

# Inherit the Wasteland: Ecofascism & Environmental Collapse

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Patrick Hassan

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## Introduction

According to ecological holism, only the relations between living organisms within a biotic community are what generate intrinsic value, and so the sole bearer of intrinsic value is the ecosystem and its contents considered as a whole. On this view, the intrinsic value of an ecosystem provides a *pro tanto* obligation to preserve or, on stronger versions, promote it. Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic" is an early version of this view, the essence of which he expresses in the principle: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. (Leopold, 1949: 224–225). While Leopold's version is the most well known, holism has been defended and refined more recently, notably by Baird Callicott (1989, 1998).

A *prima facie* implication of ecological holism is that it would sometimes be morally permissible—and perhaps even morally *required*—for individual human interests to be trumped by the interests of the ecological whole. Like when a species of plant or non-human animal ought to be culled when they threaten the holistic environmental good, on pain of glaring inconsistency the same must be true of humans. For this reason, one traditional objection to holism has been that it embodies what Tom Regan has called "environmental fascism" (Regan, 1983: 262). William Aiken has described the view as "extreme eco-holism", and claims that it would prescribe "mass genocide or species suicide", and "massive human diebacks" in which humans would be required to cull or "eliminate 90 percent of our numbers" (Aiken, 1984: 269). Marti Kheel shared similar concerns: she claimed that holists—and in particular Callicott's brand of holism—"may be compared to totalitarians, with their insistence on the subordination of the individual to the greater good of the collective whole (Kheel, 1985: 138; cf. Shrader-Frechette, 1996: 63). This sentiment is echoed by Frederick Ferré, who claims holism entails that it would be right to "exterminate excess people", and that "the land ethic—despite the best intentions of its supporters—would lead toward classical fascism" (Ferré, 1996: 18; cf. Attfield, 1998: 300-301). These alleged 'ecofascist' implications have been taken to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of ecological holism.<sup>i ii</sup>

Sophisticated attempts have been made show how ecological holism does not necessarily entail ecofascism, specifically by claiming that the theory has the conceptual resources to grant intrinsic value to

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<sup>i</sup> The charge of ecofascism, although usually levelled at the Land Ethic, could equally be launched against other forms of holism, including those that centre on the intrinsic value of *species*, or of the *biosphere*. It may in principle also be launched against biocentrism, the view that each living thing—including vegetation, animals, and micro-organisms—has intrinsic value (Attfield, 1987; Agar, 2001), and especially *egalitarian* versions of biocentrism, which hold that each living thing has *equal* intrinsic value (Taylor, 1981, 1986).

<sup>ii</sup> Another objection to ecological holism has been that ecosystems are not the type of entity which *have* a good of their own, and thus cannot have interests which can be weighed against those of individual members (Cahen, 1988). I will say nothing about this objection here.

individuals *as well as* ecological wholes (e.g. Nelson, 1996; Callicott, 1999).<sup>iii</sup> However, such attempts have been severely criticised as jeopardising the integrity of the theory insofar as they draw upon a conceptual apparatus foreign to ecological holism (e.g. Y.S. Lo, 2001). Contemporary defenders are thus in a precarious position, the counter goes: either advocates amend their theory to the point where it is no longer recognisable as a version of holism, or they bite the bullet and accept the ‘ecofascist’ implication that significant human interests can be defeated by those of the whole.

My own aims in this paper are twofold. First, I seek to clarify exactly what ‘ecofascism’ is committed to, and how holism—and perhaps ‘radical environmentalism’ more generally—allegedly implies (some version of) it. Second, once the relevant definition of ecofascism has been established, I will argue that given the extent of the current environmental crisis, the threat of this type of ecofascism traditionally associated with ecological holism (with good reason) is increasingly going to become applicable to even the most austere anthropocentrist if nothing is willingly done to immediately prevent such a crisis. Why? I claim that (1) the survival and flourishing of the biosphere, and therefore the human race, requires human beings to radically reduce their carbon footprint; (2) the longer action is delayed, the more radical restrictions would have to be later; (3) there may be good reasons to be sceptical about human beings’ willingness to significantly and immediately reduce their carbon footprint. Thus, if preserving the human race and the biosphere are worthy goals, then significant coercive measures—similar in kind and degree to those seemingly implied by holism—may be required in increasing degree, relative to delay.

This, I assume readers will agree, would be an unwelcome result. However, the severity of the climate crisis, and the array of forces in place to prevent effective combat against it, makes such ‘ecofascist’ coercion a very real and fast-approaching danger, *regardless* of one’s view of the scope of the moral community, and what is identified as a bearer of intrinsic value. In other words: the anthropocentrist is in ever-growing danger of becoming a *de facto* ecofascist, rendering the initial objection redundant.

## 1. Clarifying the Charge: What is Ecofascism?

It is important to clearly distinguish how the term ‘ecofascism’ shall be understood in this paper from other possible meanings. When the likes of Regan, Kheel, Shrader-Frechette, and Aiken charge certain environmental views with advocating “environmental fascism”, what they seem to have in mind is the licensing of discounting significant individual human interests—and the rights that protect them—in favour of concerns to preserve the good of the environment and biotic community. This will typically involve enforced restrictions on human autonomy. But a lot will turn on what is meant by the qualification of ‘*significant*’ human interests and rights. Without such a qualification, this understanding of ecofascism would be hopelessly general: even the most liberal states restrict citizens’ freedom on a range of environmental issues in a way that most would find unobjectionable. These might include, for example, restrictions on the liberty to dump my garbage in a river, hunt endangered animals, use toxic chemicals to pollute public soil, felling, or common littering. So it must be that only particular kinds of restrictions of liberty in the interests of the environment count as ecofascist.

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<sup>iii</sup> Others have tried to show that something like ecofascism is a product only of a *certain interpretation* of the holist position, which is itself ambiguous. For example, Eric Katz (1985) has argued that from Leopold’s Land Ethic there can be distinguished a “community” model and a “organism” model of holism. On the “community model”—which Katz claims best represents Leopold’s own position—moral consideration is given to the biotic community as a whole, *as well as* to constitutive members as individuals (cf. Callicott, 1999). On the “organism” model, moral consideration is given *only* to the biotic community as a whole. Katz argued that only this latter model was conducive to ecofascism, or what he calls the “substitution problem”: it permits (or requires) the replacement of one entity in an ecosystem by another, provided that the overall functioning of the system is not harmed.

I propose that the best way to understand what Regan *et. al* must implicitly accept as ‘significant’ interests and rights are those thought to be *fundamental* to human life, transcending particular political institutions. These will typically (but not necessarily) include: the right to life and security of person; to reproductive freedom; to own property; to free movement within a person’s state; to political participation; to freedom of belief and expression; to freedom from degrading treatment; and a range of possible others of the kind now enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. At least some of these fundamental rights are those that when disregarded by a state typically identify a fascist regime. When they are disregarded for the purposes of maintaining environmental integrity, this is the ‘ecofascism’ which Regan *et. al* show concern about.

With this distinction in hand, we can define ecofascism in the following way:

*Ecofascism (EF)*: the view that political entities (e.g. states, federations, unions) ought to enforce restrictions on individual citizens’ or members’ fundamental rights to the extent that the exercise of those rights causes harm to the environment and its non-human contents which make up the biotic community.<sup>iv</sup>

Notice that this characterisation of *EF* is a matter of degree: it can be milder or stricter depending on the extent of such restrictions.<sup>v</sup> Moreover, ‘restrictions’ may be positive or negative. By ‘positive restrictions’ I mean regulative measures which prohibit or require certain behaviours (e.g. banning the production/use/sale of plastics). By “negative restrictions” I mean opt-in incentives to curtail certain behaviours (e.g. tax breaks for recyclers; extra financial aid for adoptive parents with no biological children). There are a variety of forms of which such positive restrictions could take; some of which are harsher on individual autonomy than others. Michael Zimmerman, for example, lists “not only the seizure of private property, but perhaps also harassment, internment, torture, deportation, and worse, those designed to force people to comply with centrally-imposed regulations (in areas ranging from consumption to reproduction) purporting to deal with an ‘ecological emergency’” (Zimmerman, 1995: 209). For example, if it was the case that a rapidly increasing human population within a state was a danger to environmental integrity, *EF*-style measures may involve the enforcing of anti-natalist policies, ranging from prohibiting any reproduction, to limiting reproduction to *X* amount of offspring per family.<sup>vi</sup> Alternatively, if it was the case that mass overconsumption within a state was a danger to environmental integrity, *EF*-style measures may range from the prohibition and criminalisation of meat and dairy consumption/production, to the restriction of habitation or (certain means of) travel to newly protected natural areas.<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>iv</sup> It should be noted that this view might also include the suppression of threats to the *aesthetic beauty* of the ecosystem. After all, Leopold’s principle explicitly includes the claim that “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and *beauty* of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. (Leopold, 1949: 224–225 - emphasis mine).

<sup>v</sup> One might claim that the *severity of the punishment* for acts such as littering, felling, polluting soil, etc, is what would make something identifiably ecofascist. But this, it seems to me, would be a much broader objectionable feature, namely: an injustice in virtue of a *disproportionate* and *Draconian* response to a crime, rather than in virtue of a discounting of a fundamental human right as a *means* of preserving environmental integrity. I do not deny, however, that draconian punishments for environmental crimes could *symbolically* serve an ecofascist program.

<sup>vi</sup> Examples of philosophers sympathetic (in varying degrees) to the need for government-enforced anti-natalism include Sarah Conly, (2016: 3) and Garrett Hardin (1968: 1246-1248). This commitment would fit the definition of *EF* I give here, even if their views are not informed by holism—a point which I explicitly draw attention to in section 2.

<sup>vii</sup> In this paper I make no commitment to what the root causes of environmental disaster are. Elsewhere (\*\*\*\*\*) I argue that human population is *in-itself* a red-herring, and that it matters only insofar as it exacerbates the real problem of overconsumption. The argument here only concerns theories of intrinsic value and their implications for the accusation of ecofascism.

Our working definition of *EF* above should be disassociated from a distinct understanding of the term which is sometimes used in contemporary parlance. Concerning the types of restrictive measures described above, Zimmerman writes that one “could certainly describe such practices as Draconian or tyrannical, but not necessarily as fascist” (Zimmerman, 1995: 209). This is because Zimmerman has in mind a more conceptually robust understanding of ecofascism that involves further substantive commitments.

These additional commitments, which serve as *justifications* for restrictive measures on human rights, typically (but do not essentially) involve: (a) “claiming to restore dignity, nobility, purpose, and privilege to some unique people or race whose members feel that their original mystical-organic social unity and their ties with their homeland are degenerating because of the insidious influence of alien races and foreign ideas” (Zimmerman, 1995: 209); (b) an emphasis on the value of *struggle* and *heroism* as a means of restoring racial, cultural or national unity with the land; (c) an emphasis on the necessity of strong centralised leadership, usually of a single authoritarian figure; (d) a conservative and essentialist understanding of gender and gender roles (particularly tying masculinity to strength and determination, and femininity to family care and fertility); (e) an emphasis on *a sense of duty* and civic virtue as the highest *moral* goods. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and indeed some components of it may take different forms,<sup>viii</sup> but these features are typically included in some uses of the term ‘ecofascism’. For the sake of clarity, let us call this more conceptually robust view *Green Fascism (GF)*.

*GF*—from (a) through to (e)—is recognisable in the *Blut und Boden* [Blood and Soil] ideology of the Third Reich, developed by Nazi ecologist Richard Walter Darré, and later propagated by the biologist and, in 1942, director of the *Reichsstelle für Naturschutz*,<sup>z</sup> Walther Schoenichen. This ideology sought to capture some romantic-mystical relation between a race and a specified territory—their *Lebensraum*—they either originate from or traditionally reside in.<sup>ix</sup> Tied to the concept of racial health or cultural flourishing was not only the idea of respect for the land that is bonded with its people, but that human beings are a part of the natural world, not above it, and as such are subject to the same struggles for survival.

Components of *GF* are also recognisable in more contemporary uses of the term. For example, the terrorist and racist who carried out the fatal March 2019 Christchurch shootings referred to himself, in his ‘manifesto’, as an “ecofascist”, lamenting the contemporary exploitation of nature and concurrent “white genocide”. Similarly, amongst outbursts over “the Hispanic invasion of Texas”, the August 2019 El Paso shooter wrote on an online forum minutes before the attack that “[t]he decimation of the environment is creating a massive burden for future generations. Corporations are heading the destruction of our environment by shamelessly over-harvesting resources”. He continued that “If we can get rid of enough people, then our way of life can be more sustainable”. The ‘alt-right’ subculture to which

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<sup>viii</sup> For example, (d) may instead be replaced by a *radically egalitarian* conception of gender roles, and would still qualify as a component of an ecofascist view in the sense being discussed.

<sup>ix</sup> Thus, this view was opposed to ‘nomadic’ forms of existence which the Nazis associated with the Jews and other diaspora, further demonising them. The idea of an ethnic group having a specified ‘homeland’ from which they could flourish goes back to at least the philosophy of Johan Gottfried von Herder (1743-1803), especially in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind [Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit]*, 1784-91. However, while Herder’s ideas were read enthusiastically by Nazi theorists, it is a matter of controversy whether Herder’s view that values owe much of their formulation and expression to cultural and geographic climate [*Klima*]—and thus in some ways are better realised the closer the *Volk* are to that environment—is simply repeated in Nazi ideology. There are important differences in Herder’s view which Nazi interpreters—such as Friedrich Berger, Martin Redeker, Benno von Wiese—were highly selective in under-emphasising or ignoring (see Bernhard Becker, 1987). For an overview of this controversy see Sonia Sikka (2011), Ch. 4.

these individuals belonged is imbued with a quasi-spiritual veneration of ‘nature’ which certainly reflects the features of *GF*.

While Zimmerman rejects that *GF* is entailed by ecological holism, it is noteworthy that some critics have explicitly referred to this conception when attacking the theory. As we saw above, Ferré claims that holism “would lead toward classical fascism, the submergence of the individual person in the glorification of the collectivity, *race, tribe, or nation*” (Ferré, 1996: 18 - emphasis mine). In addition, Robin Attfield has also claimed that on views which take the value of human life to be subject to holistic calculation, “[t]he possibilities for *racist* or fascist outcomes are all too clear” (Attfield, 1998: 301 - emphasis mine).<sup>x</sup>

Ferré and Attfield’s claims look to invoke a straight-forward slippery-slope argument. There are a number of types of such argument, each of which essentially hold some *Y* to follow inevitably from some *X*. Where they may differ is in holding whether *Y* follows from *X* for *logical* reasons or *psychological* reasons. If what Ferré and Attfield are suggesting is that ecological holism *logically* entails *GF*, their position would clearly be implausible. There is nothing within ecological holism which necessarily prioritises races, ethnic groups or nations. Luckily, Ferré and Attfield’s claims are best read as a speculative diagnosis of a *psychological* tendency towards endorsing *GF* from holism. This is suggested by Ferré’s claim that holism would “*lead toward* classical fascism” (Ferré, 1996: 18 - emphasis mine), and Attfield’s claim that viewing human beings as a ‘cancer’ as holism allegedly does “generates a *reluctance* to show solidarity with vulnerable humans, and *can predispose* those who endorse it to misanthropy” (Attfield, 1998: 300-301 - emphasis mine).

But there are two responses which render this psychological thesis *prima facie* problematic as an objection. First of all, I do not deny that as a *speculative* psychological claim, the thesis has some intuitive pull. Fascist ideologies of any kind can be alluring broadly for the same reason that some religions can be: they offer a romanticised *totalising* narrative in which one’s life can play a meaningful part, and this can be appealing to certain individuals. However, the psychological slippery slope is an empirical claim, and therefore it needs to be supported with evidence before it can be confidently accepted.

Secondly, it is difficult to see how getting *GF* from holism or *EF* is psychologically assured or likely. Assuming that a holist or ecofascist would be morally content with prioritising the good of the environment over a human, why would they be more inclined to prioritise one race over another, or one gender, and so on? Moreover, why wouldn’t the fact we have independent reasons to believe that racism and sexism to be misguided and morally problematic be sufficient to prevent the alleged slippery slope?

Part of what motivates the psychological thesis is, I believe, the proclivity for opponents of holism—and radical environmentalism more generally—to reduce it to the sentiment of “misanthropy” (Attfield, 1998: 301; Brennan, 1998: 326; Avery, 2004: 34-35). It is certainly unsurprising why this has been the case: many environmentalists have invited this charge by likening, or approving of likening, humans to a kind of cancer upon the planet (e.g. Hardin, 1974; Rolston, 1996).<sup>xi</sup> However, unless ‘misanthropy’ here means something other than ‘failing to give lexical priority to human interests’, its use in the psy-

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<sup>x</sup> Attfield’s concerns here, to be precise, are focused on a certain population discourse which treats human beings as a “cancer” upon the earth. But his claims about what is objectionable about this clearly implicate holism: “if each individual existence beyond a certain numerical level is an evil, then (whatever humanitarianism may dictate) there must be virtue in letting such individuals die, if not in speeding the process” (Attfield, 1998: 300).

<sup>xi</sup> Perhaps the most clear example of misanthropic attitudes in the radical environmentalist movement is demonstrated in the notorious 1987 article in the *Earth First!* journal—written anonymously by a “Miss Ann Thropy”—arguing that AIDS was a welcomed solution to the ecological crisis in virtue of its effect of decreasing the human population. Despite many *Earth First!* members disavowing the article, it reinforced the idea that radical environmentalism is infused with a hatred for the human race.

chological slippery-slope the argument is clearly question-begging. On the other hand, if we understand ‘misanthropy’ more commonly as ‘harbouring a hatred for the human race’, this is question-begging in a second way. As a philosophical *theory*, the view that intrinsic value resides within wholes rather than individual constitutive parts—or that humans are not the only bearers of intrinsic value—involves no such sentiments. In other words, holism has no more a propensity towards misanthropy than anthropocentrism does to philanthropy.

Let us return to the classificatory aims of this section. Armed with the distinction at hand, when opponents of holism offer a *reductio* of that view on the ground that it embodies ecofascism, their argument is patently invalid *if they are referring to GF*. It is for this reason I am inclined to agree with Michael Nelson’s claim that the use of the term ‘fascism’ by Regan *et. al*, with its clearly “negative emotive and visceral connotations” (Nelson, 1996: 113), is designed to function “not only as a highly emotive accusation, but also serves to encourage summary dismissal of that proposed ethic” (Nelson, 1996: 103).<sup>xiii</sup> But I take it the real—and warranted—concern about holism that Regan *et. al* share is the sense of ecofascism understood in *EF*: that fundamental human interests may sometimes be discounted and sacrificed for the sake of environmental interests. It is *EF* that shall be the concern of this paper.

It might be objected at the outset that it is unwise to use the term ‘ecofascism’ to refer to the contents of *EF*, given the connotations outlined by Zimmerman and their manifestation in the likes of the racially-motivated terror attacks mentioned above. However, as we have seen, *EF* has been used in the academic context as an objection to various positions in environmental ethics. Thus, by using another name for what I take to be the essence of the complaint raised against holism, I may invite the charge of wriggling out of the problem with semantics. To avoid this and to tackle this issue head on, I will stick to ‘ecofascism’ as defined in *EF*.

## 2. Environmental Crisis: Cumulative Damage & Coercive Policy

So far I have been focusing on *EF* as a potential commitment of radical environmental views such as ecological holism. But here it will begin to be argued that *EF* is now, in effect, strictly neutral between holistic or biocentric views on the one hand, and anthropocentric views on the other.

Few now deny that the planet is facing an ever worsening environmental crisis. Recently, dozens of climate scientists published a paper in *BioScience* warning “clearly and unequivocally that planet Earth is facing a climate emergency” (Ripple, et. al., 2020: 8). Moreover, that the crisis “is accelerating faster than most scientists expected”, and “is more severe than anticipated, threatening natural ecosystems and the fate of humanity” (Ripple, et. al., 2020: 9). The paper, and its constitutive data, was explicitly endorsed by a further 11,258 scientists from 153 countries.

These sentiments echo the findings of the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*’s 2018 report on the impacts of increased global warming. The report found that the effects of an increased global warming of 2°C, in comparison to a limiting to 1.5°C, would be environmentally devastating. For small a sample of evidence:

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<sup>xiii</sup> This would be analogous to how opponents of genetic engineering or cloning might quickly dismiss such practices by associating it with an emotionally loaded term like ‘eugenics’. For example, 1997 EU legislation forbidding cloning was justified partly on the grounds that “it permits a eugenic and racist selection of the human race”. This, of course, is a hasty jump—lots of morally unproblematic practices *permit* such revolting things (e.g. sperm donation, surrogacy, sexual partner selection)—but the use of this terminology is designed to alarm and swiftly dismiss.

- Coral reefs are projected to decline by a further 70–90% at 1.5 °C, and even more than 99% at 2 °C (IPCC Report, 2018, Summary: B.4.2);
- Of 105,000 species studied, 18% of insects, 16% of plants and 8% of vertebrates are projected to lose over half of their climatically determined geographic range for global warming of 2 °C (IPCC Report, 2018, Summary: B.3.1);
- Around 4% of the global terrestrial land area is projected to undergo a transformation of ecosystems from one type to another at 1 °C of global warming, compared with 13% at 2 °C (IPCC Report, 2018, Summary: B.3.2);
- High-latitude tundra and boreal forests are particularly at risk of climate change-induced degradation and loss, with woody shrubs already encroaching into the tundra. Global warming of 2 °C is projected to result in the thawing over centuries of a permafrost area in the range of 1.5 to 2.5 million km<sup>2</sup> (IPCC Report, 2018, Summary: B.3.3);
- The level of ocean acidification due to increasing Carbon Dioxide concentrations associated with global warming of 1.5 °C is projected to amplify the adverse effects of warming, and even further at 2 °C, impacting the growth, development, calcification, survival, and thus abundance of a broad range of species, for example, from algae to fish (IPCC Report, 2018, Summary: B.4.3).

Additionally, a 2 °C increase would directly be of significant detriment to human communities. For example, the report found that there would be “greater proportions of people both exposed and susceptible to poverty in Africa and Asia” (IPCC, 2018, *Special Report*, Ch. 3) as a result of increased risks across energy, food, and water sectors. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reports that between 2008 and 2016, 21.5 million people were displaced by climate-related natural disasters; more than those fleeing war or persecution (IDMC, 2016, *Global Report on Internal Displacement*). According to the Stern Report, in the event of a global warming increase between 3 °C and 4 °C, up to 200 million ‘climate migrants’—those displaced by climate related disaster—could be created by 2050 as a result of shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and agricultural disruption (Stern, 2006: 56; cf. IPCC Report, 2018, Summary: B.5.1).

Important for the purposes of this paper is that the report concludes that “[w]ithout societal transformation and rapid implementation of ambitious greenhouse gas reduction measures, pathways to limiting warming to 1.5 °C and achieving sustainable development will be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to achieve” (IPCC Special Report, 2018, Ch. 5). Assuming that the environment and the life-forms dependent upon it are worth saving (if only as a means of furthering human interests), the addition of two theses to this call for ‘ambitious measures’ and ‘societal transformation’ would push one closer to *EF*.

The first thesis is that the more the social requirements to change consumption behaviours and their resulting pollution are delayed, the *more* extreme and draconian those requirements will have to later be in order to preserve environmental integrity. Call this the *Compound Thesis*. The *Compound Thesis* has been most clearly expressed by Zimmerman, who writes that:

...the longer democratic societies postpone making the difficult political decisions needed to solve environmental problems, the more drastic will be the political measures that may have to be taken later on to save remnants of humankind and the biosphere (Zimmerman, 1995: 209)

The *Compound Thesis* is justified in part by the exacerbating effects of pollution. Climate change is not a static affair whereby one generation, if nothing is done to combat it, simply passes on that same problem to the next generation. Rather, pollution and the effects of climate change are cumulative:

how much we pollute now makes things worse for the coming generations. One result of this is that the costs of addressing climate change—monetary, temporal, and in terms of human wellbeing—increase. This can be so in a number of ways. For example: the longer that societies postpone drastic climate action, the greater costs of transitioning to alternative modes of living will be. This is because more resources will have been invested in current, problematic industrial infrastructure (e.g. fossil fuels; factory farming). Moreover, greater environmental degradation—e.g. through desertification, ocean acidification, rising sea levels—may mean increased scarcity of resources. In addition, the longer radical climate action is delayed, more resources will have to be poured into defences from climate-induced natural disasters, as well as relief for increased ‘climate migrants’ mentioned above.

The *Compound Thesis* has been expressed by climate scientists and public policy officials. For example, Nitin Desai, a member of the Indian *Prime Minister’s Council on Climate Change* and a Distinguished Fellow of *The Energy and Resources Institute*, writes that:

There is a very human tendency to wish away such dire prognostications and even to question the underlying science. But the science is now quite firm. People need to be told how it will affect them in their country and why they need to worry about it now rather than at some later time (GHF-G, 2009: 6)

The *UN Environment Program’s* 2019 Emissions Gap Report found that with respect to levels of global greenhouse gas emissions over a ten year period “The summary findings are bleak. Countries collectively failed to stop the growth in global GHG emissions, *meaning that deeper and faster cuts are now required* (UNEP, 2019: 14 - emphasis mine). The report continues:

Had serious climate action begun in 2010, the cuts required per year to meet the projected emissions levels for 2°C and 1.5°C would only have been 0.7 per cent and 3.3 per cent per year on average. However, since this did not happen, the required cuts in emissions are now 2.7 per cent per year from 2020 for the 2°C goal and 7.6 per cent per year on average for the 1.5°C goal. Evidently, greater cuts will be required the longer that action is delayed (UNEP, 2019: 20)

But the *Compound Thesis* is not, by itself, sufficient to warrant concern over *EF*. A second thesis is required, namely: that people are unlikely to radically change their consumption behaviours, for any significant period of time, without government enforced legislation to produce that effect. Call this the *Restriction Thesis*.

The *Restriction Thesis* might upheld in various ways. One possible argument for it is inductive in nature: previous attempts at reducing consumption have failed miserably, so it is unlikely that current attempts will fare any better. For example, the Kyoto Protocol, agreed upon in 1997 but adopted in 2005, had a relatively modest goal of reducing the emission of greenhouse gases by 5% relative to 1990. Despite a number of countries reducing their own emissions, *global* greenhouse gas emissions significantly *increased*, rising at a rate of 1.5% per year in the last decade (UNEP, 2019: 14).

But there are also stronger, conceptual arguments which attempt to explain *why* previous initiatives have failed, and further support the claim that the required radical changes in consumption behaviours likely cannot succeed without state-enforced legislation. The most convincing reasons of this sort, in my view, take the familiar form of prisoner’s dilemmas between various sets of agents. One relevant set of agents is current and future persons. A troubling feature of climate change is that it is *intergenerational*: the effects of emissions made now are deferred to generations which do not exist yet. This calls attention to what the *incentive* is for current generations to make significant material sacrifices when the benefits of those sacrifices will accrue, wholly or disproportionately, to future persons who, because they do not yet exist, cannot reciprocate, compensate, bargain, reward or punish current persons for what they do (Maclean, 2015; Gardiner, 2011).



For all that, the difficulties of effective action do not just lie between current and future persons; there are challenges that face even current persons. For any particular country, the optimal outcome with respect to pollution is for every citizen to not pollute beyond a certain threshold, resulting in the maintenance of environmental integrity, which benefits every citizen. But since each person's *individual* contribution to climate change is infinitesimal, each citizen would individually be better off not making a sacrifice in lifestyle and polluting, *no matter what everyone else does*. If everyone else makes the required sacrifices to maintain environmental integrity, one becomes a free-rider, benefitting from the sacrifices of others. If everyone else anticipates others will free-ride and consequently refuse to make sacrifices in stopping pollution, then it is still individually rational for one to continue polluting, since one's sacrifices in this circumstance would (a) disadvantage oneself, and (b) produce no significant benefit to the environment.

These familiar kinds of prisoner's dilemma—which I can only sketch here—are likely exacerbated by other features of the environmental challenge. For example, since there is a substantial delay between cause and effect with respect to pollution and climate change, the lack of observable difference in one's material sacrifices likely minimises the motivation to change one's consumer behaviour. Secondly, the structural pressures of a capitalist economy too, likely affect motivation. Capitalist markets are essentially driven by production for the sake of *profit* as opposed to, say, the satisfaction of needs. Capitalism thus creates a situation in which it is in the interests of the owners of capital to keep consumption high. Consequently, capitalists are incentivised to create, via advertising, the impression amongst consumers that they would benefit greatly from obtaining particular products (e.g. the latest Ford Mustang, iPhone, Nike trainers, etc).<sup>xiii</sup> These pressures are inimical to the goal of reducing emissions: in a culture and economy that heavily encourages consumption via multiple channels—with often the most environmentally damaging products being sold for the cheapest (e.g. fast food hamburgers)—it is understandably difficult for people to do exactly the opposite and consume less.<sup>xiv</sup>

In short, the concern is the following: first, radical change is required in consumption behaviours in order to prevent environmental (and therefore human) catastrophe, but there are good reasons to think that various pressures will prevent individuals from voluntarily making these changes to the required degree, and for any significant period of time. Second, as a result, if some comparatively mild form of *EF* is not endorsed now, a much uglier and draconian form of *EF* would have to be implemented later. I assume agreement that this would be a worse outcome. If the *Compound Thesis* and *Restriction Thesis* are defensible, then claims such as those of Charles Brown that “[t]he possibility of ecofascism is only a dim and distant threat” (Brown, 2007: 115) are, unfortunately, mistaken, regardless of one's theory of intrinsic value.

This is not to suggest that *EF* would be a *sufficient* condition for radically reducing environmental damage. In 2018 the IPCC reported that “Limiting warming to 1.5°C would require all countries and non-state actors to strengthen their contributions without delay. This could be achieved through sharing efforts based on bolder and more committed cooperation, with support for those with the least ca-

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<sup>xiii</sup> It will not only be advertising that influences consumer behaviour, but also explicit disinformation campaigns by parties with a financial interest in keeping environmentally harmful practices going. A famous case of this was the oil and gas giant ExxonMobil, who between 1998 and 2005 granted \$16 billion to a network of organisations which push an ideology of climate change denial. Such tactics—reminiscent of big tobacco companies—are designed to manufacture public uncertainty about the relevant science in the interest of maximising capital (see UCS, 2007).

<sup>xiv</sup> An additional relevant feature of the capitalist mode of production which I will not be able to address in detail here is that given some plausible assumptions about how it produces social stratification, laying blame *solely* at the feet of individual citizens—and working class individuals in particular—as opposed to corporate entities is misplaced in so far as the former are incentivised to consume high emission-inducing products at low prices (e.g. fast food, inefficient vehicles, etc).

capacity to adapt, mitigate and transform” (IPCC Special Report, 2018, Ch. 5). But one might, for good reason, be sceptical about whether all (or even most) countries would comply with implementing policies which may disadvantage them economically, no matter what other countries do. This is especially likely given the large disparity in greenhouse gas emissions between affluent nations (who tend to be the biggest polluters) and less economically developed nations.<sup>xv</sup> Thus, it may be rational for less economically developed nations not to comply, resulting in an international prisoner’s dilemma (Gardiner, 2011: 75-140). Prisoner’s dilemmas can often be avoided when there is a mutual authority which can incentivise action based on the availability of legitimate and enforceable punishment and reward. But the problem is that there is currently no such authority that transcends the state level which could play this role.<sup>xvi</sup>

### 3. Axiological Neutrality

In the previous section we saw how environmental catastrophe is impending, and that (a) the longer drastic measures are delayed, the more draconian they will have to be later; (b) there are good reasons to think that the required measures are unlikely to be taken voluntarily. We are now in a position to spell out more clearly the claim that significant coercive environmental policies characteristic of ecofascism are not exclusive to ‘radical environmentalist’ views such as holism. Rather, the charge of ecofascism is, in effect, now axiologically neutral between *biocentric* or *holistic* views on the one hand, and *anthropocentric* views on the other.

Biocentrism is the view that each living thing—including vegetation, animals, and micro-organisms—has intrinsic value (Taylor, 1981, 1986; Attfield, 1987; Agar, 2001). Holism, as previously stated, is the view that the relations between living organisms within a biotic community is what generates intrinsic value, and so the sole bearer of intrinsic value is the environment and its contents considered as a whole (Leopold, 1949; Næss, 1973, Callicott, 1989, 1998). So the difference between biocentrism and holism is that the former considers any value of the environment as a whole to be merely *the sum of its individual parts*, whereas the latter is an instance of organic unity: only *the whole*—the ‘biotic community’—bears intrinsic value, which is generated by *the relations between its parts*. Both views, however, maintain that whatever bears intrinsic value for that very reason generates a *pro tanto* obligation to preserve or, on stronger versions, promote it.

Anthropocentrism denies that relations between organisms generate any intrinsic value, and likewise denies that *every* living thing has intrinsic value. Instead, it holds that only human beings possess intrinsic value, and that as a result *pro tanto* obligations only ever apply between humans. Many have claimed that anthropocentrism is the prevailing view in the western world, and that insofar as it arbitrarily privileges human concerns over others, is imbued with “human chauvinism” (Routley, 1973: 207), which may further be identified as the root cause of the (over)exploitation of the natural world (White, 1967). Particularly strong versions of species inequality—the view that all living things have value, but that some classes of living things have a *greater* intrinsic value than others—may also be susceptible to this charge if they in effect produce the same consequence. This can be the case insofar as, as is typical, a gradation of intrinsic value corresponds to degree of ‘rationality’, placing humans at the top of the value hierarchy and hence assigning a greater weight to *pro tanto* obligations to preserve or promote human interests when in conflict with non-human interests at the outset.

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<sup>xv</sup> See Boden, T.A., G. Marland, and R.J. Andres, (2011) for a comprehensive account of differences in emissions.

<sup>xvi</sup> The UN, currently being the best candidate, is unsuited to the role given its undemocratic nature and lack of effective means to enforce its policies.

The reason why the charge of ecofascism is now, in effect, ‘axiologically neutral’ is that the extent of the environmental crisis is such that unless significant changes are made to prevent further climate change, drastic restrictive measures may need to be taken in the near future in order to preserve the biosphere. This is true even if the only reason to preserve the biosphere is because it is *instrumental* to human welfare in the long-term, making the anthropocentrist a *de facto* ecofascist. To be clear, the holist thinks that the environment ought to be preserved because it has intrinsic value, and coercive *EF* policies would be justified by protecting this value. The anthropocentrist, on the other hand, thinks that the environment has value only as a means of sustaining or advancing human interests, and coercive *EF* policies would be justified only by protecting those long-term interests. The way in which *EF* is ‘axiologically neutral’ in a way it was not before is that the worsening climate crisis increasingly justifies more severe restrictions even on anthropocentric views; restrictions virtually indistinguishable in effect from those allegedly derived from holistic views. The result is that to accuse one axiological position of being ‘ecofascist’ loses the philosophical purchase that it may have previously possessed.

My claim here is deliberately broad in the following sense: to say that anthropocentric views generally are—or soon will be—vulnerable to the charge of ecofascism is compatible with a range of normative accounts of intra-generational and inter-generational justice. Such accounts specify two things:

- (a) the *types of good(s)* to be distributed among persons;
- (b) the *principles of justice* which provide a mechanism for determining one’s obligations to both current and future persons.

The content of (a) might include happiness, flourishing, private property, the satisfaction of needs, or something else. The principles of (b) could similarly vary. They could be: *sufficientarian*, which hold that justice requires current and future people be above a specified threshold for a decent standard of living (e.g. Meyer & Roser, 2009: 219-248); a *maintenance* view, according to which future generations should not be made to endure a standard of living that is anything less than that of the current generation (e.g. Barry, 1991: 258); *maximising*, according to which the specified goods ought to be maximised across current and future persons.

This list is, of course, not exhaustive: sub-principles would be required to determine how to balance inequalities between persons, future and current. This will affect how demanding one’s obligations will be to others, and also, therefore, the appropriate burden of sacrifice required that states may enforce. However, on any plausible specification of the content of (a) and (b)—which, for the anthropocentrist, pertain only to human beings—impending environmental catastrophe would, at least eventually, require drastic restrictive measures in order to satisfy them. If we owe *anything* to current and future people, it will require preserving the biosphere. Hence, the threat of *EF* is a very real one, not just for ‘radical environmentalism’ as has traditionally been the charge, but for anthropocentric views too.

Notice that the ‘drastic measures’ to restrict fundamental human rights which I refer to here—and which characterise *EF*—are at some point going to be justified even by those who take fundamental human rights to be near absolute, that is: they are not easily overridden. To take an example, consider Robert Nozick’s libertarian theory of justice. His theory includes a commitment to the idea that all individuals which possess the feature of being able to make autonomous, rational choices in accordance with some considered conception of the good life also possess, in virtue of this feature, rights which protect it from interference. Following Locke, Nozick takes these rights to be ‘natural’ in the sense that they precede any legal and social conventions. Importantly, Nozick takes the *weight* of these rights to be of the upmost significance, refusing to trade them off against other social goods. However, even Nozick concedes that violations of these rights could be permissible if it were the sole means of being able to “avoid catastrophic moral horror” (Nozick, 1974: 30, fn.). As sections two and three of this pa-

per have argued, impending environmental collapse *would* be such a moral horror, whether this is cashed out in terms of harm to the the environmental whole, particular species (including humans), or individuals. Nozick considered the possibility of such a moral catastrophe overriding human rights to be highly unlikely. However, as both the data and the conceptual arguments given in section two suggest, this possibility is now anything but unlikely.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued for a number of interlocking claims. Let us recapitulate. As we saw, the traditional claim of Regan (1983), Ferré (1996), Attfield (1998), and others, that ecological holism is a form of ‘ecofascism’ is importantly ambiguous. Ecofascism can be understood (broadly) in at least two ways: as the significant restriction of citizens’ fundamental rights in the interests of preserving the biosphere (*EF*); or, in addition to this, it may include inclusion of themes of racial supremacy, national unity, heroism, dictatorship, and so forth (*GF*). But as it was argued in section 1, while ecological holists may be forced to endorse *EF*, it is difficult to see why *EF* entails *GF*, and the intended *reductio* of holism only works without begging the question if it is committed to *GF*. Once *EF* had been established as the real and most plausible concern that the likes of Regan have about holism, it was argued that as a result of increasing environmental disaster and impending catastrophe, even the most austere anthropocentrist (eventually) would *de facto* endorse *EF* as a temporary means of averting human misery. The philosophical import of this finding is that it makes the objection of being ‘ecofascist’ redundant, since the *effects* of prudent environmental policies would be the same despite radically differing axiologies which offer wildly different reasons for them.

From here, the point of this paper has not been to advocate for *EF*, but rather to suggest that: (a) the charge is now applicable to a much broader range of positions than previously supposed; (b) since there are good reasons to expect that the radical actions required to avert environmental disaster won’t be taken voluntarily, and that, unfortunately, any eventual manifestation of *EF* will become increasingly draconian and sinister in form the longer action is delayed, this itself provides additional reasons to implement *relatively* minor restrictive measures now to avoid comparatively major restrictions later.

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