Inclusionality–Exclusionality: Environmental Philosophy and Simulative Politics

Ingolfur Blühdorn

Summary

In direct response to Alan Rayner’s *Inclusionality – An Immersive Philosophy of Environmental Relationships* in this volume, this chapter critically reviews the validity of some stereotypically reproduced arguments within the environmental debate. It aims to demonstrate how late modern societies have moved beyond the philosophy of inclusionality that provided the foundation for ecologist thinking and politics. The *post-ecologist* realities of contemporary society however, are, arguably, obscured by a societal practice that is described as *simulative politics*: whilst there is no serious confidence – nor actually ambition – that the modernist project and promise of ecological thought will ever be completed, late modern society keeps reproducing the illusion that the ecologist ideals are still valid and on the agenda. Academics and intellectuals can hardly avoid contributing to this collective strategy of simulation, or they expose themselves to charges of having abandoned humanist values, and fatalistically taking refuge in apologias of an unacceptable status quo. Trying to pierce this protective screen surrounding late modern consciousness, this chapter aims to expose how the well-intended appeal for an *immersive philosophy of inclusionality* has become a function of an individualized reality of exclusionality.

Introduction

Having to abandon long established and cherished beliefs tends to be painful, and there is risk and uncertainty in every such departure.
Nevertheless, if we allow ourselves to get unduly attached to established perspectives, our perceptions of contemporary society and our recommendations for its further development can easily turn stale and rather unbearable. This is the case for certain currents within the ecological debate. Whilst economic development and growth have once again clearly taken priority over any concerns about climate, resources or biodiversity; whilst eco-political negotiations and agreements proceed at the pace and to the conditions of the slowest and most refractory countries (which are often at the same time the most affluent and ecologically unsustainable ones); whilst the idea that an ecological rationality genuinely differs from economic thinking has been abandoned and ecological issues are being rephrased as managerial issues and issues of resource efficiency; whilst Green Parties are trying to secure their survival by redefining themselves as agents of civil society and consumer safety; whilst eco-movements are fragmenting into short term, often radical and violent, single issue campaigns lacking any positive vision, continuity and mass support; whilst environmental NGOs are mutating into global businesses and eco-service providers; in other words, while we are confronted with huge transformations in the way ecological issues are being formulated and dealt with, significant parts of the ecologically committed literature – Alan Rayner’s chapter in this volume being a good case in point – keep reproducing categories and appeals which have long since lost any analytical validity and political potential.

Environmental philosophers and ecological idealists are still talking of our *attitude problem*, of the urgent need for a *radical reorientation* in the way we think. We are urged to appreciate the implications of our exclusive, exploitative and domination-orientated scientific rationality. We are told about the *real happiness and fulfilment* that we forsake and the cumulative damage to our living space that may become irrevocable if we do not manage to reorganize our lives and societies on the basis of a new *immersive philosophy of inclusionality*. This lamentation, these promises, these appeals have been regurgitated ever since the very beginnings of ecological concern. They echo concepts, categories and ideas which have their origins in the European movement of the Enlightenment and have been shaped and reshaped by thinkers like Rousseau, Kant, Marx, Weber and a plethora of twentieth-century proponents of critical socio-political theory. However, in *late* modern or even *post*-modern affluent societies, neither these appeals nor the underlying concepts and analyses have ever been convincing. Unsurprisingly, their effect has always remained rather limited. After more than a century of eco-political analysis and campaigning – and in particular against the background of the radical transformation which late modern societies have experienced since the end