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Introduction¹

John Barry and Marcel Wissenburg

For a long time, environmentally oriented political theorists assumed that ‘the’ ecological crisis required, even necessitated, a kind of green revolution. Saving the Earth meant, among other things, a reduction of the world’s population, reduced economic growth, a reduction of trade, transport and individual mobility, and new and very modest patterns of consumption. Most of all, it meant a changed attitude towards the environment, away from subjection, exploitation and use as mere means to human ends, to a recognition of or reverence for nature’s intrinsic value, and to a reunification of culture and nature. Our world would change from one of states, nations and liberal democracies into an open federation of small, socialist or anarchic communities, the borders of which would be defined by the borders of ecosystems.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, politicians, experts and environmental pressure groups try to tackle global and local environmental problems while still operating within these ‘obsolete’ liberal democratic systems. One idea inspires them all: that of sustainability or sustainable development. The liberal democratic system is here and it will not go away; it is, moreover, in many respects, a desirable achievement in human evolution. Yet its way of dealing with ecological issues seems to leave much to be desired. The cooperation between parties is far from harmonious; policies are not always effective or radical enough, let alone on time. A recognition of the fact that liberal democracy is both here to stay and has intrinsic value (to use a term much used in environmental thought) is that the starting point for most of the contributions in this volume is an acceptance that ‘green politics’ is ‘post-’ as opposed to ‘anti-liberal’ in Robyn Eckersley’s terms (1992, p. 30).

In addition, the terms sustainability and sustainable development are interpreted in countless different ways. Even the almost authoritative

Brundtland definition of sustainable development (meeting present needs without compromising the needs of future generations) is interpreted mostly in environmental terms in the North, and more in economic and developmental terms in the South. Nor is sustainability an uncontroversial objective: green critics have signalled that, on whatever version, it leaves little room for intrinsic value or even for an evaluation of nature in a language other than that of resources. The term sustainability is in itself also rather meaningless. All it says is that the existence of 'something X' (the Earth's resources, the environment, nature, humankind or any mix of these) should be perpetuated. It is not a definite prescriptive concept, indicating exact goals or means, a best shape of society, how far into the future we should look, or a particular way of apportioning the benefits and burdens of sustainability. Thus, not only is it 'essentially contested', but also essentially vague and imprecise, which perhaps reveals that sustainability or sustainable development refers to a process rather than an end product or state. For some radical greens (Sachs, 1993), this impreciseness and ambiguity of sustainable development, especially post-Rio, has allowed the environmental agenda to be hijacked by corporate and anti-environmental interests. Thus, global corporations can, along with environmental NGOs, talk of sustainable development, giving the impression of being part of the same process of moving towards global sustainability. Others, such as Jacobs (1999), see this ambiguity as potentially radical. Its all too easy rhetorical acceptance by actors such as economic corporations can in fact lead to their 'commitment' to sustainable development being used to criticize their activities when they fail to live up to its emerging radical social, economic, political and ecological implications. As he puts it, 'Sustainable development appears to have the remarkable capacity to articulate, nourish, propagate quite radical political ideas while appearing respectably "non-political"' (1999, p. 30).

Mainstream (read: traditional, non-green) political theorists and philosophers are only just beginning to recognize sustainability as a subject of debate. Most contributions to this debate originated in circles of environmentalists or from a dialogue between environmentalists and progressive thinkers (cf. the two volumes mentioned below). As a rule, they assumed a broad and general consensus on the normative aspects of sustainability and moved on to ask how modern society, particularly democracy and the institutions sustaining democracy, should be adapted to achieve this ideal. This book has a different focus: it asks whether liberal democracy, in particular in its liberal aspects, can tackle 'the' ecological crisis. Two questions can summarize the

starting point of this issue. Can and in what ways can liberal democracy deal with the ecological crisis? Or, alternatively, how much 'sustainability' or ecological concern is compatible with liberal democracy?

The texts collected here were originally presented in an ECPR Joint Sessions workshop on 'the shape of liberal democratic sustainable societies' (Warwick, March 1998, organized by one of the editors, Marcel Wissenburg). They pursue a course in green political thought set out in earlier workshops (*The Politics of Nature*, edited by A. Dobson and P. Lucardie (Routledge, 1993) and *Democracy and Green Political Thought*, edited by B. Doherty and M. de Geus (Routledge, 1996)). Their common denominator is the question whether sustainability can be (made) compatible with the theory and practice of liberalism, and a continuing effort to establish 'green' or 'ecological' issues, such as sustainability, as serious and important topics for contemporary political theory.

What has been missing in the debate so far – two gaps which the present volume hopes to fill – are contributions that do not a priori assume consensus on the normative aspects of sustainability or even the desirability of consensus, and contributions from more traditional, mainstream liberal philosophical points of view. With Brian Barry as the one major exception, theorists inspired by leading philosophers like Rawls, Nozick, Nagel and Dworkin have been virtually silent on issues of sustainability. The papers brought together in this volume therefore (in a way) turn the main question around: they do not (only) ask how society should be adapted to sustainability but (also) how the concept of sustainability is to be interpreted in ways that respect these liberal democratic values and institutions. In more detail, they try to distinguish a series of conceptions of sustainability, to ascertain the fit between these separate conceptions and the most important liberal principles and liberal democratic institutions, and to determine if and where institutional changes might be needed after all.

Answers will be sought in four directions, corresponding to the four parts of the book; each of these parts (with the exception of Part I) consists of three chapters focusing respectively on liberal theory, liberal institutions and the place of the individual in a liberal society:

1. whether liberalism is (or liberal theories are) in principle compatible with attention for nature and sustainability;
2. the degree to which liberalism or liberal democracy can be 'reformed' to meet green demands;
3. the place of rights (a central concept in liberalism: it is, after all, about protecting individual freedom, thus creating 'liberties' to

- which the word 'rights' is applied in common usage) in promoting sustainability;
4. the place of duties in 'sustainable' liberalism: a common critique of liberalism sees it as focusing on rights and ignoring duties (as if the two are opposed); a more sophisticated critique says that sustainability is about side-constraints to human behaviour, therefore about prescribing rather than licensing. Moreover, several influential green theorists insist that greening the world requires a change of heart and of preferences, hence the development of an individual attitude recognizing duties towards nature and future generations.

In the first part, *Liberalism and Sustainability*, it is recognized that liberalism itself cannot be taken as a constant factor. The options for a successful integration of types and criteria of sustainability differ between economic liberalism (the free market, capitalism), political liberalism (the institutions of liberal democracy) and philosophical liberalism (the political theory). Moreover, different types of philosophical liberalism inform economic and political liberalism in different ways. One of them is, of course, Lockean liberalism, with its stress on individual liberty and its links to libertarianism and free market conditions. Social liberalism on the other hand, in the tradition of Mill up to Rawls and Barry, allows for a wide range of arguments in support of a more principled view on, and integration of, conceptions of sustainability. Both traditions, however, offer room for arguments from within liberalism in favour of policies aimed at sustainability and for a broad set of different conceptions of sustainability.

According to Marius de Geus, the Brundtland definition of sustainability as sustainable development changed the concept from a foundational and normative principle associated with a steady-state economy into a politically open, hence virtually meaningless, notion. Systemic factors in liberal democracies like political parties, re-election interests, institutionalized bargaining mechanisms and the interwovenness of state and economy result in a systematic lack of appreciation for ecological interests. The vagueness of the concept of sustainability of course adds to the confusion. In Dutch politics, for example, four interpretations of sustainability are defended: sustainability as a steady state, as ecological modernization, as stewardship and as stable economic growth. Each of these differ in the underlying assumptions, proposed strategies and ultimate goals.

De Geus argues that it would be wise to move towards an unambiguous, robust and consistent definition of sustainability. As long as one is

lacking, widespread non-commitment remains possible, the link between intra- and intergenerational justice is lost and environmental policies keep lacking credibility. However, the heritage of liberal democracy makes it less likely that liberal political theory can be compatible with a fundamental, 'hard' notion of sustainability. Part of this heritage is formed by Lockean elements like individualism, the legitimation of dominance over nature, the idea that nature is (nothing but) a rich and plentiful resource, the identification of happiness with consumption, and so on. De Geus then analyses Mill's version of liberalism, to discover that Mill offers far more room for stronger interpretations of sustainability. He concludes that present-day liberal democracies are not very well equipped to defend ecological interests. As he says, if liberalism wants to take the environment seriously, it should rid itself of its Lockean inheritance and rediscover Mill.

Gayil Talshir observes that ecological concerns and social demands are often clustered together as New Politics issues, the rise of which would be explained by postmaterial values. Ecological concerns, often characterized as aesthetic needs even though they concern the most existential needs of all, and social justice are, she claims, brought under the same heading without having any obvious substantive relation. For one, justice and ecology belong to different ontological realms: nature is by definition a non-social agent and therefore not a subject of the social injustices that are at the heart of the New Politics critique. The kind of state, society and individual that seems required if the demands of ecologists are taken seriously does not fit the framework in which issues of social justice are resolved, to wit liberal democracy. Finally, ecologists tend to commit the 'is-ought' fallacy by attempting to derive social values from ecological premises. Talshir then moves on to discuss philosophical, historical and structural explanations for the co-emergence of ecological sustainability and social justice. She concludes that it is possible to understand ecological concerns as 'a private case of social justice', if sustainability is seen as a way of dealing purely with the social consequences of ecological problems. One could also argue that there is sense in using the phrase 'ecological justice', perhaps metaphorically, given features like exploitation and disregard that the environment shares with other New Politics problems. Despite all attempts at identifying ecologism with issues more easily added to the liberal democratic agenda, the third alternative can still not be excluded. It may well be that ecological concerns and social justice cannot be reduced to one another, but form the two distinct pillars of New Politics.

Part II, Reform and Change, discusses what might be termed 'reform liberalism': general changes in the structure and guiding principles of liberal democracies, adapting liberalism but not changing it beyond recognition. A first topic here relates to the addition of environmental side-constraints to 'real-world' (legal and political) liberal principles of justice. Is a liberal interpretation of sustainability destined to be negative (i.e. aimed at preventing unsustainability) or could it also offer room for positive sustainability (i.e. a particular social ideal or set of ideals of the sustainable society – Barry's chapter on the 'greening' of liberal democracy in theory and practice). Next, four versions of 'sustainability-sensitive' modern economic liberalism are examined with regard to internal consistency (Labaras, chapter on liberal theory). Lastly (Achterberg's chapter on liberal institutions), liberalism is confronted with a critical conception of modern society as a risk society. Liberalism still seems to be predicated on the existence of liberal democratic states, whereas (1) states no longer appear to be the sole (inter)national political actors and (2) environmental problems are often of an international or even global nature.

John Barry's chapter looks at the 'greening' of liberal democracy in theory and practice. He starts with an examination of ecological modernization as a contemporary expression of 'real-world' attempts by liberal democracy to meet ecological demands of sustainability. While largely an empirical question, Barry argues that an ecologically modernizing liberal democracy does demand a shift away from a 'free market', capitalist political economy. This implies a separation of economic liberalism and political liberalism, with an increased role for the state in 'planning' or 'steering' socio-economic development away from unsustainable paths. Barry suggests that this 'negative' interpretation of sustainability is more compatible with the underlying norms of liberal democracy than the positive, determinate and prescriptive views of sustainability one finds in the green political canon.

He then moves on to examining some of the resources within liberal democratic theory, which it can use to 'green' or 'ecologize' itself. Here, the 'social liberal' tradition, indicated above, is suggested as offering the most positive potential for the greening of liberalism. Barry then goes on to show how the 'precautionary principle', a central feature of modern green politics, can be interpreted in liberal terms as an ecologized 'harm principle' which can justify state regulation and intervention of economic and other behaviour which have serious environmental impacts or risks. One implication of the application of this ecologized harm principle is how it calls for a rethinking of the

private ownership of land towards viewing it in terms of 'stewardship' as opposed to exclusive private ownership and use. Finally, Barry suggests that the 'greening' of liberal democracy demands a less 'unecological' underlying political economy than its current free market, globalized capitalist one, and he suggests that a less consumption-orientated liberal democracy need not necessarily affect basic liberties and freedoms. As he puts it, 'What liberties are ecologically unsustainable? Or what liberties are threatened by the emergence of a liberal welfare state less orientated towards maintaining and supporting increasing individual consumption levels?'

Nicos Labaras's chapter focuses on four forms of political economy approaches to environmental issues, all of which accept the institutional-normative framework of liberal democracy. These are: (1) free market environmentalism (also discussed by Oksanen); (2) the constant capital approach of neoclassical environmental economics; (3) ecological economics; and (4) ecological modernization (also discussed by Barry). Taking sustainability as relating to the question of how to preserve the natural capital stock and achieve intergenerational equity, he examines each of these political economic theories in turn in terms of two main questions. Given the chapter's main focus on the integration of ecological concerns into economic activity, Labaras is concerned, firstly, to assess each model of political economy in terms of how successfully it achieves this integration and, secondly, to consider the political-normative legitimacy of each model's approach to this integration. While finding problems with all four, and concluding that no approach offers a coherent and convincing account of the integration of the economic and ecological systems, he tentatively suggests that ecological modernization may offer the best 'real-world' example of successful integration (particularly in the German context). Still, he admits, it falls short of the better outcome of ecological modernization in the Netherlands. The discourse of ecological economics performs best in terms of legitimacy.

Wouter Achterberg discusses the social context necessary for sustainable patterns of production and consumption in relation to Ulrich Beck's analysis of what the latter calls risk society and the process of reflexive modernization. Beck's work is important because the emergence of large-scale hazards in modern society defines Beck's picture of risk society, and because learning to deal with hazards is 'just what taking sustainability seriously is all about'.

In Achterberg's view, the normative and institutional implications of Beck's thesis are far from clear or developed. He therefore sets out to

amend and extend Beck's theory where it remains unclear about the nature of risk in modern society, as well as about typically environmental concepts. Thus, he argues, Beck needs to – and can – offer room for questions of intergenerational justice through deliberative and democratic forums where a debate can be conducted on morally acceptable risks and hazards imposed on future generations. Beck's two possible answers to 'the organized irresponsibility that allows the transformation of risks to unmanageable global hazards' are subpolitics, politics outside formal institutions and channels (a not necessarily democratic or desirable reply), and ecological democracy. The latter, again, needs 'more content and structure'. For Beck, ecological democracy implies (unspecified) 'new ways of thinking' and liberation from dependence on the judgements of experts. Achterberg suggests that the best way to make sense of this is by reading it as a plea for deliberative democracy, i.e. the forum where preferences are discussed and developed rather than the market where they are merely aggregated. Achterberg concludes that ecological democracy interpreted along these lines is a necessary condition for risk society's ability to cope with ecological and 'other challenges of its own making'.

In Part III, special attention is given to what is often taken as a core concept within liberalism: rights. Contributions here look at the (im)possibilities and (un)desirability of environmental protection by means of property rights at the micro-level (Oksanen on liberal institutions), at the possible role of constitutions and international law at the macro-level (Hayward on liberal theory), and at ways in which environmental needs might overrule liberal principles of justice, including liberal conceptions of (moral) rights (Attfield on the liberal individual).

Tim Hayward's chapter explores the case for pursuing ecological ends by (liberal) constitutional means. He examines the case for constitutional environment rights and the entrenching of ecological interests within a constitutional framework, and the implications of the latter for central aspects of political theory, including social justice and the character of liberal democracy and the state. A constitutional approach to dealing with environmental issues includes but is not reducible to concerns of sustainability or sustainable development. Hayward suggests that the large-scale and transnational character of many environmental problems requires cooperation both within and between polities. This cooperation needs to be grounded on widely agreed principles, and it is important that the latter be above the horse-trading, negotiation and 'log-rolling' of everyday political life. Given this, he

suggests that constitutional principles are required, and points out that many national constitutions have already established environmental provisions and some have entrenched environmental rights. He points out that there is mileage in extending existing human rights discourse in an environmental direction and discusses the potential for environmental rights to be constitutive elements of a 'new generation' of human rights. At the same time, he recognizes that there are areas of tension and conflict between various environmental interests (which are open to different and conflicting interpretations) and interests associated with traditional human rights.

Hayward then discusses Rawls's work, in particular his distinction between liberties (which are subject to equal distribution) and income and wealth (subject to unequal distribution, in accordance with the difference principle). He suggests that while both principles are affected by the introduction of ecological constraints and conditions, the difference principle in particular is severely affected. Insofar as the latter implicitly relies on (1) economic growth and 'trickle-down' redistribution and (2) the justification of socio-economic inequalities as necessary for the latter, acknowledging ecological constraints on economic growth would move liberal democracy in the direction of a more equitable distribution of socio-economic wealth. While recognizing the difficulties, particularly in establishing 'rights' for non-humans, Hayward claims that some degree of constitutional protection for them is possible and desirable. Moving on to the issue of 'ecological democracy' and the relationship between constitutional and democratic imperatives, he argues that the appropriate attitude (from a constitutional environmentalist perspective) toward liberal democratic institutions is one of 'immanent critique'. In addition, one needs to see the flexibility and accommodation of a plurality of interests within liberal democracy as positive features that can be used to move liberal democracy in a more sustainable direction. However, globalization (especially in its economic and ecological aspects) tends to undermine the 'sovereignty' of the nation-state. In this context, the 'greening' of liberal democracy via constitutional means needs to be sensitive to the empirical and conceptual developments attendant upon globalization, and recognize that constitutional environmentalism does not present a panacea for environmental problems and issues. Hayward concludes with the argument that the 'fit' between constitutional and democratic environmentalism (or ecological democracy) moves us in the direction of more open, deliberative and discursive modes of democracy. This argument finds much support among others in this present volume (e.g. Achterberg, de Geus, Mills).

Markku Oksanen looks at the issue of privatizing genetic resources via intellectual property rights and biodiversity conservation, thus exploring in more detail the issue of ownership relations regarding the natural environment, also raised in Barry's chapter. His starting point is that for many, the sustainable use of natural resources has to do with patterns of ownership and access to those resources, with two opposing approaches often framing the debate. He distinguishes two different meanings of 'privatization', one meaning individual ownership, the other stressing the centrality of some property-right regimes (which can include communal ownership). On his view, the latter use of the term 'privatization' is misleading. He then goes on to discuss the significance of both for issues around genetic biodiversity conservation. On the one hand there are those (usually of an 'economic' liberal, i.e. libertarian persuasion, such as free market environmentalism) who suggest that it is the lack of clear, enforceable and tradable private property rights which is the main cause of the unsustainable use of natural resources. Thus from this perspective the privatizing of natural resources ensures their sustainable use. On the other are those for whom common ownership and access to natural resources, in this case modifying and extending the Intellectual Property Rights regime to include indigenous communities, can deliver sustainable (and equitable) use. This does not necessarily imply, as Oksanen is at pains to point out, an 'open-access' regime. Thus a commons regime is not an open-access regime, contradicting Garret Hardin's infamous and misleading 'tragedy of the commons' hypothesis. On the basis of this argument, he concludes that 'although it is conceptually disputable whether intellectual property rights can be generated to traditional and indigenous peoples, it is not so when considered in the light of sustainability'.

Robin Attfield argues that 'sheer practicality' requires us to take sustainability seriously, that is to design societies and processes capable of being maintained indefinitely without undermining themselves, the segments of nature they depend on or other sustainable societies. There are, he says, areas in which sustainability could undermine liberty, for instance carbon emissions. Curtailing liberty in this area, however, enhances liberty in others: the reduction of pollution, for instance, also reduces illness; having fewer cars reduces congestion and promotes people's freedom from inundation by traffic. From this perspective, such curtailment of freedom to enhance freedom is also compatible with liberalism itself. Attfield rejects the objection that liberal democracies cannot or should never import an idea of the good. They already do so in fact, and they cannot theoretically defend the kind

of neutrality that would tolerate unsustainable practices: sustainability, like national survival, is a prerequisite for liberal democracy. One could even argue that liberalism and liberal democracy are compatible with ecological views beyond purely anthropocentric conceptions of sustainability.

A second area of potential conflict between sustainability and liberalism is that of population policies. Such policies are necessary, since the limits to population growth in relation to expected food supplies, pollution and biodiversity are in sight. Yet they need not be illiberal. Policies of education and persuasion are acceptable as long as citizens are allowed and empowered to decide for themselves. In fact, they increase our freedom (and freedom elsewhere in the world) in other respects. Liberal democracies have a special responsibility in this field: someone has to pay for the development policies that must accompany population policies in the Third World. Attfield concludes that 'where liberalism focuses on the freedom of all affected human beings or of all affected parties, or on the principle that freedom may be curtailed to prevent harm to others, there is no irreconcilable conflict, and some possibility of liberal societies eventually becoming committed to sustainability.'

Part IV looks at what may be the Achilles heel of liberalism and the future focal point for research in green political thought: duties. As several contributors note (liberal), institutions cannot work without civic support, yet liberalism asks even of convinced radical greens that they accept liberal pluriformity and submit to democratic procedures. Liberalism, green or not, lacks a proper account of individual and civic virtue and might not even offer room for one. In these chapters, authors discuss the kinds of green duties compatible with liberal democracy and the question whether liberalism can expound any particular conception of duty at all.

Mike Mills's chapter focuses on the duties, which are often neglected in liberal democratic theory and practice stressing individual rights instead. For him, the main difficulty for liberalism in dealing with environmental issues is that it offers little reason for individuals to behave well within established liberal discourses and practices of rights and social justice, yet behaving well is precisely what Mills argues sustainability requires. The main aim of the chapter is to suggest that for liberalism to address this issue, a more comprehensive theory of duties is required to supplement the more established liberal rights discourse. Mills discusses the problems in conceptualizing sustainability, pointing out that while it is 'essentially contested', we can at least acknowledge

its basic normative character, thus he suggests that an unethical form of sustainability is a contradiction in terms. Mills indicates that two of the difficulties liberalism has in dealing with environmental issues are (1) the global character of some pressing environmental problems (also recognized by Hayward), and (2) the way in which 'there appears to be a "private" or "personal" aspect to achieving sustainability which co-exists with its "public" face'. The latter is particularly problematic for liberalism given its foundational commitment to protecting the 'private sphere' from political and social interference. Mills takes what he calls the 'best-case example' of liberalism (following Sagoff, 1988, p. 151). He notes that on the face of it, liberalism seems able to accommodate the personal and institutional aspects of sustainability. It is, after all, not incompatible with liberal principles (of individual freedom, rights, impartiality, social justice) to circumscribe individual (economic) freedoms if these interfere with the freedoms of others, and given that ecological sustainability is logically (but not ethically) prior to the achievement of freedom or justice.

However, Mills finds this best-case view of liberalism wanting (from an ecological perspective), largely on the grounds that the liberal reliance on rights and justice to promote ethical behaviour is simply insufficient in addressing sustainability. Firstly, Mills argues that our behaviour is not motivated by acknowledging and respecting the rights of others. Secondly, rights-*qua*-claims require the prior existence of an institutional system to process rights-claims, which of course may not actually exist, in which case the ethical imperative is on the claimant rather than the rights-violator. Thirdly, an exclusive focus on rights demands agents who know their interests and those of others and take them into account before acting. Yet, as Mills suggests, this is not how people actually behave, and we are left asking why, from a liberal perspective, we might expect individuals to do things that are required for sustainability to work. Here Mills turns to the work of Onora O'Neill (1996) who argues that rights do not banish obligations, but an ethical framework based on the former does mean that obligations and questions such as 'How should I live?' will be secondary and derivative. Mills suggests that the latter sort of question is precisely what sustainability entails, and thus to the extent that liberalism is rights-centred it will fall short of what sustainability requires.

He then moves on to discuss Rawls's distinction between 'natural duties' (non-voluntary and non-institutional) and obligations (voluntary and institutional). However, Mills argues that it is not reasonable to assume that all obligations inside an institution are voluntary. It is

intuitively sensible to believe that natural duties (or what he later calls ‘duties of being’) are retained wherever we are, regardless of the institutional or non-institutional context. Mills’s concern is that the Rawlsian distinction, for one, creates an unnecessarily wide gap between an ‘ethic of justice’ (‘duties of association’) and an ‘ethic of virtue’. It also presents the dangers that institutional behaviour becomes parochial, defined by purely institutional goals, and that office holders within institutions lose their sense of being a ‘person among others’, and lose sight of the importance of moral character and virtue to institutional office holders. Mills, following O’Neill (1996), emphasizes the way in which institutionally generated obligations, such as justice, cannot work unless they are seen as grounded in natural duties and virtues, such that the ‘community of justice’ is more properly thought of as based in duty than in mutual recognition of rights. So long as we can generate the duties of being in this way, liberalism can be rendered compatible with the demands of sustainability. He concludes with the strong claim that sustainability requires the partial dismantling of the separation of the public and the private ethical realms, best pursued through virtue and understood as the carrying of basic duties of being from the private to the public sphere.

This stress on virtue and sustainability is also discussed by Ludvig Beckman. Beckman argues that one way of achieving sustainability is to make citizens attend to ecological virtues. A politics of virtue, he feels, can supplement more traditional approaches to environmental issues – witness recent proposals for a theory and practice of ecological virtue (Barry, 1999). On the other hand, the pursuit of ecological virtues may conflict with fundamental principles of liberal democracy, like liberty and respect for diversity of beliefs. A common belief is that the state should remain neutral to questions concerning virtue and the good life, and should not support or promote any particular way of life and its virtues.

Beckman then discusses three elements within contemporary liberalism that might make it incompatible with a politics of ecological virtue. The first of these is the idea of individualism, the individual’s right to form an independent opinion. Secondly, he investigates equality, interpreted as an obligation on the liberal state to treat all lifestyles equally. The last topic on his list is scepticism, the idea that the truth about which virtues and lifestyles are good remains uncertain. He concludes that neither one of these three provides a conclusive argument against a politics of ecological virtue. Yet the compatibility of a politics of virtue and liberal values is not unconditional. The liberal democratic

appreciation of individuality, for instance, precludes coercive and violent means, and in general limits the room for pursuing moralistic aims. The idea of equality allows interference with 'mere' preferences and tastes but not with the truly ethical elements of lifestyles. Scepticism properly understood, finally, demands room for revising, changing and even abandoning specific ecological ends: what is now regarded as true may later be proven to be false. Beckman boldly concludes that the values of liberalism do not justify the principle of neutrality in politics. Liberalism can legitimately support ecological virtues. This, he says, opens the door for a democratic deliberation on ecological virtue, resulting in a choice 'to encourage or discourage certain attitudes on the basis of their relation to an idea of the good and sustainable society'.

Marcel Wissenburg argues that liberalism can prescribe certain types of behaviour – and hence offers room for duties. There are, he says, several ways in which liberal theory can be 'greened', including strategies not mentioned earlier in the book. Some are more promising than others, and, oddly, those ways that imply individual duties promise to be most successful. Wissenburg begins by stating that philosophical liberalism is already environmentally conscious and friendly, it is just that past and present liberal theorists and commentators have failed to realize this green potential. He then proceeds to offer seven 'green amendments' to liberalism which show how liberalism can make room for environmental concerns while still being recognizably liberal. These amendments include how liberalism can incorporate the environment as either a subject or an object of liberal concern, the compatibility of ecological duties with liberalism, and how the Rawlsian savings principle can be amended and developed into a novel and potentially powerful and liberal-based 'restraint principle'. It can act as a legitimate environmental side-constraint on the attribution of rights in a liberal society. The chapter as a whole indicates both the potentials within liberal theory for dealing with (some) ecological problems and how in dealing with them liberal theory itself changes. This signals one of its enduring characteristics, the flexibility and adaptability of liberalism, which, to use an appropriate term, has ensured its own sustainability over time.

In a concluding chapter, John Barry, Marcel Wissenburg (the editors) and Marius de Geus (the initially most pessimistic contributor to this volume) consider the evidence and revisit the initial research question: how to conceive of sustainability in a liberal context? Is liberal theory flexible enough to support sustainability? Is De Geus's pessimism

justified? Or Wissenburg's optimism? To what extent can liberal democratic institutions constitute a basis for solving environmental issues? In what ways, if any, is the liberal appreciation of nature compatible with a viable environment? And finally, which problems remained unsolved, and which new ones emerged?

So, is liberalism compatible with sustainability? What type and how much sustainability can liberal democracy deliver in theory and practice? To find out some suggested answers to these and other questions, read on dear reader, read on ...

Note

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