

Preface

Andrew Dobson and Green Political Theory

This book falls within the field of political theory, which requires a few explanations in the case of France because, as Jean Leca explains, "In its current practices, political theory is less a paradigm than a scientific (or cognitive) community [because] having an interest in the history of ideas, the logical constitution of a discourse, the explanation of a process, and the ethical value of a doctrine (or a practice) are fundamentally different activities" [LEC 85, p. 76]. In contrast, the reader can find the following sentence on the Princeton political science department's website: "Political theory is the study of the concepts and principles that people use to describe, explain, and evaluate political events and institutions. Traditionally, [therefore: this is not new], the discipline of political theory has approached this study from two different perspectives: the history of political thought, and contemporary political philosophy"¹. What is true on one side of the Pyrenees is not on the other: this brings us to the heart of our subject, in a way. Jean Leca was writing in 1985, but Benjamin Boudou noted in 2016 that the field of political theory was still "poorly defined" in France [BOU 16b]. Seeking to legitimize the process, Boudou presents four functions of political theory, in terms of utility, which readers may be interested to learn: heuristic (discovering new problems or new ways of framing problems), pedagogical (political theory is not only of interest to students but also relates to the formulation of deep philosophical questions), critical (non-normative function of knowing whether the world could be better than it is, without asking how it should be) and ethical (it contributes

¹ <https://www.princeton.edu/politics/fields/political-theory/>.

to asking oneself how the world should be in order to be more human). This book wholeheartedly endorses these four functions, as well as the definition proposed by Princeton University.

Political theory can be practiced in different ways. History tends to prefer extensive archival work; sociology places emphasis on fieldwork, like the political sciences, both having a tendency to focus on social movements and political parties, respectively. Our approach is mainly philosophical, in the sense that it is primarily interested in the elucidation of a situation, to use Castoriadis' expression [CAS 75, p. 60]. Naturally, philosophy does not own this activity, which it does not always practice very diligently, often preferring the history of ideas. Secondary analysis [DAL 93] in sociology and social history of political thought in political science are relatively similar approaches, being both demanding in terms of concepts and concerned with the socially anchored nature of these ideas, and therefore situated at the intersection of fieldwork and analysis. The primary epistemological justification is that the ideas studied do not exist without the context of action in which they operate. This observation, which seems banal, has several implications such as recognizing the positioning of ideas in a language and therefore in a Saussurean system of significations; the performative function of ideas that seek to obtain practical effects against other ideas, to which they are opposed; their irreducibility to a set of major authors who have been entrenched by the academic tradition; or the fact that these ideas also "invent" precursors and traditions, as observed by Hobsbawm and Ranger [HOB 12]². In addition, Walter Bryce Gallie noted that political concepts are essentially contested [GAL 56]³, in the sense that they are always defined in opposition, without it being possible to reach a signification with which all of the parties would agree, but without resulting in the radical incommensurability that Jean Leca reports either. More recently, Michel Dobry highlighted the importance of developing ideas in a context of action [DOB 03]. In this perspective, the academic division of labor can be counter-productive if it is constructed as a categorical imperative. If a political current does not emerge in a vacuum, if it is developed in opposition, if its process of individualization can only be dialectic, resulting from a confrontation that is often rough or even openly

2 These epistemological references were identified by Thibaut Rioufreyt and Arnaud Skornicki in a work group for the *Association française de science politique consacré à l'histoire sociale des idées politiques*. <http://hisopo.hypotheses.org/>.

3 See also Volume 122 of the journal *Philosophie*, summer 2014.

conflicting with its exterior, then the approach cannot help but become aware of this Other opposite where it is situated, which supposes having recourse to multidisciplinary and even transdisciplinary resources, if necessary.

As this book discusses political theory from both the French-speaking and English-speaking worlds, Andrew Dobson has been selected as a point of departure and point of reference because he is a well-known figure in both. The methods are more or less consistent. Dobson explains that his approach consists of understanding the intrinsic structure of ideologies, defined by Eatwell and Wright as "key tenets, myths, contradictions, tensions, even [their] morality and truth"⁴. Ideologies are historical, anchored and situated; they present a coherence that makes it possible to distinguish them from one another. Interdisciplinarity is present (sociology, philosophy, etc.), which generates certain heterogeneities in Dobson's book: sociological data are presented side by side with an environmental ethics for which the analyses are extremely decontextualized. However, the whole thing is supplemented and structured for the reader's enjoyment. Transdisciplinary sources are also present: the author often cites Jonathon Porritt, who was a director of Friends of the Earth EWN (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) for several years and a member of the Green Party. We will also borrow from stakeholders in the field like the Friends of the Earth activists as well as authors who are involved with ecologism and not yet established, whom we will contribute to making more known. This is the first difference with Dobson to note: although the academic debate in France has often focused on English authors (such as Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess), French ecologism has produced several quality authors who have been marginalized, and continue to be, even though they are sometimes well-known elsewhere (such as Jacques Ellul in the United States) and even though recent work tends to rediscover them (for example [CHA 14]). Inversely, Dobson does not mobilize any references who could add to the academic corpus. In this book, there are approximately 500 books by ecologists and as many researchers working on the subject that we draw on, without citing them all, as this would be a tedious task.

This book is not part of a comparatist perspective properly speaking because our goal is to expand on the points that were not fully developed in Dobson and also to raise awareness about French ecologism. We will not be

4 [DOB 00, p. 4] citing [EAT 93, p. 1].

conducting a detailed comparison of contexts. The point of departure is the following: we believe that what this British author calls ecologism or green political theory from his context overlaps quite closely with the political ideology that carries the same name on the other side of the Channel. We will concentrate on a little-explored aspect: confrontations with other major political ideas. There is also a difference in method: rather traditionally, due to the division of labor, Dobson *first* constructed ecologism and *then* compared it to other political ideas, whereas we construct ecologism *through* this confrontation. That a political ideology can be essentially contested is the reason why a political movement can be characterized by main "sites of controversy" such as the *inherent value of nature* or *modernity* with regard to ecologism. These sites are dated, and they can evolve, being historical; this is also the case for actors and authors, such as Dominique Bourg, who was initially very hostile toward ecologism (for example [BOU 96a, BOU 96b]) but moved toward opposing and openly activist positions in the 2000s (for example, [BOU 16a, BOU 16b]). Sites of controversy identify fault lines and opposition, that are more or less important and direct. No method is without its pitfalls: this one tends to homogenize what is empirically presented as diverse. Researchers who demand a higher granularity will be troubled by the degree of generality of this study; we invite them to consider it as complementary to narrower works that have the opposite limitation of not offering a general perspective.

What political ideas should ecologism be compared with? Dobson chose liberalism, socialism, conservatism and feminism. The first three will be examined, as conservatives and Marxists have agreed that they constitute the three main ideologies of our time, which we can call "modernity"; consider, for example, Robert Nisbet [NIS 84] and Étienne Balibar [BAL 92] or Immanuel Wallerstein [WAL 92]. In our view, feminism raises a similar issue to ecologism: that of its incompleteness, inasmuch as it leaves several questions aside. Socialism also has this tendency, as we will see: by focusing on one form of oppression among many, it presents two faces. One is "unionist", sectorial and limited, centered on the main struggle, and the other aims for an expansion to a societal project, bringing in questions that are more distant and more likely to divide activities. The question of knowing whether political ideologies are always dominated by a central conflict will be left aside however.

Dobson proposed a first confrontation; it is a belated topic in his work. This work will occupy the bulk of our time. We will not linger over the

common points, and we will content ourselves with pointing them out; for example, the fact that, in both France and the UK, ecologism is a critique of growth and the solutions proposed are very similar (organic agriculture, decentralization, basic income and labor critique, regionalism, or even the relocation of the economy); the differentiation between environmentalism and ecologism (the former is not a political ideology, because it does not seek to propose a government program or an alternative society: it is a "trade-unionism"); the insufficient place of ecologism in contemporary political theory research (French textbooks only rarely mention this trend and the situation seems similar in the English-speaking world [GOO 01]). Differences in opinion exist, such as the centrality of nuclear power in the case of France or the importance of animal cruelty and bioregionalism in the United Kingdom. They indicate the differences in sensitivities between the ecologisms, as well as the differences in context or history, but the high similarity of programs suggests that they come more from variations in the structure of local political opportunities than from strong doctrinal differences, which is confirmed by Simon Persico [PER 14]. A detailed comparative work was conducted by Florence Faucher [FAU 97, FAU 99]; it shows that the main differences are much more concerned with the context than with the body of the doctrine.

Without being comparatist, the fact of writing for a non-French context does however involve making national particularities understood. France is notably distinguished by the importance attributed to the French Revolution in confrontations between political ideas, a solid socialist and communist tradition, the absence of a declared conservative party, an important but specific colonial and imperial history, a marked republican and Jacobin dimension, the absence of constitutional monarchy or Commonwealth ("Francophone countries" are much less structured), a very different relationship to secularism and cultural pluralism (far from the English "communitarianism") and a particular kind of relationship between the State and the economy or regionalisms. Dobson's analysis is relatively indifferent to the British context: the authors drawn upon for liberalism are mainly Marcel Wissenburg [WIS 98], who is Dutch, and Mark Sagoff [SAG 88], a citizen of the United States; the socialism invoked is rather theoretical; regarding conservatism, the main author Edmund Burke is also used in the case of France [BUR 19]. We believe that we can show that a more detailed consideration of the context explains the large controversies between ideologies a bit better and facilitates their understanding. This volume can therefore be read in two ways: as an introduction to French ecologism or as a

contribution to green political theory, complementary to that of Dobson. In a more secondary way, we will also dialogue with Kerry Whiteside who is also involved in political theory [WHI 02, p. 6] and sought to understand the particularities of French ecologism from an American context. The references used by Whiteside will also be used here.

Apart from the work of studying the arguments that will occupy the majority of this book, we would like to lead an epistemological discussion about the status of the nature and the difficulties of interdisciplinarity in studies about ecologism and, more generally, in relationships between human beings and nature. Dobson started his work by evoking climate change or deforestation [DOB 00, p. 1] as if these problems were self-evident, but he does not say anything about the status of these objects in political theory. Yet this was one of the most hotly debated points in the French academic world in the 2000s, going as far as questioning the competence of scientists: one long-standing attitude consisted of affirming that axiological neutrality required not "believing" in climate change on the grounds that it was one of the activist "values" of ecologism. At the same time, this Durkheimian constructivist requirement of only explaining the social by the social [DUR 60, Chapter 5] was perceived by the natural sciences as leading to either an unacceptable relativism, incapable of discerning right from wrong, or to refusing knowledge, voluntary ignorance, that is, a non-scientific attitude. From their side, the natural sciences claimed scientificity just as much as the human or social sciences. The issue was to find out how to express the knowledge between them. The most common solution in social sciences was to pass through the sociology of natural sciences (Latour, notably [LAT 05, LAT 91, LAT 99]). However, the problem was only displaced: relativism was transferred to the scientists, who became "manufacturers" of facts, which angered many of them because it amounted to taking all scientificity away from them, a bit like if we said that symbolic capital was only an invention of Pierre Bourdieu and had no "real" return. The approach also moved away from the object of study: the relationship of ecologists to nature, and not that of scientists. In practice, the adopted solution was often extremely simple: to create distinct epistemic communities. Those who believed in climate change separated from those who doubted and each one left with distinct working hypotheses. The difficulty not only comes from a desire to marginalize the ecological question, but also arises from the requirement of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. Today, the difficulties have lessened, without being eliminated.

This book is organized into two parts. The first part establishes the general framework: reviewing ecological science and its main concepts; reviewing what ecological science teaches us about the metabolism of the two main contexts that we are concerned with (France and the United Kingdom, from a global perspective because that is the most general ecological framework); an exposé of the three main positions that exist in the case of France regarding the ecological question (dematerialization, "the other development" and degrowth) where Dobson only identified two ("light" green and "dark" green) and concentrated on the second one; an examination of the challenges of structuring human and social sciences and natural sciences; highlighting the question of expertise, that is, science in society; and, finally, the ordinary history of French ecologism, from "whistleblower" scientists to what was later called alter-globalization. These elements are still fairly neutral in terms of major political thought: we do not yet really know what to think of our research subject at this stage. The second part seeks to tease out ecologism through successive confrontations with liberalism, socialism and conservatism, which leads us to reconsider each of these three political ideas from the perspective of questions posed by the newcomer, which appeared in the 1960s and 1970s. We choose pivotal authors like Luc Ferry who wrote on both liberalism and ecologism; we also selected issues for their persistence and the regularity with which they manifest in concrete political activity, for example the perennial accusation made against ecologists of wanting to "return to the stone age". The serial and repetitive nature of the conflicts indicates ideological lines of force.

Faced with ecologism, liberalism first reveals itself to be skeptical, careful not to attribute nature a status that is other than instrumental, which leads it to rather strongly object to this cardinal benchmark of an "inherent value of nature", which notably translates into the idea of granting "rights" to nature. For liberalism, ecologism rejects modern Prometheanism and reactivates conservative ideas that seek to anchor political order in a fixed natural state, even though its arguments were defeated in 1789 in favor of a modern (that is, mobile and constructed) order, with nothing escaping the domain of will. The criticism partly falls under the debate of deafness and incomprehension (voluntary or not) because ecologism, based on ecological science, does not intend to "renounce" this "conquest", although it often questions the monopoly that modernity has on this subject. Rather, ecologism affirms that liberalism is much less open and tolerant than claimed by Wissenburg, who wants to believe that diversity in individual "life plans" must only be neutral in relation to a theory of the Good, as if

everyone was equally capable of leading them and none of them had a harmful consequence for others. For Wissenburg, ecologism need only renounce its holism to be accepted. For ecologism, liberalism refuses above all to recognize that the life plans of the wealthy weigh heavily on others and on nature. It forces the greater number to work more and consume more, under threat of social exclusion. It is inhabited not by a rational examination of the causes and consequences but by a belief in the powers of technology. Through this systematic reference to individual choices in the general framework of action, ecologists seem to reactivate the "liberty of the Ancients" and the issue of virtue. This is partially not the case. First, liberalism itself is not as modern as it claims: it embodies a utilitarian ethic and a productivist conception of the Good, which are imposed as if derived from human nature, as Ferry explicitly states. Although small communities and direct government are often claimed, from the ecology side, this aspiration is never accompanied by the rejection of the economy and a purely contemplative attitude towards nature that Catherine and Raphaël Larrère attribute to the Greeks [LAR 97b, p. 175]. Finally, if the reference to the Whole is assumed, it is in a pragmatic way to acknowledge interdependence updated by the insertion of humanity into the "web of life."

The tendency of liberalism to refuse in practice the rights that it defends formally does not surprise socialism, which has been aware of this for a long time. However, ecologism raises questions and is not warmly welcomed. The movement is distinct from worker struggles, has its own agenda, and appears leftist or middleclass due to its composition and the positions it takes. Socialism often denies the importance of the issues and believes in technology, like liberalism. When the deterioration in nature is recognized, the ready-made solution is used to replace the capitalist social relations with "new" relations, as Pascal Acot said [ACO 88, p. 240]. Ecology therefore appears as a "secondary front" and must line up behind anti-capitalist forces. But what are these "new" relations, ask the ecologists? And how do we implement them? Who will support them? These questions are all the more interesting since socialist programs often differ very little from their liberal counterparts on the ecological plan, which leads them in practice to often be as productivist as them. And the fact is persistent. It notably translates into critiques of ecologism that are similar to the ones deployed by the liberals: criticism of the idea of the rights of nature, distrust toward all respect of nature and confidence in the powers of technology. However, socialism seems to contradict its own premises: how can we ensure everyone's emancipation if a few generations consume everything? Why should other

species be destroyed? Socialism does not respond clearly to these questions. It seems to maintain an unchanging agenda. What is the cause of this difficulty? To try to explain this fact, we return to the typology proposed by Marx that is often repeated to classify socialisms into four families. This leads us to underscore the structuring nature of a particular shape and space of oppression in this political ideology: the exploitation of labor. This observation leads to re-evaluating the role of environmentalism to the extent that it is often opposed to ecologism: is it not akin to a sectorial issue similar to the syndicalism of the payroll which, in order not to assert a perspective of greater social transformation, also plays a structuring role in the political orientations of the ideology that is constructed from it? What appears clear in this case is that what is missing from socialism, with regard to ecology, is a social base. This observation invites a second one because ecologism also lacks a concrete basis for the struggle when classic "social" questions are in play. There, we find one of the basic lessons of Marxism that Marxists tend to forget when they repeat the theory of the "secondary front" because this theory presumes, despite observable facts, that the worker base would be sufficient to defend the world. The difficulties of reconciling ecologism and socialism lead into a situation of pluralism in social movements; then the difficulty is to determine what happens to emancipation in such a context. The task is not limited to composing a program that adds the claims of one to the claims of the other, because social movements have their own repertoires, visions of the past and the future, traditions and cosmology, which are not necessarily compatible with each other: an entire world, or a paradigm, is involved in a political movement, as shown by the variety of problematics addressed in *Manuel de sociologie de l'environnement* [BAR 12]. Thus, socialism is not content to defend the rights of workers: it has a tendency to see the result of human progress in production.

The third and final part addresses conservatism, a political idea that is present in France under other names, such as "the right wing". A typological debate also exists regarding the structure of this conservatism. The distinction between a liberal conservatism and an illiberal conservatism makes sense from the moment when currents exist that seem similar to ecologism: critiques of modernity, the Enlightenment, progress or even technology. Authors like Jean Jacob [JAC 94, JAC 99, JAC 00, JAC 06] have made their careers underscoring this fact. Stéphane François explained that the rejection of modern Prometheanism is the touchstone that makes it possible to distinguish progressive ecologism from conservative ecologism [FRA 12]. This is a somewhat hasty conclusion that excessively glorifies

modernity. There is a movement that is in a minority position and is situated mostly in the center; it should be carefully distinguished from the vast majority of what is located on the side of emancipation while criticizing modernity, the Enlightenment, progress or technology. The practice of conflation is unfortunately frequent: differences are obscured by similarities and identities are decided upon too hastily. However, criticism of modernity, the Enlightenment, progress or technology are not new, regarding emancipation, and they are not only based on ecology. When Horkheimer critiques reason, for example, he attacks the characteristics that are common to liberalism and socialism, and therefore appears anti-modern, because these two ideologies embody modernity, according to their own points of view. In this sense, Horkheimer participates in "neither right nor left" that some experts consider as characteristic of fascism or the "Legitimist" right, loyal to the Old Regime. This is obviously not Horkheimer's real position. Nor is it to implement a conservative order demanding that the vast majority of ecologists re-evaluate the so-called "primitive" societies or post-colonial societies: it is to take into account the forms of emancipation that have been neglected by modernity. The Vichy regime was a planning regime and yet no one has mistaken it with the ecological planning called for by the candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the French presidential elections held in 2012 and 2017.

The general conclusion retraces the general movement. What emerges is that liberalism and socialism both offer some flexibility to ecologism, which explains the alliances that can be observed in both of them; but they remain narrow so far which is why ecologism remains a minority and weak. The main obstacle from the socialist side is the social base, which again underlines the necessity of considering a situation of pluralism in social movements and situations of struggle that are recognized by analyses such as the ones by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau in terms of political theory, for example. Each struggle has its particularities and its tangible characteristics, sustained by specific knowledge that can be ignored by others, voluntarily or not, because they can also be difficult to perceive or beyond the reach of practical politics/struggles. From the liberal side, the obstacle comes from the conservative dimension of this movement, both from the underlying affirmation of power (especially national) and the respect for the rules of the game that are presented as neutral and, in reality, embody a kind of tradition. These characteristics of conservatism make a conservative ecologism very difficult due to the contradictions. The national populism of the National Front in France has no chance of becoming

ecologist, from this point of view; neither does Alain de Benoist's New Right, to the extent that their true motivation, beyond their strategy to win over the masses and opportunistic use of arguments, is to ensure French or European unity against everything that may threaten it, particularly Islam. From there, the two main positions of ecologism on the French political chessboard are: the center, which tries to influence or resemble the liberals, such as Antoine Waechter in the 1990s, and the left of the Socialist Party, which seeks to offer an "ecosocialist" synthesis. On this topic, the very strong influence of ecological ideas from Jean-Luc Mélenchon (*France insoumise*, an organization created in 2016 that has taken on a hegemonic position to the left of the SP) and Benoît Hamon (official SP candidate, but dropped by the party) is considered, although the former also promised the return of growth and the latter displays a great deal of faith in robotics. The conclusion is the title of this book and echoes the continued warnings from ecologists: not taking responsibility for ecological issues jeopardizes freedom and emancipation. The authoritative ecologism (also called "ecofascism") that can emerge from ecological catastrophes is not really one properly speaking, because conservatives side with the fight and not nature, like the two duelists in Goya's painting on the cover of the *Contrat naturel* by Michel Serres (published in 1990) [SER 99], who dig themselves deeper into the quicksand rather than reaching out to one another. This conclusion largely confirms Dobson's conclusion, which can be partially generalized to industrialized countries. The question of authoritative ecologism somewhat reduces the distinction often made between the so-called "southern" or "poor" ecologism characterized by a direct and immediate threat to ways of life and the "northern" ecologism that tackles more distant and less perceptible issues [GUH 97a, GUH 08, TAL 14], to the extent that there are other more immediate threats to freedom. It also highlights that the result of a crisis situation or "state of exception" is not written beforehand. This is also demonstrated by history, especially recent history with the example of Podemos in Spain, or even studies about the collapse of civilizations [TAI 13].

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