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To cite this version:

Fabrice Flipo. Planet's right use through political philosophy. The Right Use of the Earth : Knowledge, Power and Duties in a Finite Planet, May 2018, Paris, France. hal-01822994

HAL Id: hal-01822994

https://hal.science/hal-01822994v1

Submitted on 25 Jun 2018

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Planet's right use through political philosophy

In this communication we wish to explore the question of the right use of the planet through the prism of major political ideas. According to Mannheim two major political ideas dominate modernity: liberalism and socialism. Each of them is subdivided into various subcurrents. Mannheim also adds conservatism, which seems to be less important, but we will examine these three political ideas. Mannheim's analysis of each of these political ideas is rather limited. For the sake of the discussion we will base our analysis of liberalism on the book of Catherine Audard ("Qu'est-ce que le libéralisme?", mainly based on a rawlsian framework), and socialism on Jacques Droz's "History of Socialism". Conservatism has been the subject of several recent books (Scruton, EHESS etc.) and does not give itself easily in the form of a single reference; we will therefore use several references including a relatively well-known author in conservative circles in France: Alain de Benoist, who wrote a famous book on ecology, with an apology of degrowth. We will also follow the method proposed by Mannheim, who suggests that political ideas can be studied only by the conflicts they generate, because they are performative concepts, aiming to reach a goal: to convince. "The planet" will be understood here as the space where life is constantly taking place.

In liberalism Locke and Kant are probably two cardinal references. The right use of Earth is given by what is usually called the "lockean proviso". Locke writes in the Treatise of the Government that no one can be wronged to see another person drink in a river if he leaves enough and as good water for everyone who wants to quench his thirst. He says also that what is true for water is the same for the earth, if there is enough of both (1690: chapter 5). Appropriation of land is also subject to some limitations. One of them is that ownership is given by work, which means that you cannot appropriate a surface that exceeds your work capacities. Locke says also: "The same law of nature that gives us ownership in this way [ie, by work] imposes limits on it. God has given all things in abundance. [...] All that a man can use in order to derive any benefit for his existence without wasting, is what his work can mark the seal of the property. All that goes beyond it belongs to others "(ibid.). Locke also recognizes a right to appropriate the property of others if one's vital needs are at stake. In general, it is clear to Locke that there are limits to human appropriation of the natural environment, and this for various criterias ; at the same time he sees no conflict, especially with established properties, and this mainly because one appropriates only a tiny portion of natural resources, which integrity is not threatened by human industry. On his side Kant makes a distinction between intelligible property and empirical property. Intelligible property derives from the fact that Earth is a finite sphere, and therefore every property is contiguous to another, which means that the extension of any property affects all the others. Thats' why property cannot only be "empirical", that means : legal. Rawls keeps this in mind when he says that natural talents or abilities are inappropriable and should benefit to everyone, especially the less gifted.
Nowadays the situation is different and there are various adaptations of the lockean provisio. For right wing libertarians such as Nozick human rights are linked to private property: our properties have same status as our body, nobody as the tiny right to challenge one's legal entitlements. Appropriation of natural resources is private and everyone must manage alone to find resources to use and to value, without using force or threatening private property, only at the will of the owner. That is true also for the State or any collective body, whose role is only to protect life, that is : private property. Another argument is money and wealth. Locke was limiting appropriation by forbidding any waste making, and this means that I cannot appropriate what I cannot use (for exemple, to much food, to much water etc.). As Pierre Manent says: "[...] suppose that I find a way to avoid this waste, by agreeing with my fellow creatures an incorruptible equivalent of corruptible natural goods, for example gold or silver, then the accumulation can be limitless since it will no longer involve waste. Therefore, by appropriating a piece of land by my work, far from removing

the common good of humanity, I add "(Manent, 1987: 98-99). For liberals, work can always add value, and therefore wealth, that's why there's no limits on appropriation. Everything relies on ingenuity and work. Paul Romer, an wel known economist, argued that there will be growth for 3 billions years, given that growth is mainly based on resources and ideas. Nuclear power is a frequent example for explaining that capital accumulation, which means also physical accumulation, is not a threat but a solution, given that without nuclear machinery uranium is useless. Capital accumulation creates wealth, litteraly, out of nothing. Every human being who owns his own work has a parcel of nature more than sufficient for his life, depending on what use he will make. Sharing is unnecessary. Scarcity is only relative. Depending on the degree of "social" in a given form of liberalism, this political idea will accept some distribution (Dworkin) or redistribution (Rawls), in order to grant some fair and equal opportunities to each member of society.

Socialism takes up most of the liberal argument, but criticizes distribution. Socialism argues that liberalism idealizes the situation, when considering that exchange is free and equal. Socialism shows that not everybody wins over free trade, which is not free. Some are exploited and others are exploiters: they are usually the owners of the means of production. The question of limits appears in three ways: as a temporary limit of the technological progress carried by capitalism, which digs its own grave, destroying the peasantry and creating an ever larger mass of workers; as ideological discourse on the part of capitalists who do not wish to share the production and thus make workers believe in the existence of limits where there is in fact only egoism; as the inability of workers to gain access to the products of their own labor, because of the propensity of capitalists to compress wages, in order to win the competition between themselves. The dominant idea of socialism, which is a modern idea, is that of a rich communism, where equality would be attained by the saturation of needs, and putting an end to scarcity; this breaks deeply with earlier communisms rather based on poverty. When socialism admits ecology, usually, it tends to lead to a Polanyian conception, pointing to the exploitation of the land and the worker; These general remarks, however, are not very clear about their consequences for political action. Polanyi himself was not criticizing the act of destruction of the commons, but only the manner it has been done; he believes it was necessary, for modernity to awake. Another difficulty is that socialism relies on workers movements, especially clasical socialism and classical marxism, as defined in the Communist Party Manifesto. It's not true for "utopian socialism", as Marx call them, which are criticized because not being based on a social movement. Even today unions and workers' movements are usually asking for more growth, as we can see in the current crisis of university. This explains that ecologism rises as a distinct political idea, and that it is still difficult to see a massive support in favor of what could be called an "ecosocialism". One source of the difficulty is alienation from capitalist or productivist system, which is dividing issues. One finds difficult to fight for another content of production when his salary depends on that production and at the same time unemployment is high. Unions now use the concept of "just transition" to underline the necessity of taking care of workers, when restructuring production. But sociologically speaking workers in developed countries rely deeply on products with high content of natural resources. They are all the time intoxicated by the system's ability to hide ecological information, which can discourage sales. Who wants to buy products that destroys Earth? Almost nobody. Therefore ecological implications of production should be hided behind a massive effort for "lift the bottlenecks that constrain the expansion of consumption". Ecologists are therefore mostly coming from the "petty bourgeoisie", with low economic capital and high cultural capital. They rely often on liberal types of working, such as entrepreneurship. Only a minority is employee or worker in big industry. Unions are often suspicious against them. Ecologists are not necessary very prone to support workers fights, given that they are not very often in line with ecologists fights. There are convergence cases such as the defence of railways. But many divergences. The idea of respect for nature is present in socialism and especially in Marx

but in vague terms that do not go as far as the idea of a nature subject of right, endowed with rights. The content of this idea partly covers the idea of a harmonious society carried by socialism; but the expected or expected cosmology is often different: while ecologism is often opposed to mega-tools, socialism has often made it a condition of emancipation. Any limit in this domain is lived as a renunciation, a privation and almost a sacrilege; since the Marxian condemnation of Luddites the problem is deemed to reside first in the use of tools, not in the tools themselves.

Conservatism is more difficult to identify, as we pointed out in introduction. Either it is confused with a liberalism emphasizing national power and a traditionalism of manners (the respect of the "natural" family for example), and we thus return to a current already examined, either it covers currents of very small magnitude, thus the illiberal and anti-capitalist right of Alain de Benoist or Alain Soral. What is confusing or surprising at first glance is that the arguments are partly similar to socialism and communism, with a clear condemnation of capitalist egoism, exploitation, destruction of nature, which is why this trend feeds on writers such as Polanyi, again; but the solutions are different, based on corporatism of Vichy or Maurassian inspiration and the critique of democracy. Conservatism tends to externalise the social order, to make it inappropriate by individuals, contrary to the liberal and socialist claim of autonomy. The support of this externalisation can take all appearances, not just religion as one might think. Nature is a good candidate, if it is understood as a set of intangible laws, as an eternal essence, which does not necessarily have much to do with the empirical nature understood as a planet or biosphere. Thus the example of the “Manif pour Tous”, a french movement fighting against homosexual unions, and naturalises a specific, catholic family arrangement. Culture is also a good candidate: custom also externalizes the social order. But reason can also be elevated to the rank of sacred intangible and indisputable. This is what Jacques Ellul criticized in the technology, the fact that it is depository of the sacred: so we must believe in technology (in the sense of capitalistic growth of tools) and not question it. The "ecological conservatism" embodied by Alain de Benoist however seems to us contradictory insofar as his obsession with the enemy, inside or outside, does not seem to lead him to give up the means of power, which are destructive of nature.

This short discussion shows that the notion of “limit” is not intrinsically conservative, contrary to what conservatives or progressives often believe, the first to recall the limits and the second to reject them. The concept of limit derives also from the concept of justice, which can put the established order into question rather than strengthen it. This is the case of the rights of nature. The Lockean or Kantian or Rawlsian clause of the inappropriability of nature, understood in a strong way, has clearly communist implications. As everything comes from nature, no one should have more than others. This could be true for living bodies, humans or not; for past bodies, already dead ; and for bodies to come to life, in the future. An example is the discussion on climate justice; the congestion generated in the atmosphere by GHG emissions raises the question of the sharing of atmospheric space and it is no coincidence that conservative positions such as the one recently supported by Olivier Godard (2017) emphasize grandfathering as the best principle, to the extent that it comes as a long time and "consented" appropriation of the atmosphere – a custom. According to this position Godard argues that the sharing issue arose after 1990, not before, because before that date the problem was unknown. For him responsibility before 1990 does not make any sense. We can argue alternatively that emissions increase since 1900, indicating an excess compared to the carrying capacity of the biosphere, of which Arrhenius (1896) was aware. According to the cosmopolitan perspective, limits should have been imposed on polluting countries. Denying the existence of limits was deeply conservative, in this example. This can of deny can therefore be emancipatory or conservative, depending on the case.

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