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GREEN POLITICAL THEORY AND THE CRISIS OF GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY: TOWARDS PLANETARY POLICY

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Abstract

Global environmental Policy has become an increasingly contentious issue in international relations literature, especially in light of escalating climate threats, their transboundary nature, and the limited effectiveness of institutional responses. Mainstream theories have proven unable to offer comprehensive solutions that address the complexity of the environmental crisis. In response, green political theory has emerged as an alternative that challenges dominant anthropocentric frameworks by advocating for ecocentric, planetary-level approaches. This research explores the theoretical foundations of green political thought and critically assesses their relevance and effectiveness by tracing the evolution of the green discourse and comparing it with mainstream theories. The study finds that green political theory not only critiques prevailing models but also contributes to developing a more integrated and just vision of global environmental Policy, emphasising the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and political crises.

Keywords

green political theory, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, global environmental policy, climate change, planetary policy

Introduction

Today's world is grappling with an unprecedented environmental crisis that transcends borders, impacting ecosystems across the globe and threatening key sectors essential to human well-being. This crisis also poses significant challenges to social stability and gives rise to complex, transboundary security threats. In response, *the Paris Agreement* marked a significant milestone in international climate efforts, representing a collective pledge to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Nevertheless, its effectiveness remains contested, as environmental degradation continues alarmingly.

Despite the worsening global environmental crisis, mainstream international relations theories have struggled to account for its impact on international affairs adequately. Realist theory, with its focus on sovereignty, power, and national interest, has shown limited capacity to explain the transboundary challenges posed by environmental issues. From another perspective, liberal theory, while emphasising international cooperation and the role of environmental institutions, has faced difficulties in addressing the complexities of the crisis. It has remained within the bounds of institutional optimism and trust in the potential for cooperation, without establishing binding mechanisms or narrowing the gap between commitments and actual political practices. As a result, environmental governance challenges have persisted even within the liberal framework.

Within this context, Green Political Theory has emerged as an attempt to reshape the international relations discourse on the global environmental crisis by emphasising eco-centrism and transcending the instrumental use of nature, and advocating for broader planetary cooperation frameworks that go beyond national sovereignty. However, despite its ambitious outlook, this theoretical approach still faces significant challenges in formulating a viable alternative within an international system largely driven by sovereignty and national interest.

Based on the above, the study poses the following central question: How does green political theory address the global environmental policy crisis?

Under this central research question, the following sub-questions are addressed:

- First Question: How have critical theoretical trends influenced the development of Green Political Theory's discourse?
- Second Question: What is the nature of the internal debates within Green Political Theory, and what are the limits of agreement and disagreement among its theorists?
- Third Question: What solutions does planetary policy propose to address climate change?

The study posits the following hypothesis: the planetary perspective within Green Political Theory offers an effective analytical framework for addressing the Crisis of Global Environmental Policy by revealing the structural misalignment between the interstate orientation of current institutions and the transboundary character of planetary system disruptions.

The aim of this study is to explore the theoretical contribution of Green Political Theory to international relations, focusing on how its planetary perspective enriches approaches to confronting climate change and the global environmental policy crisis.

To maintain analytical consistency, this study adopts a comparative method to differentiate between the reformist and radical strands within Green Political Theory, thereby revealing the underlying ontological tensions between environmentalism and ecologism. It further evaluates proposed solutions by systematically contrasting the dominant global perspective—characterized by state-centred and market-oriented mechanisms—with the emerging planetary perspective, which advocates for a structural reconfiguration of governance in line with Earth-system limits. Finally, the study employs a diachronic comparison to trace the evolution of its theorization across different periods, analysing how it relates to the changing contexts of the global environmental crisis and its escalating complexities.

Green Political Theory: Between Radicalism and Reformism

Green Political Theory is intellectually diverse and conceptually rich, encompassing multiple normative foundations and interpretative strands rather than a single unified doctrine. Since its emergence, it has fluctuated between radical transformative visions and more reformist approaches that seek change within existing political structures.

The Formation of Identity

Historically, the roots of green political theory can be traced to the growing public perception of an 'ecological crisis' in the 1960s, the claims of 'Limits to Growth' from the 1970s onwards, the emergence of global environmental problems in the 1980s and 1990s, and, more recently, the challenges of peak oil and climate change in the early twenty-first century (Barry, 2014).

Broadly defined, ecologism, or green political theory, is a recent school of thought that addresses both enduring philosophical questions—such as humanity's relationship with the non-human world, the moral status of animals, and the ethics of technology—and contemporary challenges like climate change, resource competition, and global inequalities. Broad and diverse, it encompasses several sub-schools and uniquely blends normative and empirical elements, setting it apart from other political ideologies (Barry, 2014).

Through his seminal work, *Green Political Thought*, and his development of the concept of ecologism, Andrew Dobson has established himself as one of the most prominent theorists of green political theory. By presenting ecologism as an ideology that seeks to transform the existing socio-political order rather than merely reform it. Accordingly, Dobson draws a clear distinction between environmentalism and ecologism as two divergent responses to ecological challenges. Environmentalism adopts a managerial approach, grounded in the assumption that environmental problems can be addressed without fundamental changes to prevailing values or dominant patterns of production and consumption. Ecologism, by contrast, contends that a sustainable and genuinely fulfilling mode of existence presupposes radical transformations in humanity's relationship with the non-human natural world, as well as in the organisation of social and political life (Dobson, 2007).

As for John Barry, he advocates for the term "green political theory" over "ecologism," viewing it as a more inclusive and accurate categorization that avoids an unduly narrow focus on human–nature relations. While he acknowledges the central importance of nature, Barry argues that defining the field solely through an ecological lens fails to accommodate the vital "non-ecological" or intra-human dimensions of the theory. By adopting this broader framework, he emphasizes that green politics is not just about the environment, but also about a radical restructuring of social, economic, and political relations. This approach ensures that the field remains rooted in the "metabolism" between humans and nature without being confined to it, effectively integrating specifically human-centric principles into the heart of the green discourse (Barry, 2014). Although the term "green political theory" is more widely used in the academic literature, "ecologism" remains the concept that most clearly defines the identity of the theory by highlighting its environmental foundations. While the former offers a broader and more inclusive framework, the latter underscores that ecological determinants are not peripheral but central, giving the theory its distinctive character and grounding it firmly in environmental concerns.

Furthermore, by departing from the anthropocentrism that has long characterized traditional political thought, Green Political Theory establishes its unique identity through the principle of human–nature interdependence. This framework reconceptualizes justice to include intergenerational equity, asserting that social and political structures must function within ecological limits rather than attempting to transcend them. As Andrew Dobson highlights, the pillars of ecocentrism and the limits-to-growth thesis are what fundamentally distinguish ecologism from mainstream ideologies. When these are coupled with decentralism, they form the three definitive characteristics of the Theory (Dobson, 2007).

Consequently, ecologism is an ideology grounded in two central ideas: a redefinition of the human–nature relationship beyond strong anthropocentrism, and an acceptance of limits to growth. While it draws subsidiary principles—such as participatory democracy, decentralization, and social justice—from other political traditions, the influence is reciprocal, as concepts developed within ecologism have begun to shape established political ideologies (Carter, 2007, p. 66).

At its core, a central concern of green political theory is the rejection of human superiority in favour of overcoming the perceived separation between humanity and the natural world. By drawing on natural sciences such as ecology, evolutionary psychology, biology, and thermodynamics, this perspective emphasizes that humans are ecologically embedded within a complex web of species, necessitating a “greening” of social theory that views society as inseparable from its natural context (Barry, 2014). As Arne Naess suggests, individual humans should be understood as mere ‘knots in the biospherical net’ rather than as separate, independent actors (Naess, 1973). And yet, Goodin holds a different view, as he argues within the reformist tradition that it remains possible to sustain a human-centred perspective without reducing nature to mere instrumentality (Goodin, 1992).

From the foregoing, it dictates that the planet must be understood as a holistic, interconnected entity where no part can be isolated; this reality dictates that the Earth is finite and subject to scarcity, imposing strict limits on industrial expansion. Recognizing natural entities as integral to our ecosystem is the core philosophical pillar of green political thought. Consequently, true environmental sustainability requires that social and political structures operate within these ecological constraints, necessitating a radical shift in energy use, trade, and regionalism toward decentralization (Tove, 2011).

Parallel to these radical views, Reformist theory positions itself as a ‘halfway house’ between ecocentric and deep anthropocentric views. Humans remain intertwined with nature, though not entirely, and only humans can become conscious of this interdependence. For Goodin, it is crucial to recognize that the value of nature cannot be reduced solely to natural values, as deep ecologists might claim, nor entirely to human values, as shallow ecologists suggest. Value exists ‘in relation to us,’ but this does not mean it is only ‘for us.’ Thus, acknowledging that things have value in relation to humanity is distinct from reducing nature’s worth to purely human interests (Goodin, 1992).

In conclusion, despite the differences between reformist and radical strands of green thought, both are fundamentally grounded in the significance of nature. Nature constitutes the distinctive core—or “signature”—of green political theory, serving as the foundational concept upon which it is built, regardless of how it is interpreted. At a minimum, any green political theory must be concerned with nature, even if the meaning of “nature” itself remains open to conceptual and historical interpretation (Vincent, 2003).

In its radical strand, green political theory provides a distinctive identity by advancing a new approach that addresses the structural causes of the climate crisis rather than merely its symptoms and consequences. This orientation situates ecological concerns within a broader project of social, economic, and political transformation, ensuring that the theory is not confined to environmental management but rooted in systemic change. In doing so, it establishes a framework capable of guiding responses to climate change at its deepest foundations.

From Limits to Growth to Ecological Modernization: Competing Approaches to the Environmental Crisis

In 1972, Donella Meadows and her colleagues conducted a pioneering study titled *The Limits to Growth*. The study examined the future dynamics of industrial production, resource depletion, pollution, population growth, and food production. Their findings indicated that continued economic growth following prevailing patterns would inevitably lead to an irreversible environmental catastrophe threatening the planet. This report profoundly impacted environmental thought, as it was among the first works to clearly articulate a zero-sum relationship between growth and the environment. It also argued that temporary technological solutions do not offer a fundamental remedy, but merely delay the moment of collapse (Carter, 2007). In response, since the late 1980s, eco-modernism has emerged as a counter-approach that promotes sustainable development and cautions against the environmental dangers of unlimited economic growth. It seeks to move beyond the zero-sum perspective between the economy and the environment by arguing that technological innovation and institutional reform can enable reconciliation (Carter, 2007).

Proponents of the environmental limits to growth thesis argue that concepts such as the green economy and sustainable development, as presented by the eco-modernist approach, contain an inherent contradiction. From their perspective, it is impossible to reconcile continuous economic growth with environmental preservation, since the logic of growth is fundamentally based on resource depletion. This approach directly conflicts with the principle of environmental sustainability (Brand, 2012). Andrew Dobson emphasises that the core of green political thought lies in its limits to growth perspective, which views rapid economic expansion as the root cause of the ecological crisis. What distinguishes greens is not just acknowledging the crisis, but their unique interpretation of its nature and origins (Paterson, 2005).

Environmentalists believe that using eco-friendly technologies within the framework of ecological modernisation can help diversify and increase natural resources. This approach paved the way for initiatives such as green technology, renewable energy, green capitalism, and sustainable urbanisation. It rests on the core assumption that environmental innovation can stop ecological degradation. The *Brundtland Report* (1987) embodied this idea by proposing a “win-win” formula that reconciles sustainability with development. This vision was formally institutionalised at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where sustainable development was adopted as a global goal (Eckersley, 2013, p. 253). A major point of contention between environmentalists and greens concerns their views on sustainable development and ecological modernisation. Environmentalists, following the *Brundtland Report* (1987), believe that economic growth and environmental protection

can be reconciled through reform within the existing system. Greens, however, reject this as a vague and inadequate approach that perpetuates capitalist exploitation of nature. They argue that true sustainability demands a radical shift in production, consumption, and the human–environment relationship, grounded in the principle of limited growth (Steans et al., 2010).

The limits to growth thesis contributed to the consolidation of an environmental awareness grounded in the recognition of the finite nature of natural resources and the rejection of the logic of unlimited growth that characterises the capitalist system, while also encouraging reflection on alternative development models more aligned with the principles of sustainability; however, within the framework of contemporary environmental discourse, “ecological modernization” is emerging as a mainstream and increasingly influential current in green political theory, moving away from the traditional idea posed by the “limits to growth.” (Dobson et al., 2009).

The continuing inadequacy of contemporary climate policies has renewed attention to the radical foundations of Green Political Theory. As technological innovation and market-based instruments increasingly reveal their structural limits, the early green critique of Enlightenment faith in human control and mastery regains analytical relevance, reviving calls for ecological restraint and a more modest orientation toward the natural world (Plumwood, 2002). However, this normative reawakening cannot remain at the level of critique alone; it requires a coherent social theory capable of translating ecological commitments into effective political practice. This, in turn, raises the crucial question of which strategies might realistically stabilize the global climate amid profound technical, social, and political constraints. Although a growing body of scholarship investigates the social arrangements and discursive frameworks that could sustain ecological values—particularly within advanced industrial societies—the task of transforming these theoretical insights into tangible outcomes remains largely unresolved (Buck, 2013).

In light of the inadequacy of both eco-modernism and gradualist reformism, the planetary perspective in Green Political Theory emerged as a transformative response. Eco-modernism placed its faith in technological innovation and economic growth to resolve ecological crises, yet it faltered as emissions and degradation persisted. Likewise, gradualist reformism confined itself to incremental measures within existing institutions, proving insufficient against the accelerating planetary scale of the climate emergency. Against this backdrop, the planetary perspective advanced a radical vision, insisting that environmental challenges require a fundamental reconfiguration of the human–nature relationship at the global level.

Green Political Theory: Rethinking International Relations Beyond Dominant Paradigms

Green Political Theory critiques dominant international relations paradigms for their inability to adequately address ecological and social crises, while simultaneously engaging with critical approaches—such as critical theory, constructivism, and poststructuralism—to provide a transformative perspective that embeds ecological considerations at the heart of global politics.

Green Political Theory and the Mainstream Theories of International Relations

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, signs of a global environmental crisis began to emerge due to the excessive exploitation of natural resources. This led to the rise of the environmental movement, which drew attention to the ecological costs of economic growth. Consequently, the field of international relations began to pay greater attention to environmental issues, recognising them as global challenges that require both theoretical reflection and practical responses (Dyer, 2017). In this context, traditional theories such as realism and liberalism—which are based on the core assumption that states are the primary actors in international relations, constantly pursuing their national interests—appeared inadequate for analysing transboundary environmental issues (Hammad & Mohammad, 2022). As a result, since the 1970s, a subfield focusing on international environmental cooperation began to emerge in response to the growing need for approaches and analytical tools suited to the nature of these newly arising global challenges (Heywood, 2011). Nevertheless, this shift did not lead to a new ontological and epistemological perspective. Instead, environmental issues were often framed within narrow research questions grounded in traditional theories and methodologies. As a result, positivist epistemology and the realist tradition continued to dominate most of these approaches (Selby, 2014).

In this context, the discipline of International Relations and its practical applications are grounded in a silent Cartesian assumption that humanity and nature are fundamentally distinct, and that social affairs unfold independently of the biosphere. This leads to a reductionist view of the environment as merely a provider of services to humanity (Dalby, 2014).

Geopolitics can no longer assume the human context as a fixed stage for global events. Human activity is now inducing profound transformations in the geo itself—that is, in the Earth and its ecological systems—undermining the realist foundations that have long treated the natural and political context of international relations as stable and self-evident (Dalby, 2013). Realism, one of the few theories that elevates survival as the core objective of states, nevertheless lacks an adequate explanation for the threat of a potential mass extinction event that could obliterate both states and humanity alike.

Green theory distinguishes itself from other critical approaches through its unique ontology, which places nature at the centre of its theoretical concerns by rejecting anthropocentrism (Rumelili, 2009). It instead grounds its ontology in ecocentrism. It critiques mainstream and critical International Relations theories for sharing a fundamental shortcoming: the lack of conceptual capacity to recognise the Earth as an independent and active agent (Burke et al., 2016).

Green Political Theory acknowledges the significant roles of non-state actors—such as international environmental organisations, local communities, and individuals—in addressing climate change. In doing so, it challenges the dominant state-centric perspective in International Relations (Oanh, 2024).

Many scholars question whether ecocentrism is a necessary component of green ideology or a sufficient or desirable foundation for a political theory. At the normative level, researchers such as Barry and Hayward have raised concerns about the appropriateness and practicality of this principle as a core pillar in the construction of green political thought

(Paterson, 2005). Anthropocentrism is not necessarily the problem; in fact, a genuine respect for humanity may also lead to respect for other species (Hayward, 1998).

Ecocentrism, as advocated by Green Political Theory, represents an unprecedented ontological shift within International Relations theory. However, this perspective faces a significant challenge: the absence of a clear practical framework that can be effectively translated into political and institutional action.

Green Political Theory and Critical Theories

Green theory has been deeply influenced by several critical theories, including post-structuralism, critical theory, post-colonialism, and constructivism, while simultaneously offering critiques of some of their core assumptions. It has also engaged with feminist and normative theories, contributing to the emergence of alternative currents such as ecofeminism and ecocosmopolitanism (Dobson, 2000, p. 248).

Green Political Theory and Critical Theory

Green theory—particularly in its radical strand—intersects with Critical Theory in viewing green capitalism as a masking mechanism that cosmetically enhances neoliberalism without addressing the fundamental contradictions of production. Practices such as green consumption or recycling generate a comforting illusion that individuals are contributing to saving the planet, while this sense of satisfaction is strategically deployed to preserve the status quo. Such an approach hinders radical thinking and obstructs the genuine structural transformation required to confront the environmental crisis seriously and effectively (Biro, 2011).

However, a clear distinction between Green Theory and Critical Theory emerges when considering the historical dimension adopted by each. Green Theory tends to embrace a long-term perspective that extends beyond the timeframe of modern capitalism, tracing the historical roots of environmental problems to periods predating the rise of the capitalist system. In contrast, critical approaches generally focus on analysing the environmental crisis within the context of capitalist accumulation and the structural relations associated with it (Fishel et al., 2017). In addition, Green Theory does not view the concept of human security, as proposed by Critical Theory, as sufficiently critical, due to its anthropocentric orientation. Instead, it advocates for the concept of ecological security, which encompasses all species (McDonald, 2018).

Capitalism has become central to analyses of the global environmental crisis, particularly within the framework of Green Political Theory, which sees it as the primary structural barrier to an effective response. It is critiqued as a system perpetuating environmental inequality and strips green solutions of their true content.

Green Political Theory and Constructivism

Nicholas Onuf, a prominent constructivist theorist, famously stated that “we make the worlds we know in a world we don’t know” (Onuf, 1989). a theoretical entry point from which Green Theory also drew. Constructivism asserts that behaviours and norms considered natural are not objectively existing truths in nature, but rather are constructed as intersubjective social realities (Hopf, 1998, p. 182). Thus, the environment and our rela-

tionship with it are not a fixed objective truth but entirely a product of social construction. It is not independent of the symbolic and cultural frameworks imposed upon it; instead, it is understood as a reflection of society or a field onto which cultural meaning is projected. It is, therefore, a result of language, discourse, and forms of power. This means that what we describe as an *environment* does not refer to an external, objective material reality but to what society intends to shape that nature into (Tester, 2015).

The planet, as Green Theory views it, with all its entities and activities, far transcends the worlds we have created or imagined (Burke et al., 2016). However, Green Theory differs from Constructivism in its reshaping of the idea of human exceptionalism, which is prevalent in sociological thought and forms one of the cornerstones of Constructivism. Green Theory proposes an alternative to the concept of the *planetary*, which transcends the traditional notion of the *global*. While Constructivism emphasizes the centrality of the social environment in shaping reality, Green Theory posits that nature plays an active role in producing social truth (Burke et al., 2016).

Green Political Theory and Post-Structuralism

Post-structuralism asserts that categorising complex phenomena to binaries like inside/outside, self/other, and global/local is a reductionist approach reflecting how we understand the relationship between humans and nature. Bruno Latour, for example, attributes the stance in international relations that excludes the environmental crisis from the realm of high politics to Hobbes's thesis on the state of nature, which established the foundation for the binary separation of society and nature by instituting the society/nature duality (Agathangelou, 2016, p. 183).

Within the environmental context, conceiving the non-human other, like nature, as a separate entity opposed to the self, justifies its domination and marginalisation. From this, Green Political Theory highlights the necessity of rethinking the relationship with the natural other as part of a shared self, rather than as an object for hegemony or exploitation.

According to Green Theory, humans should develop a more conscious and reflective relationship with the environment based on solidarity, not domination or exploitation. This solidarity requires rethinking lifestyles and the relationship with nature, moving away from elitist illusions of individual salvation from comprehensive environmental crises like climate change. Here, Green Theory diverges from post-structuralist approaches centred on deconstruction, instead emphasising the liberatory dimension and collective action in confronting the global environmental crisis (Buhari & Aydin, 2022).

Green Political theory has been influenced by post-structuralism through its adoption of deconstructive and critical approaches that focus on analysing environmental discourse rather than merely treating environmental phenomena as material givens. It has moved away from traditional rational-instrumental explanations in favour of questioning how concepts such as “development” and “sustainability” are produced.

Rethinking the State's Role in Environmental Sustainability: The Turn Toward Decentralisation

Ken Conca argues that the traditional conception of the state fails to incorporate the environmental dimension within its organisational and political priorities. He contends that the centralised, capitalist structure of the modern nation-state is one of the primary drivers behind the intensification of environmental threats. Moreover, the globalisation of the world economy constrains states in their ability to protect the environment, both domestically and internationally (Conca, 2005). From the perspective of green radicalism, the state is seen as a central instrument of the capitalist system, employed to uphold market logic and economic expansion, even at the expense of ecological sustainability. In this sense, the state is not a neutral entity but a component of the institutional structure that legitimises environmental violence within a development model that places profit above ecological considerations.

According to Hempe, global environmental governance reveals that the spatial scope of the state is insufficient to address the multifaceted nature of environmental change effectively. The state is simultaneously too small to tackle global-scale environmental challenges and too large to respond efficiently to localised ecological issues. As a result, governance practices are increasingly shifting toward regional and global levels on one hand, and local levels on the other (Hempe, 1996). This is accompanied by a push for decentralisation within the state, aiming to foster more coordinated, effective, and sustainable responses (Paterson, 2005).

In contrast to greens, environmentalists see the state as a key actor capable of addressing environmental crises through legislation and policy, assuming adequate political will and international cooperation. This view highlights a key divide between environmentalists and green political theorists. Goodin, for instance, argues that environmental issues are inherently global and require cross-border cooperation, asserting that the state, despite its sovereignty, remains the essential political structure for enabling such coordination (Goodin, 1992).

In her work "The Green State", Robyn Eckersley proposes a theoretical framework that bridges reformist and radical perspectives by reimagining the state in the post-liberal era. Her vision integrates environmental values with political critique to foster greater ecological responsibility and expand democratic representation beyond the limits of the liberal state. She contends, however, that the primary obstacle to achieving this *green state* is the structural anarchy of the international system (McCarthy, 2007). Moreover, she argues that the green state should act as a trustee of the environment by constraining capitalist activity according to standards defined through inclusive democratic processes.

Green theory views pursuing a state-centred solution as inherently doomed to fail. Instead, it proposes decentralisation as a central pillar of green politics—an idea that challenges the state's position as the primary actor. However, not all green theorists favour decentralisation over the centralised state. According to scholar Robyn Eckersley, the goals of decentralisation can be achieved through inclusive practices, such as fostering coordinated relationships between the state and society, adopting policies of ecological modernisation, and promoting active environmental citizenship at the international level (Eckersley, 2004).

Instead of relying on centralised authority, green political theory advocates for empowering local governments, emphasising its multiple benefits—enhancing democratic accountability and expanding the effectiveness of local responses to environmental issues. Decentralisation also contributes to positive ecological outcomes, as local communities are more likely to view nature as a home rather than merely an economic resource. This perspective fosters greater environmental awareness and encourages the protection of natural resources (Dyer, 2017). While environmental and socio-economic problems extend globally, they can only be effectively addressed by dismantling centralised global power structures through local action, building smaller-scale political communities, and developing self-reliant economies (Paterson, 2005).

In a different context within green theory, Eckersley stood out for her explicit rejection of the green thought's excessive emphasis on decentralisation. Drawing on her reading of ecocentrism, she developed a state-oriented theoretical approach, arguing that the modern state is a necessary political institution from an environmental perspective. She contends that ecocentrism requires both the devolution of power downward to local levels and its concentration upward to regional and global levels, considering this multi-level model to be the most consistent with ecological principles (Eckersley, 1992).

Goodin contends that small-scale communities lack the capacity—under decentralised systems—to develop effective mechanisms for addressing global environmental problems. He maintains that, since many environmental issues are transboundary or even global in scope, international cooperation is essential in responding to them (Paterson, 2005). However, this view overlooks the fact that the climate crisis is, at its core, a centralised and global problem—one rooted in the unsustainable patterns of production and consumption of major industrialised states, not in the local practices of vulnerable communities.

From Global Environmental Policy to Planetary Policy

The current international response to climate change shows significant gaps, highlighting the need for more effective approaches. This inadequacy has contributed to the emergence of a broader planetary perspective, which will be explored in the following discussion.

Dipesh Chakrabarty contends that modern political thought overlooked the planetary consequences of human action, as Enlightenment ideals of freedom were built on fossil fuel expansion without recognizing humanity's emerging geological agency. Likewise, Naomi Oreskes argues that denying global warming is tantamount to denying that humans have become geological forces shaping the Earth's fundamental processes (Chakrabarty, 2009). Historically, for centuries, scientists believed that Earth's processes were so vast and powerful that human actions could not significantly affect them, viewing human history as negligible compared to geological time. However, this assumption no longer holds. Due to large-scale deforestation and the massive burning of fossil fuels, humans have become geological agents, altering the atmosphere's chemistry and contributing to rising sea levels, melting ice, and climate change (Oreskes, 2007, p. 93).

Moreover, Humanity's geological impact is evident in dramatic expansion and resource use: in three centuries, the global population grew tenfold to 6 billion, with 1.4 billion cattle; fossil fuels formed over hundreds of millions of years were consumed within a few generations; sulphur dioxide emissions from coal and oil now twice exceed natural levels;

humans appropriate over half of accessible freshwater; species extinction in tropical rainforests has accelerated by 1,000–10,000 times (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000, p.17).

Crutzen and Stoermer argue that humanity will continue to act as a major geological force for millennia—perhaps even millions of years to come—thereby giving the Anthropocene a temporal depth that extends far beyond the immediate present (Chakrabarty, 2009, p. 211). From a planetary perspective, the threat of this epoch lies not only in its short-term implications for human futures but also in its long-term consequences for the trajectory of life on Earth itself. For Earth system scientists, global warming raises the spectre of a new mass extinction within the next three to six centuries, potentially driving the planet back to a more primitive level of biodiversity (Barnosky et al, 2011).

In light of these challenges, the persistent failure of global governance to address climate change effectively reveals deep structural limitations in contemporary politics. Mark Maslin argues that existing political systems, shaped by short-term electoral cycles, are ill-equipped to sustain the fifty-year planning horizon required for meaningful climate action, while technological fixes may produce risks comparable to the crises they aim to solve (Maslin, 2004, p.147). Moreover, despite the success of the Montreal Protocol 1987, the United Nations treated climate change as a merely “global” problem rather than a “planetary” one, thereby relying on governance mechanisms designed for inter-state coordination. As Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests, this framing has reinforced the inadequacy of traditional international governance in confronting a crisis that threatens the Earth system as a whole (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 12).

In response to the mounting inadequacy of global environmental politics, A planetary perspective has emerged in response to the growing inadequacy of global environmental politics, offering a framework that fundamentally departs from the conventional global approach. Dipesh Chakrabarty emphasizes that while the “global” remains a human-centred construct governed by international logic, the “planetary” shifts the focus away from humans, confronting us with the Earth’s inherent otherness. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes that the planet belongs to a system of its own, even as we inhabit it, highlighting humanity’s late arrival in Earth’s history and its status as a transient guest rather than a sovereign master. Addressing climate change, therefore, cannot rely on traditional global governance; it requires cultivating a planetary awareness that grounds justice and policy in the Earth system’s realities, rather than the limitations of the current international order (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 67).

Furthermore, the problem in contemporary environmental policies begins with the very nature of the terms employed; “sustainability,” at its core, is a human-centric concept aimed exclusively at preserving vital systems for the service of humankind (Morse, 2010). This human-centred orientation overlooks the fundamental distinction between “the global” and “the planetary.” While the global perspective refers to events occurring within human temporal and existential horizons (human history), planetary processes unfold according to vast geological timescales—for example, the regeneration of soil and groundwater that takes thousands of years. This creates a profound gap between the speed of human consumption and the slowness of natural processes (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 86).

Although humans have now emerged as a “planetary force” capable of disrupting the Earth’s deepest processes, the illusion of control dissolves in the face of our inability to “repair” these disturbances; the horizons of technological remediation remain far removed from the physical complexity of the Earth system (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 86). The

failure to align political behaviour with the planet's "carrying capacity" places humanity at risk of systemic collapse and the loss of habitability (Falk, 1971).

Stefan Pedersen argues that addressing climate change requires more than international cooperation among states. This transformation entails abandoning the nation as a politically meaningful unit and replacing state sovereignty with new forms of authority capable of ensuring a fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of planetary coexistence. Crucially, such a shift cannot be imposed by elites but must emerge from the collective efforts of ordinary people worldwide, working together to build a unified planetary community dedicated to sustaining human civilization and safeguarding its creative future (Pedersen, 2020, p.12).

In 2016, the article "Planet Politics: A Manifesto From the End of International Relations" offered a radical critique of global environmental policy, urging a shift beyond anthropocentrism and conventional international relations. It advocated for a planetary policy that banned coal through international treaties, treated it like a toxic substance, and replaced it with renewable energy. While international law alone may be insufficient, it remains vital for motivating states and corporations. The article emphasised the need for legal frameworks that reflect the interdependence of humans, other species, and ecosystems, and called for new global debates on corporate accountability, animal rights, environmental justice, ecological security, and international law (Burke et al., 2016).

In addition, it is time to expand the planetary governance reform agenda to establish new permanent global institutions. This includes considering whether major ecosystems such as the Amazon Basin, the Arctic and Antarctic, and the Pacific Ocean should be granted status equivalent to that of states within the UN General Assembly and other bodies, or whether new dedicated organisations should be created to safeguard their environmental integrity (Biermann, 2014).

The current international system, based on the sovereignty of states—a defining feature of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia—does not support the implementation of radical environmental solutions. For this reason, Dyer advocates for establishing international organisations or a global government capable of monitoring state behaviour and ensuring the equitable sharing of environmental responsibilities. This would help prevent some countries from free-riding on the efforts of others and avoid what is known as the *tragedy of the commons*. Green theory calls for a system of global environmental governance that promotes international cooperation, multilateral agreements, and specialised international institutions for environmental affairs. It also acknowledges the importance of involving non-state actors, such as civil society organisations, indigenous communities, and even influential individuals (Oanh, 2024).

Eckersley develops a critical approach that does not rely on transcendental moral principles regarding the environment, but rather emphasises the importance of an embedded and ongoing critique of contemporary global politics, which contribute to environmental degradation. These include international anarchy, global capitalism, and the limits of liberal democracy. In contrast, she argues that emerging trends such as ecological pluralism, eco-modernisation, and deliberative democracy can together form the foundation of a global ecological order, rather than constructing an entirely new system from scratch (Paterson, 2005).

Planetary policy is founded on the core premise of radically reforming global environmental governance. One of its major strengths lies in its capacity to foster new dialogues

around climate justice, global accountability, and the prioritisation of ecosystem protection within international decision-making processes.

Nonetheless, this approach faces substantial practical obstacles, including the difficulty of forging international consensus, the limited availability of effective enforcement mechanisms, and the persistent reluctance of sovereign states to cede any of their authority. These challenges render the transition from theoretical ambition to concrete political action a complex and high-stakes endeavour.

Conclusions

The study concludes that Green Political Theory and the planetary perspective offer a radical and dialectical approach to addressing climate change in international relations. This perspective moves beyond the sovereignty trap and zero-sum state competition, asserting the planet as an independent actor. Accordingly, political institutions must ensure that human activities operate within safe planetary boundaries, rather than merely managing interstate rivalry.

Green political theory critiques the state-centric nature of environmental solutions, which position the nation-state as the primary actor in addressing ecological crises. It highlights how such an approach is often constrained by geographic boundaries and national interests, thereby undermining comprehensive collective efforts. Instead of this closed framework, the theory advocates broadening the base of environmental actors to include non-governmental entities such as civil society, indigenous communities, and transnational environmental organisations. This expansion promotes environmental justice and fosters a more participatory response to ecological challenges.

Green political theory has evolved from a marginal critical perspective into a theoretical framework offering practical alternatives to address environmental crises. One of its key proposed solutions is the decentralisation of environmental decision-making through empowering local communities and promoting self-reliant economies, aiming to build a more just and inclusive form of environmental governance that aligns with the transboundary nature of contemporary ecological challenges.

Although green political theory does not provide detailed operational mechanisms, it nonetheless constitutes an innovative intellectual framework that offers a planetary perspective on the relationship between humanity and nature. Its main contribution lies in enriching the theoretical debate in international relations by challenging state-centric and anthropocentric models, and by opening new avenues for considering structural alternatives in global environmental policy.

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