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Summary

This book, “Introduction to Environmental Political Philosophy”, is an attempt to illustrate the main principles of a new political philosophy responding to the conditions inaugurated by the period, denoted as the ‘Anthropocene’, i.e., the epoch when, the predominantly negative, influence of humanity on nature has become so pronounced that it has reached a state exceeding the influence of geological forces. Humanity has become the dominant force affecting all parts of the planetary system (biosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, cryosphere, lithosphere) and human activities inaugurate problems directly affecting the social and political spheres in contemporary societies. An *Introduction to Environmental Political Philosophy* illustrates these problems, examining their causes and phenomenal form, relating them to each other, and seeking to understand them in detail. The book is not a manifesto, it does not formulate cheap populist solutions or take sides to serve as a political program. On the contrary, it presents detailed philosophical analyses of a wide range of ecological, sociological, political, and economic material in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political situation of the Anthropocene.

All human activities have environmental preconditions and are limited by the finiteness of the planetary system. At the same time, however, all human activities (economic, technological, and social practices) have environmental consequences. The existence and form of any political system rests on environmental conditions; this fact is rarely addressed in political philosophy. We believe that it is necessary to reformulate the classical questions of political philosophy, incorporating an *Earth System Science* (ESS) perspective, into their formulation, not least by drawing on the insights of environmental philosophy. The interactions between man,

society, and the environment are central to it. A political philosophy adequate to the threats posed by the Anthropocene will have to rethink the basic assumptions, imperatives, and conceptual frameworks that make it possible to define and reflect on politics in the first place, in the light of the changed social, technological and environmental conditions of the economic-political system. The aim of this book is, therefore, to explore the possibility of transforming political philosophy into an *environmental political philosophy* and to outline a framework within which the many ambivalent and, in many cases, contradictory processes of contemporary societies and their political systems can be consistently grasped.

Environmental political philosophy falls between political philosophy, political economy, political theory of the Anthropocene, and social, critical, theory of society as these fields of knowledge are taking shape in the first quarter of the 21st century. It follows the tradition of critical social theory but does not overlap with it in terms of content, conception of political theory, concept of (social) critique, and research method. It explores the place of politics and economics in a situation of environmental global crisis that has already seized all areas of social life and is penetrating ever deeper, even to the very foundations of mundane civilizational coexistence. *Environmental political philosophy* finds the common denominator of these problems, which are beginning to affect the survival of existing life forms on this planet, whether the biosphere, the hydrosphere, the ecosphere, or the very noosphere in which we humans live, in the (neo-) liberal economic-political order. Its permanent, unguided and uncorrected, intensification, initiated by free market capitalism and corporate monopoly imperialism, has today reached the stage of world-dominating *corporate capital*, which has become the real owner of the world and the world's wealth, regardless of any democratic principles. The result is not only the historical maximization of social and income inequality but also the indiscriminate exploitation of all-natural, non-renewable resources, completely subordinated to the profit motive.

The knowledge attained in environmental political philosophy is always non-substantial, i.e. it does not presuppose pre-empirical knowledge of the "world" on the basis of intuitions, uncorrected beliefs, and deductive conclusions. The central content of knowledge in environmental political

philosophy should consist of verified medium- and long-term tendencies of environmental, political, economic, and social development. The world, which is the subject of environmental political philosophy, is not final and cannot be treated as eternal. There stand statements about the world that alone can be inferred, which narrows the boundaries of epistemology within which we can conceive of certainty if we can think of such a thing. The overall epistemological situation leans more towards the fact that the knowable world (our lived world) is treated by environmental political philosophies as phenomenally derivative with the sense of its forms disclosed via the methods of the exact sciences. One of the central methods of environmental political philosophy is the method of political-economic utopianism, developed independently of the classical subject of economics and concentrated on the basic assumptions of the economic theory of politics. These include the initial ontological postulates (theorems about what “is” and “how it is”, for example, what constitutes a theory and how these schema constitute the sense of the realm they disclose), epistemological postulates (theorems about the general empirical accessibility of the domain of reality that is our concern, for example, what means and resources can be used in order to achieve political-economic goals, such as the appropriation of power), social scientific knowledge, particularly, political theory, and natural scientific knowledge relating to environmental issues (in the situation of the Anthropocene). It is utopian because it transcends the practice of critique (it does not abolish political economy as critique, but transcends mere critique to a selective, multi-paradigmatic, and uncontroversial theory of political-economic reality).

The method of political-economic utopianism on which *environmental political philosophy* is based can be developed in two main directions: as *a subversive anti-neoliberal critical method*, or as *a constructive post-neoliberal political-economic utopianism*. In both cases, the basic idea is the same: to achieve the dismantling of corporate political and economic globalization and to replace it with the strengthening of the political self-regulation of a complex environmentally dirigiste economic system.

The application of the method of political-economic utopianism concerns the core issues of democracy. As the power of corporate capitalism grows, overpowering the state, multinational, national, and regional

institutions, and ultimately the rights and freedoms of citizens, the incentives for loyalty to the state, to a national economy dissolved in the interests and needs of global corporations, and to the residual powers of the state are lost. Then, faced with escalating demands from the national public, governments are often left with political repression. Research into the actual effects of the democratic process of governance through the election of representatives of 'the people' reveals a paradox: at the height of globalization, a significant number of states are tending towards more authoritarian forms of governance. The crisis of democracy that has been evident over the last fifty years is bringing about a change in the concept of 'class' democracy of the last century. The inherent dysfunctions of the democratic state contribute significantly to the public reception of democracy as a social value. Political democracy is undergoing irreversible changes. It is a trend that will continue as environmental needs and demands penetrate more deeply into the sphere of political decision-making. Its study must start from a point that emerges as a unifying thread in the history of modernity and modern Europe: all talk of democracy in Western Europe and late modernity is talk of capitalist democracy. The political crisis of the present is a crisis of *capitalist* democracy.

It is questionable that democracy is collapsing because only one (capitalist) way of applying it is collapsing, which has an insoluble problem in its very embryo: capitalism is not a system of human equality, but rather grows out of inequality and deepens it. On the contrary, democracy does not create an active, informed, and politically engaged civil sphere because its main power is to breed fear, anxiety, coercion, and social insecurity. Although its roots may be irrational, it is self-defeating and prevents the emergence of a political and social order that would enable people to actively tackle the causes of paralyzing panic. Instead, the would-be creators of civil society retreat into the anonymity of mass individualism or join populist political groupings that offer them the pleasure of a leader, an intelligible nationalism (interconnectedness, gregariousness), and a compensatory hatred (of foreigners, Muslims, Roma, differently minded people). Populism is one of the children of political capitalist democracy. To talk about the crisis of democracy is to know what democracy is and how its state of crisis differs from the state of full prosperity. This is

not at all easy. The term 'democracy' is used as a cover term to describe a form of government that cannot be anything other than oligarchic, but for political-simulative reasons, it presents itself as democracy: the ideal of democracy is the garb of the political theatre used to legitimate inequalities. Its foremost problem is one of qualification: who is qualified to govern democratically? Corporate capitalism, typical of contemporary modern societies, treats democracy as an instrument of its power. Politics (governmental power) watches and facilitates this; democracy is used, spent, served, but not ruled. It is unnecessary for governance, which is why theoretical arguments about "true" democracy are pointless. As long as capital still needs institutional instruments of power other than direct power (above all economic), democracy will serve; stripped of value, any substance, and dignity. There is nothing to subscribe to if one wants to subscribe to democracy. This is not giving up democracy, we are merely stating that democracy administered by capital has given up on us. *Environmental political philosophy* does not exhaust itself in futile attempts to consolidate democracy, because only corporate capitalism, which has domesticated democracy, would gain by doing so. Rather, it must focus on the hitherto overlooked area of *environmental political democracy*, which hides the most serious problems.

All human activities have environmental preconditions and are limited by the finiteness of the planetary system. At the same time, all human activities, economic, technological, and leisure practices, have environmental consequences. The existence and form of any political system is therefore conditioned by environmental conditions. *Environmental political philosophy* argues that if the right to life is a fundamental human right, then the preconditions of life, both social and environmental, must also be the subject of political considerations. These include a stable climate, breathable air, fresh water, soil, and forests (biodiversity), but also the availability of food that is not harmful to health. They also include the availability of housing, or, at least, shelter that is sufficiently robust to provide protection against, increasingly frequent, extreme weather situations such as heat waves or storms with high wind speeds and rainfall. It appears that the current real democracies, determined by industrialization and the associated consumerist or imperialist mode of living, are

unable to provide these prerequisites for life. If democracy as a form of government of constitutional states is to be preserved in the climatic, demographic, and economic regime of the Anthropocene, it is essential, from the point of view of *environmental political philosophy*, that it be transformed into an *environmental democracy*.

Today's real constitutional democracies can be characterized as industrial democracies, primarily because the ideology of industrialism plays a significant role in the formulation of their imperatives, organizational principles, and forms of everyday life. Criticisms of industrial democracies point out, above all, that this form of organizing society and its relationship with the environment is incapable of effectively controlling, let alone limiting, economic and technological power and its impact on the state of all components of the environment. In many countries around the world, the constitution guarantees the *right to a favorable environment*, but this cannot be guaranteed within the confines of a single country. In the context of planetary climate change, pollution, or biodiversity loss, the Constitution promises something that today's states are unable to deliver. Ultimately, this disqualifies or discredits the whole concept of constitutionalism. Given the huge inequalities in the consumption of all kinds of resources and the same differences in the carbon footprint of individual states, the whole system of international political and trade relations is ultimately revealed to be inherently unfair and undemocratic.

At the same time, the countries that have contributed the most to building this system are those that describe themselves as democratic and developed meaning more industrialized. It is not surprising, therefore, that not only trade but also interstate relations are not governed by democratic principles; on the contrary, all too often even constitutionally democratic states are reluctant to act in relations with less developed states from a position of strength – if not directly military, then certainly economic. The availability of cheap goods but also of labor 'elsewhere' (i.e. abroad, mostly in former colonies but also in countries on the periphery) is organized through a world market, supported by military force or asymmetrical power relations formalized in international political, economic, and not least military institutions. It is becoming increasingly evident that without the overwhelming military domination of the colonial and

post-colonial powers of the global North, such a system of relations could not have emerged and could not have endured in the long term. Indeed, the resource and energy intensity of this way of life means that even the largest states with the most extensive mineral deposits and carbon energy carriers cannot do without imports. The imperial way of living therefore implies controlled access to cheap resources, mostly in the countries of the global South. This means that the carbon or ecological footprint of the imperial mode of living is many times higher than is common in the countries of the global South. In practice, this means that the countries of the global North place unlimited demands on global, and local, ecosystems, everywhere, and on their ability to absorb pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

The root cause of the mundane environmental, social, and political crisis is therefore the dominant modes of production, distribution, and consumption that are deeply embedded in the everyday routines of middle- and upper-class societies in the global North, i.e. not only in the norms of production but also in the norms of consumption. In other words, the causes of the current multiple crises are systemic. However, the underlying assumptions of this mode of living are undemocratic, not least, because they lack mechanisms to impose limits on resource consumption or pollution-production. Democracy is, among other things, a system of limits and constraints designed to prevent the concentration and subsequent abuse of power. However, in a closed system on a planet with limited resources, if limits are not set on consumption or profit, and thus on the accumulation of wealth and the individual ecological footprint, then global inequalities, not only social but also ecological, are exacerbated. The concept of *environmental democracy* presupposes the possibility of reversing the relationship between society and nature that is created by the institution of industrialization. It is based on the recognition of the limited resources available for the development of society and the vulnerability of the planetary system. Among its assumptions is the recognition of the existential dependence of any organized human society on the quality of the environment (not just the climate regime). It turns out that a planetary system marked by anthropogenic activity (the Anthropocene), not only, makes the availability and quality of the basic

preconditions of life (breathable air, water, food, shelter, a territory with an acceptable climate) a fundamental question of political thinking but also significantly changes the framework within which it is possible to think about society and its possible political and constitutional organization. In this context, the task of the *concept of environmental democracy* is to develop the principles of a democratically governed society, taking into account the limits and risks of the Anthropocene regime. Considering the current state of the planetary system and the economic-political system of global industrial civilization, the method suitable for the formulation of a theory of democracy for the regime of the Anthropocene, i.e. for the formulation of ways of governance in a society facing the risk of environmental collapse, is utopianism, or utopianism understood as a tool for overcoming the dystopia towards which the development trends set by the processes of industrialization and globalization are heading.

A fundamental principle of democratic constitutions is the equality of all citizens before the law and equal access to public office. However, this should be extended to equality of access to the basic resources of life, such as breathable air, water, food, shelter, and areas with a tolerable climate, which can be understood as part of *the common ownership of the Earth*, or *global commons*. Access to these can be described as the *environmental minimum of life*, without which the right to life cannot be meaningfully expressed. Only the fulfillment of this right defines the Anthropocene as *a new climatic, demographic, and economic regime* of the planetary system, emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of all territorially defined human communities. The socio-economic and environmental preconditions for a democratic form of government in one country or part of the world can no longer be secured by environmental devastation and social disruption in other countries or parts of the world. Democracy must continue to be conceived as a form of government that benefits all people in the long term while respecting and developing natural systems in a protective manner. The main premise of *environmental democracy* (i.e. a socially and environmentally sustainable constitutional form of government) is the *sustainability imperative*, or its implementation in all institutions and at least public policies. Environmental political philosophy defines the sustainability imperative as follows: *Act so that*

your overall ecological footprint becomes a universally applicable standard, i.e. so that your total material, water, and carbon footprint (consumption of all kinds of resources and production of all kinds of waste, not just personal waste), produced by each individual as part of territorially defined political units (states) and their administrative and power apparatuses (consumption and emissions of public administrations and armed forces), can become a standard that every person on the planet can follow – without compromising the stability of the planetary system.

The establishment of an enforceable environmental minimum is a prerequisite for the right to life. Requiring a reduction in consumption or even setting a maximum possible consumption or CO₂ emissions per person is in direct conflict with the implicit right to unlimited consumption or consumption limited only by the consumer's financial means. This attitude is part and parcel of the imperial mode of living that environmental political philosophy opposes. Human rights (to a favorable environment or environmental minimum, to adequate consumption, to basic food and water) and duties (to protect and improve the environment, not to pollute more than is strictly necessary) must be formulated based on an awareness of the finitude or limited availability of natural resources. The overall ecological footprint of each individual should thus be limited. This means that the *freedom of personal consumption must respect the reality of the finiteness of natural resources and the ability of the planetary system to absorb pollution*. For environmental political philosophy, this means that it understands fundamental human rights as the right to secure the basic conditions of life; in other words, *the right to a favorable environment is the basis of all other rights*.

The environmental crisis is *a crisis of well-being*. The vast amount of wealth in the Western world has been created over the last few centuries at the expense of others – nature, other cultures, and other generations of our own culture. The environmental and climate crisis is thus a crisis of privileging one over the other. The question for politics is, what political means can be used to achieve an uncorrupted state of voluntary disprivilege? The degree of well-being will be the proper object of environmental self-limitation, performing as 'loss'. It will be posed as a political problem in the context of the depoliticization of the subject and the inequality of

civilizations; perfectly in line with the posing of the political problem of democracy, which has already revealed the basic connection: liberalism will not make a poor country rich. Neither economic liberalism nor liberal democracy can withstand the environmental and climate crisis that the modernist ideology of the free market has created. We do not need to condemn or defend it. It is enough to ask ourselves, in the face of it, whether it is really self-evident that human beings can continue to exist?

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