mean that businesses which implement environmentally sound practices could lose short-term profits and incur shareholder anger, shareholder wrath, if their competitors carried on as before.

In other words, in the short term, there may be an incentive not to adopt environmentally sound practice, and that is consistent with the logic of free-market economics, which is something conservatism is committed to; and therefore conservative, eco-conservatism has to be committed to. Well, there are alternatives.

One is eco-socialism. We've done fascist ecologism, we have done eco-conservatism. We move on now to eco-socialism, sometimes called socialist ecologism. This starts with the argument that capital, capitalism is inherently destructive of the environment, because for capital, for capitalism, human labor power and the natural environment and no more than resources to be exploited for profit for surplus value.

Many successful green politicians too, have started or started as members of far left or other left groups in their younger days. But the relation between socialism and ecologism is a complex one. Even if for many forms of socialism certainly and for many forms of ecologism, capitalism is the main problem, according to them.

Well, why is the relation between socialism and ecologism complex? To start with, socialist alternatives are often expressed in terms of increasing production and consumption. These are

undoubtedly powerful messages in view of increasing inequalities and spreading mass poverty; we face those around the world. We have faced them in previous episodes in history, and the suffering of the very poor, often hundreds of millions, perhaps billions, around the world is thoroughly well known. We don't need to, we don't need to be told about that, we already know it.

Now, more recently, inequalities and spreading mass poverty have spread much more widely, have been a much more widespread phenomenon since the financial collapse of 2009, which continues; we're still a long way from, from escaping that or emerging from it.

Similar issues arise among governments. India and China, for example, have succeeded in gaining global recognition of the injustice involved in a particular claim, and that is the claim that developing countries must deny themselves the benefits of industrialization and mechanization. In effect, India and China have turned round and said, the industrial countries have had all the benefits of industrialization. What business have they denying such benefits to the developing world? This of course poses enormous challenges to the domestic systems in developing countries as well. The link between environmental degradation and poverty is well established, as is also the fact that environmental degradation all over the world affects poorer people, poorer classes, to a far greater extent than it does rich classes. I draw that from a paper by Khoday and Perch.

But there is no possibility whatever that all the seven billion people currently on the planet could consume energy and natural resources on the same scale as the United States does. We've already seen that the United States, with 6% of the world's population or thereabouts, accounts for about one half of the world's consumption of energy and natural resources. It is conceptually and physically impossible that we all consume on that scale. And yet - in face of severe poverty, even mass poverty around the world, there is an ethical issue involved in any claim that we must deny or deny ourselves the benefits of industrialization and mechanization. So that's one very tricky area in the relationship between certain forms of socialism and ecologism.

There's a second complexity involved. The ecological record of the major state socialist and communist countries, namely the Soviet Union and China, is disastrous; that's publicly documented all around the world. They both, both of those systems took an economic approach which was so instrumental that the economist Richard D. Wolff has called them state capitalist and not state socialist systems.

But conceptually, arguments for an affinity between ecologism and socialism do have a point. Marx recognized the environmental damage capitalism causes, precisely because the whole natural environment simply becomes another resource on which labour, labour power, workers' labour power must be applied to produce surplus value for the controllers of capital. Marx recognized very well the environmental damage capitalism causes; he could see it around him as well.

More recently, Andrew Collier has developed a more detailed account of this affinity. I draw that from Collier's book on Marx, published in 2004. Marx was always alert to the damage capitalism causes, by its very nature causes to the environment. And he says, we remain in I quote, 'continuous interchange with nature'. But he adds that estranged or alienated labour subordinates our productive lives into no more than means for our existence. We've already seen that in our coverage of Marx. He might have been more of a shallow ecologist than a deep one, because he saw the environment, the environment as our environment rather than something of intrinsic worth, something that has its own value in itself. And Marx also seems not to have considered humans to be part of an overarching natural system.

But nevertheless, a capitalist outlook sees the environment as just another object for exploitation. Collier brings that out very strongly, when he covers Marx on the environment. And we must remember that many very eminent campaigners would reject the application of labels to what they do, such as eco-fascism or eco-conservatism, or eco-socialism. Many very eminent campaigners would reject the application of such labels, but some of the things they do or advocate are identifiable in the broad categories we'e, we've looked at here, that we've described here. These categories are nevertheless only guidelines.

For example, one of India's most famous environmental campaigners, that is Vandana Shiva, Doctor Vandana Shiva, rejects the suggestion that she is an ecofeminist. She considers that label as too neat. And she thinks also, with good reason, that it excludes other significant concerns of hers. For example, she's rejected the Hindu caste system and other forms of religious exclusion, and I draw that from an interview with David Barsamian in 2003. Vandana Shiva also rightly points to her long record of struggle against the monopolist nature of intellectual property rights, and against biopiracy.

There is one very noticeable example, a very noticeable example of biopiracy, which affected India. It was the attempt, the failed attempt, by the United States Corporation W. R. Grace and

the United States Department of Agriculture, the Agriculture Ministry of the United States, to patent an antifungal product derived from the neem tree. The item I've got from the BBC in 2005, but the issue was reported widely around the world. The point here is that many successful environmental campaigners do what they do without necessarily making explicit commitments to ideological positions.

The neem issue is interesting; in the early 90s, I think around 1994, it appeared in the Indian press, again if I'm not mistaken, that United States scientists were trying to patent the neem tree. I did not know what action the Government of India took at that time, but fairly quickly, it acted in the international patents system, and successfully proved that the neem tree and products derived from it were part and parcel of long-established, traditional, and therefore very public knowledge - and therefore were not susceptible to being patented. They won the case.

Now the point here - we're talking about Vandana Shiva - is that many successful environmental campaigners do what they do, and they do it without necessarily making explicit ideological commitments. Some of them do address theoretical or other such issues in relation to the environment, and they often articulate highly interesting positions. For example, Rupert Read, a former, if I'm not mistaken, academic and former Green councillor in, in the English county of East Anglia, I think in the city of Norwich, Rupert Read has argued that ecologism is, he says, I quote, 'the true heir to both socialism and conservatism'. And he has got an argument as well, he's written about it, published a note about it.

Well, we have one more form to look at, at least one more - ecofeminism; this is a distinct strain or strand of feminism and it raises significant challenges to our current systems of politics and economics, in particular, in relation to patriarchy. The main argument here is that men and male-designed and male-dominated institutions are the major threat to nature. The sexual division of labour, which is not solely the result of capitalism, enables men to dominate women and to dominate the natural environment. One implication is that if we put an end to patriarchy, we could end, we would end, both those forms of exploitation. Now, that set of assumptions is in turn, I beg your pardon, that set of *arguments* is in turn based on an assumption that the differences between men and women are not so great as to make the required equalization impossible. In other words, we can do it.

One strain of ecofeminism has it that male and female humans, however, are radically different, and that women are naturally perhaps inherently closer to nature because they bear and suckle

babies. According to some versions of this theory, women find personal fulfilment when they act in accordance with nature rather than against it. That could be a form of the argument from biology, which we encountered in chapter two on conservatism. According to that, our gender or biological sex requires that we organize society in, in accordance with the differences between the sexes, the biological difference between the sexes; it's an argument from biology. Now supporters of it have often noted that many ancient cultures, and religions which existed at that time, saw nature and the Earth as female deities, we're not unfamiliar with that, with the idea of particular deities as embodying female power, and we're historically not unfamiliar with the idea that many faiths, many religions around the world have seen nature and the earth as female.

Today, Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis also does this. Politically and socially, society based on an essentialist form of ecofeminism would be one in which caring, nurturing, and sustaining the natural environment replaced or at least took precedence over what that form of ecofeminism considers the male tendency towards competition and hierarchy, and perhaps also to dominance and a society involving dominance and subordination, or based on dominance and subordination.

So, an essentialist form of ecofeminism would create or would imply a society in which caring, nurturing, and sustaining the environment would replace or take precedence over what some forms of ecofeminism consider a male tendency towards competition and hierarchy and no doubt also to dominance.

Well, there is at least one more ideologically informed type of ecological thinking that we need to take into account, and that's ecoanarchism. Many anarchist thinkers have taken environmental matters very seriously. Peter Kropotkin was one. So was William Morris, one of the early figures in the cooperative movement. More recently, Murray Bookchin has argued that ecological balance is the best foundation for social stability. Substantial evidence could be found, could be adduced, for that, such as the wars that occur over natural resources for commercial exploitation. The terrible genocide in Rwanda in 1993-94, and the protracted wars in the neighboring Congo over coltan - that is an essential ore for computers and mobile phones - are only a few of the examples thereof.

The illegal U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was acknowledged by the British government's former Chief Scientific Officer, Sir David King, to have been a resource war about oil. But when he told an interviewer about this, that was James Randerson of the *Guardian*, Randerson, the

interviewer, did not follow-up the point - and he did not respond when David Edwards and David Cromwell, noted media analysts, asked him why he had not followed the point up with Sir David King.

Similarly, severe climatic events such as prolonged drought or very severe heat waves caused by global warming, which could also cause very severe winters, might cause substantial migrations as very large numbers of people - we could be looking at tens, perhaps hundreds of millions of people - find that their immediate environments cannot support them any longer. These movements could in turn cause severe political tensions. The term ‘climate refugee’ is already current.

Now in contrast to that, ecoanarchist thinkers, thinkers hold when left to itself nature will find its own balance, just as they think human societies will find their own stability and stable systems when they’re freed of the oppression and domination they experience under conventional forms of state and government and economy.

There is another affinity too between anarchism and ecologism, and that lies in a commitment to decentralization, to smaller communities, and to local participation in public matters. These would imply a life or lives led in a much closer, in a much closer or immediate relation to nature, than is available to us in today's societies.

Now, ecoanarchists may of course differ from other ecological or environmental movements because they reject the idea of the state. Many green movements regard the state as the only body powerful enough to implement environmentally sound laws and policies. And therefore, such ecological movements or environmentalist movements seek an active role for the state. One of their main criticisms of the state is not that the state itself is the problem, but that in its present form it is suborned by very powerful business interests or other groups into colluding with global environmental damage and even destruction. So that concludes our third lecture on ecologism. We’ll go on in our next lecture to look at ecologism today, and we’ll work through some examples of contemporary - very recent - analyses of actual developments and of arguments around ecologism.