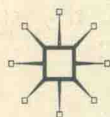# GREENING CITIZENSHIP

Sustainable Development, the State and Ideology

ANDY SCERRI

Greening Citizenship

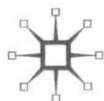## Sustainable Development, the State and Ideology

Andy Scerri

Preface: From Dualist Subjection of Nature to Holistic Participation in Nature

In recent decades, observers of Western society have sought to understand a significant transformation of citizenship as both a status and a practice. Prior to the 1950s, 'citizenship' had been conceptualized as the social institution that defines the status of individuals in relation to the state and other social institutions, especially markets. Interest in the concept had largely waned since then, when T.H. Marshall extended this basic definition to describe citizenship as not merely an 'official' category defined by the state but also as the practical, historical product of social conditions.[1] The more recent research builds upon and extends Marshall's work, yet draws attention to the emergence in the 1980s and 1990s of a 'green' transformation of citizenship that was also affecting its relationship to the state. For Bart van Steenbergen, Bryan S. Turner and others writing in these decades, a key impetus for this new 'greening' of citizenship was increased public awareness of what Ulrich Beck described as proliferating 'risks'.[2] In particular, what van Steenbergen and Turner note is that public antipathy towards the unquantifiable 'risky' consequences of techno-scientific decisions, such as on nuclear power or genetic technology, were coinciding with a significant decline in support for mass-political forms of organization and increased valuation of local community life, as well as a deepening of desires for individual autonomy. For van Steenbergen in particular, this shift had brought into contention, while also fundamentally altering, the status of citizenship in relation to the state. Meanwhile, for Turner, the new citizenship was altering how discourses of justice and injustice were being enunciated, bringing into contention what Marshall had described as the 'social' form of citizenship that had been established through the institutional arrangements of the welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s. Amidst the relatively cosmopolitan and articulate culture of the postindustrial Western states, Turner saw citizens' lack of confidence in expert opinion and lack of confidence in government policy for dealing with risk as affecting the embeddedness of citizenship within the state itself and, in turn, 'eroding' state capacities to administer the

rights and duties of social citizenship. This is because the civil, political and social rights and duties that had once been largely satisfied by state-based institutions – representative government, courts of law and the social welfare apparatus – were by the 1990s being overburdened by new demands for global human and in some cases non-human rights for both present and future generations.[3]

What is noticeable in van Steenbergen's and Turner's analyses is that this political erosion of support for social citizenship and the welfare state also has a cultural dimension. That is, concerns with the unintended 'environmental' consequences of social activities, relative lack of interest in mass-political organizations, such as parties and trades' unions, and the embrace of relatively individualistic, 'life-enhancing' inter-relations at the human scale of local communities can be understood in cultural terms as a partial consequence of the normalizing of new social and countercultural movement values, which had spread across the postindustrial West since the 1960s and 1970s. Whereas in the early 1970s Charles Reich had argued that a counterculture-led *Greening of America* was imminent, by the 1980s and 1990s it had become clear that these once marginal cultural values had been integrated into both progressive and reactionary political positions. Seen as a transformation akin to what some postmodern theorists argued at the time was a generalized cultural incredulity towards grand historical narratives – of progress, of scientific fact or of subjugating nature and controlling wayward individuals and populations – the new social and countercultural movements challenged both 'the Establishment' and progressive social movements, such as social democratic parties and trades' unions. From the 1980s onwards, the greening of citizenship that van Steenbergen and others describe called into question the prevailing cultural grammar that had hitherto enframed political concerns with justice. Whether defined in reactionary terms as a problem of distributing wealth to those deserving it or in progressive terms as a problem of distributing wealth to all equally, the new citizenship challenged the focal point for debates over justice, extending it beyond the issue of distributing wealth within the state. Born of wider cultural and political change, this 'greening' or 'erosion' of traditional social citizenship confronted the welfare state compromise between the state, organized labour and industrial capitalism as a barrier to universalizing human equality, freedom and solidarity and, especially, opportunities for self-realization, authenticity, peaceable relations with others and harmony within nature.

Adopting an 'ideological' perspective, van Steenbergen regards the political and cultural greening of citizenship as a symptom of declining

support for what had long been the prevalent *dualistic* cultural ideological view of society as rightfully engaged in a collective effort to completely dominate or subdue nature. In place of such ideological dualism, the greening of citizenship serves to highlight what he defines as growing support for a *holistic* cultural ideological view of society as an active participant in nature.[4] Whereas the cultural ideological dualism that was long associated with modernization had represented the social whole in terms of the sum of its fundamental parts, the introduction of holism through the greening of citizenship meant that social relations were increasingly being framed within a grammar that defined the social whole as a complex system, the functioning of which could not acceptably be understood in terms of its component parts only. That is, the greening of citizenship seems to represent a social shift and an ideological transformation, away from the dualism that had enframed debates over justice in terms of a grammar that represented the main social problem as one of dividing the economic spoils created by society, rightfully organized around the collective task of subduing nature. With the greening of citizenship, such debates were being reframed in terms of a shared view of the main social problem as one of how society should interact within the ecosphere.

Extending this research, in the 1990s there arose a series of normative theoretical interventions that, building upon the observations of van Steenbergen, Turner, Beck and others, seek to describe what a 'holistic' society of green citizens should look like. These theories provide normative arguments for what should be the types of social and political participation, and the rights and duties and the institutional arrangements of green citizens *qua* the state or, more ambitiously, some form of post-state polity. The normative theories respond to what the early observers identify as the erosion of social citizenship by linking green citizenship with broader and more abstract normative ideals describing rights and duties, the basis for social relations, notions of political space and, importantly, justice. For the normative theorists, the greening of citizenship has meant that justice becomes a problem of defining the terms for 'sustainable development'. Regardless of whether the greening of citizenship refers to the emergence of gradualist market-driven eco-modernization or deep-green wholesale change in social life, both have the objective of re-defining the good society as the sustainable society. From within the perspective of green citizenship, justice becomes not merely a matter of redistributing wealth amongst citizens within a political community but of how society's participation in nature is to be organized globally to address relations between humans of present

and future generations, that is, over the inherently uncertain short, medium and long terms.

In this sense, questions once couched solely in economic-redistributive terms become matters of what Tim Hayward regards as 'the fundamental human right to an environment adequate for [individuals'] health and wellbeing'.[5] This succinct statement defines a 'green' ideal of justice by evoking a holistic narrative of human belonging within the ecosphere, rather than a dualistic narrative that regards justice as the product of equitably distributing the 'spoils' derived from society's unquestioned effort to dominate and subdue nature. However, it also offers a means for moving beyond extensive and abstract normative debate about the coherence of different subcategories of holism or dualism, which would emphasise one or the other as the more rational basis for debating justice in the context of unsustainable development. The most widely debated form of holism – ecocentrism – defends the view that nature itself has intrinsic value, while dualism – most often defined as anthropocentrism – defends the view that human society is the source of all value. The interesting thing about Hayward's assertion in this respect is that although it begins from a 'weak' anthropocentric premise – that respect for Nature can and should be grounded in respect for the Self and Others[6] – his point seems to be holistic, insofar as justice and sustainable development are together and necessarily regarded as the by-products of collective efforts to live fairly within the capacity of the ecosphere, rather than of collective efforts to 'master' nature as an unlimited cornucopia.

A central contention developed in Part I of this book is that the greening of citizenship – when regarded as a consequence of a cultural ideological shift from dualism to holism that has significant political ramifications, rather than as a normative project concerned to elaborate what the ideological and practical dimensions of green citizenship should be – does not of itself imply that holism entails a progressive form of justice. Taking it that ecocentrism is but one expression of ideological holism, I find that counteracting nature/culture dualism has not directly fostered justice. This is because holism may not be a political but rather a cultural ideological issue, in that it provides the shared representational grammar or encompassing context within which citizens evaluate and deploy different political discourses as contributions to social life. I argue that the normalizing of holism has created new opportunities for progressive movements oriented to achieving justice, just as it has fostered opportunities to define justice in reactionary terms of preserving existing structures of privilege. Hence, I do

not discuss differences between anthropocentric 'environmental' and ecocentric 'ecological' green citizens; rather, I draw attention to how changing social conditions have over time shaped the greening of citizenship, and then examine these as the setting for an ideological frame for action within which progressive, or reactionary, ideas of justice may be elaborated in the context of unsustainable development.

As an admittedly somewhat provocative alternative to the normative theoretical approaches, which regard green citizenship as defining the ethical parameters of what the green good life should be and the moral parameters of how green citizens should treat each other, I find that the greening of citizenship has not been an entirely good thing. I develop an approach that allows it to be understood as the source of both bottlenecks and opportunities for progressive social movements acting to achieve justice. Throughout the book, I develop the idea that since the publication of van Steenbergen's 1994 essay, the political impacts of the greening of citizenship have been somewhat underestimated. In particular, I find that what van Steenbergen, Turner and others observed as widespread recognition that society participates in nature, rather than acts upon it, needs in the early 21st century to be taken as a definitive ideological transformation. I find that the normalizing of cultural ideological holism has impacted how progressive political movements must work to realize justice. In short, I argue that with the greening of citizenship, progressive assertions that injustice is present have become more complex, while reactionary ideas about justice have narrowed. In a holistic frame, reactionary claims that justice is served through the pursuit of narrow self-interest no longer need to appeal to secondary concerns with upholding tradition, particularism over universalism and essentialism over contingency. These merely refer to ever-greater negative freedoms that will further unburden 'deserving' individuals and communities in their narrow pursuit of security from risk through untrammelled consumerism. Meanwhile, I find that the progressive political position is bound to support institutions that, as David Schlosberg argues, redistribute rights fairly, recognize as equal all social participants and provide transparent representation or effective participation while delineating the territorial reach of the political community of citizens against global aspirations to remain within the capacity of the ecosphere to provide for present and future generations.[7] And, following Nancy Fraser, I find that in this sense 'it is not only the substance of justice, but also the frame, that is in dispute',[8] such that progressive assertions that injustice is present require domestic and international support for policy that enables capabilities for

human flourishing at the subjective level and equality of capacities to contribute, at the societal level, to global efforts to remain within the constraints set by the ecosphere.[9]

In Part II of the book, chapters develop the argument that achieving progressive forms of justice and, so, sustainable development implies competing normative premises and evaluative standards, and various formulations, identifying different human causes of social and environmental problems and prescribing different remedies for those problems,[10] remedies that need to be accepted by citizens as actors within a political community that is more than likely defined by, if not commensurate with, the state. That is, sustainable development cannot just be about technical decisions or, indeed, upholding nature's inherent value, but must be the product of political and cultural decisions to support certain rights and responsibilities, and the practical and institutional arrangements that come with them. 'Remedies' to the problem may extend from relatively 'weak' options, supported by the administratively led adjustment of policy tools that might uncritically accommodate deep contradictions, to the 'strong' transformation of political and economic institutions, which is necessarily the product of citizenly critique of social conditions and relations.[11] That is, change tends to be forced upon the state by citizens, while also being enacted by the state on behalf of citizens. This is because states remain the key sources of legitimate political authority to organize the rules for life held in common amongst citizens who, as well as being political actors, share a cultural narrative that describes their belonging within the ecosphere and amongst each other. For these reasons, I regard securing a progressive form of justice as a problem that is inexorably linked with cultural ideas about what counts as a meaningful narrative of social belonging within the ecosphere *and* with political challenges to the *status quo* that seek to effect how the rules for life held in common are organized and, by extension, how these impact others. By recognizing the greening of citizenship as a partially successful rather than a yet-to-be implemented project, I conclude by examining how some contemporary progressive social movements are responding to the continuing reproduction and 'export' of injustice by postindustrial ecomodernizing Western states.

A key impetus in developing this argument is recent work by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, Fraser and Axel Honneth. In Boltanski and Chiapello's argument, a novel form of exploitation has been fashioned from the new social and countercultural movement critique of bureaucratic welfare statism, such that much of what was once emancipatory in relation to industrial society now motivates and supports

socially and environmentally destructive postindustrial processes of accumulation.[12] Moreover, these theorists all notice what Fraser concedes is the recent 'disturbing convergence' of the new movement ideals 'with the demands of an emerging new form of capitalism – post-Fordist, "disorganized", transnational ... neoliberal'.[13] Fraser deals specifically with feminism, but argues that the utopian desires of the New Left currents that supported it in the 1970s and 1980s have, more recently, found a second life as feeling currents that unwittingly help to legitimate postindustrial injustices. Meanwhile, for Honneth, the individualization of demands for self-realization once tabled by critical new social movements have morphed, and currently support the displacement of social infrastructure by neoliberal markets that demand ever greater self-responsibility in relation to matters hitherto dealt with collectively.[14]

Throughout the book, I argue for a similar view of the greening of citizenship by regarding it as having coalesced around five central normative claims: the need to challenge nature/culture dualism; to dissolve the divide between the public and private spheres; to eschew social contractualism; to undermine territorialism; and to ground justice in awareness of finite and maldistributed ecological footprint or 'ecospace'. The problem that I address is that, from within the postindustrial ecomodernizing 'global competition state',[15] the injustices associated with unsustainable development appear to be framed by holism, the lack of a clear distinction between ethico-moral and political obligations, the dissolution of the social contract, globalized deterritorialization and widespread awareness of finite ecospace. That is, the central claims of the normative theories of green citizenship might just be *for another time*. The central critiques seem to challenge a dualistic, Fordist, industrial, state-centric and conformist society that no longer exists.

As a Westerner born in the final year of the 1960s, and so old enough to have experienced the decline of the industrial solidarity that sustained welfare statism and the metamorphosis of counter- into consumer culture, and to have witnessed the battle to save the Tasmanian Franklin River and unfolding media reports of the disaster at Chernobyl, all in the context of rising social inequality and deepening ecological crisis, I find the line of questioning that Boltanski and Chiapello, Honneth and Fraser open up to be deeply interesting. To paraphrase Fraser, the book asks on what terms certain aspirations that had a clearly emancipatory thrust in the context of industrial society have come to assume a far more ambiguous meaning in 21st-century postindustrial conditions. I trace a heuristic narrative that links the political and cultural

developments that Boltanski and Chiapello, Fraser and Honneth observe with the greening of citizenship, the state and ideology. Through it, I try and understand how many of the political hopes held by greens have, in recent decades, been enlisted in the service of achievements that run contrary to a larger vision for strong sustainable development.

Acknowledgements

Writing this book has been an adventure. And, like any adventure, it has had its lows and highs. I am deeply thankful to those who offered help, support and encouragement as I worked through the research and writing process. I thank Paul James and Manfred Steger of the Global Cities Research Institute and Martin Mulligan and Damian Grenfell of the Globalism Research Centre, as well as Tom Nairn, Kim Humphery and Heikki Patomäki, all currently or formerly at RMIT University. I also thank my colleagues Anne McNevin, Erin Wilson, Liam Magee, Rob Cameron, Selver Sahin, Tommaso Durante and Victoria Stead, as well as Alan Roberts, Arran Gare, Bobby Roberts, James Oliver, Sophie Bibrowska and Vivienne Waller for their support and advice. I also thank John Barry, Andrew Biro, Anthony Elliott and Bryan S. Turner, as well as the publisher's anonymous reviewers, for their helpful comments on my work. I am grateful to Andrew Gorman-Murray and Ruth Lane for introducing me to the literature on social practice and consumption, and to Caroline Norma for helping me to think more clearly about the division between public and private spheres. I am especially indebted to Meg Holden for constantly raising the bar in relation to my interpretation of the French critical pragmatists and for introducing me to the literature on 'the world's most liveable cities', as well as for what became highly enjoyable annual visiting scholar placements in the Urban Studies Programme at Simon Fraser University. I thank Hayley Stevenson and the other members of the Environmental Politics and Policy Standing Group of the Australian Political Science Association. And, Peter Christoff, Robyn Eckersley, David Schlosberg and Simon Tormey, who provided opportunities to develop seminar papers, and whose comments helped to clarify my thinking on questions of citizenship and justice towards the end of my work on the final chapters. I am thankful to James Goodman, who has long influenced my thinking on critical social movement theory, and to Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, Kate Auty for challenging me to think more critically about public participation. I am deeply grateful for the support of Christina Brian, Senior Commissioning Editor, and Amanda McGrath, Editorial Assistant, at Palgrave Macmillan. Finally, I thank my dear friend Antonia Settle for her endless patience and uncommon sense in relation to both the academic and personal matters that

completing this project raised. Of course, I stand responsible for all of the shortcomings of the book and its argument.

The work for the book was carried out in large part thanks to the atmosphere of intellectual inquiry and professional freedom that has been fostered over several years by Paul James, Manfred Steger and others at RMIT's Global Cities Research Institute. It would also not have been possible without the support of Martin Mulligan and Damian Grenfell, successive directors of the Globalism Research Centre, and David Hayward, Dean of the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT. Elements of the work were funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant DP077030, led by Tom Nairn, and Linkage Grant LP0990509, as well as by small grants made available by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia/Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research International Science Linkage Programme, the International Council for Canadian Studies Faculty Research Programme and the Canadian Government Social Science and Humanities Research Council Research Development Initiative. Elements of the argument presented in Chapters 5 and 6 have been substantially modified on the basis of research published in *Environmental Politics* 18(4), 2009: 467–85, *Management of Environment Quality* 21(10), 2010: 122–35 and the Springer Verlag *Encyclopaedia of Quality of Life* (2013).

<div style="text-align: right;">

Andy Scerri
Melbourne, June 2012

</div>

Contents

Tables

Part I