

Review: Greening Citizenship: Sustainable Development, the State and Ideology

By Andy Scerri

Reviewed by Yves Laberge

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Scerri, Andy. *Greening Citizenship: Sustainable Development, the State and Ideology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012. xix+235 pp. ISBN: 9781137010308. US\$95.00; hardcover (print-on-demand); also available as an electronic book.

Located at the intersection of environmental studies, eco-citizenship, policy studies, social theory, and the analysis of ideologies, Andy Scerri's first book is an impressive synthesis of many fields, which reconfirms the transdisciplinarity of all these domains. The opening pages provide a diversified mapping and revisiting of the recent theories in environmental studies. Drawing from a variety of authors — including Andrew Dobson's claim that citizens' participation is "what shapes the contours of sustainability itself" (p. 3), Andy Scerri proposes five key claims for theories of green citizenship within a scheme of sustainable development, including the requirements:

"...to challenge nature/culture dualism; to dissolve the divide between the public and private spheres; to eschew social contradictions; to undermine (state) territorialism; and to ground justice in awareness of the finiteness and maldistribution of ecospace" (p. 9).

The author situates the book's main concepts and his own assertions in his detailed Introduction chapter:

"I see citizenship and the state as expressing an encompassing cultural ideology that 'does not preclude contradiction and conflict' but, in fact, encompasses or enframes political debate and difference at the necessarily abstract level of what political discourse have in common" (p. 23).

Furthermore, Andy Scerri adds that ideologies are salient for the understanding of actions being made within environmental issues:

"The key premise here is that actors, acting from within a particular cultural ideological frame, face political requirements that they give reasons for their actions, which are set against the backdrop of historically established social conditions, relations and reproductive practices" (p. 25).

Most of *Greening Citizenship: Sustainable Development, the State and Ideology* remains on the theoretical side and therefore might be too dense for

undergraduates. Despite the fact Andy Scerri refers to “practical terms” in many examples (p. 9), there are no case studies, no advice for practitioners and no strategies for teachers in classrooms, although the author analyses or refers to cases such as the movement for fair trade (p. 155). A great amount of energy and analysis is given to the recommendations in the United Nations’ Agenda 21. On this topic, the author concludes, “the two most common approaches to understanding social indicators of sustainable development are governmentality and deliberate democratic theory” (p. 160). But conceptualization is strong and definitions are instructive, for example regarding what culture is: “I take culture to be the practices, discourses and material objects that express commonalities and differences, continuities and discontinuities of meaning over time within a society” (p. 23). One of the book’s conclusions is the existence of an artificial split between the users of “green consumerism” vs. those who are unaware and therefore reproduce the “neoliberal networks,” a divided scheme which in fact corresponds to the wealthy and the poorer (p. 158).

As for its potential readership, Andy Scerri’s book would certainly be most useful for doctoral students who need to see a rich theoretical framework in environmental studies that is strongly rooted in Social Theory and open to other disciplines. Furthermore, the author includes salient works from a large array of scholars, including some non-Anglophone thinkers (like Louis Dumont on ideologies; Luc Boltanski on capitalism), which is always important for any academic book (p. 23). In summary, *Greening Citizenship: Sustainable Development, the State and Ideology* will please scholars who want to connect environmental education with citizenship studies into one single book.

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Electronic Green Journal, Issue 37, 2014, ISSN: 1076-7975