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Introduction: Arguing about the Environment – What Difference Does Culture Make?

In recent years environmental debate has moved from the margins of public and political life to occupy a key position in discussions on the political, social and economic prospects of the human world. Unprecedented media coverage on central environmental problems such as climate change and biodiversity loss has accelerated a dramatic shift in how we view our physical environment and our role within it. This book deals with consequences of an important aspect of this shift that may look unsurprising but has yet to receive sufficient attention from social scientists, politicians, environmental policy-makers and others who contribute to public life: environmental arguing takes place between people who differ from each other in many ways. These people, or groups or institutions or nations, often have radically divergent assumptions and convictions – sometimes quite unconnected with the environment as such; thus debates about the environment present themselves as instances of intercultural dialogue. Here we try to explore some factors which can make environmental arguments seem plausible, or otherwise, to their adherents, and which lead them to react to the arguments of others as they do. Many of the effective, on-the-ground meanings of debates about the environment are generated and affected by clashes between different ways of living – ‘cultures’. In this collection, we examine instances of environmental arguing drawn from three contrasting societies – Ireland, Germany and China – and made by people with dissimilar points of view within those societies. We highlight some of the ways in which interculturality can shape arguments, influencing them in terms of ‘background’ factors which may, in the event, make all the difference.

This suggests that culture matters in ways which rarely find expression in everyday discourse or in the literature. The different back-

grounds of our cases allow us to illuminate some of the effects of people's cultural habits and ways of life; they also show that obvious or acknowledged cultural effects are by no means always the most decisive. For example, contrasting culture-specific views of how best to use time are rarely reflected upon, at least not consciously, though we shall show that they significantly shape people's stances on transport and mobility and their environmental implications. If we wish to understand environmental arguments, therefore, as well as the people who make them, we cannot do so without becoming sensitive to the influences of the networks of cultural practice within which they make sense of their physical and social world, or fail to do so. The cases presented in this book show that these influences can be decisive in shaping the outcomes of environmental debates – or, sometimes, in preventing them from being solved at all.

Any argument about public affairs depends both on an underpinning of ideas about how the world works and on arrangements for how debate should be conducted. If one participant in a discussion comes from a background in which keeping the peace is considered paramount, and the other assumes that public negotiations depend on the ferocious defence of core interests, the outcome will depend as much on these assumptions as on the substance of debate. People's ideas about how to live their everyday lives, how to get on with their neighbours, or how everyday politics work, all influence what they say and do in public interaction. Not only this, but the meanings of central concepts – even the idea of 'the environment' itself – can differ, as we shall show, from person to person, between different groups in society, and from one part of a culture to another. The contributions to this book explore different implications of these facts, seeking to show and analyse sociologically what is going on when people argue about the environment.

We have chosen the examples we did to highlight differences in argumentation within and between different cultural contexts, and to explore the effects these differences have on approaches to the environment. We deal here with cases from three countries which appear very different in terms of overall argumentative conventions as well as in terms of relationships with the physical environment – Ireland, Germany and China. But we find that contrasts and comparisons be-

tween them are not always those we might expect if we failed to take into account the ways in which argument interacts with more local needs, interests and points of view. In rural parts of Ireland, as in agricultural communities in other parts of Europe, patterns of arguing can be associated with dependence on neighbours and the need to preserve local networks which support meaningful forms of everyday living. These habits of arguing influence the way the environment itself is experienced and thought of. But it is not only farmers who take their views of the environment from close associates: as one of our examples from Germany shows, medical practitioners and researchers also share worldviews about what can be taken for granted and what appears to be beneficial or useless, and this affects what they consider acceptable in the physical world and what they treat as dangerous.

From Germany, we also have an example of debate between different groups within a particular geographical region. In this case, environmental argument about how to deal with severe flood events takes place between people with sharply divergent points of view about what should be saved and what aspects of the countryside are dispensable. But, as the example shows, it is possible to develop procedures which encourage more constructive interaction than simple binary conflict between ‘my’ position and ‘yours’. Conflicts and contrasts can be managed in different ways, as is instanced by Ruairí O’Brien’s artistic treatments of the environment, designed to impinge radically on audiences’ sensitivities. In her *Postscript*, Renate Künast, prominent in the Green Party in Germany, urges us to return to a venerable European tradition of diversity and tolerance in argument in order to make positive use of differences. This tradition is one which works through people’s imaginations as well as through debate about policy. Correspondingly, Green politics aim to provoke the kinds of shift in cultural identity which make it possible for people to envisage themselves as engaged in environmentally friendly living.

We do not, however, wish to limit ourselves to a European perspective. Chen Hong’s article explores some Chinese approaches to arguing which can be beneficial for environmental reflection, not least a readiness to embrace personal and cultural predilections as potentially significant fulcra for change. But, as Liu Wei reminds us, environmental policy in China cannot but be subject to a fluid and sometimes

contradictory dynamic of argumentational pressures, whose results are not always positive for the environment. Nonetheless, there is a rich reserve of stances towards human action in China which offer a plethora of possibilities for constructive development. Cases like these amount to a collection in the sociology of argument. They show how it is that environmental argument is 'about' far more than meets the eye.

This book thus explores in detail how different argumentative frameworks impact on environmental debate. This theme is reflected in the arrangement of the chapters. They are not divided along national lines, since we wish to highlight the ways in which the influences of national cultures *interact* with cultural components from other sources. They may be intertwined with power relationships which can take effect anywhere on the globe; they are often modulated to reflect highly specific interests and conventions. The first two chapters, by Sylvia Kruse and Mark Garavan, deal with cases of environmental arguing in Germany and in Ireland, showing how arguments which are closely bound to their contexts can be influenced in contrasting ways by larger-scale impacts, by local government or by transnational companies. The next pair of chapters, by Henrike Rau and Lisa Moran, deal with cultures of knowing and argumentation in urban and rural Ireland respectively, developing different aspects of the theme of local meanings. Rau discovers communities of meaning associated with different mobility cultures and their preferences for particular modes of transport; Moran deals literally with localities in the countryside. The roles played by governmental regulation are a strong background feature of these first chapters, and attempts to evolve environmental policy are highlighted more directly in the next pair. Liu Wei's overview of environmental arguing in China depicts political and economic influences on approaches to the environment both from within the country and from outside. Frances Fahy examines policy-makers' approaches to citizens' environmental attitudes, arguing that far more details 'on the ground' need to be taken into account before campaigning for populations to change their environmental behaviour.

The next two chapters examine subcultures reflecting very basic aspects of humans' connections with the environment: they relate to eating and to health. In their contribution, Perry Share and Oliver

Moore outline some visceral habits and feelings attached to environmental arguments connected with food in Ireland. Walter Wortberg, a doctor practising in Germany, then addresses a similarly fundamental question, the ways in which human bodies are affected by environmental pollution. He shows how difficult it can be for medical practitioners and medical policy-makers to acknowledge environmental causes of illness and threats to the body; they, too, are constrained by habitual assumptions and priorities which affect their reactions to evidence. This reinforces a point made earlier by Sylvia Kruse: that influences from different cultural backgrounds in arguing are exerted within the scientific world as well as outside it. The next two chapters address the question how attitudes to environmental matters can be changed through art and literature. Chen Hong explores recent debates in China that revolve around the publication of a novel, whereas Ruairí O'Brien shows how artistic contributions can attempt to make impacts on environmental attitudes in post-unification Germany. The last two chapters in the book, by Kevin Ryan and Ricca Edmondson, are devoted to the process of environmental arguing itself and how it can be constructively developed. Finally, Renate Künast's *Postscript* outlines how both novel and established forms of environmental arguing come to bear on the political process, affecting the nature and trajectory of social-environmental change.

Sylvia Kruse's and Mark Garavan's opening chapters offer striking evidence of the variety of influences to be taken into account when we treat environmental arguing as intercultural arguing. Sylvia Kruse's case centres on reactions to the flooding of the river Elbe in Germany in 2002. This river traverses an area of eastern Germany with strong cultural connotations for the whole country. The religious and political influences exerted from this region have played significant roles in German history; West Germans felt that it was cut off from them during the period of the GDR (1949–1989). Though the reintegration of Germany since then has been complex and incomplete, the disastrous 2002 Elbe floods provoked generosity and sympathy from other parts of the country. But there remains the question what longer-term measures can prevent recurrences of serious flooding in the region. Different groups vie for different solutions, strongly marked by cultural allegiances of very different natures and origins.

Only some of them are in the first place attitudes to the environment as such. Kruse and her colleagues thus explore a situation in which there are many participants to argument, reflecting contrasting cultural attitudes to what should be done. They are presided over by an authority in whose interests it is to help them arrive at a common understanding. Kruse's chapter is based on a method of analysis which maps the constellations formed by these arguments; this is part of a social-action project to interview participants and help them to understand their own and each other's positions in more constructive ways.

Kruse's account of the groups debating how to avoid further disastrous flooding includes those who wish above all to protect nature in some sense of the term – either specific fauna or flora, or the natural formation of the Elbe itself and its environs; those whose interests focus on cultural heritage, therefore wishing to preserve the historical dykes rather than modernise them; or those whose interests centre on the practicalities of commercial and daily life in the area. This vividly illustrates the way in which environmental disputes are influenced by a plethora of attitudes, only some of which are primarily directed towards the environment as such, and only some of which are fully apparent to those engaged in debate on the ground. Attitudes to culture and history, or to how to conduct everyday commercial life, heavily influence the expectations of those involved in this dispute. Kruse's 'constellation analysis' is part of an attempt to analyse this debate and also to take it further in a positive direction.

Kruse shows that in the course of this dispute, different kinds of knowledge-claim are produced – though the people concerned do not always notice that this is the case. Some regard everyday acquaintance with the habits of the river as basic knowledge; for others, this role is played by cultural references to the history of the region, or assumptions about the economics of human survival. The interactions between these types of claim form a culturally unfamiliar terrain of argument which participants must traverse. They must do so, moreover, at a time when relations between humans and nature are in crisis, and under conditions of great uncertainty, not only about the causes of the crisis but about the effects other people's reactions to it will have. Multiple cultures shape different relationships between nature and the people involved: how they use, deal with and react to nature is shaped

by personal, local or national values, habits and preferences. Some local people have known the river since childhood, and know where it has changed its banks or where dykes have been weakened; others know which neighbours have water in their cellars; others have little local knowledge but are experienced in disaster control. Scientific responses to environmental crisis are similarly kaleidoscopic. Because they must be transdisciplinary, they too make up a regime of heterogeneous knowledge-types. Political and administrative knowledge about environmental disaster is also fragmented. Kruse notes that in responses to such complex predicaments, solutions often seem to be blocked: people begin by wanting to co-operate, but their attempts founder. Her approach tries to locate reasons for these blockages – discovering that they are less black-and-white than at first it seems – and to help dissolve them.

Mark Garavan's paper, in contrast, describes a conflict over gas recovery in North Mayo in the West of Ireland, in which the cultural viewpoints of two sets of protagonists are so far apart as to seem irreconcilable. In this instance, participants have very different ideas about what constitutes arguing itself, and these ideas themselves affect the environmental subject-matter of their debate. It is again the case that many of the disputants' positions, though entrenched within an environmental dispute, may not be intrinsically 'environmental' as such. The transnational company involved is necessarily committed to economic viability and profit, and embraces a form of rationality which seems appropriate to this orientation. The inhabitants of the Erris peninsula – a remote, beautiful and unspoilt area of the Atlantic seaboard – have concerns which are sparked by what they see as a radical threat to their environment but which also have other roots, difficult to describe in the public languages common in the 21st-century Western world. Deep-seated anxieties about their sense of belonging, rooted in the local landscape, the future viability of their community and the bodily integrity of its members, are central to their struggle. These concerns remain mostly implicit in argument because they do not fit easily into the language of instrumental rationality imposed on the dispute by the conventions of contemporary politics. They are hard to explain in modern Ireland, with its sympathy for pragmatic, economic considerations. The gas company's representa-

tives and the campaigners against the pipeline are thus talking past each other with significant effects. From the point of view of the company, its own position appears to be so reasonable as to be independent of contextual influence; it perceives its arguments as neutral and correct, and those of opponents as tied to their setting in fundamentally irrational ways.

Garavan has reservations about the ease with which cultural translation could be effected in this case. For the local community, the imperative to review its own arguments is imposed by intercultural relations, especially the need to deal with influential parties outside the dispute who are operating with very different cultural assumptions. As the more vulnerable party, trying to explain a position not easily understood, the community learns to perceive issues usually left unexamined in its own views about how to live well. Like Kruse, Garavan shows that disputes cannot just be understood in terms of definite positions set out at the beginning of a dispute: they develop as an argument progresses. The gas company is not subject to an equivalent pressure. Thus it is able to continue to believe it is taking a 'genuinely open perspective' even while imposing a language of argument which heavily favours its own position. Garavan distinguishes the different phases of this dispute rhetorically, in terms of the campaigners' successive addressees: the gas company and the local authority, the Department of the Marine, and the environmental planning board. In each case, terms of debate are imposed by a more powerful interlocutor. Eventually, the process culminates in a '*tour de force* of popular discourse' at a planning hearing, as protestors move to an innovative defence of their own way of life. In Ireland, Garavan contends, disputes about the environment often appear to centre on the idea of place. But this can act as shorthand for much deeper concerns about ways of living a good life, difficult to reflect in the terms of debate usual here.

Henrike Rau's chapter continues to explore implications of the fact that arguments about the environment are not *only* about the environment. She notes that Ireland, far from the 'haven of tranquillity' represented by horse-drawn tourist carriages in Galway, is one of the most car-dependent countries in the world. Indeed, a motorway is about to be driven through Tara, a sacred regal landscape which epit-

omises ancient Ireland, complete with traffic intersections and the industrial growth they will entail. This, Rau argues, reflects changes in mobility cultures which are associated with changing views of time during the modernisation of Ireland. Time has become accelerated, condensed, desynchronised: that is, one person's use and experience of time is disconnected from another's. Personal mobility used to be linked to social synchronisation, doing things either together or in a way which dovetailed with other people; this was linked to ways in which local communities survived. Changing mobility patterns affect not only the amount of time people spend travelling but also its social meanings. Some people see these changes as positive, conferring flexibility, freedom and progress; others, as undermining the ability to participate in social life, a 'time trap'. Similarly, commuting can be seen as a burden, or as a buffer zone between work or school and home. Rau examines evidence that there are competing 'mobility cultures' in Ireland, interpreting travelling in different ways. Personal transport can be emblematic of personal freedom, an assertion of the power of the individual; people's mobility choices may at least in part be forms of 'cultural identification'. Different time-space practices conduce to cross-cultural misunderstandings, in which disputes over transport infrastructure bring cultural choices to the fore.

In these circumstances, Rau suggests, intercultural dialogue is not made easier when the Irish State refuses to enter into dialogue with environmental groups, as in the case of an official hearing about the Ballinasloe-Galway motorway. Transport *planning*, here, purveys a view strongly shaped by technological and economic measurability. This has the effect of shutting out other priorities; it comes to seem reasonable and 'objective' to spend millions to save a few minutes' commuting time. Technical and legalistic rhetorical strategies back up this position, which is underpinned by an interpretation of the car as a powerful symbol of societal progress. The language of traffic flow management leaches out meaning from other interpretations – for instance from the history of the area, the site of the Battle of Aughrim in 1691, the bloodiest battle ever fought on Irish soil. Objectors challenge this attempt to technicise the dispute, vividly highlighting allegiances to deeper cultural convictions on the parts of different 'mobility cultures' in Ireland. Disputes about roads are not concerned

only with roads, not even only with the environment, but depend on ideas about justice, equality, and what adds up to a good quality of life. Rau argues that opposition between the Irish State and environmentalist objectors to road projects reflects deep-seated cultural differences. Questions of mobility link into socio-cultural practices which mirror the political landscape and its dominant ways of thinking and talking.

Lisa Moran deals with another respect in which arguments about the environment can include (and sometimes occlude) other topics. Dealing with farming communities in East Connemara, she argues that views about sustainability, here as in other places, are inextricably linked with views about how society works and how to maintain relationships with other people. What sustainability is actually thought to entail is based on local practices. Local forms of knowledge are significant influences on how people argue and on the rhetorical strategies they use to negotiate contentious matters. This is not to suggest that we cannot adjudicate between such ways of arguing. On the contrary, we need to be conscious that they have socio-cultural components which require assessment. In Connemara, people need to sustain their ties with neighbours into the future: it is this future-orientation which drives their concern. Environmental arguments in general are coloured by shared perceptions stemming from such social relationships.

In this farming community, Moran argues, being able to participate in local discourse, mastering local conventions of debate, are forms of sociability which create local power-structures. As a result, local people's views tend to have more status than those of outsiders. People see place-specific knowledge and accustomed ways of doing things as intrinsic to the sustainability of the region: this amounts to a locally specific conception of what 'sustainability' means. Paradoxically, it can sometimes prioritise relations with neighbours *over* the environment, for some local codes of behaviour may be environmentally dubious, for instance burning rubbish as a form of waste disposal. Moran shows that this social meaning of the environment has affected responses to environmental threats – which tend to develop into disputes only when an outside party is involved. In the past, people have refrained from opposing the use of chemicals to eliminate

scrub, although fearful of the environmental effects this might have; nor did contention attach to the overgrazing common in the 1980s, with the degradation to land and water it caused. Yet in 1999, when a national operator wanted to locate a mobile phone mast in the area, people in the community campaigned effectively against it. Fears over an outside threat could be expressed more freely, using vociferous rather than muted rhetoric, and community feeling actually helped in the success of the campaign.

Next, Liu Wei's chapter on Chinese environmental debate deals with new developments in environmental policy, interpreting them in the light of Chinese cultural and political predicaments. This contribution both helps us to overcome some intercultural problems of our own and throws light on intercultural problems affecting the environment within China itself. Governments, Liu Wei emphasises, are by no means unconstrained actors. Environmental problems in China are associated with cultural and economic aims which governments cannot simply abandon, and which the international community actively urges upon them: feeding the population and increasing its standard of living, enhancing governmental legitimacy and responding to the population's desires. Despite these pressures, as Liu Wei points out, Chinese responses to environmental problems have not always been less than Western ones, even within the context of the huge economic development of the last half-century. China's environmental protection agency was formed at a similar period to Western ones, and some of the problems it faces – such as wavering enforcement powers – are far from unknown elsewhere, even as others spring from sources particular to Chinese history and politics.

Liu Wei therefore explores the ways in which Chinese environmental policy has taken different shapes as it has had to interact with radically different pressures. After the immediate revolutionary era, the idea of economic 'development' was crucial in enabling the country to re-unite. Development itself was spurred largely by rural enterprises. Though they did have some environmentally desirable effects, such as enabling workers to remain in the countryside rather than migrating to cities, political struggle over the role of profits in China took precedence over environmental debate. And, often, rural enterprises here have been no more concerned with environmental effects

than have been farming communities elsewhere in the world. As elsewhere too, local governments have been unwilling to burden successful companies with environmental demands, for fear they will move to the next province. Organisations defending the environment against these and other problems are not always assisted by the longstanding enmeshment of Chinese bureaucracy in civil society; and the bureaucratic ranking system causes additional difficulties in the capacities of environmental agencies to enforce their judgements. A magistrate, to restrain an official of higher rank, must first strip him or her of this rank, an operation replete with problems. Despite a traditionally paternalistic system, however, China's chief environmental lawmaker has encouraged the founding of more NGOs, a sign of lively intercultural debate within the country. Similarly, there are official applications of Chinese arguments against the West within China itself. There is debate over cases where polluting industries have moved into rural heartlands of eastern China, where labour is cheaper and fines lighter, with signs that public policy can sometimes achieve the remarkable feat of putting the environment above the economy.

But this environmental discussion within China itself takes a wide variety of forms (as Chen Hong's chapter also shows). While conventional scientists continue to take a 20th-century approach, arguing that nature should be subordinate to human needs, others are reviving holistic social-environmental conceptions from Imperialist times. This, for Liu Wei, is an inappropriate response. It suggests that people sometimes frame their feelings by grasping at arguments which simply happen to seem available, whatever their appropriateness to the case in hand. This casts light on an unconscious syncretism found in other cultural settings too. Elements of argument with quite disparate origins may be treated as making up a chain, though closer examination reveals fundamental inconsistencies between them. But Liu Wei suggests that, in China, debate about the environment also plays a special political role. It can offer an arena in which political cultures can clash in ways which avoid open conflict between them.

Also starting from the point of view of government policy, Frances Fahy examines the issue of waste management and everyday social practices in households in Ireland. National environmental campaigns are conducted on the basis that everyone interprets arguments

similarly and can be expected to amend their conduct on foot of blanket interventions. Fahy, in contrast, is conscious of the gap between favourable attitudes to the environment on the one hand and unsustainable behaviour on the other, but she doubts whether countrywide publicity campaigns can bridge this gulf. Her chapter argues that action research based on direct intervention and waste-management training can help to change people's behaviour regarding household waste, by responding to the *differences* between households. Her research itself is a form of intercultural intervention, offering practical support for the efforts of householders who are trying to change their habits in relation to recycling. Fahy highlights some cultural factors which play significant roles in determining the success of such interventions. As we have noticed before, decisive cultural influences may originate outside the parameters of environmental debate itself. For example, she suggests that being a student can make it less likely that new waste management habits will be adopted successfully. This seems to be because students are more prone to adopt a style of communal living hard to make compatible with effective waste management. Importantly, it is not the case here that respondents do not take arguments about the environment seriously or do not understand them. They do; but their behaviour does not always reflect this, for reasons which stem from quite other areas – how they have arranged their kitchens or how easily they can take their children to school. When environmental argument is directed at change, it may not be its *environmental* aspects which help or hinder the likelihood of transformation, but how easily it maps onto other cultural patterns.

The next pair of chapters deals with larger-scale discourses, relating to food and eating in the case of Perry Share and Oliver Moore, and to medicine and the environment in the case of Walter Wortberg. Share and Moore draw attention to the fundamental nature of food and eating, which provide our most elementary experience of belonging to a society; nonetheless, apart from well-known topics such as 'food miles' or organic farming, food plays a relatively submerged and covert role in Irish environmental argumentation. Despite the global industrialisation, not to say 'McDisneyfication' of food, for example, we need more evidence on how this interacts with local cultures and alternative food practices. The authors are clear that this whole arena is

marked by kaleidoscopic new cultural formations, with their own conventions and habits, bestowing new forms of meaning and validity on the ways in which people experience their lives.

These changes are fluid and interacting; the authors underline that to understand them we need to look closely at what people actually *do*. They therefore explore examples of lived practice taken from newly-evolved social networks relating to food culture in Ireland: organics, farmers' markets, Slow Food and community food projects. Each of these exhibits new cultural constellations. The organic movement in Ireland, with its efforts to halt the potentially irreversible loss of culture-specific knowledge about food, represents a network which to some extent cuts across socio-cultural and economic divisions. It may conjoin attitudes relating to health and the environment (often perceived as a single phenomenon), 'food miles', animal welfare or taste. Farmers' markets differ from this less in theory than in practice, what people *do*. For example they re-establish definite ideas about times and seasons in place of the 24-hour availability of urban shopping. Community gardening projects introduce rural agricultural practices into urban spaces, changing the way urban dwellers view their relationship to food production and consumption. They too create opportunities for new social relationships and forms of interaction that cut across established boundaries in society, such as age or social status. They also make attitudes to food concrete, producing food within 'a complex relationship between sociability, being outdoors, an environmental and political awareness, and working together, including the preparation and consumption of meals'. The authors enquire how these ideas should be fitted in to environmental argument, urging closer attention to the creation of ideas and arguments in the complex dynamics of daily living.

Walter Wortberg deals with a complementary arena: the damage done to humans by environmental degradation, and what – based on his long experience as an environmental doctor in Germany – he contends are very halting medical responses to this problem. Why is chemical pollution not more strongly controlled? Though major reasons are doubtless economic and political, Wortberg argues that, besides these, medical career structures and long-established cultural habits combine to lead practitioners and researchers to downgrade the

significance of evidence which ought to provoke stronger concern. He is clear that, in argument about the environment, collecting the best possible data remains the crux of the matter. Nonetheless, professional practices inevitably encourage members of medical professions to take for granted that some types of evidence should be reacted to more immediately than others, that precautionary principles should be triggered by certain types of suspicion rather than others. The point of view of the perceiver is despite everything heavily involved, and inevitably influenced by cultural habits within medicine. Wortberg, in underlining these aspects of medical argumentation, is anxious to effect changes in medical culture that will accord more significance to evidence of environmental damage and what can be done to counter it.

The dynamics of cultural and argumentative change in relation to how people perceive and feel about the environment are addressed explicitly in Ruairí O'Brien's and Chen Hong's contributions. Ruairí O'Brien, an Irish architect and artist living and working in Dresden, Germany, is well known for works of art which entice and sometimes demand interaction from audiences, and whose effects are to provoke reflection about natural, built and socio-political environments. How much space, for example, does a person need in the world? O'Brien builds wooden frames, hollow boxes, interlinked by holes leading one from another, and confines dancers within the structures. It is, he observes, both frightening and instructive to see that although at the start of such a performance they find their confines uncomfortable and hard to negotiate (they are soon covered with bruises), before long they can adjust easily to their temporary cages.

O'Brien works on a vast range of cultural projects, from prisoner-of-war camps to a memorial for the writer Erich Kästner, breathing new life into historical structures using contemporary elements such as laser sculptures. One of his projects, a memorial to the former East German practice of building houses with pre-fabricated concrete slabs, is a symbolic garden on the site of one of the earliest of these factories in the GDR. Its first slabs were made from the rubble left after the bombing of Dresden. O'Brien argues that this factory, and the practices associated with it, is just as much part of Dresden's history as is the *Frauenkirche* or the opera house. In this project, a mosaic of elements from the past urges spectators to think about the

future and how they relate to it; it revitalises an inner-city wasteland in a way that involves spectators in reflection on the environment. O'Brien's aim is to create social works of art: audiences become involved in his works, asked to make written comments or give small presents to the project which add to its collection of meanings. These works of art are environmental arguments in themselves, acting out an epigram beloved of Kästner, 'Be the change you wish to see in the world.'

Chen Hong, next, analyses the recent popularity in central China of a novel, *The Wolf Totem*, published in 2004 and now translated into English, dealing with Mongolian attitudes to nature, in particular with the totem figure of the wolf. Chen Hong explores the way in which this text has been adopted in a tacit project of self-criticism among Han people in China; this enables her to chart cultural changes in attitudes to the environment which are evolving along indirect and unexpected paths. This article casts rare light on the ways in which Chinese environmental argument may take forms unfamiliar in Western debates. The positions explored here address conceptions of humanity and nature directly, associating them with ethical and characterological features attributed to social groups. This in turn may provoke reflection about features of society and debate to which Westerners respond only with difficulty. Chinese cultural re-evaluation, in the instance discussed here, is joined with a form of reflexivity highlighting the characters of particular groups and their behaviour towards each other and towards nature. The Han people, it is argued – on the internet and elsewhere – need to attach their allegiances less to the agricultural exploitation of the environment, and more to the wolf and the wild. In the West, people may be more reluctant to recognise that politics depends not only on deep-seated ethical habits but also on habitual constellations of *feeling*. Part of the importance of this article lies in the opportunity it offers us to re-conceptualise some of our own social attitudes, as well as to assess the tones they lend to environmental debate. Chen Hong is clear that 'respecting' nature involves emotional habits among others, and *The Wolf Totem* is a means to discussing this.

The remaining chapters in the collection deal more directly with argumentation and its connection with the environment, referring dir-

ectly to discussions in the earlier chapters. Kevin Ryan and Ricca Edmondson both interrogate the instruments available to us for understanding the intrinsically culturally-embedded nature of argumentation. Kevin Ryan's analysis of debates on participatory democracy and deliberation in social and political theory assesses their applicability to environmental discussion. He examines pertinent approaches to understanding participative, democratic argument, highlighting political theorists' contrasts between consensus and contestation in political debate on the conditions for a better world. Ryan outlines a contrast between 'rationalists' who see Habermasian procedural reason as exemplary for this debate, and 'radicals', like Chantal Mouffe, who instead emphasise 'passion, strategy and the politics of domination and emancipation'. Habermas's 'fiction' of 'the ideal speech situation' is 'an ideal type of communication which is wholly rational and untainted by coercion or strategy'; for the radicals, this is unrealistic and often inapplicable.

Ryan questions which account of political debate can better respond to the sort of dispute exemplified in cases such as those outlined by Garavan and Kruse. He sees the Mayo dispute as marked by divergent 'stocks of knowledge', the taken-for-granted daily assumptions about how to negotiate the social world routinely which were described by Schütz and which delineate a community's shared cultural knowledge. For Ryan, intercultural disputes occur when these stocks are not shared, as in the case of the gas companies and the local people in Mayo. Habermas's approach seeks to offer a procedure modelled on the workings of the law, which can be used even in such intercultural cases. But, Ryan points out, in the Mayo case we have an example where procedures *silence* debate rather than facilitating it. Radical democrats would focus here on the background consensus behind the Habermasian fiction, seeing it as 'far from innocent or benign'. Rather than striving for consensus within conventional terms, therefore, they would refuse to accept the power relationships inscribed into these terms. Hence, for them, the central struggle of democracy involves continuing to debate even though agreement may never be reached. From a Habermasian position, these radicals would be judged irrational and undisciplined: they reject the orderly forms of debate offered to them in favour of a continuing ethical and political

project couched in quite other terms. For Ryan, these radical terms must be pursued 'if we want to continue to walk the line between the possibility and the impossibility of a better world'.

Ricca Edmondson's chapter draws on classical traditions of rhetoric to explore the implications of elements of environmental arguing displayed in previous chapters in this collection. She argues that social and emotional aspects of argument are by no means necessarily irrational. Indeed, they can contribute to a form of wisdom currently sought by prominent contributors to environmental debate such as Al Gore, who is looking for new *kinds of arguing* to cope with environmental crises. Edmondson contends that we can use Aristotelian and Ciceronian analyses of argument to understand what this might mean. They explicitly recognise social and emotional aspects of arguing and confront their relations to reasonable debate. They help us too to recognise the cultural variability of arguing: what counts as a good argument in one setting may seem pretentious or pusillanimous in another, but rhetorical concepts allow us to account for and evaluate this. For rhetorical writers, arguments are based on 'logos', 'the argument itself', which rests partly on submerged, taken-for-granted, culturally-influenced assumptions and approaches to how arguments should be made; 'ethos', the speaker's character as shown in the speech – whether he or she is excellently informed, ethically qualified, benevolently inclined to the audience; and 'pathos', which covers the ways in which audiences can be encouraged to respond to debate.

Audiences' views, values and feelings set the parameters for debate, even when speakers aim to change them, as is often the case in environmental arguing. Intercultural arguing is a matter not only of adapting to different audiences' assumptions but to their diverse *argumentative practices*. These differ for reasons which rhetorical concepts help us to explore and evaluate. For instance, what do specific audiences take to indicate ethos? Some environmentalists underscore their up-to-date natural-scientific information; to some audiences, this indicates professional competence, while to others it may appear over-elaborate or even suspect. But though these impressions have cultural origins, they can also be subjected to reasonable debate. Pathos influences practice by bringing people to treat arguments differently, as when Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* brought audiences to *see* science

differently – as *sometimes* advancing human progress but not *necessarily* as doing so. These are basic attitudinal and emotional positions; but they are not immune to reason. The tradition of rhetoric drawn on here aims to use such discussions in the service of constructive arguing. Aristotle and Cicero support arguing *well*, not merely correctly and effectively but in a way that promotes the public good.

This fuses their approaches with traditions of wisdom, which in the West generally indicate synthesised forms of reasoning which combine moral, socio-political, emotional, inter-personal with intellectual aspects of thought. There are many historical models of wisdom, many characterised by responsiveness to circumstance, flexibility, and accepting character, audience, time, place, process as in principle legitimate parts of arguing. Wisdom is generally taken to include strong ethical components, emphasising appropriate judgement, breadth of vision and good sense in the service of the common good. Traditions of rhetoric and of wisdom originate with the birth of democracy and the need to reach public decisions although in many ways we disagree. Edmondson proposes to revive a rhetorical conception of ‘wisdom’ to provide criteria for constructive environmental discourse. We can see how such criteria are applied in documents such as the Stern Review: they include taking people seriously even while urging them to acknowledge the need for radical change. Emotional and social elements of arguing can contribute greatly to reasonable debate, for example allowing people to perceive their opponents differently or to make the emotional shifts which may be necessary if their convictions are to alter. We need this emotional flexibility if we are to make sense of other people’s positions and debate with them in a way that acknowledges their differences. If, on the contrary, we take a technical, over-cognitive approach to argument, this prevents us from feeling the attitudes to the physical world which are needed to save it. We need to acknowledge the argumentative phenomena dealt with in rhetoric, including well-reasoned feeling, in order to behave wisely towards the environment.

The papers in this collection all focus on cases of environmental arguing which emanate from some particular cultural setting or combination of settings, and try to reach out to recipients with varied cultural backgrounds. Their location at the interfaces between cultures

makes a difference to them just because cultures are made up of interacting sets of ways of behaving, habits of looking at the world, values and preferences. When ‘the same’ argument, say in favour of cutting carbon emissions or respecting the environment, is placed within Irish, German or Chinese contexts, it is affected by these local cultural approaches to arguing, and comes to mean something different in each case. It is an empirical question how big or significant this change in meaning will be; hence the emphasis in this collection on examining particular cases. We provide both theoretical and empirical support for the claim that acknowledging the interculturality of environmental arguments helps us to understand them better. These arguments use multiple strategies, including emphasising some elements of the cultures they share with recipients and de-selecting others – just as Al Gore gives what rhetoricians would call ‘presence’ to audiences’ connectedness with the natural world and relegates their more environmentally-destructive impulses to the moral and tactical background. Environmental arguments, in short, are intended not only to promote changes in the physical environment but also to effect changes in the cultures which affect them, and this is the aspect of environmental debate foregrounded in this text.

Sometimes the components of cultures are connected in ways which strangers who live outside them can easily perceive as coherent; others of their elements may seem contradictory, arbitrary products of historical circumstance. Cultures should not be expected to be homogeneous, and changes within them may be hard to predict. A cultural discourse is what Dryzek (2003: 3) terms ‘a shared way of making sense of the world embedded in language’ – but the sharing is not always complete, and the sense is not always easy to follow. This discourse will contain ‘assumptions, judgements, contentions, dispositions, and capabilities’ (*ibid.*), but also feelings, passions and preferences – which we need to make intelligible too. Social maps are subject to change and flux whose origins are not always clear; they sometimes show lacunae, ‘white areas’ in which people do not know quite what to do; they are shaped by the contours of political power. In Ireland, for example, cultural inheritances from earlier forms of rural living have different implications from those passed down in Germany. In Germany, references to rural living (for instance in styles

of interior decoration) may be associated with an attachment to the countryside itself, regarded (accurately or otherwise) as a touchstone of social customs which is still readily accessible. In Ireland, recollections of the countryside are imbued with a pragmatism very much open to certain forms of change – with varied effects on the environment. In the mid-20th century, newly-developed rust-resistant wheat was adopted instantly by Irish farmers, who avoided the devastation to crops suffered by the more conservative British; yet, at that time, inhabitants of the Irish countryside still objected to archaeological investigations as sacrilegious to the dead. Nowadays, the idea of running a motorway through Ireland's most sacred landscape, at Tara, arouses only limited dismay. Clearly, the 'meaning' of Tara to different cultural groups is connected with different *ways of living* which make it seem valuable or irrelevant to the modern world and which alter in tune with changing power-structures in the country. Members of these groups do not 'choose' what to think entirely independently; their everyday social habits present them with a world within which one approach or the other seems to make obvious sense.

Our work is therefore intended to complement other discursive approaches to environmental debate, specifically those which are conscious of the way in which language and debate are themselves seen as forms of action – not commentaries on the world, but actions within it. Some of this work has highlighted frameworks specifically connected with the idea of environmentalism itself. Yearley's *The Green Case* (1991), for instance, rightly drew attention to the influence of narrowly natural-scientific conceptions of valid arguing versus wider-ranging forms of social assessment, as far as the calculation of environmental risk is concerned. Our own more general interest is in the influence on environmental arguing of cultural attitudes with varied origins, many external to environmental debate as such. Here, important work by writers such as Frank Fischer has highlighted the power of argumentative styles and stances vis-à-vis environmental debate. Fischer (2003: x), exploring the possibilities for democratic debate of the argumentative impacts of policy discussion, terms democratic politics 'a struggle for power played out in significant part through arguments about the "best story"'. Thus Ronald Reagan, for instance, 'reshaped the contours of public discourse' by presenting a

story about the world in which self-interest could appear self-evidently saner than concern for 'the common good' (Fischer, 2003: 25). The effects of such changes resonate throughout society, refracting their power throughout our everyday talk and behaviour. 'Politics is a world of multiple realities' (Fischer, 2003: 55), which need to be questioned and, if necessary, undermined. For Steve Fuller (2003), reflections such as these should impact on how we think of debate in the public world itself, currently 'under assault' from sectional versions of how to carry out argumentation. Fuller points out that environmental argumentation itself has given a lead here, as scientists have effectively sustained public debate about global climate change. They have created a new public sphere in which matters of shared importance are debated, reclaiming for the public world just those scientific questions whose sequestration Yearley had noted.

We aim to add to work of this kind by reflecting on the cultural positions of participants in environmental debate, taking into account that many of their stances will have origins unconnected with environmental questions in themselves. We hope to go some way towards tracing answers to questions about how social meanings originate and evolve (Fischer, 2003: 56). Hajer (2003) offers one such example, showing that an environmental consensus may be created among formerly disparate and disconnected social groups when government edicts are promulgated with sufficient insensitivity to unite them. Kelly (2007) also highlights diverse discursive patterns and strategies that shape the nature and trajectory of environmental debate in Ireland. She shows that Irish people make use of a multitude of arguments and seek to present them in ways that are effective within their socio-cultural settings. This collection aims to take further steps towards examining environmental clashes from the points of view of the different cultural approaches they involve. Without understanding these, environmental discourse cannot be adequately understood – let alone (at least temporarily) resolved. As a rule, people take their own communicative patterns for granted, as well as their assumptions about what is important and urgent in the world and what is not. They may be quite unaware that these *are* cultural positions and do not carry the same plausibility for everyone. For example, people communicating within large-scale organisations often evolve shared habits of

talk with which they are familiar and comfortable; they may expect members of the public to respond to these ways of using language as if they were self-evidently normal, rather than expressing specific patterns of organisational power. Environmental debate questions and resists such arguments, claiming that they are less self-evident than they are made to seem. Our aim is to support this enterprise.

The collection derives from three international workshops held under the auspices of the Social Sciences Research Centre (SSRC) in the National University of Ireland, Galway between 2005 and 2007, for the specific purpose of exploring these issues. We assembled researchers with different cultural and disciplinary origins, but with a common interest in environmental arguing, asking them to analyse the interplay of cultural detail and contextual structures that marks the way in which environmental debate evolves. This work underlines the fact that arguments about the environment are not merely neutral, they are always political interventions in the world. It is up to us, as Renate Künast makes clear in her Postscript, to ensure that these interventions are as effective in terms of the common good as we can make them.

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