

## Regulation, Ecology, Ethics: The Red-Green Politics of Alain Lipietz

By Kerry Whiteside

### 1. Introduction

Perhaps the most significant recent attempt to join social theory and ecology in France has occurred in the writings of Alain Lipietz. Affiliated since the 1970s with a research institute concerned with economic planning, Lipietz is known as a leader in the "regulation school" of political economic theory in France.<sup>1</sup> After years of participating in political movements to the left of the Mitterrand's Socialist Party, he decided to join *Les Verts* (The Greens) in 1988. Within only a few years, he was named spokesperson of the party's economic commission and elected a regional counsellor in the Paris region.<sup>2</sup> When Lipietz was recognized as the main author of *Les Verts'* 1992 economic program, the party's reputation for economic naïveté began to change.<sup>3</sup> In fact, he became one of the most oft-cited members of *Les Verts* in the popular press. Since 1989, he has written three

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<sup>1</sup>Lipietz's first books, *Le Tribut foncier urbain* (Paris: Maspéro, 1974) and *Le capital et son espace* (Paris: Maspéro, 1977), reflect his specialization in urban political economy. His reputation as a leading figure of regulationism developed with a series of controversial books in the mid-eighties, including *Le Monde Enchanté: De la valeur à l'envol inflationniste* (Paris: Maspéro, 1983); *Mirages et Miracles: Problèmes de l'industrialisation dans le Tiers-Monde* (Paris: La Découverte, 1985); *L'Audace ou l'enlisement: Sur les politiques économiques de la gauche* (Paris: La Découverte, 1985).

<sup>2</sup>Sophie Gher, "L'itinéraire d'un économiste 'vert'," *Le Monde*, 22-23 mars 1992.

<sup>3</sup>"Les Verts contre le 'productivisme'," *Le Figaro*, 25 février 1992; "Les propositions économiques des Verts remettent en cause la 'logique productiviste'," *Le Monde*, 26 février 1992; "Les Ecologistes dans le débat économique," *La Tribune de l'Expansion*, 11 mars 1992.

books and numerous articles combining ecological themes and regulationist analysis.

This essay explores the main tenets of regulation theory and Lipietz's proposed application of it to ecological problems. To link regulation and ecology, he sets forth a Green political program that would be the basis of a "new social compromise." The questions I particularly want to pursue are these: How are ecological values and regulation theory connected? To what extent can regulationist concepts like "social compromise" and "regimes of accumulation" inform ecological critiques of contemporary society? From the opposite angle, how do ecological perceptions of the finitude of nature feed into regulationist explanations of social stabilization through negotiated common rules?

Lipietz is more a social theorist than an ethicist, more focussed on understanding processes of social organization and change than in offering a systematic exposition of normative concepts, premises, and justifications. My objective is to strengthen the ethical dimension of regulationist ecology by sorting through several overlapping interpretations of the connection between social theory and ecological ethics. Regulation theory has wavered unsatisfactorily between what I call Weberian and Hobbesian conceptions of the relation between explanation and evaluation. I argue that Jürgen Habermas' communicative ethics would more convincingly fill in the normative dimension of Lipietz's regulationist ecologism. The practical significance of this ethically elaborated regulationist ecology consists in its orienting ecosocialists towards "universalizing" strategies when dealing with other social actors.

## 2. Regulation Theory and the Crisis of Fordism

In *Vert Espérance (Green Hope)*, Lipietz recounts the intellectual changes that led him from an ideological mélange of communism and French Maoism to political ecology. Originally attracted by Marx's revolutionary vision, he jettisoned some features of that perspective when he came to see the failures of communism as failures of theory as well as failures of practice. He no longer believes in the centrality of the workers' movement; he no longer believes that capitalism is the unique source of all forms of oppression; he rejects any calls for a centralizing, strictly disciplined party. In his own work, he strives to incorporate critical insight drawn from diverse oppressed groups — women, gays, peoples of the Third World — and from ecologists. Yet Lipietz also sees his evolution in terms of a core commitment, one which he has only extended through time. Its unifying theme is a

"revolt against an unjust economic order, which tears society apart into rich and poor, which sullies nature because it does not even respect human dignity...."<sup>4</sup> Such a red-green perspective places Lipietz among the more Marxist adherents of regulationism, a post-Keynesian school of economic thought flourishing in France since the 1970s.<sup>5</sup>

Robert Boyer, one of the main proponents of regulation theory, explains that this school's approach originates in a rejection of the methodological individualism of mainstream economics. Methodological individualists explain social phenomena entirely in terms of the features of individuals, irrespective of their place in social categories like class, race, or gender. For example, in explaining where individuals end up in the social division of labor, neoclassical economists may look at factors like the individuals' own choices of education or profession and the demand for certain products constituted by other individuals bidding in the market. In contrast, regulation theorists deny that one can properly understand social phenomena by seeing them merely as the outcome of choices made by autonomous, perfectly rational strategic actors. Regulationists show how socially structured patterns of behavior like wage and commodity relations themselves guide individual choices. Lipietz, who ponders the theory's metaphysical underpinnings more than some of his *confrères*, begins explicitly from the materialist view that society — particularly production and exchange to meet needs — fashions the motives of individuals. At the same time, needs themselves evolve in the context of struggles between social groups, on the basis of limited resources passed on by previous generations.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Alain Lipietz, *Vert Espérance: L'avenir de l'écologie politique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>It should be emphasized that regulation theory is uniform neither ideologically nor in terms of explanatory hypotheses about phenomena like transformations in wage relations. See Robert Boyer, *The Regulation School: A Critical Introduction*, trans. by Craig Charney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 22-24. Lipietz himself criticizes one of the founders of regulationism, Michel Aglietta, for taking a "leap backward" from Marxism toward a more individualist theory. See Alain Lipietz, "De la régulation aux conventions: Le grand bond en arrière?," *Actuel Marx*, 1994. Lipietz, in turn, is the target of Marxists who detect too little attention to "political exclusions" or a tendency toward "institutionalist determinism." See Julie Graham, "Fordism/Post-Fordism, Marxism/Post-Marxism: The Second Cultural Divide?," *Rethinking Marxism*, 4, 1, Spring, 1991, pp. 49, 53; and John Bellamy Foster, "The Fetish of Fordism," *Monthly Review*, March, 1988, pp. 29-30.

<sup>6</sup>Alain Lipietz, "Reflections on a Tale: The Marxist Foundations of the



The social structures of greatest importance to regulationists are those that make possible the growth of productive capital. Regulation theory describes an economy oriented not toward "general equilibrium," but rather to "phases of expansion and moderate cyclical fluctuations, followed by phases of stagnation and instability."<sup>7</sup> Capital accumulation is not a smooth, self-governing process; it is beset with recurring crises of overproduction, unemployment, and social turmoil. So it is the stability and reproduction of socio-economic systems, not their crises per se, that most urgently require explanation. Regulationists hypothesize that it is a "mode of regulation" that mitigates disorder in a "regime of accumulation."<sup>8</sup> Lipietz adds that a particular "model of work organization" governing the division of labor and structures of authority within firms form an integral part of a stable "model of development."

To study a "regime of accumulation" is to examine at a macroeconomic level how production (mechanization, importance of different sectors of the economy, worker productivity) and the composition of the social product (for personal consumption, investment, trade, etc.) co-evolve and support each other.<sup>9</sup> Given the conflictual nature of capitalist development, however, a regime's longevity depends on a "mode of regulation" to become stable. "Regulation" goes far beyond the American sense of government intervention to correct potential market failures or to control monopolies. The French term designates a variety of social mechanisms which attenuate conflicts within a set of social relations, allowing those relations to reproduce. A mode of regulation includes behavioral norms (e.g., to see certain forms of workplace hierarchy as legitimate); welfare legislation; union contracts; and state-mandated safety regulations.<sup>10</sup>

Concepts of Regulation and Accumulation," *Studies in Political Economy*, 26, 1978, pp. 12-14.

<sup>7</sup>Boyer, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14, and Alain Lipietz, "A Regulationist Approach to the Future of Urban Ecology," *CNS*, 3, 3, 1992, p. 103.

<sup>9</sup>Alain Lipietz, *Choisir l'audace: Une alternative pour le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1989), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>Like David Gordon, Richard Edwards and Michael Reich, Lipietz links cycles in capital accumulation with changes in the organization of the labor process. However, Gordon et al. tend to make the labor control system the single most crucial variable in the development of capital (*Segmented Work, Divided Workers: the Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982]). They have been criticized for giving too little attention to other factors such as state policy and monetary and banking systems — factors which Lipietz's concept of a "model of

Under what conditions are such arrangements created? Conflict is transformed — always temporarily — into social reproduction when competing groups arrive at a set of compromises over how to organize the production and distribution of social goods. In their struggle for advantage, groups eventually press each other to accept limits, rules, procedures, divisions of territory, and rights and duties. Social mobilization and negotiated settlements, backed up by state-sanctioned rules, help steady the regime. Its contradictions temporarily tamed, capital accumulation then proceeds apace until new crises force further adjustments.

According to this model of social explanation, stability is won through the creation of "hegemonic historical blocs."<sup>11</sup> A regime of accumulation typically gives disproportionate advantages to certain groups. Yet widespread, voluntary acceptance of its institutions and norms is crucial to its stability. Lipietz draws on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "*habitus*" to explain how a regime fosters "appropriate" individual expectations about work, consumption, life chances and so forth; these dispositions help fit most individuals smoothly into social roles functional to the regime.<sup>12</sup> The state furthers this process of normalization by putting its legitimizing imprimatur on the compromises and customs that form the hegemonic system. So the state must not be seen merely as the tool of a regime's privileged groups. As the guarantor of numerous social compromises, the state mediates conflicts. In this role, it protects rights and material advantages won through struggle even by less privileged groups. Only in this way can it maintain the regime of accumulation as a whole.

Still, nothing guarantees the long-term success of such efforts. A regime of accumulation may eventually be unable to fulfill all of the expectations it creates; changes in technology, trade, or available resources may cause unforeseen friction between the pieces of the hegemonic system. Indeed, this is to be expected, since regulation only lessens social tensions, it does not eliminate them. At best, it creates "armistices" within class struggles. Capitalist "extortion of surplus value," for example, remains.<sup>13</sup> A crisis occurs when the system of regulation shows itself unable to stem problems like mounting

development" embraces.

<sup>11</sup>Lipietz builds upon the work of Antonio Gramsci and Nicos Poulantzas in formulating this concept. See Alain Lipietz, "Building an Alternative Movement in France," *Rethinking Marxism*, 1, 3, 1988, p. 82.

<sup>12</sup>Alain Lipietz, "Rebel Sons: The Regulation School," an interview with Alain Lipietz conducted by Jane Jenson, *French Politics and Society*, 5, 1987, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup>Lipietz, "De la régulation aux conventions," *op. cit.*, p. 41.



productivity losses, trade deficits, and sociopolitical turmoil. Social actors then search for the terms of a new compromise, one better able to manage the accumulated tensions of the previous regime.

Most regulationists apply this general schema for understanding social change to the political economy of post-war Europe and the U.S. Lipietz especially contends that, since the late 1960s, crisis has unsettled the "Fordist" social compromises that underwrote prosperity after World War II. In *Choisir l'audace*, he explains the nature of the crisis and, for the first time in his major writings, links it to ecological concerns.

He argues that what sustained the relative social peace and economic resurgence of most industrialized Western countries after World War II was a "Fordist" regime of accumulation. Fordism couples a model of work organization based on high levels of mechanization and Taylorist "rationalization"<sup>14</sup> with agreements to distribute the fruits of economic growth widely within the nation. The first element of Fordism disadvantaged workers. It devalued their knowledge of the production process gained on the shop floor, making work less fulfilling. It made workers more easily replaceable, potentially lowering wages. The resulting possibilities of labor unrest and declining productivity made a second element of Fordism essential. In compensation for their diminished position in the workplace, workers demanded that capital redistribute more of its profits to them.<sup>15</sup> They sought full employment as the norm of national economic policy and they supported the construction of a welfare state. Achieving these objectives brought the Fordist regime of accumulation to its equilibrium position. Labor's higher wages and job security, far from undermining competitive capitalism, actually stabilized it, assuring outlets for its productivity gains. In the 1930s and 1940s, from the American New Deal to the Scandinavian social democracies to the French model of economic planning, governments oversaw the compromises that attenuated tensions between capital and labor. By combining free enterprise with union contracts, extensive government regulation and welfare policies, a workable compromise was struck — at least, for a time.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) spelled out methods to increase the productivity of laborers, including separating those who design production processes from those who execute them, implementing time-motion studies of workers, simplifying and standardizing production routines.

<sup>15</sup> The following analysis of the crisis of Fordism draws principally on Lipietz, *Choisir l'audace*, op. cit., pp. 17-58.

The eventual breakdown of this agreement follows, in part, from its own internal logic. The system unravels because its field of incentives generates long-term behavioral consequences contrary to its own premises. Increasing mechanization and computerized production, subcontracting of manual labor to areas where wages are low — these strategies, says Lipietz, only exacerbate Taylorism: workers whose knowledge and talents are excluded from their firms' organizational plans become less productive. Diminished profit brings diminished investment — and eventually unemployment and reduced tax revenues for the welfare state. Meanwhile, the growing internationalization of trade worsens the crisis. Heightened competition between the U.S., Europe, and Japan brings calls for rolling back regulation at the national level. In the West, wages that once intensified demand and helped finance the welfare state suffer downward pressure.

In the 1980s, Reagan and Thatcher sought to counter the economic slowdown by "freeing up rigidities" in the market. Production could be stimulated, they believed, if the state allowed capital a freer hand in dealing with labor, and if the state reduced its attempts to regulate workplaces and trimmed the welfare state. But these strategies, too, are inherently unstable. Reducing state economic intervention boosts production only by exacerbating trends toward social inequality. And deficit spending, which financed Reagan's military build-up, only temporarily stimulated the economy.<sup>16</sup> Eventually deficits drive up interest rates, thus discouraging capital investment and slowing growth also. In all of these cases — productivity losses, globalized markets, diminished state intervention in markets — Lipietz demonstrates how current economic trends undermine the mode of regulation that made the Fordist regime of accumulation work.

### 3. The Ecological Turn

While this understanding of economic crisis is common among regulationists, this school only takes an ecological turn when Lipietz introduces a new category of analysis into it. Since 1988, he has argued not only that the various compromises are generating self-defeating behavioral effects, but also that they rely on a strategy of social stabilization that is ultimately incompatible with ecologically responsible economic development. "The era of the finite earth has

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that high levels of military spending and social cohesion inspired by fear of war do not fit well in the regulationist model of social stabilization. Sorting out the relative impact on social stabilization of each set of factors — the military and the regulatory — would be an valuable line of research that, to my knowledge, no regulationist has yet attempted.



begun," he warns — and even regulationism has not, up to this point, taken theoretical account of this sobering realization. Such an account requires regulation theory to analyze a previously unrecognized premise of 20th-century regimes of accumulation. They incorporate a strategy that Lipietz calls "productivism." They aim at maximizing production and consumption by minimizing community constraints on investment, exchange, patterns of work.

Capitalism always tends toward productivism. Growth is inherent in its logic. One invests in capital for profit, and sustaining profit requires expanding market share. Firms that fail to grow must eventually see their products superseded by competitors bent upon capturing their profits for themselves. Nonetheless, until the mid-20th century, the growth-tendency of capitalism was held in check by the system's own distributive and organizational weaknesses. It concentrated wealth in the hands of a relatively few capitalists, whose ability to consume was necessarily limited. This created crises of commodity and capital overproduction, periodically disrupting the growth patterns of the economy. Inefficient, pre-Taylorist organization of work processes finally slowed increases in productivity.

Although the Fordist compromise admitted some collectivist constraints on economic activity (e.g., channeling some profits into pensions or safety regulations), it did not really challenge productivism. Instead, it perfected it. Giving workers additional income and security, it turned them into consumers capable of absorbing the increased output of scientifically rationalized work processes. Thus, the Fordist compromise removed earlier impediments to economic expansion. Not only *could* growth accelerate; it *had* to. "Free enterprise" became responsible for generating sufficient capital to fund not only accumulation and profit, but also higher wages and some of the charges of the welfare state. More than ever, the social logic of productivism prevailed. The stability of such arrangements depended on one key assumption: growth must continue unabated.

The connection with ecological concerns is made when one realizes that the Fordist compromise was a Faustian bargain, trading away the livability of earth's environment. Its productivist premise implicitly denied the finitude of the planet's capacity to supply the raw materials of production and to absorb its waste products. This first became apparent when firms ended up casting off so much waste or so intensively exploiting resources that different enterprises began to interfere with each other's profitability. Problems like the greenhouse effect and pollution of the oceans raised popular awareness that current rates of production and consumption undermine the well-being of

future generations.<sup>17</sup> And yet those obliged to clean up their waste complain that such efforts force them to raise prices, diminish production, and cut back employment — steps which further weaken the foundation of a regime of accumulation whose stability depends on maximizing production and consumption. Only a new social compromise, Lipietz argues, can resolve the crisis.

Obviously, not just any compromise will do. If we are to mitigate the sources of social instability arising from the exhaustion of Fordism *and* respect the ecological constraints facing humanity, the new compromise must embody a nonproductivist set of values that can, arguably, settle into a self-reinforcing system. Lipietz identifies those values as solidarity, autonomy, ecological responsibility, and democracy.<sup>18</sup> These are better understood through concrete proposals than abstract definition. Lipietz's eco-socialist program includes: organizing work relationships so that workers have more control over their activity; increasing leisure time; systematically choosing ecologically sound technologies and recycling; reducing hierarchies in social relations; subsidizing socially-useful, self-organized group activities; promoting grassroots democracy; developing more egalitarian and mutually advantageous relationships between national communities.<sup>19</sup> If the postwar compromise is exhausted in part because technological change has reduced the demand for labor, then a new compromise would combine solidarity and ecological responsibility by more equitably distributing work and free time. If the Fordist regime of accumulation allowed private enterprise to "socialize" the costs of environmental damage in the form of pollution, resource degradation, and destruction of the landscape, then an ecologically responsible compromise must use state taxes, subsidies, and development strategies to restore and protect the environment. Such means, however, usually imply transferring even more power to a bureaucratized, centralized state — thereby weakening the value of democracy. To express democracy and ecological responsibility simultaneously, Lipietz proposes fostering political activism by progressive, grassroots organizations. State intervention can be avoided if society is composed of organized interest groups which express their conflicting interests in face-to-face dialogue, arriving at tolerable compromises.<sup>20</sup> At the same

<sup>17</sup>Lipietz, *Choisir l'audace*, op. cit., p. 62-64.

<sup>18</sup>Lipietz, *Vert espérance*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

<sup>19</sup>Lipietz, *Choisir l'audace*, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

<sup>20</sup>Lipietz, *Vert espérance*, op. cit., pp. 28-29. This is not simply American-style pluralism where money, education, and personal contacts are essential for access to power. The "interests" that Lipietz most wants to see organized are



time, to counter the destabilizing social and ecological effects of internationally mobile capital, institutions with transnational regulatory powers are needed. Social compromises — this time in the form of international agreements — are necessary to prevent countries' internal compromises from being undermined by competition to retain or attract investment.<sup>21</sup>

So, the ecological turn in Lipietz's theorizing brings together the regulationist emphasis on the consensual resolution of social conflict with an environmentalist value system — one that defends ecologically sustainable development and respect for nature. Yet it is by no means clear how Lipietz has melded explanation and evaluation. Can one derive green values through the same cognitive processes of observation, reasoning and testing that support regulation theory? If so, how? If not, with what sort of argument does one support green values? How do the motivations imputed to social actors in regulation theory tally with the transformed ethics presupposed by a green society? What is the relationship between "compromise" as a variable in regulation theory's explanation of social reproduction and as a legitimating ethical conception?

Lipietz does not often address such questions explicitly. But when he does, he sounds distinctly Weberian. Regulation theory, he implies, yields explanations that are analytically distinct from the theorist's own ethical convictions. As social theorists, Lipietz says, the task of regulationists is to search for relatively "fixed tracks" in the midst of conflictual group relations. Various social compromises create a relatively enduring system, allowing the theorist to examine the functional interdependence of the ways of organizing work, regulatory regimes, state economic and welfare policies, popular values, and so forth. Evaluation is another matter. "One can have an ethical judgment about a form of social relations," remarks Lipietz, "but no one can say

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those that "pluralism" most often disfavors: the poor, the ghettoized, the environmentally endangered.

<sup>21</sup>Lipietz, *Vert espérance*, op. cit., pp. 62, 80. Some argue that the global mobility of capital has reduced not only the power of labor, but also of the state — which might call into question the realism of Lipietz's proposal for stronger international accords to regulate capital. See Robert J. S. Ross and Kent C. Trachte, *Global Capitalism: The New Leviathan* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990). For purposes of evaluating the ethics of regulationism, however, the important point is that the logic of this social theory pushes it to conceive political remedies as negotiated agreements between organized interests, whether the problems are national or international.

there is something like historical progress..."<sup>22</sup> Apparently, whatever moral judgments the theorist might have about the quality of the compromises — whether they are distributionally fair, whether they come at too great an expense in the destruction of nature — originate in an ethics devised independently of the process of social change. The theorist can propose ethically superior arrangements. But the ethics are his, not history's. Alternative consensual arrangements will "win" only if taken up by groups willing to struggle for them. Deliberately or not, Lipietz follows Max Weber's injunction: "the investigator... should keep unconditionally separate the establishment of empirical facts... and his own practical evaluations, i.e., his evaluation of those facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory."<sup>23</sup>

This separation of social and ethical theory does justice to neither. At the ethical level, this interpretation falls short because it fails to justify the values it defends. Liberal productivists have their values; Lipietz and the new social movements put forth different ones. Neither makes its case in terms of superior rationality. The two simply clash in struggle and compromise. But that is not really the form of Lipietz's own arguments for an ecological politics. Throughout *Vert Espérance* he makes judgements that presuppose the comparability of different values — and the superiority of green ones. When he characterizes biological diversity as the "immune system of our biosphere," he chooses an image designed to make us all see the folly of wrecking the very system that supports our lives. He denounces distributive systems that allow the wealthy North to capture a disproportionate share of the planet's resources, disregarding the more urgent needs of the South. He assesses the relative ability of different strategies of economic development to improve the quality of life of all. In all such cases, Lipietz is proposing more than an alternative ethic, which others may or may not find attractive. He is laying out a candidate for a system of values that is more consistent, that better meets our own stated goals, that does not make unwarranted assumptions — in a word, that is more *rational*, in a sense not conveyed in his more Weberian statements.

Equally troubling, by making it seem that the values of an ecological ethics arise in ways that are entirely distinct from cognitive processes of observation, reasoning and testing, Lipietz disconnects his "green" values from the nature of the crisis itself. Ecological challenges

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<sup>22</sup>Lipietz, "Rebel Sons," op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>23</sup>Max Weber, "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality'," in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. and trans. by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1949), p. 11.



do not articulate with human interests in any systematic way, such that one might expect certain conditions of environmental change to favor the development of a "green" consciousness. Demands to protect biological diversity, for example, appear to arise simply because some new social movements decide that it is important — not because at this particular historical juncture humankind's species-depleting activities have reached a point where they are particularly likely to activate an interest in the preservation of ecological systems. Lipietz's decisionist model of moral criticism, then, deflects theorists from the important task of explaining the origin of interests or of the conditions favoring their critical re-evaluation.

#### 4. Regulationist Ecology: From Hobbes to Habermas

How then might regulationist social theory and ecological ethics be brought into closer relation with one another? I want to argue that the best hope for combining Lipietz's empirical and ethical projects lies in the notion of "compromise" — provided that that notion is interpreted in a Habermasian, not a Hobbesian sense. The problem is that Lipietz's writings can support both interpretations.

A "Hobbesian" perspective posits a minimum ethical content in regulationist understandings of social stabilization. Regulation theory, with its emphasis on negotiated settlements of conflict, validates a view of human existence in which the preservation of life, material welfare, and social peace take precedence over, say, spiritual commitments or some particular understanding of distributive justice. In contrast to those who say "no justice, no peace," regulation theory says that social peace requires no particular view of justice. And that, as Thomas Hobbes understood already in the 17th century, is (the beginning of) an ethical theory. It is an ethical theory claiming that perfectionist ideals of "the good life" actually breed conflict and fear. Since no perfectionist ethical consensus is really possible (says Hobbes), those who act as if it were end up locked in perpetual battle to vindicate their views. Mankind's "natural condition" is, in the pessimist's famous phrase, a "war of everyman against everyman." Peace is achieved only in a "covenant." Finally persuaded that a secure life is preferable to constant, unwinnable war, each person accepts a compromise: I will not press my claims for (my own conception of) what is right provided that you do likewise. In Hobbes' view, it is better — morally better, better for all — to get the benefits of "commodious living" that a peaceful society affords than it is to pursue perfectionist demands on society.

Lipietz's view is strikingly similar. Suggesting that life might be viewed as "a state of nature," he repeats the regulationist claim that

"contradictory social relations are the result....They create unity through struggle and this struggle is the very essence of the social bond. Hence, struggle is the basis of everything."<sup>24</sup> Like Hobbes, regulationism holds that conflict is the primary fact of social life. Thus the challenge for social theory is to explain how any durable form of human organization is possible. Regulation theory's key hypothesis, like Hobbes's, is that only compromise can check society's underlying tendency toward discord. The potential agents of disorder must internalize a conviction that institutional arrangements far short of their own ideals nevertheless serve their interests better than a continuing struggle. And when Lipietz says "struggle is the basis of everything" he aligns regulationism with the Hobbesian ethical insight that compromise *constitutes* moral standards. A regime of accumulation, he says, promotes "the interiorization...of a certain representation of social reality and of norms of behavior...."<sup>25</sup> A stabilizing compromise acquires normative hegemony.

If this is the implicit ethical standpoint of regulation theory, then its turn to ecological politics is going to be problematic, for numerous reasons.

1. Lipietz's explicit ecological ethics and the implicit Hobbesian ethics of regulationism substantially contradict one another. Ecological ethics, as Lipietz proposes it, is perfectionist. It suggests that a good human life grows out of forms of social solidarity that embody ecologically sustainable patterns of development. The problem is, the Hobbesian interpretation of regulation theory requires one to set aside claims that ecological responsibility makes special demands on humankind's conscience. Suppose, for example, that we had to choose: either more material goods combined with a serious greenhouse effect or fewer material goods and no greenhouse effect. Like many ecot theorists, Lipietz argues that we must moderate our appetite for material satisfaction in order to protect the environment. Expect advocates of endless growth to argue, in contrast, that even if there is a greenhouse effect, it would cost less to move populations inland, build dikes, adapt crops to hotter weather. Which perspective wins, the ecological or the economic, is a matter of group struggle. This is tantamount to giving the two options moral equivalence. The urgency of ecological politics is lost.

2. This interpretation also gives up any grounds for objecting that a particular compromise was unjust because it was based on coercion.

<sup>24</sup>Lipietz, "Reflections on a Tale," *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.



Lipietz knows this problem too well to let it pass from view. As a *tiers-mondiste*, he constantly decries the scandal of the wealthy, profligate North dictating austerity and environmental protection policies to the destitute South. Third World countries may accept such policies only because they have *unjustly* been made absolute conditions of loans and foreign aid. No true compromise, this. But when Lipietz protests such arrangements, he invokes substantive principles grounded in something other than prior compromises. He starts from moral premises which Hobbesian regulation theory would deny him.

3. Nor can this variant of contactarianism question the genuineness or legitimacy of the contending groups' beliefs. Thus, it risks endorsing "compromises" that a dominant group manufactured by shaping the ideas of a subordinate group. Of course, devising an independent standard for genuine beliefs is fraught with difficulties of its own. Lipietz may resort to the Hobbesian contract out of skepticism about the prospects for discovering such a standard. But it is particularly unexpected to encounter this problem in regulation theory, because it both wants to show how a mode of regulation depends on "hegemonic" shaping of customs and routines by dominant groups *and* to deny that current hegemonic values are the best ones. If "productivism [the habitus of our mode of development] has spread over the entire planet"<sup>26</sup> while Lipietz sets himself up as a critic of its ecological consequences, he sets forth moral criteria for a "good" compromise whose existence the Hobbesian interpretation of regulation theory negates.

4. Finally, this interpretation of regulation theory seems to rely on an understanding of human motivation often challenged by ecologism. Hobbes argued that some matters, like religious belief, artistic taste, or ethics, were too subjective to ground consensus; the desire for physical security and material well-being, on the other hand, is both universal and powerful. Therefore, this desire could motivate a social contract to which all could adhere. Now, regulationism does not explicitly postulate that, given a choice between more products to be privately consumed and more free time to be enjoyed conversing with others, most people will opt for material consumption. Nonetheless, Lipietz's examples do nothing to dispel the impression that those sorts of motivations really are dominant. What long stabilized the Fordist regime of accumulation, according to his analysis, was its ability to respond to contending groups' demands for access to the material fundamentals of human welfare: income, security, work and leisure.

Lipietz seems all too aware that "Fordism" brought relative social peace by integrating workers as "a crowd of consumers" into the productivist system.<sup>27</sup> The Hobbesian interpretation of regulationism might then suggest that new, ecologically-sound compromises that institutionalize reduced material consumption will be politically unstable. Regulationism would be the basis, not of green hope, but of green despair.

My contention is that these objections would be lifted if regulation theory could be plausibly interpreted as a concrete application of Habermasian communicative ethics. Communicative ethics distinguishes between compromise understood as "a balance of power" — the Hobbesian interpretation — and compromise as an agreement incorporating "norms [that] express generalizable interests."<sup>28</sup> Interpreted in this second sense, regulation theory would express neither a subjective decision to favor egalitarian values nor a Hobbesian preference for life and material welfare. Rather, it would issue from a respect for individuals as autonomous, mutually communicating moral agents, capable of evaluating their own circumstances and of negotiating social arrangements that embody a rational consensus. From the point of view of discursive ethics, people meeting in search of compromise are not bundles of power pitted against one another; they are communicative actors seeking to provide universal justification for their claims about the good of their community. Merely by engaging in this dialogue, they implicitly accept others as equals, as agents who can understand and act according to general moral rules.

Thus Lipietz's commitments to equality and individual autonomy could be seen not merely as contingent outcomes of compromise but as necessary ethical presuppositions of the bargaining situation. The concept of an "ideal speech situation" — one in which participants reach their conclusions only through "a rational redemption of justified claims" — furnishes a standard to disqualify "compromises" that were the result of coercion or ideological manipulation. Communicative ethics would also fit well with Lipietz's *tiers mondisme*, since its conception of generalizable interests would require us to seek ecological policies that respected inhabitants of all parts of the globe equally. Regulation theory-as-communicative ethics could explain why the idea of a "social compromise" *deserves* to be at the center of social theory.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23; cf. p. 48.

<sup>28</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), p. 111.

<sup>26</sup>Lipietz, *Choisir l'audace*, op. cit., p. 65.



Does this emphasis on the ethical presuppositions of dialogue deny the regulationist premise that conflict is the norm of human existence? Only if one holds that conflict ultimately *constitutes* ethical standards. No communicative ethicist denies that struggle between social forces has been the *vehicle* of ethical change. What separates the Habermasian from the Hobbesian, however, is the former's conviction that moral standards are not simply those of the victor in the struggle. Habermas formulates a minimal ethics that can be used to judge the positions of contending groups without adopting the explicit values of either victors or vanquished. Lipietz clearly presupposes such a judgmental position when he promotes green values. But the question is: how could he *account* philosophically for this position? My complaint is that the regulationist language of struggle, compromise, and hegemonic values invites a Hobbesian interpretation that is at odds with Lipietz's own moral convictions. What makes the Habermasian interpretation a superior alternative is not only that it affirms the same ethical standards that Lipietz promotes, but that it does so by extracting those standards from the very processes that regulationism makes central to its analyses of social change: the processes of negotiation and compromise.

Habermas' writings make sense of an even bolder claim that Lipietz has advanced about the prospects for diverse new social movements converging toward "a single will for change." Seeking an agent of social change and yet rejecting both traditional Marxist hopes for a universal class and a simple conglomeration of protest groups, Lipietz concludes that "the only solution is thus to work towards the maturation of a 'shared meaning,' an alternative culture... so that *each can recognize in it not only their own direct interests, but equally the interest that each has for others to find their interest there too.*"<sup>29</sup> Evidently Lipietz aims at a social order suffused with "mature" feelings of reciprocity and community, not merely a grudging willingness to trade-off advantages. The ethical basis of regulationism is neither mere consensus nor some conception of goodness independent of worldly concerns. It is the extension of interest — interest enlarged and enriched through the development of interactive competence.

Explaining how such a maturation of shared meaning is possible is central to Habermas' work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*.<sup>30</sup>

Going beyond extracting moral guidelines from the structures of communication, discursive ethics sees history as a learning process in which humankind accumulates knowledge about the conditions of its fullest emancipation — conditions which require ever more completely shared meaning. Only recently have (some) societies (very imperfectly) learned to quell conflict by recognizing the humanity of workers, tolerating ethnic diversity, equalizing economic opportunities, democratizing political structures. These values are not merely elements of the most recent social compromise — ones that are morally incommensurable with those of preceding compromises. These are advances in humankind's ability to abide by norms of reciprocal accountability. History, in other words, reveals progress in our moral consciousness as well as in the area of technical-instrumental knowledge.

This approach is not only normative; as social theory, it offers an important hypothesis about why certain social structures are more stable than others, and hence how social change can take a particular, progressive direction. Modernity, according to Habermas, embodies a "rationalizing" project. As societies try to enhance their capacity for material reproduction, they also find their diverse members interpreting their needs within that system and subjecting them to discursive testing. Along with technological sophistication, societies develop their collective identities in ways that express higher degrees of communicative competence. Discursive testing subjects the society's practices to critical questioning: are its distributive principles capable of being "communicatively shared"? Are they based on generalizable human interests? Do they encourage critical reflection among citizens? Failure to meet such testing motivates system instability, as social actors search to reshape the social system according to more rationally defensible norms. The Habermasian view makes us see that what constitutes "crisis" is not merely a dysfunctioning system; it is a *delegitimated* system. More than that: delegitimation occurs because the system fails to meet the *evolving* norms of social actors who are becoming increasingly competent at criticizing myths and justifications serving partial interests — not just because it violates expectations that it created. Sharing meaning is not merely a goal for which groups decide to struggle; it is a rational imperative.

There is a significant obstacle to reading regulationism in this way: Lipietz himself appears to reject this interpretation categorically. He specifically repudiates any view of history as a movement through a staged series of social transformations that spontaneously generates an

<sup>29</sup>Lipietz, "Building an Alternative Movement in France," *op. cit.*, p. 95, emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I, Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. by T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).



to others' interests? Doesn't it assume unequal rights to create and bear risk?

To put the questions this way is to illustrate how ecological concerns become subject to discursive processes presupposing Habermas' higher order ethical orientation. They hold up each nation's conduct to tests of logical comprehensiveness, consistency, and respect for equality. Moreover, discursive testing at the conference invoked notions of need and luxury to distinguish the moral defensibility of the practices causing those emissions (e.g. automobile driving versus cultivating rice). Wouldn't a commitment to reciprocity have to acknowledge that, under many conditions, some forms of consumption take moral precedence over others? White's extrapolation of Habermas' theory leads us to see ecological consciousness emerging through such dialogical examination. Ecologism then is a contemporary manifestation of the process of historical moral development that leads us to integrate a greater variety of conflicting claims into a generalized perspective of justice and well-being.

This interpretation shows how Lipietz's environmentalist "altruism" fits into a theoretical framework emphasizing compromises in human interests. Concern for the survival of diverse species, preservationist sentiment regarding pristine territories, and so forth develop out of humankind's critical-reflective quest to situate itself more satisfactorily in relation to nature. Heretofore human interest was interpreted largely in terms of dominating nature in order to satisfy physical desires. But our very success at such domination has revealed (at least to some) that it is possible to go too far, that an overexploited nature endangers our communities at the levels of bodily well-being, social justice, and aesthetic satisfaction. An ecological ethic does not take shape merely through a contingent process of group struggle and compromise or through the assertion of an "ecocentric" good will. What Lipietz calls "altruism" is really a human interest in nature that is becoming more articulated through collective deliberations in which the criteria of communicative competence come into play.

Both Habermasian critical theory and regulationism stand to gain from understanding the convergence of their lines of inquiry. Habermas has written only sketchily on ecological politics and his works are often criticized for being written at a very high level of abstraction. After multiplying the tasks of an immense "research program," he often speaks only vaguely of actual events or of the institutions of an alternative politics. I am suggesting that Lipietz's regulationism contributes to Habermasian theory by concretely exemplifying its tenets — and by decisively extending its analysis in the direction of

ecological politics. Regulationist ecology exposes the socio-economic mechanisms that drive what Habermas calls one-sided modernization processes — ones that allow the process of capital accumulation to impoverish political-ethical discourse, to drain away social and natural diversity. Conversely, drawing on communicative ethics gives regulationist ecologism the consistent ethical bearings that it needs to guide us toward "better compromises." Without such bearings, it risks appearing arbitrary or uncertain when negotiating with representatives of productivism, who are themselves prepared to deploy any argument to protect their privileges.

What does this advance in theory mean for eco-socialist practice? The joining of critical theory and regulationism suggests that political ecologists do best to develop practices that are designed to make evident the universality of ecological responsibility. By building on ethical intuitions and institutions already partly acknowledged, they should pursue attempts to forge a more inclusive and consistent — generalizable — understanding of humankind's interest in protecting the natural world. Following Lipietz's call for international regulatory compromises, a conference like the one in Rio is an indispensable forum in which ecosocialists, whether in negotiations or in the media or in the streets, can highlight the irrationality of practices that reflect only national egoism. But if they are to represent a morally compelling alternative to national egoism, a conception of potentially universalizable interests needs to inform the arguments that they voice and the institutions that they target.



generations can no more be present in social bargaining sessions than they are in liberal fantasies of a hypothetical contract. They cannot sit at a bargaining table or destabilize institutions by marching in the streets of Paris. How can we conceive ecological goals in regulationist terms when the potentially disadvantaged "parties" lack the capacity to represent their own interests?

This is precisely the complaint that certain "ecocentric" theorists lodge against more "humanistic" ecologists. Robyn Eckersley, for example, charges that a communicative ethics "is unable to work the interests of nonhumans into [its] theory in any meaningful way because it is theoretically grounded in human speech acts."<sup>40</sup> Whatever Habermas' success in discovering a transcendental commitment to equal respect in the very act of communicating, his model of ethical discovery cannot cover our relations with nature since natural objects are not partners in discourse. Because humanistic moral systems aim at human emancipation, they cannot adequately express ecological demands to respect nonhuman, external nature. Lipietz's call for a "dynamic extension of an altruistic consciousness" virtually concedes that such an ecocentric critique poses a problem for a regulationist approach to ecological politics. Presumably, he believes that, with the human conscience suitably extended, we will bring nature into our political negotiations, thereafter following out the regulationist model of social stabilization. Ecologized political movements will inject demands for reduced material consumption and ecologically responsible development in the Third World into the negotiations that elaborate the social compromise. Yet the ideas of "extension" and "altruism" end up distorting regulation theory in order to get it to encompass ecological concerns. After all, a social reformer in the early 20th century might have asked capitalists to "extend their altruism" and identify more with the needs of their workers — e.g., give them shorter hours, health insurance. Regulation theory (rightly I think) places little faith in such remedies. The Fordist compromise was hammered out through strikes, protests, hard-fought electoral battles. Workers pushed through recognition of their needs in spite of the profit-maximizing ethic of their employers. Regulation theory's emphasis on the conflictual nature of group relations leaves little room for good will as a source of social stability. If Lipietz covers ecological concerns primarily by appealing to altruism, it is hard to see that he is still in the regulationist framework.

<sup>40</sup>Robyn Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 111.

On the other hand, Steven K. White sees grounds within Habermas' recent works for connecting an historicized communicative ethics and ecology. Surely it is more than an accident of group struggle that more and more people have developed interests in the protection and restoration of the environment. White proposes seeing "growing environmental crises....as a practical catalyst for reflection on how the ways in which we currently assault nature are leading to a more and more frustrating and self-destructive form of life." It is plausible to argue that they have developed these interests *because* the widespread destruction of nature has activated a sense of loss or aesthetic distress or fear of dangers to health. The advance of technical-instrumental knowledge puts nature at ever greater risk, but also creates the conditions for our becoming more aware of the severity and implications of that risk. Alarm about the global effects of technology and demands for wilderness preservation or protection of species now have entered into political deliberations at one time almost monopolized by the quest to maximize production or to distribute social goods fairly. Those who share these concerns then begin "experimenting with alternative forms of life and technology...[with a] potential for enhancement of a sense of balance or harmony with natural systems." Thus, critical reflection and aesthetic yearnings could prompt an expanded "sense of what makes for human satisfaction and well-being;" no reference to the problematic ecocentric notion of valuing of nature for its own sake is necessary.<sup>41</sup>

Yet the *moral* status of these interests can only be assured, according to the Habermasian perspective, through their *universalization* under the impact of discursive testing. And that too plausibly describes developments in ecological politics. Lipietz's description of what transpired at the 1992 UN Conference for Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro offers a vivid example.<sup>42</sup> At that conference, Bush administration representatives balked at having the United States accept limitations on emissions of greenhouse gasses. They then found themselves facing questions in areas hitherto largely ignored in international negotiation. Not just the brute danger of atmospheric warming, but the injustice of the distribution of risk was raised. How can the U.S. justify contributing vastly more per capita to this danger than many other nations, and yet not accept proportionately greater responsibility for reducing the risk? Doesn't the American position demonstrate unjustifiable insensitivity

<sup>41</sup>Stephen K. White, *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 137-138.

<sup>42</sup>Lipietz, *Berlin, Bagdad, Rio*, op. cit., pp. 107-120.



moment. This process, moreover, is the outcome of communicative interaction among diversely situated groups, not the foreseeable goal of any one of them. No elite can claim privileged knowledge of society's ethical evolution.

Why not say then that Fordism was one, temporarily workable stage in humankind's search for a social order, one that was relatively equitable and responsive to the needs of many? In time, however, accumulated experience revealed the instability and partiality of this system, too — its inability to extend a commitment to fair distribution, its tendency to destroy or to dirty the very resources on which it depends to feed production. Lipietz favors "alternative movements" (e.g., environmentalists, feminists, multiculturalists) that offer up ethically-motivated prescriptions of "what 'the new world should be'." According to the interpretation I have been building, there are grounds for a much stronger claim. In Habermasian terms, one would say that these movements, sparked by the dysfunctions of prevailing exclusionary or ecologically unsustainable social practices, challenge defenders of those practices to meet the test of the generalizability of their interests. Like those before them who opposed slavery or imperialism, they are agents for the advance of historical reason, challenging the *rationality* of certain strategies of socio-economic development. An audacious claim: quite so. Nonetheless, it comes closer than the alternatives to unifying the ethical and social theoretical ideas of regulationism.

### 5. Conclusion: Nature and Compromise

Before reaching ecological conclusions, however, this analysis must surmount one additional obstacle. While an historical learning process might explain how, through a refined ability to take the perspective of the other, human communities acquire a universalistic moral sensibility with respect to interpersonal relations, it is still difficult to understand in what sense we might include "nature" in that sensibility. What sort of reciprocal accountability can there be between human and non-human communities?

There is some evidence that, as Lipietz has become more taken with ecology, he has begun to perceive that "nature" may be more difficult to assimilate in *any* regulationist model of social relations than he first thought. In 1989, ecological concerns enter as the fifth chapter of his book analyzing the decline of Fordism and the impasse of liberal productivism. Environmental problems appear not as an essential motive for the crisis of Fordism, but as an additional constraint on any solution to the problems of rising unemployment and increasing

difficulties in financing the welfare state. The crisis of Fordism is first and foremost a crisis of declining production. In the absence of environmental problems, it seems that Lipietz would have proposed agreements between capital and labor to restructure work organization, increase production and distribute its benefits more fairly. But now, because environmental systems are overburdened, he rules out solutions calling for increased material production. Lipietz insists that the capital's *quid pro quo* for workers should not be more purchasing power, but rather more free time. Remaining within the regulationist perspective means envisioning a new compromise — a sort of social contract — assuring all interested parties that their interests have been taken into account in their society's key distributive decisions.

Three years later, Lipietz fires this criticism at the *liberal* social contract tradition:

Political ecology raises problems that no social contract...can solve. Thou shalt not kill — whom?... "Your partners in the social contract," respond secular thinkers. Fine. But then, what about species of wild animals?...And future generations of human beings? "After me, the deluge" responds the individualist who founds his ethics on "self-interest rightly understood." No expressed interest: no social contract.<sup>39</sup>

The same words have a dangerous potential to ricochet and wound regulationist ecology.

Before it was extended to ecology, there was nothing theoretically incoherent about viewing social systems as modes of development stabilized by multiple negotiated arrangements linking workers, employers, and the state. The stabilizing factors that regulationists typically study — workplace organization, wages, availability of capital, social "safety net" legislation — are matters of intergroup bargaining. Workers who cannot tolerate the pace of the production line resort to industrial action to force management to slow it down. Managers who believe that workers' wages endanger profitability attempt to get workers to accept reduced earnings. Systemic balance results from achieving a "compromise" among all the interested parties in the society.

That pattern of argument does not apply so well to the issues of ecological politics. Animal species, pristine territories, and future

<sup>39</sup>Lipietz, *Vert Espérance*, op. cit., p. 16.



ethically preferred resolution of a community's contradictions.<sup>31</sup> Teleology in this sense, he maintains, is only an illusion. Reflecting on the disappointed hopes raised by Marx, Lipietz concludes:

Progressivism needs to be reinvented. It can no longer count on the movement of history, on the development of technique and knowledge, it can no longer be satisfied with praising modernity.... Henceforth, progressivism must always be on the side of the poor in the name of an ethic of solidarity.... it must take a stand in favor of an *other* modernity....<sup>32</sup>

If regulation theory makes it appear that the pieces of a model of development fit together as if they were "made for" each other, this is only because it is an "*a posteriori* functionalism."<sup>33</sup> A contingent process of struggle, negotiation, and accommodation has worn off the pieces' rough edges, permitting the theorist to see retrospectively how they join together in a self-perpetuating structure of social relations. No particular compromise is historically preferred; "notions of 'reform' and revolution" are thus relativized.<sup>34</sup> Compromise is simply whatever accommodations various groups have settled on in their search to mitigate conflict. Such remarks force us back to the Weberian, or perhaps the Hobbesian, interpretation.

And yet, those interpretations simply fail to translate many of Lipietz's theoretical claims. Most obviously, he does appear to believe in some notion of ethical progress. Lipietz is clearly more sympathetic to the Fordist compromise, with its commitment to full employment and welfare state protections, than to its predecessor. He clearly thinks that work is more fulfilling when it engages a variety of talents than when Taylorist methods strip it down to the most efficient motions. Today, he urges Europe to take the lead in putting forth "better compromises" between economic activity and environmental preservation, just as it earlier led the way to "better compromises between capital and labor."<sup>35</sup> In moving from one mode of regulation to another, ethical advance is possible.

I would contend, moreover, that when Lipietz speaks of "better compromises," he is implicitly paralleling a Habermasian argument that

moral imperatives for change *grow out of* our experience with the irrationalities of existing institutional arrangements. Lipietz argues that the Fordist compromise has been in crisis since the late 1960s, *because* (among other reasons) workers whose jobs are precarious and whose workplace-acquired technical expertise is systematically ignored become less productive. He maintains that its productivist commitment to unlimited economic growth generates so much waste and pollution that people eventually come to demand more environmental protection. "At the end of the eighties," he writes, "the rising social, macroeconomic, and ecological perils are belatedly provoking a new awareness," which supports "more advanced social compromises."<sup>36</sup>

Such awareness results from a "dynamic extension of an altruistic consciousness."<sup>37</sup> His plea to include future generations, the Third World, and nature in our ethical deliberations is a fine example of what Habermas calls "the expansion of the domain of consensual interaction."<sup>38</sup> Lipietz warns that, failing this extension of moral consciousness, we face a future of environmental war between North and South. If we continue to buy into liberal-productivism, with its blinkered, individualistic moral vantage point, we sanction social polarization and should expect social unrest in response. What is this to say but that a model of development can provoke internal tensions *because* of its failure to incorporate the interests of many whom it affects? Failure motivates a search for more adequate norms, ones expressing more generalizable interests.

Why not say then that we are in the midst of an historical learning process — one that is unfinished but is still ethically progressive? Perhaps Lipietz worries that such a vision of ethical progress sweeps human freedom aside with historical determinism, or that it could be misused to legitimate an authoritarian politics in which those who *know* the direction of historical change command others who are less enlightened. Yet neither concern applies to Habermas' schema. There is no inevitability in enlightenment; the possibility of failure haunts every free being. Just as in the maturation of a personality, there will be instances of failure and possibly even regression in social development. Today's resurgence of ethnic tribalism and growing social inequalities should be seen in this light. Habermas describes only the most general contours of the historical learning process, not its status at every

<sup>31</sup>Lipietz, "Rebel Sons," *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup>Lipietz, *Vert Esperance*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>33</sup>Lipietz, "Reflections on a Tale," *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup>Lipietz, "Building an Alternative Movement in France," *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup>Alain Lipietz, *Berlin, Bagdad, Rio* (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1992), p. 124.

<sup>36</sup>Lipietz, *Chosir L'audace*, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>37</sup>Lipietz, *Vert Esperance*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>38</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 120.