Is Progressive Environmentalism an Oxymoron? Dobuzinskis, Laurent Critical Review; Spring 1992; 6, 2; Periodicals Archive Online pg. 283

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IS PROGRESSIVE ENVIRONMENTALISM AN OXYMORON?

Environmentalism has been a part of the ideological landscape of liberal societies for nearly three decades. Classical liberals have not yet succeeded, however, in articulating a coherent response that would be relevant to politically active environmentalists, as well as to liberals receptive to postmodern ideas. Robert C. Paehlke argues that, conservative liberals being in fact hostile to environmental thinking, moderate progressivism and environmentalism should enter into a close alliance. This paper challenges both assertions. Admittedly, not all currents within contemporary conservative liberalism could play a part in the development of a neoliberal environmentalist movement. One current, however, the skeptical tradition, whose origin can be traced back to the Scottish Englightenment, is remarkably well suited to this task. Progressivism, on the other hand, could end up smothering the environmental movement under the weight of its own certainties.

Just when we thought that the clash of ideologies had finally ended with the triumph of individualist liberal principles, we find ourselves confronted with an emerging ideology. Environmentalism is in the process of asserting its autonomy vis-à-vis liberalism and socialism.

CRITICAL REVIEW, Vol. 6, Nos. 2–3. ISSN 0891-3811. © 1993 Critical Review Foundation.

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According to Robert Paehlke, the author of *Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), the environmental movement is much more than one pressure group among others. It is the carrier of a new vision of the good life, grounded in science—more so, indeed, than any other ideology so far, *pace* Marx (273)—but not reducible to science. The virtuous life, from this perspective, is guided by a reverence for the natural world and a belief that humankind must live in harmony with it. Paehlke is not very clear on this, however. He endeavors to establish environmentalism as an ideology in its own right, referring to his own work as making a contribution to that cause (4), yet he remains surprisingly vague as to its defining characteristics. Perhaps it should be pointed out in his defense that environmentalism—the least reductionist of all ideologies—cannot easily be encapsulated in a single formula. Moreover, there exists an already substantial literature on environmental ethics and "ecosophy" to fill some of the blanks left by Paehlke.

There is, however, one aspect of this emerging ideology about which Paehlke is far from silent. He argues that environmentalism is neither "left" nor "right" on such conventional questions as economic redistribution. This is partly because, as I explain further on, he discerns elements of both the "left" and the "right" in environmentalism. But it is above all because, he claims, environmentalism is concerned with an entirely different range of problems and issues than the usual societal concerns, including distributive issues.

While affirming that environmentalism is well on the way to becoming a complete and coherent ideology, Paehlke suggests that it stands a better chance of being effective in the present context if it enters into a close alliance with the forces of moderate progressive reformism (i.e., contemporary American "liberalism" or, perhaps more appropriately, social democracy). This strategy is justified by what Paehlke regards as the profoundly anti-environmentalist positions adopted by "neoconservative" governments in the Anglo-American world.[1] (This was written before the election of [former] President Bush, and before [former] Prime Minister Thatcher expressed her commitment to the protection of the ozone layer and other environmentalist goals.)

This position, however, involves a potential contradiction. How can Paehlke pretend that environmentalism is neither "right" nor "left" while, at the same time, insisting that it is a progressive movement after all? Not to mention that environmentalism, especially at its more radical core, rests on a set of values that are not obviously compatible

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with those that inform humanistic, progressive, left-of-center liberalism or social democracy. Paehlke is, in fact, aware of these tensions, but the answer he provides is ambiguous and perplexing. One reading of his work suggests that, in a somewhat Machiavellian fashion, environmentalism could use the progressive movement as a launching pad that would propel it into its own orbit, thus becoming the first truly new ideology to have emerged in the postwar years. Another possible reading places environmentalism in a subservient position vis-à-vis the progressive movement; the role of environmentalism would be to breathe new life into a movement that has so far failed in its attempts to stem the rising tide of conservatism. I have considerable sympathy with the first reading, all the more so because I think that all existing ideologies have run out of steam in their efforts to make sense of the bedeviling complexities that define our postmodern condition. I too look toward environmentalism as a way out of this dilemma. But I would argue that a better launching pad would include a larger dose of the concepts and values we have inherited from skeptical classical liberal thinkers than the few concessions that Paehlke is prepared to make to these values. As for the second reading, it is potentially disappointing, especially in light of the fact that Paehlke pays almost no attention to the problem of "government failure"—a problem that could prove fatal to the progressive program and to environmentalism if it were to follow Paelke's prescription to the letter.

Paehlke's goal sounds reasonable insofar as most environmental protection groups appear to side with the left against the "capitalist establishment." I believe, however, that environmentalism is closer to conservatism than is generally acknowledged. What the specific points of convergence between environmentalism and conservatism are is a question that still remains largely untouched. Unfortunately, some of the possible combinations of these two modes of thought could turn out to be very unpalatable to classical liberals and moderate conservatives. The irrationalist connotations of the radical critique of technology proposed by "deep ecologists" could mesh with the antihumanist tendencies of a resurgent reactionary movement, such as exists in Europe. Is it irrelevant to point out that Heidegger, whose own critique of technology often serves as the model for such reflections, expressed sympathies for national socialism? Or is it coincidental that in France the fascistic and racist National Front sometimes uses concepts derived from sociobiology and also has succeeded in forging some tactical alliances with antinuclear protesters and animal rights activists? I do not wish to dwell on these admittedly rather impres-

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sionistic and speculative observations. My point is simply that if, as I hope and attempt to explain hereafter within the limiting constraints of a short paper, environmentalism and conservatism can be married in such a way as to produce a new ideology that will help us to face up to a wide range of new challenges better than Paehlke's progressive environmentalism, we have to proceed with care and remind ourselves that this enterprise entails the risk of legitimizing reactionary archetypes.[2]

One of the best ways of guarding against this risk is to build on the already solid foundation established by libertarian economists who have proposed ingenious solutions to current environmental dilemmas in terms of property rights and free-market pricing.[3] Economics, however, does not have all the answers and might even be part of the problem because of its positivistic tendencies. Therefore, I suggest that these market-oriented policy proposals must be placed in a broader epistemological context, namely, the skeptical and evolutionary interpretation of the tenets of liberalism, such as we find in the Scottish Enlightenment, in Hayek's works, and also in recent reflections on complexity and self-organization. In such a context, the very notion of property rights might advantageously be rethought and adapted to ever-changing circumstances.

This paper focuses first upon the central themes in Paehlke's book, and particularly on his prescription for articulating a progressive environmentalist program of political action. Then I sketch out the contours of an alternative strategy intended to produce a resonance, as it were, between concepts and values drawn from nonrationalistic and evolutionary social theory, on the one hand, and from environmentalism, on the other.

There is Still Hope

Doomsday scenarios are one of the preferred genres of environmentalist literature. Beginning with Malthus, and especially since the late 1960s, all sorts of predictions of an impending and catastrophic ecological crisis have been made. One of the latest, and not the least effective, expression of this kind of environmental gloom and doom is Christopher Manes's *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization.*[4] But Paehlke refuses to play Cassandra's part when discussing the changing and complex relationships between humankind and the biosphere. Not that he agrees wholeheartedly with apologists of technology such as Peter Vajk or Petr Beckmann,[5] nor with "Cor-

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nucopians" like Julian Simon,[6] nor even with arguments of the "on balance, everything is all right" variety.[7] But in Paehlke's opinion, environmentalism need not convey an apocalyptic message. He recognizes that, for all the very real and serious problems we face, the sky has not fallen yet, contrary to what some predicted only a decade or so ago. (Similar predictions we hear today may suffer the same fate.) He ventures, however, that an "environmentalism without a millennial dimension . . . may turn out to be a much more important movement than was anticipated in the early years" (2). The reasons that he adduces for this prediction are often compelling but fraught with intriguing contradictions—contradictions that also characterize the environmental movement as a whole.

There are reasons to be deeply troubled by the many threats to the ecological health of this planet, not to mention our own health. Pollution of the natural environment is something that practically everybody has witnessed and experienced. It is, of course, not a new phenomenon; indeed, some may want to argue that many European and North American industrial cities are cleaner today than they were a hundred years ago (the cleaning up of the Thames is a case in point). All the same, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that matters have become worse on a global scale. This is what helped to transform the old conservation movement into the new environmental movement. While conservationists were preoccupied with the preservation of natural resources and had, on many occasions, advocated the protection of wilderness areas, they lacked an ecological consciousness—with the exception of a few visionaries like John Muir or Aldo Leopold. In the early days, environmentalists like Rachel Carson or Barry Commoner were preaching in the desert, as it were. But the monotonous repetition of events like the Love Canal disaster added momentum to a movement that in the space of two decades has become a powerful political force, even if its strength continues to vary in inversely with the business cycle.[8] The vigor of the movement is in itself a hopeful sign that ecological degradation does not have to become inexorably worse. But if the movement is to continue to grow, Paehlke argues that its advocates must avoid being trapped into a strictly negative discourse. It is in this light that he approaches the discussion of the population explosion and the energy crisis.

Resource depletion and overpopulation are not new themes but environmentalists have reformulated them in a more systematic manner while also adding an ecological dimension. Coming after two decades of sustained economic growth, which seemed to have contrib-

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uted the final counterproof to Malthusianism, the publication of *The Limits to Growth*[9] came as a shock. Based on a computer simulation that made it appear "scientific," this work forecast massive starvation and other calamities as a result of the leveling off of the rate of growth in food production and in the production of other essential commodities derived from natural resources.[10] While the work remained vague regarding the policy implications that should follow from this scenario, other authors, most notably Paul Ehrlich, Garett Hardin, William Ophuls, and Robert Heilbroner, reached the conclusion that, in the new age of scarcity, politics would have to sharply limit economic expansion. Paehlke reacts strongly against such authoritarian prescriptions. The demographic and ecological situation may well be as serious as these authors estimate it to be, but coercive measures have more of a chance of being counterproductive than helpful. Paehlke relies mostly on appeals to authority; to rebut Heilbroner and Co., he refers to Richard J. Barnett's *The Lean Years: Politics in the Age of Scarcity* (1980) as the definitive case against the temptation to espouse ill-conceived Hobbesian solutions rather than securing a greater degree of public understanding and participation. In a more recent article, he has elaborated upon this theme,[11] contending that there are three related reasons for advocating participatory solutions to environmental problems. First, democratic participation turns out to be a better discovery process than bureaucracy; that is, experts will always miss some of the facts that a public inquiry will reveal. Second, participation brings about a greater degree of mobilization of the political resources required to implement policy objectives. Finally—and here we return to the Machiavellian dimension of Paehlke's project—participation must be encouraged because it is likely to attract followers to the cause, and environmentalism in North America can succeed only on the condition that it becomes the preferred option of a large majority of citizens. (Although there is no reason to question the sincerity of his commitment to the democratic ideal, the *Realpolitik* undertone of Paehlke's last argument is evident, even if perhaps unintended.)

Similarly, Paehlke contends that if there is an energy crisis, it is due to the fact that industrialized societies are traveling on what Amory B. Lovins calls the "hard energy path."[12] The "soft energy path" can lead to a more promising future. A central feature of this alternative strategy is energy conservation. Not only is energy conservation an ecologically sound way of meeting energy needs, but it also opens up a wide range of opportunities for creating new employment, and it may

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be implemented "from the bottom up" rather than through coercive means. But despite his opposition to draconian political measures, Paehlke has in his sights the same target as the neo-Malthusians: endless economic growth.

Environmentalism vs. Economic Growth

Drawing on the work of E. J. Mishan, Kenneth Boulding, Herman Daly, and the research done by the Science Council of Canada on the concept of a "conserver society,"[13] Paehlke mounts a full-fledged attack on economic growth. The alternative, he claims, is not necessarily a completely stationary or even a declining economy: there would still be opportunities for some growth in a conserver society, although it would more often be qualitative rather than quantitative. But "economic growth becomes, for environmentalists, a means rather than an end" (142).

To bring about this momentous shift—assuming for a moment that Paehlke is right in his characterization of economic growth as the contemporary end in itself—he suggests that new values must prevail over existing ones. He identifies the "core values" of environmentalism as certain philosophical and moral attitudes, such as "an appreciation of all life forms," a "sense of humility" and an "extended time horizon"; socio-political orientations, such as "some preference for political and/or population decentralization," a "belief that human societies should be reestablished on a sustainable basis," and an "inclination to more democratic and participatory political processes"; and some practical norms, such as a "revulsion toward waste" and a "love of simplicity" (144–5). Paehlke stays clear of the controversy that pits "deep ecologists" against "social ecologists" on the question of whether environmentalism expresses a "biocentric" worldview, or is better understood in terms of a reformulation of the political economy of industrial societies. One may argue that this split is an aberration, and that the two camps could be reconciled if they were to embrace an "eco-centric" worldview that would transcend the limitations of both perspectives, as Brian Tokar has suggested.[14] Indeed, it is rather obvious that what both tendencies share is a rejection of instrumental rationality. But the fact is that the defining values of North American environmentalism are not quite as easily synthesized as Paehlke seems to assume. A synthesis of the values of environmentalists on a worldwide scale would have been even more challenging, but Paehlke has

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reasonably chosen not to attempt such a feat. (European environmentalists are more likely to be peace activists and tend to be more concerned with quality-of-life issues than with the preservation of wilderness—not surprising, considering the almost total absence of something like complete wilderness on the European continent.)[15]

Implicit in Paehlke's ringing endorsement of the concept of the conserver society is a deep suspicion of the market economy. According to its advocates, the conserver society is supposed to provide for our "real" needs, as distinct from the "artificial" needs induced by advertising. In other words, markets do not serve to adjust sovereign consumers' preferences to the supply of goods and services, but reflect the choices made by influential corporate executives in favor of certain goods over others.[16] This prejudice is even more apparent in his critique of the environmental record of the Reagan administration. Many, including myself, would agree that this record was uninspiring, especially during the first term. Secretary of the Interior James Watt will long remain cast as the legendary "bad guy" among environmentalists, and for some good reasons. But, to be fair, it should be granted that this hostility to environmentalist goals was not necessarily rooted in a failure to appreciate the environment; it was instead motivated by a desire to allow for its recreational and commercial use (which is not necessarily unsound ecologically) and, more important, by a preference for market-based solutions to environmental problems. Paehlke categorically asserts that "the market itself imposes a few limitations, as in the case of rising energy prices, but usually these are not as prompt or as thorough as environmental prudence suggests" (208). The effectiveness of property rights in protecting the environment may indeed be difficult to evaluate in the abstract since these rights are interpreted and qualified by a multiplicity of economic and political actors in a variety of contexts where other objectives often prevail. Society is not a laboratory where controlled experiments can be carried out. However, there are good reasons to believe that if property rights were to become part of a comprehensive environmentalist program, they would turn out to be more effective than government regulation.

Market-oriented approaches can be of at least two types: measures that monetize undesirable social effects, and measures that establish property rights (or their creation where none existed before). Pollution taxes are an example of the first type. Tradeable emission rights, such as those already administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, are an example of the second. The first reason that

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Paehlke's dismissal of market incentives is, to say the least, overly hasty is that as the latter example has shown, such incentives can be a flexible and effective way to reduce pollution. Tradeable emission permits ensure that the total amount of pollution from a given industry is reduced without imposing excessive compliance costs on the least efficient firms, since the latter can purchase emission rights from more efficient firms. The privatization of common-pool resources is another (and somewhat more radical) example of how property rights can be used to promote sound environmental practices. For instance, privately owned fishing streams in England have been remarkably well managed.[17] Similarly, the environmental record of the forestry industry in Sweden, where privately owned wood lots predominate, is much better than in Canada, where the provinces grant farm licenses to companies applying to exploit Crown-owned forests.

Second, the alternatives to market coordination have so far proven to be often less than totally satisfactory. On theoretical grounds first, it can be argued that bureaucratic agencies tend over time either to be "captured" by special interests or to become a sort of state within the state over which elected politicians are unable to exercise necessary controls. The environmental consequences of these "government failures" can be disastrous. The underpricing of water and premature development on an excessive scale of irrigation projects in the western United States is a good example of the first of these trends, i.e., capture by agricultural interests.[18] The extraordinary power and self-serving investment policies of publicly owned utilities in some Canadian provinces (e.g., Quebec and Ontario) is an example of the second type of failure—indeed, the environmentalist group Pollution Probe has been demanding the privatization of Ontario-Hydro for some time now. Paehlke might reply to this criticism that, in his view, and in the view of many environmentalists who favor a decentralized community-based model of economic development, the alternative to free markets is not necessarily bureaucratic management. However, even if such is the case, it remains true that, on pragmatic grounds, the development of new and less polluting technologies is not possible without the direct involvement of business.[19] Especially at a time when most governments are practically paralyzed by severe fiscal constraints, it would be very unrealistic to expect that public agencies could play a leading role in the development of more "sustainable" techniques of production. On the same pragmatic grounds, it must be conceded, however, that there *are* environmental villains and that the

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state has a legitimate policing role to play in sanctioning some very basic rules of environmental safety.

Progressive Environmentalism or Environmentalist Progressivism?

Paehlke's objective in *Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics*, as can be seen from the title, is not confined to a discussion of the content and implications of environmental policy. In order to do justice to his book, it must be placed within a broader cultural and ideological context. John S. Dryzek has prepared the ground in this respect. He argues that the late modern predicament is symptomatic of the limitations inherent in the dominant form of rationality, i.e., instrumental rationality. We need to move beyond this reductionist perspective and to gain a more holistic understanding of ecological rationality. That is, freely determined individual and/or collective actions cannot be evaluated without reference to their environmental consequences, but these are not singular and discrete but rather symbiotic and systemic. To arrive at such an understanding, new forms of social and political practice (i.e., discourse and interaction) must be developed.[20]

In contrast with the liberal "open society," which is indifferent to the goals pursued as long as their formulation and implementation do not violate fundamental individual rights and freedoms, social democracy is sometimes defended on the ground that it provides the means for assessing the merits of these goals. Until now, the criteria deemed relevant to the selection of societal goals concerned distributive justice. Adding an environmental dimension to the definition of policy goals consistent with the social-democratic ideal should not prove to be an insurmountable problem. Indeed Paehlke supplies a list of such goals (270-72). They can be briefly summarized as a commitment to sustainable development, full employment, and international cooperation. The political community that would be best suited to the practice of this kind of progressive politics would promote participatory approaches to problem solving instead of technocratic social engineering: "Many of these proposals assume that reducing centralized bureaucratic power is compatible with enhanced environmental protection" (272).

Yet could not the communicative rationality inherent in this type of political life still serve to justify overly ambitious and potentially

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destructive projects? The new "design" perspective advocated by Dryzek,[21] as well as the community-based progressive politics outlined by Paehlke, differ categorically from technocratic planning in being much more modest in their assumptions concerning the availability of a knowledge base for engaging in planning activities. If that knowledge base is nonexistent and illusory, as ecologists, participationist social democrats, and conservative or skeptical liberals tend to think, the technocratic ideal ceases to make any sense. This is not the whole picture, however. While Paehlke seems convinced that the complexity inherent in ecosystems defies any attempt to find technological fixes to environmental problems, he entertains no doubt about the benefits of far-reaching social reforms achieved through social-democratic processes, as if these, together with the institutional requirements for their implementation, could be evaluated a priori without posing the same epistemological and ethical problems that face technocratic environmentalism. In other words, active community involvement in the management of sociopolitical systems is to render transparent what remains obscure to technocratic planners. While I readily agree that political practice can go a long way toward resolving abstract and disembodied epistemological paradoxes, there is still room for a healthy dose of skepticism about the merits of even as sound an idea as democracy. A contemporary Madison or Tocqueville would raise some pertinent questions not only about the social and economic, but also the environmental wisdom of participatory regimes. As long as majorities can be mobilized by political entrepreneurs, there is always a danger that the deliberative process so dear to contemporary participationists will degenerate into the "tyranny of public opinion." And whether public opinion will always be consistent with ecological wisdom is anyone's guess. Besides, decentralized, community-based problem solving could become even more coercive than state controls insofar as constitutional and other "check and balance" mechanisms might be difficult to reproduce on a small scale.

Paehlke's enthusiastic endorsement of André Gorz's thesis about the possibility and desirability of transforming the meaning of work is illustrative in this regard.[22] Liberation from work in a society that provides its members with greater leisure time and, by sharing employment, comes closer to full employment than is the case at present, may sound like a desirable goal. It is the kind of policy that one might expect a more participatory regime would seek to put in place. But could it not bring about unanticipated practices that might have damaging social, economic, and/or environmental consequences?

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After all, some leisure activities can be less than environmentally benign (e.g., the destruction of fragile desert habitats by cross-country motorcycles). Of course, it is entirely possible that, on the whole, the balance of the various costs and benefits of such a fundamental shift in values and habits would be positive. My point is simply that assessing the consequences of policies and programs reflecting inputs from democratic consultation and participation is not necessarily any easier than calculating the risks inherent in untried technological and/or bureaucratic planning experiments. (That there are merits in these democratic practices apart from the utilitarian evaluation of their outcomes is not something that I wish to deny; but if one values environmental integrity as highly as Paehlke does, then my argument retains all its force.)

Progressive environmentalism may turn out to be a valuable ideology, even if not as promising as the prudential, neoliberal environmentalism I allude to below. But environmentalist progressivism—an ideological perspective that also subsumes some of Paehlke's ideas—would be a different beast. It could, paradoxically, end up playing down the respect owed to the autonomy of the natural world even further than is the case at present. Environmentalist progressivism could rhetorically set itself above any criticism of its own understanding of ecological processes, while in practice pursuing goals that might well be damaging to these processes. Just as Marxist socialism, by definition, was not supposed to work against the interests of the working class, environmentalist progressivism would be incapable of self-criticism as far as environmental issues are concerned.

The intended target of these remarks is not Paehlke's entire book, but rather a few passages that could have been more carefully written. Paehlke's fundamental thesis, as I read it, is that environmentalism is still too weak to survive on its own in today's ideological climate, and therefore needs to enter into an alliance with one of the strongest contending ideologies. He chooses social democracy (whereas a certain version of liberalism might have been a more appropriate choice). But in asking "how might environmentalism play a role in the restoration of moderate progressive political ideas?" (243), he makes himself vulnerable to the criticism that what he is actually seeking to achieve is to ensure the future of progressive politics on the back on the environmental movement.

Paehlke would probably respond that lending support to an environmental movement still in its early stages of development, and breathing new life into the progressive movement, are mutually com-

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patible goals. To a large extent this is true, just as it can be argued that environmentalism and liberalism could mutually benefit from a closer alliance. But, as Paehlke recognizes on numerous occasions, there are also instances of contradictions between some of the tenets of environmentalism and progressivism. Generally, Paehlke resolves these contradictions by siding with environmentalism, especially as far as limits to economic growth are concerned, and trying to propose compromises that would also satisfy most of the groups and interests constitutive of the progressive movement. He does not do so very systematically, however. Because his book does not articulate explicit criteria for determining the limits that ecological imperatives create with respect to the satisfaction of individual and group aspirations, it offers no guidance for deciding what goals and values are more important when they cannot be reconciled. To state one's preference for a liberal regime does not solve this problem, either. The tolerance of competing values and goals must, at some point, give way to an assessment of their compatibility with ecological processes if, as I argued previously, the latter are characterized by a systemic but fragile unity and integrity.

Environmentalism and the Future of Conservative Politics

As mentioned already, Paehlke is careful to take note of the fact that the left-right dimension is not the proper measure of environmentalism as an ideology. While his goal is, nevertheless, to attempt a dialectical tour de force in order to reconcile environmentalism with the left, he concedes that environmentalism and conservatism have a few things in common. He alludes to a possible convergence between environmentalism and the kind of conservatism illustrated by thinkers like Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott—a form of conservatism that shares some common ground with the skeptical liberal tradition. These links, I suggest, are actually more promising than the ones Paehlke sees between environmentalism and the progressive movement. Unfortunately, Paelhke does not elaborate on these links between, on the one hand, Burkean conservatism and, by extension, skeptical liberals who side with Hume, Tocqueville, or Hayek, and, on the other hand, environmentalism. He simply points to the notion of prudence and to the sense of responsibility toward past and future generations as being central to that linkage (191). He even admits that "neoconservatism"—an ideology that he clearly dislikes—and envi-

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ronmentalism subscribe to some of the same values, including a preference for decentralization and a willingness to eliminate budgetary deficits (217). But he is much more interested in articulating the relationship between environmentalism and moderate social democracy. (Strict socialism and environmentalism, he admits, are far less easily reconcilable insofar as they are based on divergent assumptions regarding the merits of economic growth and central planning [206]).

A more "conservative" approach to the problems posed by ecology would start from the commonsensical premise that free markets are not necessarily the cause of environmental degradation. (I use here the term "conservative" in scare quotes to point out that what Paehlke and social democrats in general refer to as "conservative" ideas may actually reflect liberal or libertarian principles; this being said, genuinely conservative themes do surface in the discourse of the neoclassical and Austrian economists; moreover, I am not limiting my search for alternative ideas to libertarian thinkers.) In fact, as I explained already, it is often the *absence* of property rights and of market pricing that is to blame for pollution.

But economistic prescriptions provide only limited answers. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the complexity of ecosystems and of their interactions with human societies, and in order to appreciate at their just measure new conceptions of the role and responsibilities of humans in their relations with other species, we must address at a more fundamental level the dilemmas posed by the collapse of a whole system of thought that for brevity, and for lack of a better term, I shall call "positivistic scientism." The appeal and success of environmentalism reveal the extent to which many of our contemporaries aspire to recover something from the past, or some mythological image of it. They are deeply ambivalent about the mechanized and "disenchanted" modern world, even though they are unable to tear themselves away from the comforting certainties inherent in the technological worldview.

Not everything from the past, however, is worth recovering. All manners and forms of conservatism are not equally defensible. Already, some environmentalists have embraced a rather futile primitivism. But, as I pointed out earlier, the worst possible outcome of the neo-Romantic critique of modernity would be manifested in an irrationalist and reactionary exaltation of the "land of our ancestors," "the authenticity" of traditional communities threatened by (often foreign or "cosmopolitan") interests, and even in racialist or plainly racist quasi-Malthusian arguments about overpopulation and related

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themes. Admittedly, European countries are more prone to this kind of ideological aberration, but that is hardly a consolation, and North American variants of these themes do exist.

Classical liberals and nonreactionary conservatives have an important contribution to make in this respect. A rethinking of two of the most essential elements of the Scottish Enlightenment would yield precious insights into both the policy issues and the philosophical problems addressed by Paehlke. These two elements are skepticism and what, in today's idiom, we would call an evolutionary anthropology.

By systematically criticizing constructivist fallacies, among which environmentally destructive projects figure prominently, skeptical liberals can make a valuable contribution to the environmental movement, drawing attention to inconsistencies in government policies, opportunities for the expansion of property rights, manifestations of utopian scientism, and so on, without blaming scapegoats like "capitalism," "profits," or even civilization itself, as leftist environmentalists do.[23] (I do not specifically aim this criticism at Paehlke, but he sometimes also treats generalizations like "economic growth" as if they were concrete agents of environmental destruction.) Finding further inspiration in the Aristotelian notions of prudence and immanent developmental potentialities, they could seek to cultivate values that emerge spontaneously from practices in which a sense of time and place is evident, without falling into the trap of mythologizing the past. A skeptical critique of the discourse of professionalism and technocracy[24] is also needed to stress the inadequacy of our understanding of complex natural and societal phenomena, without, however, elevating the prejudices of a minority of Luddites to the status of a revealed truth. (In this respect, skeptical liberals and progressive, participationist democrats share some common ground.) Skepticism undermines plans that ignore or play down the complexity of ecosystems, without posing a threat to either the liberal commitment to freedom and tolerance or to environmentalism itself. The reason is that skepticism does not, by definition, prescribe a priori a specific ordering of values and goals. A progressive critique of societal practices, however, necessarily implies the ranking of these practices in relation to the rationalist/constructivist certainties or moral principles upon which the progressive project is built. And in this particular hierarchy of values, the ideas of positive freedom and collective progress are ranked at the top, thereby relegating environmental objectives to a subordinate position.

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Now, by insisting on a return to a more skeptical outlook, I am not advocating ethical relativism. An authentic commitment to environmentalism must be sustained by a reverence for life. And evidently a preference for liberalism entails, at a minimum, a positive valuation of liberty. But the epistemological and political expressions of these commitments can vary. I advocate skepticism precisely because raising doubts about claims to knowledge of the mechanisms whereby complex natural and societal systems can be controlled serves the purpose of protecting the environment against imprudent actions while leaving entirely open the question of deciding how, and in what context, these doubts will be expressed, discussed, and acted upon. Even reformulations of the rules defining liberal institutions are not precluded. The strategy consisting in proving that environmental objectives are progressive ones, by contrast, closes some options right from the start. It implies that we know much more than we really do about both nature and society.

Too single-minded a skepticism, however, can lead to retrenchment rather than to the kind of political action that would be commensurate with the gravity of the ecological problems facing us. (I take "political action" in a very broad sense here, one which cannot be reduced to merely demanding that the state intervene in a particular way; political action can result in constitutional reform, participation in public debates, establishment of voluntary organizations, etc.) Thus I now turn to the evolutionary perspective that one finds in the Scottish Enlightenment, but also in Hayek's work, in the new "sciences of chaos and complexity," and in many of the recent contributions to a post-Cartesian epistemology. These have in common that they pay special attention to the paradoxical relations that develop between autonomous entities and the structures or patterns of interaction that they produce, but also through which they are reproduced. Concepts such as spontaneous order, self-organization, synergy, or emergence are signposts along a road that points toward a still incompletely formulated theoretical system. At least intuitively, one can sense that there are intriguing parallels between the Humean-Burkean-Hayekian quest for the wisdom embodied in spontaneously evolved institutions, on the one hand, and an environmentalist sensitivity to the perplexing complexity of self-organizing ecosystems, on the other. But I do not mean to imply that the only kind of convergence that could take place between environmentalism and the tradition of political and economic thought I am interested in here would be a vindication of the latter by the former. New ideas, new practices, and new institutions are needed

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to ensure that this tradition continues to evolve and to remain relevant to our contemporaries. I would like to suggest that such cross-fertilization can indeed take place.

An interesting development, for example, in a wide variety of domains, including quantum physics, ecology, and feminism, is the new emphasis on the primacy of relations over the entities that these relations act upon. From this perspective, fields of potential relations are the formative matrices from which entities evolve into concrete and observable structures.[25] This emerging paradigm could be the catalyst for an even more profound redefinition of property rights than what I alluded to above (e.g., the creation of tradeable emission rights). What would justify a political reform of this nature is the need to move beyond environmental protection (e.g., pollution controls) and toward a greater sense of harmony with the natural world. The goal here is to reshape social institutions, such as property rights, in a manner consistent with an understanding of eco-social interactions as being organized into fields of potential structures, rather than in terms of reified rights claimed by individuals entrenched behind the metaphorical barriers delineating their atomized selves. ("Rather than" is not the best way of conveying this idea; it is not so much an "either-or" situation as it is a recognition of an emerging organizing principle operating on a somewhat different plane, perhaps as an ethical standard.)[26] What a relational understanding of property rights, as advocated by Gus diZerega, might entail in practice is still somewhat unclear.[27] At the very least, it would mean entrenching in law and/or in a new public morality a more complex set of criteria for determining the rights and obligations attendant on private property. A guiding principle would have to be an appreciation of the autonomy of both human and nonhuman beings. Thus remedial actions could be undertaken even in cases where, strictly speaking, no trespassing has taken place, even if some of the parties involved (e.g., nonhuman life-forms) cannot make any claim to property rights of their own. The articulation of these added dimensions would most certainly require debates and consultations on a scale extending far beyond the limits of parliamentary institutions. And actual changes in the legal definition of property rights might need to be accompanied by new constitutional protections. As for the sanction of reformulated property rights, it would most probably require the development of nonjudicial conflict resolution procedures of the kinds that are increasingly being used for the settlement of environmental disputes. All these arrangements would take some time to be put in place and would probably entail

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modalities that I cannot anticipate at the moment. Thus I cannot be much more specific. The point is, though, that private property is "private" in the sense that it stands in contrast to collective or state ownership, but insofar as it is defined and recognized in law and/or in custom, it is a relation between an individual or a group of individuals and a broader community; we now have to broaden the definition of that community to include certain aspects of the ecosystems we have learned to recognize as being essential to our well-being and our self-understanding as responsible dwellers on this planet.

Environmentalism signals a cultural change that will inevitably result in institutional changes, since institutions are not so much willed as they are evolved. An even more radical decentralization than the kind of community-based planning envisioned by Paehlke would be the pursuit of environmental goals through the unguided and freely determined choices of individuals or firms owning land and other resources under a more complex set of legal and customary rules defined not only with respect to short-term efficiency goals—as is the case with mechanisms like the creation of tradeable emission rights—but also to a more inclusive and comprehensive environmental ethic.

What I have outlined so far are some very tentative and sketchy proposals for developing a neoliberal environmentalism. But I have not attempted to shore up liberalism against the challenge posed by environmentalism. That is, I am not proposing an environmentalist neoliberalism that could be used to counter Paehlke's environmentalist progressive (or social-democratic) liberalism. Such a project would be regressive—for the same reason that Paehlke's progressive environmentalism is far more appealing than his environmentalist progressivism. The question is whether environmentalism is an ideological prop or a value in itself. In Paehlke's case, due perhaps more to rhetorical slippage than deliberate intention, the object sometimes seems to be to use environmentalism as a means of imparting a renewed vigor to progressivism rather than to integrate the two.

Environmentalism bears the promise of becoming a truly new worldview capable of transcending existing ideological divisions. While there are reasons to doubt that Paehlke's plea for a closer alliance between environmentalists and social democrats is the best way of fulfilling this promise, classical liberals and libertarians cannot claim to provide a better alternative without themselves redefining some of their fundamental ideas (e.g., property rights) and reordering their priorities. Until such time as this has taken place, Paehlke's tactical observation that, as a rule, environmentalists have found a more

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receptive audience among social democrats will, unfortunately, continue to ring true.

NOTES

1. Note that for Canadians, including Paehlke, "neoconservatism" is a term that refers primarily to laissez-faire economic liberalism and libertarian values rather than to neoconservatism à la Irving Kristol.
2. It is symptomatic of this possible risk that one of the last texts written by the reactionary and profoundly anti-individualist French thinker Charles Maurras (the founder of the Action Française movement) was about the risk of pollution in the Etang de Berre posed by the industrialization of the Marseilles region. See Raoul Girardet, *Mythes et mythologie politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 104.
3. See John Baden and Richard L. Stroup, eds., *Bureaucracy vs. the Environment: The Environmental Costs of Bureaucratic Government* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1981); Terry L. Anderson, ed., *Water Rights: Scarce Resource Allocation, Bureaucracy, and the Environment* (San Francisco: Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research, 1983); Richard L. Stroup and John Baden, eds., *Natural Resources: Bureaucratic Myths and Environmental Management* (San Francisco: Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research, 1983); Walter E. Block, ed., *Economics and the Environment: A Reconciliation* (Vancouver: Fraser Institute, 1989); and G. Bruce Doern, ed., *The Environmental Imperative: Market Approaches to the Greening of Canada* (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute, 1990).
4. Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990). Manes, an associate editor of the journal *Earth First!*, paints an extremely bleak picture of a ravaged planet plundered by rapacious capitalists and socialists alike. For Manes, the culprit is not a particular regime, nor even industrialism, but civilization itself. To stop the destructive folly that he sees at work all around him, he advocates such radical measures as "ecotage," i.e., the active destruction of the instruments of technological exploitation.
5. See Peter Vajk, *Doomsday Has Been Canceled* (Culver City, Calif.: Peace Press, 1978).
6. See Julian Simon, "Resources, Population, Environment: An Oversupply of Bad News," *Science* 208, no. 4451 (27 June 1980): 1431–7.
7. For example, see Richard L. Stroup, "Chemophobia and Activist Environmental Antidotes: Is the Cure More Deadly than the Disease?" in Block.
8. A similar argument is developed by Samuel P. Hays in the first chapter of his *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Policy in the United States, 1955–1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
9. Donella H. Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe

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Books, 1972); see also the somewhat more sophisticated analysis offered by M.D. Mesarovic and E.C. Pestel, *Mankind at the Turning Point* (New York: Dutton, 1974).

10. For an ironic look at the way in which such predictions have missed their targets, see John Tierney, "Betting the Planet," *New York Times Magazine* (December 2, 1990).
11. Robert C. Paehlke, "Democracy and Environmentalism: Opening the Door to the Administrative State," in Paehlke and D. Torgerson, eds., *Managing Leviathan: Environmental Politics and the Administrative State* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1990).
12. See Amory B. Lovins, *World Energy Strategies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1972), and "Lovins on Soft Paths versus Hard Paths," *Alternatives* (Summer/Fall 1976).
13. See Science Council of Canada, *Canada as a Conserver Society: Resource Uncertainties and the Need for New Technologies* (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1977); and Ted Shrecker, *The Conserver Society Revisited* (Ottawa: Science Council of Canada, 1983).
14. Brian Tokar, "Social Ecology, Deep Ecology and the Future of Green Political Thought," *Ecologist* 18, nos. 4/5 (1988): 132–41.
15. See Manes, 123–36; and P. R. Hay and M. G. Haward, "Comparative Green Politics: Beyond the European Context?" *Political Studies* 36 (1988): 433–48.
16. For an analysis of the bias toward state allocation in the Science Council of Canada report on the conserver society, see John F. Chant et al., "The Economics of a Conserver Society," in Block, 1–89.
17. See Terry Anderson, "The Market Process and Environmental Amenities," in Block, 145–47.
18. See Jack Hirschleifer, Foreword to Anderson, ed., *Water Rights*, xviii.
19. See Norman R. Ball, "Technology, Business, and Leadership in a More Environmentally Conscious Era," in Doern, ed., *The Environmental Imperative.*
20. See John S. Dryzek, *Rational Ecology: Environmentalism and Political Economy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), Part 3.
21. See ibid.
22. André Gorz develops this theme in *Farewell to the Working Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), and *Paths to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work* (London: Pluto Press, 1985).
23. For a passionate attack on civilization and an apology for primitivism, see Manes, *Green Rage*, Part 4.
24. For a recent and refreshing example of this type of reflection, albeit more on the subject of the social sciences than on technology, see Charles E. Lindblom, *Inquiry and Change: The Troubled Attempt to Understand and Shape Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
25. See Gus diZerega, "Integrating Quantum Theory with Post-Modern

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Political Thought and Action: The Priority of Relations over Objects," in T. Becker, ed., *Quantum Politics: Applying Quantum Theory to Political Phenomena* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

26. Therefore, I cannot point to Jennifer Nedelsky's stimulating article, "Law, Boundaries, and the Bounded Self," *Representations* no. 30 (Spring 1990), as offering more than a very rough approximation of my conceptualization of a relational approach to property and other individual rights, because her critique of existing definitions of property rights is uncompromising and insists that a radical departure from liberalism is required.
27. See ibid., and diZerega, "Green Politics and Post-Modern Liberalism," CRITICAL REVIEW 1, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 17–41.

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