

The evolution of the concept of environmental discourses: is environmental ideologies a useful concept?

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Abstract

The concept of environmental discourses currently has two distinct meanings in environmental politics. The first approach emphasizes its traditional meaning, as textual and spoken interactions about the environment. The second, more recent approach utilizes the notion of environmental discourses as group worldviews towards the environment. This paper discusses the evolution of the term environmental discourses and the appropriateness of each approach for environmental politics scholarship. This study develops the concept of environmental ideologies as a belief system towards the environment, using the analogy of political ideologies that describes systems of beliefs towards political, social, and economic structures of a society. A formula: $\text{environmental discourse} = \text{environmental issue} + \text{environmental ideology}$ allows combining three core concepts of environmental politics: environmental issues come into environmental discourse, and, therefore, into existence as environmental policy problems, through the lens of environmental ideologies.

Introduction

The coherent systems of beliefs about the political, social, and economic structures of a society are usually known as political ideologies (Gross 1985; Næss 1980; Sargent 1990; Vincent 1995).

Although there is, of course, a wide spectrum of opinions about what constitutes political

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ideologies and their typology, there are also some well-established and widely used concepts that can be used as a common ground for discussion. In addition to the clear concept itself, there are well-developed typologies of political ideologies. Many authors identify such political ideologies as Liberalism, Conservatism, Communism, Nationalism, Socialism, Fascism, Nazism, Anarchism, etc. Political Ideologies has become a legitimate academic discipline that is studied in many universities around the world. Although any typology of political ideologies provides a grossly simplified version of political worldviews, this concept contributes a lot to the understanding of major belief systems about human nature and human interactions, about the role of the government and civil society, and how political power and wealth is distributed (and should be distributed) and why. On the contrary, we rarely find the concept of ideologies in the study of environmental policy and politics. Most often, this term is used to describe an ‘environmentalism’ (Paehlke 1989), ‘ecologism’ or ‘green thought’ (Dobson 2000; Vincent 1995), ‘green ideology’ (Doherty 2002) as a type of political ideology that belongs to the same list as the other, more traditional ideologies mentioned above.

In this paper, I develop a quite different notion of environmental ideologies using the ‘neutral’ or ‘inclusive’ concept of ideology (van Dijk 1998; Næss 1980; Næss, Christophersen, and Kvalø 1956; Seliger 1976). In many respects, the concept of ‘environmental ideologies’ is similar to the notion of ‘environmental discourses’ developed by Litfin (1994), Hajer (1995), and Dryzek (1997). However, all these authors use the term ‘discourse’ in a broader sense, as ‘an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations’ (Hajer 1995, 44) rather than in the traditional understanding of discourse as simply being forms of textual and spoken interactions (Potter and Wetherell 1987). In this study, I utilize the van Dijk’s (1998) multidisciplinary approach to ideologies and thus make a conceptual difference between the terms ‘environmental discourses’

and ‘environmental ideologies.’ I do not exclude the notion of environmental discourses from the use. However, similar to van Dijk’s (1998) I use it only in its traditional meaning, as texts and speeches—in this case, as texts and speeches towards the environment. Thus, environmental discourses are these textual and spoken interactions about the environment. What stands behind these acts—‘assumptions, judgments, and contentions’ in Dryzek’s (1997) words, or discursive formations, are environmental ideologies. Essentially, environmental ideologies are group belief systems about relationships between humans and the environment. Similar to political ideologies, which are the belief systems towards politics and social conditions, environmental ideologies regulate our attitude and behavior—in this particular case, our rights and wrongs about human relationships with nature. Julia Corbett in *Communicating Nature* (2006) uses this term in a similar sense, using a definition from the *Oxford Dictionary*. However, the use of the concept has not been justified.

The concept of environmental ideologies allows the combining of the three core concepts of environmental politics—environmental issues, environmental ideologies and environmental discourses. Rephrasing Edelman (1988), I argue that environmental issues come into environmental discourse and therefore, into existence as environmental problems, through the lens of environmental ideologies. I summarize this assumption with the following formula:

Environmental discourse = environmental issue + environmental ideology

Finally, I conclude that a concept of environmental ideologies is often more appropriate to describe the variety of belief systems towards the environment than environmental discourses.

From Issues to Problems

The past decades have witnessed an increased awareness of pollution, environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and overexploitation of natural resources in all countries

around the world. These devastating effects of human activity have started to occupy the attention of national governments and the international community. This has resulted in certain public policies intended to mitigate and prevent environmental problems and to regulate the use of natural resources. Although all governments in the world face a great number of social issues, there is no government that pays an equal amount of attention to every existing issue. As Baumgartner and Jones put it: ‘Political science is the study of how political preferences are formed and aggregated into policy outputs by governments’ (1993, 12).

Environmental issues, as well as many other social problems, usually do not represent themselves as distinct, well-defined issues. For instance, even though air pollution, global climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss can be discussed as separate issues, in their ecological consequences, they are extremely interconnected. This makes their analysis very complicated. Consequently, in a political discussion, these problems are usually simplified in order to make it possible to develop a certain public policy. This simplification leads to sometimes ineffective public policies that target only certain symptoms, not the problem as a whole. An additional challenge exists if several environmental issues express themselves simultaneously, and, therefore, the policy-maker should decide which one is more urgent (H. A. Simon 1997).

Many issues are viewed as not appropriate for a government to step in (Anderson 2006). For instance, although water vapor is the most abundant greenhouse gas and the major player in global climate change, it is hard to imagine a public policy that would aim at decreasing its level. On the contrary, an atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide and other anthropogenic greenhouses gasses is manageable, and, therefore, a subject of public policies. Additionally, the

consequences of global climate change are obviously a subject of public policy because the government can definitely do something to mitigate them.

A focus of public attention and governmental policy regarding the environment is also constantly shifting from some certain issues to others. The history of environmental protection is characterized by periods of increasing interest in environmental issues and, as a consequence, an increasing number of environmental legal acts and regulations, and by periods of relative low public interest and, similarly, low activity of the legislative and executive branches of government (Downs 1972; Klyza and Sousa 2008). At different periods in the United States, the focus of environmental protection has shifted between wilderness, forests, natural resources, water and air pollution, energy use, and global climate change (Kraft 2001). Similarly, the approaches to solving environmental problems have also been a subject of change. Administrative mechanisms, such as bans and fines, are more often replaced by market-based solutions, such as emission trading.

The major question is how certain issues, which always exist in society, turn into policy problems that require governmental redress or relief. Before the government steps in, issues need to be officially defined as policy problems (Anderson 2006). Environmental issues such as air pollution, global climate change, and biodiversity loss can only become public environmental problems when they are recognized as unacceptable and, therefore, needing to be addressed. In other words, environmental issues are only acknowledged when they are defined, articulated and brought to the public attention as such. Thus, environmental issues that hurt people do not necessarily become public environmental problems (Evernden 1992). If nobody persuades the public that a certain environmental issue is harmful, then the government will not seek to act because the problem is not perceived as such (Anderson 2006).

An additional difficulty is that different people disagree over whether or not certain environmental issues should be viewed as policy problems. This question is crucial because the way in which people interpret environmental issues finally determines governmental environmental policies. In contrast to the actual existence of issues (or, at least, of most of them), policy problems are almost never objective but are socially constructed and so can vary in different times and places, and in different social groups. This subjectivity is due to the fact that any debate about environmental issues involves a debate not only on 'hard' evidence such as physical concentration or temperature, but also on its consequences, especially social, political, and economic. Therefore, environmental debates are not usually the conflicts over the content of environmental issues but struggles over the definition of these issues as environmental problems (or otherwise). The interpretation of an environmental issue is always just that of a certain group in a given time and place (Evernden 1992; Hajer 1995). Thus, the perception of an environmental issue, that is, the way in which actors define it, depends on the actors' subjective belief systems towards the environment (Anderson 2006).

This subjectivity of belief systems does not contradict the rational choice model that Lasswell (1951) identified as being central to the study of the decision-making process, however. This model is based on the neoclassical economics assumption that decision-makers arrive at their decisions by following a specific set of rules: by noting the pros and cons of any decision; assigning weights to the pros and cons; striking out equalities, and then using the information to make the decision. According to the rational choice theory, people respond to a certain event using a means-ends calculation to identify the most efficient solution to a specific problem. In this process, a policy-maker identifies the ends and then looks for the means to achieve them. It is important to note that the word *rational* is applied to the means, but not to the ends. That is,

the intended goal is never judged and, therefore, rationality makes sense only within a consistent system of beliefs (H. A. Simon 1997).

Beliefs are, in van Dijk's definition is 'anything than can be thought' (1998, 18). Following van Dijk's (1998) ideas, I prefer to use the term *environmental beliefs* over *environmental ideas* or *worldviews* which have a similar meaning. The terms *ideas* and *worldviews* are more general than *beliefs*. The term *ideas* is often has a meaning of a 'new thought.' Most importantly, the word *belief* explicitly emphasizes the imaginary component, as opposed to *knowledge*. Thus, beliefs are usually imaginary and represent an interpretation of reality, an ideal view, express a will (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or nostalgia, rather than a precise description of a reality (Ricoeur 1981). Since a traditional epistemological definition of knowledge is justified belief (Steup 2014), the relationships between knowledge and beliefs depend on the method of justification (Vincent 1995; van Dijk 1998).

From Beliefs to Ideologies

Socially shared beliefs have been always associated with the term *ideology* (van Dijk 1998). However, historically, beginning from the *ideologues* in post-revolutionary France, the concept of ideology often has negative connotations, meaning systems of ideas of the ruling class and, correspondingly, a distorted or even inverted image of their social existence for the working class (Thompson 1984; Vincent 1995; van Dijk 1998). This view has been preserved and then extremely popularized by Marxism:

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their

historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process. (Marx 1972, 118)

Engels defines ideology in an even more comprehensive sense:

‘Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence, he imagines false or seeming motive forces’ (1972, 648).

This understanding of ideology as false consciousness produces what Thompson calls ‘a critical conception of ideology’ (1984, 4). Næss (1980) divides this critical notion of ideology into two categories. In the first case, ideologies present idiosyncratic beliefs, preconceptions, mistakes, and narrowness. Nevertheless, this type does not imply insincerity. Thus, in Ricœur’s words, this type of ideology is ‘the cousin of error and falsehood, the brother of illusion’ (1981, 223). The second type of ideology presents not just the distorted image of reality, but also refers to insincerity. Thus, the distorted image of reality is actively promoted to others as indoctrination or propaganda. The primary function of this type of ideology is domination and, therefore, it is inevitably linked with power relations. This is why this notion of ideology, as an essentially negative phenomenon was generally accepted by numerous, both Marxist and non-Marxist approaches which emphasize the asymmetric power relations. For instance, in orthodox Marxism, ideology traditionally has been viewed as merely a function of a false representation of the interests of the ruling class and propagated by that class:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Marx 1972, 136)

Thus, in a Marxist tradition, when someone characterizes a certain view as ‘ideological’, he is automatically criticizing it: therefore, ideology is not a neutral term. It is always laden with

conflict and controversial. These negative connotations conveyed by the term *ideology* were later revised even by some neo-Marxist scholars. For instance, Seliger (1976) proposes to divide ideologies into two categories. The *restrictive* conception comprises the original Marxian notion of ideology, even though the author opposes the understanding of the Marxian notion of ideology as a *false consciousness*. He argues that Marx and Engels were interpreted wrongly, and they actually did not conclude that ‘because men’s ideas merely reflect socio-economic reality, without any free creation of it, their ideas must, therefore, be false’ (1977, 31). Anyway, the *inclusive* conception of ideology ‘covers sets of ideas by which men posit, explain and justify ends and means of organized social action, and specifically political action’ and, therefore, is applicable to all political belief systems (Seliger 1976, 14).

In non-Marxist literature, the term *ideology* has become equal to the conception of political ideology beginning from the 1940s (Seliger 1976). In this sense, political ideologies are merely systems of beliefs towards the political, social, and economic structures of the society (Gross 1985; Vincent 1995). These belief systems are relatively stable and clear and, therefore, can be described in certain terms. In other words, this is a system of thoughts transformed into a coherent system of political beliefs. Political ideologies’ objectives and programs derive from deep, core beliefs towards the social life, the analysis of a current situation, and the plan for change (Næss 1980). Ideologies attempt to explain major relations within society both from empirical and normative standpoints. They not only describe the nature of human interactions about these structures but also prescribe human actions aimed to change them.

Basically, every political ideology answers three types of questions: “What should our society look like? ‘What is the current state of our society?’ and ‘What should we do in order to change the existing order of things?’ More specifically, political ideologies usually discuss the

following questions: ‘What is human nature?’, ‘What is the origin of society?’, ‘Should people obey the government?’, ‘What is the function of law?’, ‘Are people equal?’, ‘How should resources be distributed?’, and many others. By using these questions, it is possible to define and compare political ideologies (Sargent 1990). Because the primary function of ideology is concerned with social relations, the meaning of each ideology depends on social structures which sustain the ideology and its relation to other ideologies, rather than to a *real* (Althusser 1969).

Every ideology is a complex structure, which is unified by a certain issue and must be analyzed only as a whole. Deep beliefs, descriptions of reality, goals, and therefore, a program for actions are always complex and, most importantly, are in constant conflict with one other. The notion of ideology as a coherent and organized set of beliefs does not imply that ideologies are consistent systems. In fact, they may include elements that contradict each other because ideologies are socio-psychological systems rather than logical ones (van Dijk 2006).

The term *ideology* is usually not applied to the personal beliefs of individuals. Although it is possible to talk about individual belief systems, ideologies are rarely personal but usually represent the group, institutional, social and political structures (van Dijk 1998, 2006). We can identify fundamental concepts in every individual belief system and, therefore, formulate a limited number of environmental ideologies typical for a certain social group. Because ideologies are usually directed at a large popular audience, people rarely express them in person-to-person communications. In order to achieve the maximum persuasive and convicting power, an ideology should be able to represent their ideas in a form comprehensible to a broader audience (Næss 1980). As a result, all ideologies are schematic and simplifying—they express in slogans, lapidary formulas, and maxims. As a rule, an ideological communication between social groups occurs through the media. In the process of this communication, one group can change

the actions of the other group. As a result, social groups can affect social issues indirectly through other groups. For instance, a non-governmental organization can interpret an issue of climate change based on its environmental ideology. The result of its interpretation can be translated through the media to the government, which can produce certain public policies to mitigate global warming. 'In most (but not all) cases, ideologies are self-serving and a function of the material and symbolic interests of the group' (van Dijk 1998, 8).

Thus, any social actors, in order to realize and represent themselves, have to give an image of themselves to other groups. Ideology plays the most important role in this process—it justifies that the group has a right to be what it is (Ricœur 1981). Ideologies, therefore, shape and organize group attitudes and interests and target other groups or popular audience (Sargent 1990). As a result, any social group has to have an ideology, which is a coherent system of interrelated group beliefs. Ideologies are always action-oriented. Their purpose is more just a reflection—they always promote the reform, preservation or destruction of a certain order (Seliger 1977; Ricœur 1981; Gross 1985). Although all belief systems are similar and function alike (Seliger 1977), they also differ in their values or elements which can be formally distinguished (Sargent 1990). At the same time, ideologies share certain assumptions and, in fact, are less divided than they pretend to be, and this makes an ideological pluralism within a given society possible (Seliger 1977).

From Ideologies to Discourses (and back)

In recent decades, in many instances, the term *ideology* has been gradually replaced by the term *discourse*. This transformation is usually associated with the works of Michel Foucault, although, according to Sawyer (2002), Michel Pêcheux (1982) contributed the most to the contemporary

widespread meaning of the term *discourse*. Pêcheux developed the idea of the relationships between discursive and ideological formations, arguing that the meaning of words, expressions, and statements are determined by the ideological positions of those who use them. Consequently, a discursive formation determines what should be said and how.

Anyway, the distinction between discourse and ideology, which were quite clear prior to the 1980s, has become more and more blurred (Sawyer 2002). The term discourse has started to be used in a broader way than its standard usage, which is a unit of language larger than a sentence, groups of statements, all forms of texts and spoken interaction, both formal and informal (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Sawyer 2002). The broad usage of the term *discourse* has started refer to beliefs, the concepts, objects or strategies, and practices that are part of the discursive formations (Hajer 1995). This gradual shift has been caused by dissatisfaction in existing theories of ideology, caused, mainly, by their Marxist heritage. Firstly, Marxism often prioritizes ideology over science. Secondly, the term implied a clear opposition between material reality and ideas (a concept of base-superstructure). Thirdly, ideology was related to a Marxist idea of class struggle (Sawyer 2002). The new notion of discourse (in its broader sense) was seemingly able to overcome these limitations.

‘Discourse’ has captured the totalizing and semiotic connotations of ‘culture’, combined it with the Gramscian and Althusserian notions of ‘hegemony’ and ‘ideology’, blended it with Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts, tapped into the linguistic turn in literary theory, and then introduced Foucault’s historical perspective on power/knowledge relations. ‘Discourse’ thus retains many connotations of 1970s Marxist and Lacanian theory, but in a way that allows the incorporation of history, culture and both structuralist and post-structuralist insights. It is not surprising that such an all-encompassing term is now associated with a wide range of conflicting and confusing meanings. (Sawyer 2002, 450)

As a result, in environmental policy literature, the group beliefs towards the environment are often referred to as environmental discourses. Karen Litfin (1994), Maarten Hajer (1995), and John Dryzek (1997) have contributed the most to the popularization of that term.

Hajer defines discourse in the following way:

Discourse is here defined as a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed into a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities. (1995, 44)

Quite similarly, for Dryzek, discourse is:

A shared way of apprehending the world. Embedded in language, it enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts. Each discourse rests on assumptions, judgments, and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis, debates, agreements, and disagreements, in the environmental area no less than elsewhere. (1997, 8)

Consequently, environmental discourses are ‘the way we construct, interpret, discuss, and analyze environmental problems’ (Dryzek 1997, 9). At any rate, all these authors attribute their notions of discourse to Foucault, albeit with certain limitations. For instance, Dryzek denies the Foucauldian way of viewing discourses in hegemonic terms, and, consequently, viewing individuals as helpless subjects of a dominant discourse who are unable to make choices across discourses. Most importantly, none of these authors uses a common-sense understanding of discourse as just speech acts, or as a mode of talking, but rather they understand it in a broader way, connecting discourse to the social practices in which it is produced.

Litfin’s, Hajer’s, and Dryzek’s notions of environmental discourses are very much in a post-positivist tradition, and by no means is the purpose of this paper to doubt the rightfulness of this term. Nevertheless, there are several concerns about using the term *discourse* in environmental policy scholarship.

Firstly, as mentioned above, the introduction of the notion of discourse was in many respects caused by the inability of older notions such as ideology, language, and culture to describe social reality adequately. As a result, a notion of discourse has absorbed a number of meanings from different disciplines, mostly from philosophy and linguistics. Sawyer defines the problem in the following way:

This broad usage of the term ‘discourse’ is quite widespread and typically appears without attribution, indicating that the usage is established and unproblematic. The few writers that attribute the broad usage refer to Foucault. That these attributions are typically quite casual—lacking page numbers, quoted passages, and sometimes even lacking references to any specific work—indicates that the Foucault attribution is as established and unproblematic as the usage itself. (2002, 434)

However, the problem is not in a wrong association with Foucault, albeit this problematic association opens the road for misinterpretation. According to Sawyer (2002), such attribution of this broad usage to Foucault is problematic and, most importantly, the variety of definitions and meanings associated with the term *discourse* can be grossly misleading.

Secondly, a shift from ideology to discourse in many respects was caused by the Marxist heritage of this term. Meanwhile, a contemporary neutral notion of ideology has little, if anything, in common with its Marxist predecessor. A neutral concept of ideology, first developed by some neo-Marxist scholars, and then broadly adopted in non-Marxist scholarship as the systems of beliefs, can be a good substitute for discourses, at least about the description of our worldviews towards the environment.

Regardless of obvious similarities, ideologies cannot be reduced to discourse even though they are interconnected—discourses play the important role in the reproduction of environmental ideologies. In political science (and often in everyday life), we naturally differentiate between conservative ideology and conservative discourse. While the former is understood in terms of

certain ideas and beliefs, the latter is related to exact speech acts, phrases, and statements. They are mutually connected, of course. We can expect a certain discourse from a bearer of a certain ideology, for instance, a member of a party. Similarly, by analyzing a discourse of an unknown individual, we can draw conclusions about their beliefs, or, in other words, their ideological positions. Therefore, through analyzing discourse (for instance, a certain textual or spoken act), we can identify not only the issues it discusses but also the ideology of the author. Analogously, I differentiate between environmental discourses and environmental ideologies.

Environmental Ideologies

In this paper, I propose the concept of environmental ideologies, which are essentially a particular example of ideology. As political ideologies explain what our society is, what society should be, and what we should do about it, environmental ideologies answer the questions of what the relationships between humans and society are and what these relationships should be. Environmental ideologies mostly comply with almost all of Hamilton's (1987) 27 elements of the concept of ideology. Several of Hamilton's characteristics of ideology, such as being 'a weapon in a class struggle,' are challenged in non-Marxist scholarship. However, the majority of Hamilton's elements of the concept of ideology fit the concept of environmental ideologies well. Indeed, they consist of ideas concerning, beliefs about, understandings of, and attitudes towards the environment. They contain statements of fact, a normative character, and seek to explain human relationships with nature. Environmental ideologies take a form of a coherent system of patterns. Finally, they advocate for actions and change.

Analogously to the political ideologies, environmental ideology does not bear the false consciousness but only major belief systems towards the environment. Analogously to political

ideologies which answer questions regarding political power, such as: ‘Who rules, why and how?’, environmental ideologies answer the questions, ‘What should we do about the environment and environmental issues, and why?’ Similar to those of all political ideologies, the objectives and programs of environmental ideologies derive from deep, core beliefs towards the environment, the analysis of a current environmental situation, and consequently, an agenda for action (Næss 1980). Thus, a structure of any environmental ideology includes the following interconnected parts:

- 1) Core environmental beliefs. A concept of human nature is central to any political ideology. Similarly, relationships between human nature and nature and are the cornerstone of environmental ideology.
- 2) Analysis of a current environmental situation. This involves the identifying the main environmental problems and prioritizing them.
- 3) Plan for a change to achieve the desired situation, identifying limitations and possibilities. For instance, who must take a lead in this change—the state or civil society? What kinds of actions are allowed?

This lack of agreement among social actors over the reality and priority of environmental issues has clearly contributed to environmental policies that do not appear to be tackling the scope of the problems that environmental policy is supposed to address. Although it is more important to know what people do rather than what they think or say about the environment, an analysis of environmental ideologies can reveal a lot about what people do or will do about environmental problems.

Environmental ideologies and environmental discourses are both interconnected with environmental issues. The core of the environmental discourse is an environmental issue—what

is discussed. It can be the issue of air pollution, nuclear waste, or global climate change.

However, how exactly this issue is interpreted depends on the environmental ideology of the interpreter. Thus, when people think, speak, and write about the environment, they interpret it through their lens of their belief system or ideology that results in a certain environmental discourse—whether or not this issue is defined as an environmental (policy) problem and how it should be solved. Therefore, the differences in interpretation of a given environmental issue by interpreters can be explained by differences in environmental ideologies of the interpreters. For instance, an issue of global climate change has a broad range of meaning that stretches from ‘myth and therefore not a problem’ to ‘an urgent and growing threat’ because of the differences in environmental ideologies among people who discuss that issue. In each case, in addition to these polar views, there is an infinite number of intermediate opinions. Similarly, proposed policy solutions range from ‘do nothing’ to ‘use all available resources.’ This makes any environmental issue a contested term that invariably produces a range of conflicting meanings and, therefore, policy outcomes.

By analyzing the discourse, we can reveal both the discussed environmental issue and the environmental ideology of the actor. Because of the complexity and interrelation of environmental issues, and because of the different environmental problems and their severity in different societies, to create a universal classification of environmental issues is not always an easy task. Moreover, every discourse is issue specific. For instance, a discourse about different environmental issues will be different, even if it is based on the same environmental ideology.

From Political to Environmental Ideologies

The main conceptual problem lies in the relationship between political and environmental ideologies. It is hard to dispute the opinion that any conception of human-nature relations implies a conception of the political, social and economic structures of society. If the interpretation of an environmental issue depends on its social, political, and economic consequences, the interpretation of the issue, and more generally, the perception of the environment itself, depend mainly on the interpreter's belief systems regarding the social, political, and economic structures of the society, which are political ideologies. However, reducing belief systems towards the environment to fit into existing political ideologies is problematic.

Historically, no particular political ideology has monopolized ecological thinking (Paehlke 1989). On the contrary, every classical political ideology has (at least recently) had a certain environmental agenda. Thus, the question of how Liberalism (or Conservatism, Marxism, Anarchism, etc.) would deal with a particular environmental issue or would view the environment, in general, is a reasonable one. However, the traditional political ideologies do not cover the entire spectrum of possible relationships between humans and the natural world. The problem is that most of the traditional political ideologies, regardless of their differences, are explicitly anthropocentric and committed to unlimited industrial growth and conquering nature, or to industrialism, which is something of a super-ideology of the traditional political ideologies (Dryzek 1997). As a result, these ideologies almost entirely ignore the ecocentric approaches. An extensive body of literature supports the claim for the autonomy of environmental politics (Paehlke 1989; Eckersley 1992; Dryzek 1997; Dobson 2000; Doherty 2002). Although the primary focus of political ideologies is to describe the political, social, and economic structures of the society, ecologism fits that category because, as Paehlke (1989) points out, the current

environmental problems have an essentially political character and cannot be solved with existing political paradigms and institutions. Therefore, environmental ideologies must depart from the terms of traditional political ideologies. In Paehlke's words: 'environmental ideas and ideas and policies cannot be subsumed easily under one or another of the traditional ideological headings' (1989, 190).

Some authors develop the idea of building new, ecologically-oriented political ideologies based on existing political ideologies, adding the prefix *Eco-* to the name. For instance, Eckersley (1992) identifies Orthodox Marxism, Orthodox Eco-Marxism, and Humanist Eco-Marxism as variants of Marxism. However, these ideologies differ from each other so widely that we have to refer to marxisms rather than to Marxism (Dobson 2000). Moreover, by paying attention to differences within ideologies, we blur the differences between them. For instance, a difference between eco-Marxism and eco-Socialism becomes less significant than between the parental ideologies.

Recently, green ideology (environmentalism, ecocentrism, ecologism) has been viewed as a type of political ideology, alongside the more traditional ones. For instance, Vincent in *Modern Political Ideologies* (1995) places ecologism among the other political ideologies. Dobson explicitly defines ecologism as an ideology, 'in the same sense as ... liberalism, socialism, conservatism or fascism' (2000, 1). One of the problems relates to the location of ecologism within the political spectrum (Doherty 2002). Indeed, historically, nature conservation was associated with Conservatism. Recent approaches to ecology emphasize more equality rights and emancipation and, therefore, gravitate towards the Left (Dobson 2000). Most importantly, being defined as a political ideology, ecologism has to deal with every social and economic issue. As a result, the view of any issue exclusively through the lens of ecologism is often constrained.

It follows that ecologism ought to borrow already developed concepts from other ideologies (or share with them). This, again, causes a blurring of differences between ideologies (Dobson 2000).

Paehlke (1989) attempts to solve these problems by adding an additional dimension to existing political ideologies. He argues that, in contrast to other political ideologies, ecologism cannot be located on the right-left spectrum. Thus, a left-right dimension is still valid but is no longer sufficient. Consequently, Paehlke adds a new axis (environmentalism/anti-environmentalism) to the existing political axis (left/right) of ideologies, thereby constituting a two-dimensional field. In other words, any political ideology can be viewed through the environmentalism/anti-environmentalism lens.

In fact, convincing arguments now place ecologism within the typology of political ideologies. Indeed, the green thought is one of the major philosophical and political breakthroughs of the twentieth century and shares many of the characteristics of a classical political ideology. Similar to other political ideologies, ecologism has objectives and programs that derive from deep, core intrinsic beliefs towards social life and the environment (Goodin 2003; Hayward 1998), and that stem from an analysis of the current environmental situation, as well as specifying the strategies for green change that are necessary to achieve the desired state (Dobson 2000). Many authors apply the term *ideology* only to *deep ecology* (Næss 1973), which demands radical changes in relationships between humans and nature, in contrast to *shallow ecology*, a managerial approach for solving environmental issues that does not challenge the existing order and, therefore, 'is not an ideology at all' (Dobson 2000, 2–3). The difference between the two terms is fairly clear—the managerial style being the ultimately anthropocentric approaches to the environment that do not stress the existing relationships between humans and nature, and can be easily incorporated into any traditional ideology. To be considered as a

distinct ideology, green thought must be based on deep ecological values, must reject the current approach to the environment, give projected future outcomes, and, therefore, demand changes not only in public policy but also radical changes in human behavior, and involve a reassessment of the human place in the natural order.

The point is that Dobson is correct in arguing that ecologism is a political ideology because it views acid rains as ‘symptomatic of a misreading of the possibilities (or more properly here, constraints) inherent in membership of an interrelated biotic and abiotic community,’ whereas environmentalism is not a political ideology because it views it as ‘simply a result of not fixing enough carbon dioxide scrubbers to coal-fired power-station chimneys’ (2000, 3). However, environmentalism (as Dobson defines it) is an environmental ideology (and so is ecologism) because its approach in viewing and solving this particular environmental problem is based on certain intrinsic beliefs towards the environment. When discussing the entire spectrum of all possible belief systems towards nature, these managerial approaches, or environmentalism in Dobson’s definition, have their own place. This place is especially justified because there are belief systems that deny the existence of many environmental issues in terms that should be somehow solved. One might argue that those anti-environmentalist ideologies should be excluded from the spectrum of ideologies towards the environment. Moreover, some environmental ideologies that give absolute priority to ecologism at the expense of democracy and equality are excluded from the ecological spectrum by other greens (Doherty 2002). Næss warned about viewing other ideologies as either irrational or functioning irrationally: ‘Doctrines which state that political ideologies are irrational to promote irrationality in politics’ (1980, 141). Thus, I tend to agree with Dryzek, for whom the notion of environmental discourse (or environmental ideology in my definition) is broader than just environmentalism/ecologism

because it also should include the worldviews of those who do not consider themselves as environmentalists and even those who are hostile towards environmentalists. Following this logic, Dryzek and Schlosberg have included certain environmental skeptics, such as Simon and Kahn (2005), and Lomborg (2005) in their *Environmental Politics Reader* (2005). Without these opinions, the entire spectrum of environmental beliefs would hardly be complete.

Typology of Environmental Ideologies

Being a new concept, environmental ideologies do not have a developed classification. However, the approaches to environmental politics discussed above do provide several classifications that could serve as a ground for the classification of environmental ideologies.

The most convenient, but also most limited classification of the environmental ideologies is based on the typology of existing political ideologies. Eckersley (1992) identifies currents of Green political thought such as *eco-Marxism* (including *orthodox eco-Marxism* and *humanist eco-Marxism*), *Frankfurt School*, *eco-socialism*, and *eco-anarchism*. Although *orthodox Marxism*, *Liberalism*, and *Conservatism* are not defined as green ideologies, they can be considered as environmental ideologies.

One-dimensional typologies, similar to the 'right-left' classification of political ideologies, propose ranking from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, or, from *shallow* to *deep ecology* in Næss' (1973) definition. For instance, Eckersley (1992) provides the ranking from Anthropocentrism to Ecocentrism, identifying such streams as *Resource Conservation*, *Human Welfare Ecology*, and *Preservationism* in Environmentalism, and three varieties of Ecocentrism such as *Anthropoeic Intrinsic Value Theory*, *Transpersonal Ecology*, and *Ecofeminism*.

Dryzek and Lester (1995) use the same dimension of values—from anthropocentric to biocentric. Additionally, they divide the anthropocentric values between the individual and the community. Moreover, since the authors use a policy-oriented approach, they include an additional dimension—locus of solutions, dividing it into centralized and decentralized. The combination of these two dimensions produces a six-celled typology of environmental worldviews or ideologies.

		Locus of values		
		Individuals	Community	
			Anthropocentric	Biocentric
Locus of solutions	Centralized	<i>Hobbesian and Structural Reformers</i>	<i>Guardians</i>	<i>Reform Ecologists</i>
	Decentralized	<i>Free-Market Conservatives</i>	<i>Social Ecologists</i>	<i>Deep Ecologists</i>

Table 1 A taxonomy of environmental worldviews (adapted from Dryzek and Lester, 1995)

A similar approach to the classification of environmental ideologies was used by Dryzek (1997) (though referred to as environmental discourses). A first dimension is based on a view of nature—from prosaic to imaginative. A second dimension is based on a type of solution—from reformist to radical. The combination of these two dimensions produces a four-celled typology of environmental ideologies (or discourses in Dryzek’s definition).

	Reformist	Radical
Prosaic	<i>Problem Solving</i>	<i>Survivalism</i>
Imaginative	<i>Sustainability</i>	<i>Green Radicalism</i>

Table 2 A taxonomy of environmental discourses (adapted from Dryzek, 1997)

Dryzek and Schlosberg organize their *Environmental Politics Reader* (2005) in a similar manner, identifying five key axes of environmental debate, each broken down further into the sections: *Limit to Growth and Survivalism*; *Prometheans*; *Administrative Rationalism*; *Liberal*

Democracy; Market Liberalism; Sustainable Development; Ecological Modernization; Deep Ecology, Bioregionalism, and Ecocentrism; Social and Socialist Ecology; Environmental Justice; and Southern and Indigenous Perspectives.

Conclusion

A proposed conception of environmental ideologies is a logical development of the notion of environmental discourses which, despite its progressive impact, has limitations caused by the ambiguity of the term *discourse*, at least in the social sciences. This ambiguity inevitably results in a vague concept, which hinders a common agreement about its use. Although the term *ideology* is not free from the ambiguity either, mainly due to its Marxist heritage, the term *environmental ideology* appears to be more appropriate for describing and classifying coherent systems of beliefs towards the environment. Regardless of the theoretical debate on the appropriateness of the terms *discourse* and *ideology* as a definition for group beliefs, the priority of the term *environmental ideology* over *environmental discourse* is also in a vein of contemporary political science and environmental politics. The neutral conception of ideology has produced a notion of political ideologies, which is a well-developed and broadly accepted concept in social sciences. Obviously, any answer to the three questions about human-nature relationships that an environmental ideology should answer would necessarily reveal a political ideology or, at least, some components of it. In this sense, the environmental ideologies nonetheless have clear links with the political ideologies. But to be effective as a concept, they must also stand apart.

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