

2 Liberalism

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It is not uncommon to point to liberalism as the evil genius behind the ecological crisis. In this chapter, I shall argue that there were once good grounds to suspect liberalism of at the very least a certain indifference towards ecological challenges – yet this attitude is changing dramatically. Interest in environmental issues does not come naturally for liberalism, but its internal checks and balances are slowly yet perceptibly greening liberalism.

It is important in this context to distinguish between liberalism as a ‘pure’ political theory, and the practice of liberalism or the practices ascribed to liberalism, such as the free market and liberal democracy. Classical liberalism, especially, supports the *idea* of a free market, as it sees freedom of enterprise and freedom of trade as necessary conditions for the realisation of individuals’ plans of life. Yet that does not necessarily mean that each and every existing free market system or each and every effect of free market enterprise is desirable or defensible from a liberal perspective – involuntary exploitation of humans through slavery or rape, for instance, never is.

Critique to the effect that liberalism is a threat to the world’s ecology comes in many forms, and as it turns out, not all are appropriate. At the deepest philosophical level, critics argue that liberalism is a child of the Enlightenment from which it has inherited its parent’s deficiencies (cf. Sagoff 1988). Primary among these defects are René Descartes’ body/mind, mind/matter, human/nature and nature/culture dichotomies. Although these distinctions are supposedly neutral descriptions of ‘how the world works’, they would convey an implicit assumption of human superiority over everything else. Historically speaking, many philosophers and scientists did in fact confuse the descriptive and the prescriptive. Yet the argument is not as strong as it appears to be. Cartesian dichotomies are not a necessary condition for a superiority complex: the Bible, for instance, lends itself to similar interpretations. Nor are they necessarily part of what defines a liberal: for one of the greatest liberal philosophers, Spinoza, mind *is* matter.

Similar arguments and counter-arguments can be given for many other heirlooms of the Enlightenment. Its belief in progress, for instance, seems to be almost inevitably tied up with embracing growth, specifically material (economic) growth, and hence with thoughtless exploitation of nature – but ‘almost inevitable’ is not inevitable enough, and not every liberal confuses progress with economic growth. Thus, John Stuart Mill has in recent years become an icon in green political thought because of his defence of a steady state (or zero growth) economy a century before ecologists reinvented the idea (Mill 1999).

Yet there is one genetic defect that liberalism inherited from the Enlightenment that cannot so easily be discarded: its anthropocentrism (Eckersley 1992). As a *political* theory, liberalism is by definition focused on the welfare and wellbeing of humans, thus not just placing human interests, wants and desires above others but making them the exclusive measure of morality. As we shall see below, when liberals include non-humans (Kant’s angels or Bentham’s animals) they do so only because they are so like humans. The theory simply did not and could not take other interests or obligations into account; it could only see nature as resources with user value, as means to human ends. However broadly defined those ends may be, as a political theory liberalism is necessarily anthropocentric, therefore necessarily at odds with anti-anthropocentric ecologist theories, and from those perspectives necessarily a threat to the ecology.

In addition to its Enlightenment philosophical heritage, there is another cluster of reasons for believing liberalism and ecological concern to be incompatible. In part, these reasons concern the defining traits of liberalism itself, and in part, they signal the existence of a gap between liberal theory (its potential) and practice.

Democracy was the first defining trait of liberalism to be criticised in the 1970s (Ophuls 1976, cf. Holmes 1993). On the one hand, it would promote the expression of short-term individual (human) preferences, discouraging reflection on the formation and sensibility of those preferences. On the other hand, democracy would limit the effectiveness and efficiency of government: the ecological crisis calls for drastic, unpopular measures, the good of which will only be visible in the long term.

Two responses are possible. First, democracy is not necessarily unreflective or limited in temporal perspective – a position now widely accepted among green political thinkers, promoting ‘deliberative democracy’ and other improvements on Western democratic practice (Dryzek 1990; Barry 1999; Schlosberg 1999; Dobson 2003; Smith 2003). A second answer also addresses the concern that even ideal democratic procedures do not guarantee non-anthropocentric results: constitutionalism, special

protection for fundamental rights and procedures against the democratic vogue of the day. Some rights and duties are deemed more important than others, and should thus be satisfied before other are; some rights may even be inviolable. Again, however, green critics have voiced reservations: the rights of liberalism are rights for humans, not rights for nature, and the rule of human law (or of human rights) is not necessarily good for the ecology.

One of the main liberal criteria for a good system of rights is that it be neutral. It should not only accept the fact of irreducible moral pluralism (the existence of multiple ethical theories, multiple theories of a good life, multiple plans of life and hence of lifestyles), but it should also promote pluralism. This means, depending on one's interpretation of liberal neutrality (cf. Bell 2002: 718), that it should either not unjustifiably exclude various theories of the good, or not unjustifiably inhibit their realisation in the form of plans of life and lifestyles. The operative word here is 'unjustifiably': moral pluralism has to respect human dignity and further the emancipation of the individual. One of the implications neutrality has for the ecology is that ecologically destructive lifestyles cannot be excluded on grounds of principle: neutrality prohibits judgements on the ethical worth of different lifestyles. Another implication is that there is little room for ecological lifestyles – ecologists who would want to live in a world of harmony between humanity and nature, cannot as long as they have to accept the lifestyle of others who do not share their ideals. In more abstract terms, liberalism is open-ended, a collection of procedural ideals for society, whereas ecologism defends a substantive ideal, demanding definite results (Dobson 2001).

As for specific, typically liberal, rights that would inhibit sound ecological behaviour, the role of property and free trade rights are probably most noteworthy. Private property is seen as a symptom of a deeper problem within liberalism: its acceptance (neutrally put) of materialistic plans of life and lifestyles, i.e. the idea that a good life can be defined by the kinds of goods one owns and consumes. One might argue that this is not a specifically liberal problem – the quest for property, consumption and luxury is eternal; all liberalism aimed to do was to bring this ideal within the reach of all of humanity rather than professional elites or an elite of the blood. However, there are also two problems associated with property rights that are typically liberal.

Private property, or more precisely legitimate ownership, implies that owners are free to use their property in any way they like, even to destroy it or use it to their own advantage, to the disadvantage of the community. Thus nature, landscapes, animals and natural resources are *prima facie* unprotected; the onus of proof is on those who would argue for a need to restrict property rights.

Private property rights also imply a right to transfer goods at will, and to produce them at will: the foundations of the free market and of capitalism, both of which can be argued to have contributed immensely to ecological problems. In historical and practical terms it is absolutely true that classical liberalism and capitalism were often close allies (for reasons on which we do not need to expand here) – and yet ‘modern’ social liberalism’s critique of the unrestrained free market also *predates* e.g. Marxism. Property rights are not sacrosanct for liberals: particularly the Millian tradition of social liberalism has embraced the notion of a welfare state.

In this section we have discussed the green critique of liberalism, and have tried to establish what exactly ‘the ecological challenge’ is that liberalism would have to meet. We have in fact identified several challenges. First, as a *political* theory, liberalism has always ignored the non-political, and thus never developed any other notion of nature than as the other of humanity. It also seems to be *incurably* anthropocentric: unable to appreciate nature as anything but resources. Its ethical neutrality and in particular its insistence on the importance of property rights works to the disadvantage of ecologically minded theories of the good life.

The Greening of Liberalism

Although liberalism has not been fundamentally changed by its contact with green political thought, it has developed in many important respects. To be more precise, *some* liberals have taken on a shade of green. While liberals are united by an at times flimsy basic consensus on the importance of freedom, equality, individual responsibility and emancipation, it would be wrong to treat liberalism as a monolithic theory (as its green critics tend to do). Thus, *some* liberals have developed a variety of responses, and *some* strands of liberalism are capable of more. In the context of this brief text, a rough outline focusing on neutrality, anthropocentrism and economic freedom is all we can offer. Where appropriate, the different strands are distinguished, but most of the time we shall refer to generalised notions of social and classical liberalism.

Neutrality

Liberalism’s neutrality may not be absolute: it is still in principle biased against green political thought, inasmuch as the latter demands more than a greening at the level of individual preferences. Neutrality of process and neutrality of outcome both seem incompatible with

substantive green policies aimed at the realisation of a unique ecologically desirable society and way of life.

Nonetheless, the fact that liberal neutrality is never absolute allows it to come a long way towards answering green challenges – both in practice (pollution, global warming, etc.) and in theory. It all depends on the *kind* of solution one wants, and on whether that solution is compatible with neutrality. At least two factors limit neutrality: the liberal theory of the good, and its conception of reality as limiting the desirable.

No liberal political theory can do without a conception of the human good. For one, without at least some shared interests, both the existence of conflict over scarce resources and the presence of motives for co-operation and mutual benefit would be inexplicable – there would be no need for politics. Hence liberals have to make certain assumptions about what it is that makes individuals feel life is worth living and worth maintaining. In addition, liberal criteria for a desirable social order necessarily presume a foundational idea of the good life: if, for instance, liberty were a morally neutral or even amoral concept, there could be no grounds for promoting it. John Rawls' theory (1972, 1993), which has become the defining statement of liberalism relative to which all other versions of liberalism are understood, illustrates these points. Rawls presumes that individuals share an interest in so-called primary social goods, that is, properties of the physical world like wealth and income, rights and freedoms and self-respect, that all humans require to successfully pursue a plan of life – and all individuals will want more rather than less of these primary goods. This so-called 'thin theory of the good' explains both why social co-operation is required, and why liberty and equality are desirable.

In addition, all political theories including liberalism necessarily contain ontological hypotheses, that is, assumptions about how the real world works and how it restricts political and ethical desires. These hypotheses may concern human psychology (such as Rawls' idea that humans want to realise plans of life), but they can also include environmental factors – such as the notion that some resources really can be scarce. Together, these ethical and ontological assumptions necessarily limit neutrality. Neutrality is not absolute and was never meant to be absolute; its aim is to minimise the moral prerequisites for social co-operation and at the same time maximise social consensus (which comes down to a balancing act).

The fact that liberalism presumes rather than rejects ethical and ontological limitations to neutrality has allowed it, over the past decades, to absorb ecological ideas on the scarcity of natural resources in a

multitude of forms. John Rawls' original theory of justice (1972), for instance, contained a so-called just savings principle demanding present generations to save some of their resources and achievements for future generations. After critics pointed out that this seemed to *oblige* us to guarantee infinite growth, Rawls (1993) adapted not the principle (its formulation was ambiguous enough to allow for shrinking economies) but its defence, turning it into a principle that requires present generations to take the welfare of future generations into account under any circumstances. Donald VanDeVeer and others (VanDeVeer 1979; Singer 1988; Garner 2003) accused Rawls and liberals in general of being biased in favour of humans, ignoring the good or interests of animals. This resulted among others in an ongoing debate on animal-friendly amendments to Rawls' theory, for example by including animals in the setting of the Rawlsian social contract. Other critics amended liberal conceptions of property rights, for instance by arguing that the right to ownership of a good does not include an absolute right to destroy the good in question – thus making room for a restraint principle demanding that no goods be destroyed unless necessary and unless proper compensation is offered (Wissenburg 1998: 123), or for a minimum harm principle that further limits the possibilities of justifying 'necessary' destruction (Wallack 2004).

Finally, several liberals have also moved beyond formulating public (political) limits to the neutral or impartial satisfaction of individual preferences into the realm of preference formation itself. In line with Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, many liberals admit that ideals like emancipation and autonomy are not served by taking preferences as given. This has given rise, first of all, to a rapidly growing literature on public deliberation regarding private preferences, an example of which is the debate on whether ecological principles can be included in the so-called Rawlsian basic consensus, the set of values on which reasonable individuals should agree, values that make social co-operation possible and at the same time limit the areas in which individuals may disagree on the good life (Achterberg 1993; Bell 2002). Thus, allowing a government to *a priori prescribe* a moderate and quiet lifestyle (a life most green authors argue is a necessary condition for ecological and human survival; cf. De Geus 2003) and thereby impose a substantive ideal of the good life is definitely incompatible with liberal neutrality – but allowing ecological concerns for ethical or ontological reasons to *limit* the range of admissible lifestyles is an entirely different thing. In the end, the bottle that greens consider half empty (liberalism being unwilling to prescribe a substantively 'correct' way of life) may well be half full.

To direct the process of individual preference formation, some authors also point to Mill's harm principle (Mill 1998) as a forceful instrument for the protection of natural resources: if one may do what one wishes as long as one harms no one (as Mill interprets liberty), and if depriving others of resources they need constitutes harm, then there are again clearly limits to how one may use nature. Of course, there are weak spots in the argument. The strength of the harm principle depends on how one interprets harm, and the principle presumes that Pareto-optimality is actually possible, that is, that when one person benefits from an action, no one else is disadvantaged. If resources should indeed be considered finite, then Pareto-optimality is always impossible, regardless of the definition of harm.

All of these amendments to liberalism's neutrality have two things in common: they still perceive nature in terms of natural resources, and they limit neutrality only on ontological grounds. Even when animals are taken into consideration, the animals are still mere consumers of nature. Nature, it seems, is still nothing but resources.

Anthropocentrism

The distinguishing feature of deep-green or ecologist political thought is that it sees more in nature than resources for humans, unlike environmentalism – regardless of how broadly one defines resources. This ecologist critique of liberal anthropocentrism has two dimensions: on the one hand, it is a critique of the liberal subject (individual humans), on the other, a critique of its conception of the value of nature. Technicalities aside, liberalism can easily meet the environmental challenge, as we just saw – but it has had more difficulty with ecologism.

Until quite recently, liberals had no incentive or reason to worry about scarcity of the supply of natural resources – scarcity was not a matter of supply, nature being an eternally renewable horn of plenty, but of demand. The time factor was irrelevant: a liberally just political order today would be as just tomorrow or any day after. The ecological crisis changed this: suddenly, future generations came into the picture. Moreover, as long as the supply side of the equation could be ignored, there was no practical reason to question the ethical assumption that only humans matter, that only humans have interests and can be harmed, that only humans are moral subjects.

Future generations consist of future individual humans: the one difference with normal liberal subjects is that they do not yet exist – for the rest they fit perfectly within liberalism. It is now widely recognised within liberalism that present generations have obligations towards

future generations – but the reasons given vary considerably (Carter 2001). Rawls originally argued that humans ‘naturally’ care for their own offspring, a concern that an impartially governed society should universalise and translate into solidarity between generations. His critics rejected the naturalness of procreation in the first place, and of natural care secondly, forcing Rawls later to argue for solidarity between generations on the basis of mutual advantage (Rawls 1993). Others argue that no one deserves to be born into this generation rather than another, hence that no generation deserves natural resources more than any other, leading to the conclusion that resources should be shared impartially by all generations (Barry 1989, 1995). Still, some liberals have voiced reservations: if procreation is not natural, and if (as any liberal would assume) it is or should be an individual *choice*, then how can I be held responsible for the fate of other people’s children (including my own grandchildren), when others cause their existence (Wissenburg 1998)? Worries like these tie in with the debate on population policy (de-Shalit 2000), where liberals argue against compulsory birth control but in favour of information, emancipation, the availability of contraceptives, etc.

The introduction of animals into the liberal matrix has been at least as difficult. Although liberals like Kant and Bentham already addressed the moral concern owed to animals, it was not until Robert Nozick (1974) put the issue in a political context that it became salient. Nozick asked by virtue of which properties or qualities human interests should take precedence over those of animals, and concluded that whatever those properties might be, liberal moral theory’s answer would always remain inconclusive since – if a hierarchy of qualities makes the difference – a race of alien space invaders could always claim superiority to humans by virtue of a quality unknown and unknowable to humans. The problem of inconclusiveness aside, the important thing is that liberals distinguish between humans and animals on the basis of a hierarchy of objective qualities, such as consciousness, a sense of self, of time, of morality, and other qualities that make it possible to have a plan of life and a theory of the good. The alternative (Wenz 1988) is to base priorities on the subjective recognition of responsibilities or relations of care – an alternative that is obviously incompatible with warranting liberty and equality for all humans.

The apparent inevitability of a hierarchy of moral concern does not imply that animals necessarily always draw the short straw. For one, ‘typically human’ qualities overrule qualities shared with other animals only when human needs (understood as what is vital to the execution of a plan of life) are at stake; in other cases, the interests of animals may be

more important than those of humans (e.g. where the interest in not being painfully slaughtered meets a sadistic interest in seeing pain). Secondly, a hierarchy of moral concern means that some creatures may be morally less important than others, but not that their interests do not matter at all. Liberalism's giving precedence to human interests is therefore even compatible with the idea that MPs should not be asses only, but should actively represent the interests of all animals: it is simply a matter of proportion in representation.

The fact that liberalism and proper concern for animals are compatible as a matter of principle does not, of course, answer the question what we owe exactly to which animals when and where. Nor is it important how we refer to these obligations – greens and liberals have wasted countless pages on the smell-of-a-rose issue of whether animals are subjects of justice or 'merely' of 'less strong' moral obligations. What is important is that neither including animals nor including future generations will really satisfy ecologists because the obligations involved are still predicated on individualism (Devall and Sessions 1985; Naess 1989).

Ecologists defend communities and species and their distinct ways of life, landscapes and ecosystems, and not only individual humans or animals. Liberals cannot but argue that one cannot prick an ecosystem or tickle a stone: moral concern is owed only to what has an interest in being benefited or harmed, and that is individual beings, not collectives or senseless entities. This brings us to the second dimension of the ecologist critique of liberal anthropocentrism: if its conception of morally relevant subjects cannot be extended to include non-individuals, then perhaps it can meet the critique by valuing nature differently.

There have been three responses to this particular challenge. One has been for liberals to straightforwardly deny the possibility of valuing nature intrinsically or 'for its own sake'. The concept of intrinsic value, they argue, can only be sensibly applied to humans (or a more extended circle of morally relevant subjects), whereas all else that is valued must by definition be instrumentally valuable in some way, that is, it must be valued because of the purposes it can serve (Wissenburg 1998). Although this approach allows a very wide interpretation of the instrumental value of nature – from direct utility as economic resources to the pleasing, possibly purely aesthetic consciousness that somewhere some bit of pristine nature remains untouched by human hands – it is also an obvious refusal to accept one of the fundamental tenets of ecologism.

Recognising that the green agenda is not served by scholastic debates on the nature of value, various liberal and ecologist authors defended a second, more tactical response: accommodation. Thus Bryan Norton

has argued that greens do not need to accept or reject, for instance, liberal *reasons* for acting as long as liberal *policies* are green enough – which they can be (Norton 1991; Barry 1999; Wissenburg 2004).

Recently, a third possible response – for which a name has not yet been coined – has been developed. Andrew Dobson (2003) argues that if liberals value choice for the sake of autonomy, then they should value the existence of as wide a range of ‘life environments’ as possible. Simon Hailwood (2004), using the term ‘landscapes’ since no part of nature is or can be untouched by human hands anymore, makes a similar point when he argues that liberals can and should appreciate the ‘otherness’ of nature (cf. DiZerega 1996). The crucial difference between this third and the other two responses is that it does not presume that nature (or the life environment or landscape) is always already imbued with value – rather, it is valuable because it *is there* as an option, to be appreciated or not. Although valuing a range of ecological options implies that non-individual entities like ecosystems and species are still in a way valued ‘instrumentally’ (as necessary conditions for the existence of a life environment or landscape), it would seem as if this answer finally takes the sting out of the green objections to liberal anthropocentrism and – ultimately – individualism. The reasons motivating ecologists and liberals may differ, but the results would be the same: maximised protection of ecological diversity combined with maximum freedom for humans to pursue a green life.

Economic Freedom

There have been two quite distinct responses within liberal thought to ecologism’s critical assessment of the free market and liberal conceptions of property rights: a reaffirmation of elements of classical liberalism, and an extension of social liberalism to ecological issues. Since the latter comes down to amending liberal conceptions of social or distributive justice, treated in another chapter in this book, I shall only discuss the former here.

Robert Nozick (1974) observed that John Locke’s classic justification for ‘original acquisition’, that is, taking natural resources and calling them private property, was based on the flawed proviso that one cannot take anything from nature unless one leaves ‘enough and as good’ for others. The proviso is flawed because it assumes infinite resources: my taking the last breath of fresh air would be illegitimate because someone else took the last but one breath, leaving too little for me, and so on. The Lockean proviso actually makes the existence of legitimate property impossible. Nozick’s solution involved the idea of adequate

compensation; others in later years have tried to amend and refine Locke's proviso and the rest of his theory to make finite resources adequately available to future generations and animals (cf. Dobson 1998). One problem still facing the Lockean is that Locke's theory is distribution insensitive, i.e. it may give an account of legitimate property but not of the distribution of property. Natural resources may still end up benefiting some parties (e.g. the North) more than others (e.g. the South) – which is neither conducive to sustainable development nor to sustainable living.

For any free market advocate, the most natural but also most ambitious response to the accusation that the free market is a threat to the environment would be to argue that there is actually no better warrant for the environment than the free market. This is exactly what so-called free market environmentalism (Anderson and Leal 1991) argues: privatising natural resources makes individual owners directly responsible for the value of their property. A rational property owner will do anything necessary to maintain or even increase the value of her property over time, taking into account that resources may have different uses over time: a piece of land valued today merely as a potential second-rate business development area may tomorrow be appreciated as the most precious nature reserve ever.

Free market environmentalism is at best an environmentalist and at worst a nihilist answer to an ecological challenge (Stephens 1999). Consider a natural forest: if industrial forestry is (in the course of an owner's lifetime) more profitable than turning the forest into a nature reserve, the rational owner would be unwise not to start foresting – thereby destroying the forest's natural qualities. Moreover, the free market environmentalist confuses money with value: even if a strong preference exists somewhere in society for protecting the forest's naturalness, the nature lovers in question may simply not have sufficient resources to compensate the owner for lost economic opportunities.

Similar problems haunt most other attempts at reconciling classical liberalism and ecologism. Thus, green consumerism argues for environmental protection through changing consumer preferences, forcing producers to provide ecology-friendly products at the risk of losing clients and profit, but it too depends on contingent preferences and the financial power of consumers. Ecological modernisation (Weale 1992) argues that economic growth and ecological protection can be combined: producing in an ecologically sane way may well turn out to be a profitable growth market. Then again, it also may not. Finally, some authors offer a principled defence of ownership rights as a potentially strong instrument in the protection of the ecology: it may allow, for

instance, large pharmaceutical companies to monopolise access to new medicines derived from ancient tribal practices, but it can also be used as an instrument by indigenous peoples to protect their 'local knowledge', not to mention their natural environment, against over-exploitation (Oksanen 1998). Note, however, that one must assume the indigenous property owners to be interested in maintaining their short, nasty and brutish way of life at all, and note that their property rights only protect nature because a worldwide system of property rights is already in existence – a system for which, as we saw above, only ecologically suspicious justifications have been given.

An Even Greener Liberalism?

Two conclusions can be drawn at this point. First, classical liberalism cannot meet the ecological challenge, however that challenge is defined, simply by insisting on negative liberty (and particularly on the free market) as the answer to all ecological problems. To ensure that those problems will be addressed, it has to accept limits to neutrality and rid itself of its anthropocentric bias. This requires at least a form of institutional representation and protection of non-human and non-present-human interests, and means and methods for accounting for the formation of individual preferences. The inevitable result is that negative liberty can no longer be seen as the supreme criterion of a good society.

Second, both a classical liberalism thus transformed (perhaps beyond recognition), and a social liberalism amended with ecological limits to neutrality and an ecological expansion of its original anthropocentrism, *can* be green, at least in theory. There is no fundamental contradiction between affirming human dignity through individual emancipation, and protecting nature as much as is humanly possible – indeed, the two may well mutually reinforce one another. There is room within liberalism for protecting the ecology rather than the environment and (behind that) for conceptions of nature's value that perhaps do not eliminate but at least pacify the conflict over intrinsic value. There is also room for appreciating animals as more than resources, for limits to neutrality and limits to the use of property rights on ecological grounds, and so on. There are and will at least for a long time be differences of opinion between liberal and ecologist political thinkers, yet most of these are no longer fundamental challenges – they no longer force us to ask *whether* but only *to what degree* liberalism can be green. The ball is back in the ecologist court: it is up to ecologism to indicate what kind of society can no longer count as ecologically sane.

Yet there are also, undeniably, a few topics on which fundamental agreement seems impossible. There will always be disagreement with those green thinkers who on principle reject the notions of property and ownership. Liberalism can go a long way in defending limits to the legitimate *use* and *acquisition* of property, and social liberalism offers ample opportunity to defend the *redistribution* of property even for green reasons – but at its heart remains the idea that individual beings matter, that their lives or plans of life matter, and that such lives cannot be lived without individually available material resources.

This ties in with another area of fundamental disagreement: there are deep-green thinkers for whom the only acceptable society is one where everyone leads an ecologically responsible, modest or even frugal life in a way and an environment that is as close to nature as possible – regardless of whether other lifestyles (like more efficient urbanisation) turn out to be better for all of non-human nature. Most liberals, on the other hand, can go no further than maximising the individual's opportunity to live a life like that alongside with others living different lives; perfectionist liberals might even discourage 'unsustainable' lifestyles, but will never embrace the idea of a unique road to salvation. This contradiction is irresolvable for two reasons. First, it requires the prescription of a deep-green life and the explicit elimination and prohibition of all others, which is by definition incompatible with the liberal ideal of dignity and emancipation through freedom of lifestyle and equality of opportunity. Secondly, the deep-green life risks self-effacement by denying what liberalism seeks to regulate: the existence of rogue elements in society who willingly or unwillingly sabotage social harmony. In the case of deep-green 'naturalism', what is denied is the fear of the Four Horsemen from which humanity has fled throughout its existence, the fear that generated the quest for ever more safety and security through the acquisition of resources. To assume that humanity *should* conquer its fear and abandon the quest for material prosperity may (or may not) be reasonable; to expect that each and every individual *can* and *will* is suicidal.

It is here that we meet the final challenge. If liberalism can meet the theoretical challenges posed by green political thinkers (even if it is by rejecting some as unreasonable), the question remains why there is a gap between theory and practice. Why is there still a global ecological crisis? The intellectually honest answer is that this is an unfair question: it presumes a counterfactual situation in which the world could have been 'ruled' by 'true (green) liberalism', but where the ideal was betrayed by non-liberal politicians and political structures.

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