

Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature,

David Schlosberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 256 pp., \$99 cloth.

Environmental issues have loomed large in domestic and international politics for decades, but only over the past twenty years have they caught the attention of political theorists. Environmental political theory is now extending the boundaries of the political to include the natural world and our relations with it. Some environmental political theorists are integrating ecocentrism—that is, moral consideration for nature itself—into conceptions of political community. They are thus bridging a theoretical divide between nature and politics that goes back at least to Aristotle. Meanwhile, the environmental justice movement has bridged the divide between nature and society in another way, urging that environmentalists pursue not just the protection of wilderness and natural systems but also the ecological health of human communities, specifically poor, minority, and indigenous communities.

David Schlosberg's *Defining Environmental Justice* is political theory at its best, providing an invaluable review of the contemporary literature, subverting traditional political categories and distinctions, and suggesting new directions for politics and policy. This volume will be of immense value to scholars and practitioners of domestic and international environmental politics, environmental political theorists, and political theorists in general. *Defining Environmental Justice* breaks important ground not only in advancing political theory's engagement with nature but in crafting a theoretical and political framework that draws together moral consideration for nonhuman nature with environmental justice concerns. In fact,

Schlosberg builds from the discourse of the environmental justice movement to extend justice to our relations with the natural world—in his own terminology, he moves from *environmental* to *ecological* justice. He also offers a powerful critique of liberal theories of justice and their often singular focus on distribution, offering a more inclusive notion of justice that embraces recognition, capabilities, and participatory democracy.

Schlosberg argues that justice is not only—and not even *primarily*—about securing a fair distribution of goods. Treating others justly also involves recognizing their membership in the moral and political community, promoting the capabilities needed for their functioning and flourishing, and ensuring their inclusion in political decision-making. Moreover, he maintains that distribution, recognition, capabilities, and participation are interrelated and interdependent—one cannot pursue one dimension of justice in isolation. Finally, Schlosberg argues that justice concerns not only individuals but also collectivities—that is, social groups and ecological systems.

Schlosberg also suggests the foundations of a more unified green movement, built on a set of common conceptions of justice, though he rejects “a singular, overarching, and static definition of justice” for all cases (p. 9). He instead seeks a range of interrelated dimensions and conceptions of justice that can be variously applied to humans and nonhumans, individuals and collectivities, on a case-by-case basis.

Schlosberg's development of an elaborate, multifaceted theory of justice and his

extension of it to relations between humans and nature is certainly provocative. He argues that individual organisms and natural systems are entitled to a fair share of essential goods, to recognition as part of an extended community, to the development and enjoyment of capabilities for flourishing, and to some measure of inclusion in political processes (here, Schlosberg considers various options, including human proxies for nonhuman nature). As compelling as his arguments are, however, Schlosberg has not fully worked out the implications of his very ambitious project; he insufficiently recognizes the potential for serious conflict among the various dimensions of and claimants to ecological justice.

In an instructive example, Schlosberg considers whether the functioning and flourishing of such predators as tigers should include the ability to hunt and slaughter their own prey. Schlosberg rightly criticizes Martha Nussbaum's "tendency to sanitize the capabilities and functioning of some animals" (p. 151). He takes particular aim at her view that ensuring the capabilities of all animals would entail protecting, for example, gazelles or other prey from predators and having tigers and other carnivores exercise their predatory natures in ways—such as through play activities in zoo environments—that do not involve harming other animals. However, Schlosberg goes beyond criticizing Nussbaum's vision of harmony among animals, and contends that *being* prey is itself a kind of flourishing: "part of the flourishing of animals is to be the protein for other life forms. . . . To be food for others is the essence of functioning for some beings" (p. 151).

Schlosberg thus seems to deny that justice done to one being or one natural

system can be at the expense of another. But how could an individual gazelle flourish when it is reduced to an instrument for another's benefit? Schlosberg himself emphasizes recognition of an individual's or system's integrity as an aspect of justice (p. 137). Certainly both carnivores and ecological systems flourish through predation. However, serious conflict emerges between the capabilities of tigers and ecological systems on the one hand and the capabilities of individual gazelles and recognition of their integrity on the other.

Though Schlosberg is interested in human obligations of justice to the rest of nature, and not justice among nonhuman entities, this example suggests potential for serious conflict among dimensions of justice (between capabilities of different entities and between capabilities in some entities and recognition of other entities) and among different claimants to justice (predators versus prey, individual organisms versus ecological systems). One might resolve the conflict by automatically privileging systems (which rely on predation) over individuals. This, however, would have enormously disturbing implications for conflicts between individuals and social groups and between human beings and natural systems, and it is clearly a step that Schlosberg is unwilling to take. Also, if being another's protein is a mode of flourishing, does this allow us to crowd livestock into factory farms?

In working out conflicts over justice, Schlosberg eschews an a priori hierarchy of dimensions of, or claimants to, justice; instead he considers various models of political deliberation among a plurality of parties, including nonhuman nature. Here, Schlosberg undertakes an excellent review of the contemporary literature on deliberative democracy and pluralism, and shows

the practical promise of his approach to justice. However, when some conflicts—especially between predators and prey, and between systems and individuals—can become a matter of life and death, any such deliberative, pluralist politics may encounter serious limits.

What this friendly criticism shows is that Schlosberg has opened up a new political and theoretical vista, one with many

paths to work out. Let us hope he follows up this terrific volume with further excursions into ecological justice.

—PETER F. CANNAVÓ

The reviewer is Assistant Professor of Government at Hamilton College, in Clinton, New York. His research focuses on environmental political theory and the politics of place and space. He is the author of The Working Landscape: Founding, Preservation, and the Politics of Place (2007).