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'ENVIRONMENTALISM WITHOUT IDEOLOGY' AND THE DREAMS OF WIPING OUT HUMANITY

ABSTRACT
My aim is to discuss the rhetoric of expertise as objective, and ideology- and value-free, on the example of environmental policy. The first section introduces examples of the common rhetorical figure of expert, ideology-free environmental protection, revealing their presuppositions. The second introduces objects of comparison – the cartoonish proposals of wiping out humanity – with the aim of showing that the two groups of proposals assume an analogous rhetoric. The third section discusses some prominent features of various proposals of 'population control', along with the links to the current surge of so-called eco-fascism. The aim is to show that all these phenomena represent a scale of the idea of ideology-free environmentalism. The concluding section discusses the distorted understanding of expertise, ideology, and politics, central to examples given in the previous sections, as leading to deplorable ignorance or callous cynicism, and therefore, in effect, a moral failure.

Introduction

The notions of 'expertise', '(expert) knowledge' or 'ideology' are the subject of complex debates in epistemology and the philosophy of science. The focus of this paper is on the twists and turns these notions take, in a common simplified reading, in the debates over environmentalism or environmental ethics.

The common thread I will follow is the particular use of the term 'expertise': a quantified account of the world, which offers a *self-legitimising* action-guidance. Any polemics against its guidance, to the extent that it does not aim primarily at presenting a more accurate quantified factual account of the world, is vulnerable to the charge of being biased by *mere* 'ideology'. These rhetorical figures, featuring often in the public and political discourse, deserve some scrutiny.

For one thing, if this is what it means that something is truly *known* – if you equate knowledge with technical expertise – then you can rely, in

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recommendations of future actions, on expert knowledge only when it comes to operating a predictable, law-governed, effectively mechanical system, however complex. *If* humans do not work like such a system, expertise – wherever humans are involved – needs to give up the ambition of providing self-legitimising action-guidance.

The notion of expertise usually involves the assumption of some epistemic privilege. To the extent that the expertise has a clear field of application, the experts are better positioned than non-experts to know how matters within the application scope are. A part of the rhetoric employed in the debates about environmentalism and environmental policy is the explicit emphasis on epistemic privilege, along with the assumption that environment policy-making is the kind of domain where epistemic privilege stems from expertise, rather than from being a concerned, situated agent. Whether environmental policy-making is this kind of domain is, however, not uncontested.

The rhetorical figure also presupposes the *normative* laden-ness of expertise; not only does expertise alone clearly describe the state of affairs, but it also substantiates the course of actions. This assumption again has far-reaching, and not self-evident, consequences.

In section 1, will first discuss some real-world, apparently plausible, examples of the employment of this rhetoric. In section 2, I will introduce a few cartoonish objects of comparison for this rhetoric. My key point will be that preventing the notion of expertise from becoming allegedly ideology-free may be vital for a humane take on environmental policy. In a context where a rational argument, relying purely on expert data, *can* be developed as supporting genocide, countering arguments classified as relying on ideology must embrace and legitimise rather than shun the label.

Section 3 will further explore the consequences of implicitly presupposing this particular notion of expertise in seriously meant proposals in environmental policy, especially related to the threat of overpopulation, as perceived by some. In section 4, I will argue that, just as with most policies, environmental policy is a part of the political domain, too, and as such cannot be reduced to technocratic decisions. This also suggests that an appropriate defence of the role of expertise in environmental protection, which *is* indispensable, requires a more nuanced and subtler reconsideration of what expertise is. Both the production of knowledge and the meaning and implications of its statements are of a social nature.

1. Expertise and Ideology in Environmentalism

Let us begin by introducing a few real-world examples of the rhetoric around expertise:

> #Environmentalism *without ideology*. We are *not dogmatists*; environment can be protected also without unnecessary restrictions for the people. (Czech Pirate Party's Twitter account, 20 September 2017)

In a normal world, it is *experts* who make the decisions about such an important topic as climate. *Not activists*, who only exploit a 16-years old girl for reaching their ends. (Facebook post by a politician of the Czech "patriotic" party Trikolóra)

In order that establishing the committee [which will evaluate the options of the Czech Republic's 'coal exit'] and its work make any sense, its debates must rely primarily *on expert basis* and must be based on the *real needs and capacities* of our country. Its members should debate about the means of producing electricity and heat for households and companies, *on expert basis*. We should absolutely not discuss *opinions that have lost all contact with reality*, opinions of the green fanatics [...]" (a representative of the Czech mining unions)

[A study conducted by Agora has shown that] Germany will not suffer from the coal withdrawal, neither will the price of electricity rise nor will the country become dependent on importing it. Industry will even save money. This is a cogent answer and *well founded on data* – to all those who think Germans are stupid. What's more, it is the domestic renewable sources that will ensure stable prices and the abundance of electricity. I hope that the Czech coal committee will focus on exactly this kind of *expert material data*, and not on already overcome *myths*."[1] (the chairman of Hnutí Duha, an environmentalist organisation) [My emphasis throughout.]

Despite the differences in their spin, all the above texts work with similar rhetorical figures: there are expert data, facts, resources, figures – and expertise plays, or should play, the determining role in setting environmental policy. On the other hand, there are ideologies, dogmas, myths, activism – only detrimental to a good environmental policy.

There are problems, though. First, the technocratic idea of environmental policy-making. It is a *legitimate* feature of public political debate that in various areas (taxation, education, international politics), *each* proposed policy aims at organising matters of public interest in a *particular* way, and not in other ways. There are various proposed policies aiming in various directions. Does environmental policy, in contrast, have *the* aim – the only legitimate aim – one that we determine "on an expert basis"? Only if environmental policy is thus unique among the domains of policy can it allow for technocratic approach. This ramifies in several directions.

Second, there is hardly ever only one expertise. Experts vie with other experts, not only within one discipline (typically, economists with other economists), but also depending on which discipline they represent. Miners and mining unions do, implicitly, exactly that. At an anti-environmentalist march in 2015 in the Czech Republic, miners held up banners with slogans such as "Green superstitions won't warm our homes" or "Eco-terrorism doesn't warm us".[2] Were they denying the environmentalist protesters any backing expertise?

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1   Author's translations.
2   Author's translations. "700 miners in Prague are marching for breaking the mining limits" (Deník.cz, 29 January 2015); https://www.denik.cz/ekonomika/za-prolomeni-te-zebnich-limitu-demonstruje-v-praze-az-700-horniku-20150129.html.

From a different angle, they were rather preferring their own expertise. There is macroeconomic expertise claiming tenaciously that coal is a strategic mineral resource, indispensable for energy supply. There is social policy expertise predicting the shifts in regional employment structure, following the end of coal mining and difficult to solve in the short term.[3] There is environmentalist expertise displaying the harmful effects of coal mining and coal-based energy on the landscape and health. How to compare these?

Third, not only are there different areas of expertise, but also there are different *kinds*. Expertise in any area where human behaviour and actions are an influential factor (where the social sciences or humanities are concerned) behaves differently from expertise in, say, chemistry. This expertise is more of the descriptive and understanding type; it does not abstain from predictions altogether, but mostly does not present them as ironclad laws, analogous to the laws of physics. The twists and turns of social developments incorporate unpredictable developments in technology, culture and ideas; and technological advances are just as responsive to the transformations of our ideas, as it is the other way round. The behaviour of people and human societies simply *is* an indispensable part of what needs to be taken into account in environmental policy.

This complicates the interpretation of what the environmental experts say – there may not be anything that would follow from these expert *observations* with a 'moral necessity' that substantiates courses of *action*. Among other reasons, environmental expertise is not self-legitimising because the problem it addresses is not a single, homogeneous and, primarily, *stable* problem. It develops in an interaction with how our ideas about it develop. All of this contributes to the nature of the climate change as a "super wicked problem" (Levin et al. 2012).

Fourth and last, even if there is such a thing as *the* aim of environmental policy, we need to ask what the aim is. To the extent that we rely on expert recommendations, and these recommendations point towards one, clearly identified scenario, it should expectably be the best, or the ideal, scenario. It is here that further questions arise.

2. Enter the Supervillains

The examples quoted in the previous section mostly assume that in environmental protection, ideology is prone to extreme or unnecessary protection measures, while expertise mitigates these excesses with a touch of realism. In such a constellation, it is not difficult to see why expertise can have the air of the more reliable of the two. However, to the extent that the two represent an alleged opposition, it may be useful to consider a handful of examples of

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3   "Unions support cancelling of the mining limits in the Northern Bohemia" (iRozhlas. cz, 22 January 2015); https://www.irozhlas.cz/ekonomika/odbory-prosazuji-uplne-pro-lomeni-limitu-tezby-v-severnich-cechach_201501220909_vkourimsky?fbclid=IwAR19b-5PR5xK6YmJqIZOmyunP-PPbfeyUWLKNjsQZnhOC_-bGNqgeNzC0nTw

a *different* constellation, which may shed a different light on what we tend to think of as expertise and ideology in environmental protection.

A major concern for the environmentalists is humanity's negative impact on the environment. Most of conservation endeavours strive to mitigate it, or, when more optimistic, to stop or reverse it. Every now and then, people attempt to set aside a piece of nature unspoiled by human hands.

Since also 'common people' perceive the importance of this negative impact, understanding it as a problem to be addressed by people with a scientific background, the importance of environmental expertise is thereby promoted. It is these people – climate scientists, ecologists – who embody the expert outlook warranting how we understand the values underlying the scale, the ideal extreme of which could be "nature unspoiled by human hands".

Let us leave aside the idea that real climate scientists do not spend time dreaming about restoring the planet to an unspoiled state. Yet, this is how the relationship between the environment and the relevant scientific expertise is commonly understood and rhetorically reflected. A possible elaboration of this outlook, embodying the value of unspoiled nature and its putative expert endorsement, is this: the ideal outcome in environmental policy is such that would represent a radical lessening of the negative human impact on the environment. One way of achieving this would be removing humanity from the game.

Thence the *locus communis* of many movies featuring supervillains who plan to wipe out humanity. More than one of these characters refer to an "environmentalist" kind of motivation. To quote just one (Agent Smith from *The Matrix*):

> Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment but you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply and multiply until every natural resource is consumed and the only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You're a plague and we are the cure.

This is a popular theme, present in many other movies, too, sometimes meant seriously, sometimes less so (for example, Richmond Valentine in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* and Thanos in *Avengers: Infinity War*, to name just a few from some recent blockbusters).

Sure, some aspects won't let you forget the cartoonish nature of these proposals. The characters voicing them are carefully pictured as inhuman: software gone rogue (Agent Smith), a megalomaniac alien (Thanos), a deranged billionaire (Valentine). Only some, such as Smith, are in fact planning a *total* wipe-out of humanity. The logic of their explanations points in the same direction, though: humanity's presence is negative, due to the nature of the human impact on the world; humans are intrinsically incapable of living in equilibrium with the environment. The only way of restoring a natural order is to move towards a state in which the human impact would amount to as if there were no humans.

The reasoning relies on implicitly assumed *expert* rhetoric: there are resources, a clear view of their scarcity, and the question of the sustainability of the system. Insofar as the workings of humanity within a system so framed equate to the workings of a voracious virus, the sustainable rate of its presence may be: zero. All this relies on data that the relevant experts can supply. And there *is* an abundance of data, collected by relevant scientists, on the detrimental impacts on the environment of the human presence.

Consider, on the other hand, the motivations backing the actions of the characters who fight the inhuman environmentalists. An obvious choice of reasons for opposing those plans is not *expert arguments* but particular value standpoints, which some might also call an *ideology*, whether or not intending it as a term of abuse. For example: every single human life is an absolute value in itself, precious in an unquantifiable way. No *alternative evidence* about the system's sustainability – data proving Thanos wrong – is driving the fight of The Avengers.

"You cannot calculate human lives and deaths; every single human life is precious, a value in itself" is not alternative evidence. It may be an opening to a debate about morality, a different kind of debate than a disagreement about a disputed matter of facts – whether something is so-and-so, or so-and-so. Compare: "No, the data do not confirm that humanity is spreading like a virus"; perhaps "they confirm that it is coexisting with its environment in a symbiotic manner". "No, the system's sustainability does not objectively require wiping out all of humanity, or exactly one half"; perhaps "only 21.3%." (Would *this* help much?)

Instead, different moral outlooks clash here. To the initial proposal, "The expert recommendation would be wiping out humanity", the moral counter-argument is simply not that 'real' objective expertise recommends something *a bit* different. A 'partial wipe-out' would not do any more justice to the opening moral motivation.

Disconcertingly, not only cartoonish supervillains are keen on wipe-outs. If you have Facebook friends (or FB friends of FB friends) who have a degree in a STEM discipline (biology, physics, IT), it only takes few lunchtime breaks spent by procrastinating online to get entangled in a real-life analogy of those discussions. Because technically-minded people have usually spent more time than you have on figures and statistics relating to those topics, and will not hesitate to produce them, your chances of outdebating them are slim. But the main worry is not just that they will wipe the floor with you. One feels that there is something wrong with entering the debate as such – with legitimising the topic and the proposed strategy as a relevant alternative to discuss. (They are what Gaita [2006: ch. 17] calls "fearless thinkers" – who may not do full justice to what their own words and suggestions entail.)

This is perhaps what the personal experience of soul-withering in these Facebook shares with the motivation driving the superheroes who fight the supervillains. What one feels is wrong with these proposals is something that makes them, in an important respect, *absolutely* wrong irrespective of what kind

of data their proponents have (most of which are probably right) or whether they update them in details.

'Expertise' suggesting that an ideal scenario might incorporate a full or partial wipe-out of humanity presupposes a moral ideology of its own, too. A moral standpoint immune to arguments such as "every single human life is a value in itself", and open to sacrificing human lives if whatever objective facts apparently require it, points towards a crudely construed utilitarianism. If we suggest that there is something wrong with this kind of thinking *as such* – an intuition that may come from, say, a Kantian moral thinker –, we are not pointing at an error in the data supporting the proposals. Nor does the problem lie in the irrelevance of the data provided by sciences studying the environment. The intuition challenges the way in which the crude utilitarian tends to substantiate the recommendation. It suggests: you cannot measure the self-contained value of a single human life against the background of large quantities of lives or ask about the relative priority of different quantities. Once you have started doing this, something becomes lost to sight.

One might object, though: isn't talking like that exactly a cheap ideology? For decisions *must* be made; facts *need* to be taken into account. Very much so, but the component of the decision that needs to be scrutinised is its other, overlooked source, which has to do with values. We need to see that not only those who criticise the wipe-out proposals rely on something else than mere expert data. Otherwise we end up with all-too-easy arguments, equating claimed expertise with wipe-out proposals. We need to see the underlying ideology, or value arguments, more clearly. One less obvious reason for such an endeavour would be to save the experts from the rhetoric that pictures their findings in such a light that makes it difficult to show where the difference lies between them and genocidal megalomaniacs. After all, experts are called for in decisions about environmental policy, and for reasons that are absolutely relevant.

One way out is by not losing sight of the difference between managerial, administrative issues with one correct solution (and experts who can decide on it) and issues that will always irreducibly concern particular people and their standpoints (whether or not they also have an expert component) and involve negotiation between these standpoints. We need to ask ourselves whether environmental protection is not an issue of this latter kind.

3. Enter the Malthusians

The apparent contrast between the cartoonish Agent Smith-like figures and those who call for strictly expert-based decisions in environmental policy becomes much less striking when we realise that they can be parts of the same continuum, featuring serious and respected academics or public figures, too. The voices I will introduce in this section do not go into the absolutes, as Agent Smith would; their concern is 'only' *overpopulation*. The key idea is: there is an objective quantifiable threshold of population growth, beyond which the system

is not sustainable. Either we are already crossing the threshold or population growth is heading foreseeably in its direction. We need to take such measures that will reduce the ranks of humanity; in one way or another. But, once we settle on getting rid of *some* humans only, which ones, and how?

An obvious predecessor of such considerations is Malthus and his Principle of Population; he claims older inspirations for his work: Hume and Adam Smith, but later also Plato and Aristotle. According to Malthus, the human tendency towards population always exceeds the limits of resources, and either Nature itself steps in (wars, famines, diseases) or humanity must curtail its own growth by taking measures such as celibacy. The unlimited growth of population always leads to poverty, despair and misery for a greater part of the population, which tends to disrupt the society.

This basic insight finds its revival in the influential works of Paul Ehrlich or Garrett Hardin. A disclaimer first: my use of Ehrlich and Hardin as starting points should not obscure the fact that they do not represent the edge of the *current* debate about population. The discussion is still alive, though; contemporary academic arguments for taking overpopulation as a severe threat see e.g. in Kopnina, Washington 2016, or Davis, Arnocky, Stroink 2019. Few people would deny that there is a limit to what the Earth's ecosystem can sustain and that this limit is related to the size of human population. However, the issue seems more complex than mere numbers are. While I cannot directly enter the debate (conducted mostly outside philosophy) about the sustainability of the Earth's ecosystem and overpopulation as a strawman, I can focus on key terms of the moral framing of the debate, as it is conducted outside the strictly academic context. It is exactly as figures of such wide, non-academic influence that Ehrlich and Hardin prove relevant. As non-philosophers, they infused their account with the right degree of the crudeness of moral framing that made it possible even for policy makers or various publicly active personalities to take over this framing – either to develop it further, or to engage in a non-academic polemics against it.

Thus, Ehrlich's influential 1968 book *The Population Bomb* centred round one key prediction: a worldwide famine in the 1970s and 1980s. It did not happen, but this did not prevent the book from going into further revised editions, which contained updated predictions of the collapse.

Hardin, whose notion of the "tragedy of the commons" is still taught in economics schools as a plain fact, was even more straightforward. He who came up with the lifeboat metaphor, noting that it is necessary to think of the solution in its terms: "[A]dmit no more to the boat and preserve the small safety factor". Some may consider this 'unjust', but "[l]et us grant that it is. The guilt feelings will only clear the boat of those who are weak, leaving more space to those who are willing to fight for it and protect it." He observes that "complete justice" only leads to "complete catastrophe" (Hardin 1974).

Hardin's move equates moral concerns with mere sentimentality. As if he was saying: it may be unethical or unjust to do this – but I don't care about it and neither should you. The only thinkable thing to do is what I propose.

This does not mean that their environmentalist concerns are not genuine. Ehrlich's works contain calls for a "fierce defence" of nature. Even *The Population Bomb* clearly follows a more complex agenda, an indispensable part of which involves taking protective measures against pollution (Ehrlich 1988: 102 ff.). Some suggestions are more unnerving, though. He proposes classifying nations into categories by the degree of their food-production subsistence, and letting those that appear not subsistent either starve, or having various forms of *coercion* applied in order to reduce their population (e.g. simply ordering the sterilisation all Indian males with three or more children) (146 ff.).

Ehrlich's suggested measures towards Third World countries are not driven by conscious racism. He observes that pollution affects most bitterly the poor and the ethnic minorities in the U.S. and deplores the failure to tailor environmental measures so that they would not look like a white middle-class hobby interest and these affected groups could embrace them (Ehrlich 1988: 124 ff.). Consider also his passionate critique of "race science" (Ehrlich 1978).[4]

Hardin's case, given his long-time association with racist and anti-immigrant groups, is more troubling. He suggests that the key to survival of the nation is unity, while diversity undermines it, and he attacks the strawman of the "Europhobic" advocates of *exclusively* non-white immigration into the U.S. We don't want these people here, says Hardin – we are not isolationist, but we are interested only in what we can make use of: "ideas and information", but not "wrapped in human form" (Hardin 1991b). And it is difficult *not* to read his concerns such as that "[b]lack became beautiful" (Hardin 1991a), or about how Muslim nations threaten to "outbreed us", as racist.

Perhaps the most telling detail is Hardin's (1974) concession that the pernicious immigration is the *others'* immigration:

> It is literally true that we Americans of non-Indian ancestry are the descendants of thieves. Should we not, then, "give back" the land to the Indians; that is, give it to the now-living Americans of Indian ancestry? As an exercise in pure logic I see no way to reject this proposal. Yet I am unwilling to live by it; and I know no one who is. [...]

> Suppose, becoming intoxicated with pure justice, we "Anglos" should decide to turn our land over to the Indians. Since all our other wealth has also been derived from the land, we would have to give that to the Indians, too. Then what would we non-Indians do? Where would we go?

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4 Whenever Ehrlich 'classifies' nations and countries, he applies the criteria of culture and economic system, rather than ethnicity. Thus, against immigration into the U.S., he argues that "the world can't afford more Americans". This can be read as a criticism of the American lifestyle, unsustainable worldwide (Ehrlich himself would say that this is his agenda). On the other hand, those arguments are fit for the purposes of xenophobia, and Ehrlich seems more eager to fight overpopulation beyond U.S. borders than the American lifestyle. See Gosine's (2010) critical inquiry into the privileged white scientists' worries about "non-white reproduction".

It is thus not clear whether Hardin's racism-akin ideas are just an accidental attachment to "the lifeboat ethics", or the other way round.[5]

The common denominator of these considerations would be the concern with overpopulation as an objective threat consisting in sheer numbers. Also, sheer numbers are exactly the kind of criterion that points towards Third World countries as the culprit, while the (on average) lower number of children per family in developed countries can be interpreted as a more conscious and less selfish attitude (cf. Davis, Arnocky, Stroink 2019: 95).[6] The threat is of such a kind that it morally legitimises far-reaching countermeasures; in a way, the necessity of these measures follows logically from the quantitative trends of human population. While such a position is not as alive academically as it used to be, its terms still powerfully inform the terms of the non-academic debate.

Thus, murkier cases of public engagement and their underlying "ideologies" show their greater proximity to ideas like Hardin's than to the calm and balanced tone of the UN documents. Overpopulation has become the pet concern for the group of people called, with a hint of irony, 'philanthrocapitalists' – rich tycoons who spend a lot of money on charitable programmes that are subject to no public control and reflect the peculiar composition of their funders' interests and concerns.[7]

The most visible of the philanthrocapitalists, Bill and Melinda Gates, have funded a wide range of projects through their foundation, including such that were fighting overpopulation in Third World countries by means impossible or even untried at home. Contraceptives rejected by medical authorities in the U.S. have been rebranded and administered without fully informed consent in India or in African countries, resulting in years-long or permanent infertility (apart from further health issues). There were forced or uninformed sterilisation programmes in Peru and Tanzania. There are, on the other hand, also programmes encouraging access to contraception and to proper pregnancy and postpartum healthcare, as well as sex education or general education programmes. (See Levich's [2014, 2021] systematic critical overviews of the Gates Foundation healthcare agendas.)[8]

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5   As suggested by the brief (not very charitable) overview of his political engagements, compiled by the Southern Poverty Law Center, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/garrett-hardin

6   There are, however, studies showing that larger families are not simply the result of selfish behaviour, but a strategy of coping with poverty and other hardships, including environmental; cf. Merrick 2002; Gupta, Dubey 2003. While larger families are a factor exacerbating poverty, they do not simply cause it and are, largely, just as much a reaction to it. The poverty of many countries of the Global South, compared to developed countries, is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon.

7   A 12-year-old article in *The Guardian* with a symptomatic title that can now only be read ironically (but may have been meant seriously back then): "They're called the Good Club – and they want to save the world". https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/31/new-york-billionaire-philanthropists

8   The Gateses are not alone in applying shady means of anti-overpopulation warfare, though less attention has been devoted to the others. There are analogous overviews

Certainly, the Gates Foundation does fund respectable humanitarian projects. Notably, though, the common denominator of *all* those mentioned in the previous paragraph would hardly be "humanitarian". Rather, something like "whatever will help reducing the population in Third World countries" (not an exceptional notion; cf. the overview of the history of anti-population interventions in Angus, Butler 2011: 83 ff.).[9] This ambition is not ideology-free.

Let's remember that, for Malthus, a limit to population is a natural law. We should therefore *comply with* the mechanisms of Nature's population check, "We should reprobate specific remedies for ravaging diseases", because people proposing humanitarian actions against epidemics are perhaps "benevolent, but much mistaken". For Malthusians, the fact that people live in poverty, misery and disease has *not* primarily to do with the way the economics of the society is organised (even though, as Chakrabarti [2014] notes, the British Empire of Malthus's age had access to the wealth of its colonies and yet "kept its working class in squalor and misery"). It simply must be so; the number of people requires it.[10]

The language has changed, and few dare to openly reject fighting against epidemics,[11] but the general idea remains. It is an *objective fact* that there are already too many people, and thus it is an *objective fact* that the best thing to do is pursuing the reduction of the world population in various ways. Some of these may involve administering dangerous contraceptives to uninformed Third World women.[12]

In reality, this general idea may mistake the workings of the current economic system, reflecting the very specific interests of a few disproportionally influential players, for natural law. If this is the case, then contemporary

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available also of Warren Buffett's or Ted Turner's endeavours, and while the source (the 'pro-life' Population Research Institute) does not strike me as highly credible, if only a fraction of the claims hold true it is enough to unsettle: https://www.pop.org/the-billionaire-boys-club-the-worlds-plutocrats-at-work-to-decrease-population/.

9   Angus and Butler remark: "[T]he idea that providing the means for family planning to those who don't have access will somehow slow global warming makes no sense. With few exceptions, birth control has long been widely available in the countries that are doing the most to destroy the earth's climate" (42).

10   There are multiple problems with relying on sheer (population) numbers in attempts at any causal explanation. The very concept of 'population' may be questioned, as Marx famously did in his critique of Malthus: "The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed".

11   The first version of this article was written before the COVID-19 pandemics. Its outbreak may have made the truth of this sentence a more complicated matter.

12   From a point of view, the shady warfare against fertility in Third World seems desperate, a risky and borderline criminal activity with negligible results in terms of 'numbers'. Real options of achieving lower fertility (*anywhere*) lie elsewhere. As Spretnak 1990: 12 points out, it should not be surprising that "Third World women [...] are not interested in contraception unless health and economic conditions are improved (studies have shown that when the death rate of children goes down, the birth rate goes down)". The real challenge then lies in finding ways out of poverty that would not rely heavily on fossil fuels etc.

Malthusianism is not 'telling uncomfortable truths' but simply cynicism.[13] There is no point 'arguing' against truths about natural laws. You can only ask experts to explain these laws. But there are good reasons to argue against cynicism. One reason is to show that people sometimes promote worldviews disguised as 'expertise-based' for specific *reasons* rather than simply based on factual expertise. These reasons deserve critical inquiry.

First, this kind of expert rhetoric allows for leaving any *participant* perspective out of game. While 'ideology' is often rightly criticised for bypassing the situation of real people in favour of a top-down application of a principle, much the same can be objected to analogously applied 'expertise'. Feminist, or ecofeminist, criticisms of many mainstream environmentalist agendas often advocate for including a wide diversity of neglected participant perspectives (cf. Sen 2019).

Decades ago, David Harvey (1974: 273) identified the cynicism in the populationists' arguments:

> Am *I* redundant? Of course not. Are *you* redundant? Of course not. So who is redundant? Of course, it must be *them*. And if there is not enough to go round, then it is only right and proper that *they*, who contribute so little to society, ought to bear the brunt of the burden [...] [w]henever a theory of overpopulation seizes hold in a society dominated by an elite, then the non-elite invariably experience some form of political, economic, and social repression.

Harvey backs this observation by a scathing criticism of the alleged inevitability assumed by the overpopulation analyses. For there are in fact at least four alternatives:

> 1. we can change the ends we have in mind and alter the social organization of scarcity; 2. we can change our technical and cultural appraisals of nature; 3. we can change our views concerning the things to which we are accustomed; 4. we can seek to alter our numbers. A real concern with environmental issues demands that all of these options be examined in relation to each other. To say that there are too many people in the world amounts to saying that we have not the imagination, will, or ability to do anything about propositions (1), (2), and (3).

However, he concludes, "nothing of consequence can be done about (1) and (3) without dismantling and replacing the capitalist market exchange economy".

Marxist social theorists have been pointing out, as the real problem, the inequality of access to resources rather than overpopulation. Patnaik (2010) notes that when the sheer numbers of people are combined with the per capita demand for fossil fuels (which is where the threat to what the Earth can sustain really stems from), the real population pressure comes from the most developed countries.[14] Such analyses also often presuppose an insidious intention on the

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13   Cf. the criticisms of Malthusianism in Ross (1998).
14   Patnaik points out the importance of the *resources* of poor tropical countries being "sucked out to underpin the high living standards" of developed countries. To this

part of those who run the world, or they see the system itself as that which is to blame. In view of this, "lifeboat ethics" or "overpopulation" concerns may not be more than "privilege-protecting myths" (Barnet 1980: 303).

There needn't be pretence, though. Even when one hates immigrants or people of colour, one can care about the environment and think that there is a link. This combination of concerns, now nicknamed eco-fascism, comes in several varieties. Either you can fantasise about the assigned place to live for every 'race', which is then entitled to consume only its quota (Hardin), or you can think of environmental protection as a specifically white or 'Nordic' cultural value (wherein ecology converges with race science). Both notions can be mixed (see overviews in Biehl, Staudenmaier 1995; Angus, Butler 2011, 113ff; Cagle 2019).

Thus, the popular face of Fox News, Tucker Carlson, notes on his show that immigration "makes our own country poorer, and dirtier", explaining it further by saying:

> I actually hate litter, which is one of the reasons I'm so against illegal immigration. Produces a huge amount of litter [...] and I mean that with all sincerity.

While Carlson is an elite voice of white right-wing supremacism, there are genuinely *grassroots* instances of such a view, too. The 2019 El Paso shooter, Patrick Crusius, states in his manifesto that he is fighting against the Hispanic invasion of Texas, which, however, has as its deeper motivation his concern about the thereby accelerated increase in the population:

> The decimation of the environment is creating a massive burden for future generations. [...] [but] the average American isn't willing to change their lifestyle, even if the changes only cause a slight inconvenience. [...] So the next logical step is to decrease the number of people in America using resources. If we can get rid of enough people, then our way of life can become more sustainable.

Crusius also refers to the 2018 Christchurch attacker, Brenton Tarrant, who also left behind a manifesto (much longer than that of Crusius), in which he devoted a chapter to his idea that "Green nationalism is the only true nationalism":

> There is no Conservatism without nature, there is no nationalism without environmentalism, the natural environment of our lands shaped us just as we shaped it. [...]

> For too long we have allowed the left to co-opt the environmentalist movement to serve their own needs [...] whilst simultaneously presiding over the continued destruction of the natural environment itself through mass immigration and uncontrolled urbanization. [...]

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purpose, and to diverting the attention from the real sources of population pressure the story of overpopulation serves well (p. 15).

There is no Green future with never ending population growth, the ideal green world cannot exist in a World of 100 billion 50 billion or even 10 billion people. Continued immigration into Europe is environmental warfare and ultimately destructive to nature itself.

The voices reported in this section share one common motive: there is an objective limit to what the Earth can sustain, which by definition requires that we do whatever we can to prevent its crossing. Any countering morality is fake, either deluded or sentimental.

There is a particular underlying notion of a moral and humanist action. The only morality and humanism that does not contradict itself has to follow the aim of the survival of humanity. And in this endeavour, it needs to rely on expert data. Such a conception only leaves room for debate if the relevant data are not clear enough; not a debate about what action-guiding recommendation supposedly follows from the data. The idea of the latter kind of debate is simply not inherent to this notion of morality at all. There is thus no real room for negotiation. When the moral action recommended by the claimed expertise seems to be shooting non-white people, the only objection could be that the real Earth's population as of now is not yet the number substantiating this course of action.

It seems easy and right to condemn the ‘environmentalism’ of Crusius or Tarrant exactly for its *ideology*. I do not feel sure, though, that the difference between them and the philanthrocapitalist or Hardin-like scholarly arguments about overpopulation lies in a special (repulsive) ideology that the shooters *added* incongruently to the expert basis. In fact, they all, albeit in different forms, subscribe to the idea of "environmentalism without ideology" and the moral necessity of doing what it dictates.

4. Expertise vs. Politics

At the end of section 1, I mentioned a few aspects that make the rhetoric of expertise as self-legitimising and sufficient action-guidance problematic. Different areas of expertise can go against each other, depending on their respective backgrounds of discipline and practice. There may not be one goal, *the* aim of environmental policy. Even if there was, to the extent that the road leading to it comprises developments of human societies and ideas, this procedure is not subject to laws analogous to the laws of chemistry. In section 3, I mentioned that we need to consider instead the often overlooked fact that there are multiple alternative solutions to the problem of the (undoubtedly) finite resources that (undoubtedly) cannot sustain an unlimited number of people.[15] The four options sketched by Harvey indicate that, given that there is much greater plasticity in the way in which people might work with options (1) to (3) – greater

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15 Some tend to be more optimistic, arguing that human resourcefulness is such that it makes it virtually impossible to determine when population becomes overpopulation. E.g. Church, Regis 2014: 221.

than the Malthusians focusing solely on (4) are willing to consider –, it is not clear at all where exactly a population limit lies.

The choice between those options – all are relevant – cannot be made by expertise alone. Or, more precisely, it is simplistic to rely on such a notion of expertise that can be made serve equally well the fictional calls for wiping out humanity as expertise-based, which would relegate counterarguments to mere 'ideologies'.

The existence of the different notions, sources and areas of expertise that need to interact, but struggle heavily with this need, also shows how environmental policy may represent an interesting testing example for the notion of public reason. The multiplicity of expertise, as well as of possible solutions to population pressure (indicated by Harvey), shows that the political decision will inevitably involve *negotiation*. Much has been written about the mistaken and pernicious tendency to relegate political decisions to experts, assuming that there is one correct solution to any political problem, known by the technocrats (see e.g. Bickerton, Accetti 2017) on the symbiosis between technocracy and populism. This technocratic tendency can itself be understood as a twisted version of the idea of public reason, in the sense that it represents *the* solution to *the* problem, one that every *reasonable* person would embrace.

Ironically, Rawls – the major advocate of the idea of public reason – has a thin and cautious conception, confining public reason to issues such as the right to vote, or equality before the law. He even mentions environmental protection as an example of the kind of questions that are political yet *not* matters of public reason (Rawls 2005: 214). Environmental protection would thus appear to *not* have one privileged, publicly reasonable answer.

Rawls admits the existence of such openly political topics but relegates them to a "less fundamental" position in his account. However, the critics of the idea of public reason would reject the idea of such a hierarchy. For them, not only is there an inevitable pluralism of positions of interest, but we have no right to expect that they can always essentially be reconciled even in the domain of supposedly fundamental political questions (cf. Mouffe 2013: 1 ff., 54 ff.). If questions of environment policy are open to heated debate, this needs not mean either that they are of a secondary political importance or that we overlook the one objectively right solution. They can be *both* of the utmost political importance *and* of an irreducibly politically agonistic kind.

Environmental policy represents, though, a deceptive case, which makes it a particularly important example. There undeniably *is* a massive body of expert information, without which environmental policy-making is impossible, and disregarding it would amount to criminal stupidity. The body of expert information is so massive and overwhelming, and the attempts to build politics on a wilful disregard for it so outrageous and pathetic, that some suggest that *expertise is all that there is*, necessary and sufficient, for the purpose of policy-making. Wherein lies the political aspect, then?

Let us return to the charge of ideology. The word itself circulates in different meanings. Those who plead for "environmentalism without ideology"

often presuppose 'ideology' in the sense of the Marxist critiques of ideology: as a system of false beliefs diverting us from seeing the truth. However, backed by this suspicion comes the dismissive attitude towards anything beyond the putative description of bare facts. A more contemporary and less prejudiced notion of ideology – often embraced by people engaged in any professedly *non*-technocratic politics – has, as its purpose, the rehabilitation of value inputs into our political standpoints. Ideology would then not only be something that is not necessarily wrong and harmful, but may even prove indispensable, as an arsenal of interpretations helping us to understand the facts comprising our political reality and navigate within it (Freeden 2003: 1 ff.).[16]

The suggestions that expertise is everything are exactly what makes the stakes for retaining an open space for 'ideology' in the latter sense so high. Such an ideology seems the best resource to rely on in opposing those expert assessments that recommend lowering the number of 'them'. The redistribution of wealth, changes made to the structure of the world economy, rearranging the patterns of our consumer behaviour – these are options too. No expertise *alone* substantiates a preference for these, but, honestly, there are not only expert reasons behind the philanthrocapitalists' sympathies for "fighting against overpopulation". The same probably goes for our scientifically-minded FB acquaintances. They have an ideology, as do those who want to defend the life of every human being.

Which ideology is better? This is a legitimate question. The irreducible plurality of political standpoints does not mean that ideology makes no difference. Yet, once we rule out extreme scenarios (Agent Smith), practically any other option represents a challenge. None of them can present itself as unburdened by any compromises, and the decision to be made – selecting from those options – is thus not an expert decision. It remains political; in that it calls for opening the question of the *justice* of the considered options. This entry of justice, in the form of *climate justice*, makes the question of environmental policy irreducibly political.

Without going into the details of theories of justice, and merely acknowledging that they are multiple, we can say that hardly any theory considering itself a theory of *justice* could go for "let the poor die" (which is what some populationists say – see the overview in Angus, Butler 2011: 23 ff.). For various reasons, this is not an intelligible way of working with the term 'justice'. In his report for the UN, Philip Alston summarises the ways in which the disproportionally negative impact of climate change on the poor is not simply their fault but is exacerbated by the fact that "[c]limate change is a market failure". Relying on charity organised by the private sector is relying on initiatives that are, in the best case, "essentially toothless". In the worst case, relying on the private sector "poses risks to the rights of people in poverty" and could lead

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16   "[W]e are all ideologists in that we have understandings of the political environment of which we are part, and have views about the merits and failings of that environment" (1 f.).

to a "climate apartheid scenario in which the wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger, and conflict, while the rest of the world is left to suffer" (Alston 2019). Alston's protest is phrased as one of justice.

Why is climate apartheid *not* justice? And, if it is not, how should we take justice into account? Acknowledging that decisions made in environmental policy are *political* amounts to acknowledging that these decisions need to consider how they affect all the different concerned parties; as such they simply *are* about justice (cf. Sen 2014). A politician is typically in the position where every option she has available will affect somebody negatively. Justice needn't achieve a state in which nobody would have to give up anything. However, ignoring that one has made a particular decision that will be more detrimental to some simply because the others (those who benefit more from the decision) are richer, or even accepting it, suggests a blind spot in her view of what justice is.

The above-discussed kind of reliance on 'expertise' is deceptive in that it rules out the variety of situated perspectives and interests, by leaving precisely one 'ideology' invisible. This ideology implicitly tends towards a crudely simplified utilitarian calculus, the forms of which we see in the proposals and strategies of 'directly' fighting overpopulation in Third World countries. It is vital to show that this, too, is just one alternative among many, motivated by its own set of ideological (which I do not mean pejoratively) presuppositions, and especially showing that this alternative provides little justice to the weak and poor.

Environmental issues usually don't strike us as concerning the *irreconcilable* personal interests of individuals. We tend to perceive them as being of public concern with, in a sense, *only one* interested party at the table: *everybody*. One important role that the concern for justice plays is to prevent confusing 'everybody' with the 'survival of humanity'. Not even environmental issues can thus easily be considered as falling outside the domain of the "conflicts for which no rational solution could ever exist" (in Mouffe's words). For one thing, it seems plainly counterintuitive that top-down proposed, region-specific overpopulation warfare would pass for the best solution for *everybody*, upon negotiation. And, more importantly, even if there is only one interested party, what is 'good' for people is never 'objectively' one thing. What affects people's lives in ways that they consider as 'good' (whether deliberately, or spontaneously) is in a non-causal interaction with their *ideas* about life.

Political decisions never make everybody happy. But a politician cannot officially, explicitly subscribe to disregarding somebody's legitimate interests. Even though some interests sometimes cannot be met, this does not render them illegitimate, and it does not make it misplaced to care about the failure to meet them. Thus, a board of the world's political leaders may not know if the problems of poverty, hunger and access to clean water for everybody can be solved worldwide, but the fact that they see no clear solutions now does not mean that they should simply stop further worrying about the problem. Still less are they justified to say: "Since we have secured the survival of humanity, the necessary portion of which will have food and water, we can concede to letting the rest die".

An expert may provide an assessment of the situation: she may, for instance, state that there is *at present* no clear or even predictable scenario of securing food and access to clean water for everybody if the Earth's population grows to 15 billion. If we lose sight of the difference between such an assessment and inferring from it that it is therefore okay not to have it secured (and that it would be harmfully sentimental to put effort into a search for a solution), we will easily slide towards outrageous suggestions. Similarly, unless we retain the notion of the indispensably political component in environmental policy decisions (that concern population), we may end up with nothing to object legitimately to statements like "There are too many people in sub-Saharan Africa. Their number should be lowered by a targeted intervention".

The lesson from the deceptively overwhelming presence of scientific expertise in matters of environmental protection, along with the genuine importance of this expertise, suggests that we should rethink more carefully the standing of expertise. Knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is socially produced, including its system of evidence and error checks, as many have argued (e.g. Longino 1990). While Rawls (2005: 224f) simply considers science a prime instance of public reason, if we look at the public domain from a more agonistic angle, science and knowledge themselves will appear as a matter of difficult, historically, socially and culturally conditioned negotiations. In this sense, even what we know about the environment and the various courses of its protection and their consequences *can* be reclaimed as a matter of expertise, if we opt for an accordingly open-ended, pluralistic, dynamic and conditioned notion of expertise. (Which, as for instance Norton [2017] argues, is exactly what the nature of expertise in environmental policy and protection is like.) One step towards this is to stop separating the expert questions of environmental protection from issues where the worse-off groups' emancipation from the pressure of hegemony (even if masked as consensus), in Mouffe's terms, is at stake. The environmental crisis is acknowledged as *intertwined* with the crisis of agriculture, the crisis of education or the crisis of international debt (Spretnak 1990: 8 ff.). Various forms of expertise are employed in the *political* negotiations over solutions to the last two crises. They should then represent just as organic a part of the politically negotiated solutions to the crisis of agriculture, understood as so intertwined.[17] While expertise in a wholly unprejudiced form may not be possible, expertise that takes into account its own prejudices may realise that there is no reasonable method of 'population control' that could afford not to take into account centrally the local perspectives of interest of the poorest, the marginalised and those who carry the greatest part of the burden of the climate crisis (cf. Spretnak 1990: 12).

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17   Cf. examples of ecological research responsive in such a way to its wider contexts, discussed by Di Chiro 2010: 210 ff.

To Conclude

Environmental politics, as an autonomous domain of making decisions, *is* heavily expert-laden and, at the same time, is heavily ethical and political – incorporating the dimensions of (moral) rightness and justice. I would never argue that there is no such thing as expertise or that we should ignore it in environmental decision-making. On the contrary. The neglect of factual expertise is nothing short of criminal here, in ways in which it is often not in personal decisions (should I lie to a friend to cover for another friend?). But it seems equally 'criminal' to neglect what is *not* exhausted by the claim of narrowly construed expertise. Politics, after all, is simply the endeavour of taking into account all that we know about the situation in question, including how everybody is affected, and making the best of it. Determining what 'the best' is needs, of course, further ongoing negotiations, which is why political debates do not only aim at making the decision but also at understanding what it is that we want. We, as citizens, are entitled to expect nothing less than "trying to make the best of it" from ourselves and our representatives.

Many examples of decision-making contexts – cell phones in schools, the permissible age of drinking alcohol, or of consensual sex – combine values (ideological backgrounds) with expertise. But in many of these other contexts, the 'ideological' or perspective-related components are usually so saliently visible as *indispensable*, that the tendency to interpret such a decision as purely expert, ideology- or value-free, is much less striking than in the environmental context. A part of what makes dilemmas in medical ethics perceptibly moral is this salience of the other component of the decisions as one that must not be, not even rhetorically, neglected. By establishing an 'expert hegemony' here, we would clearly lose something of the sense of what makes the decision a moral decision, and thereby fail to do justice to it. The seriousness intrinsic to bioethical dilemmas is clear; they concern particular people, and the possibility of tragic harm being inflicted on them arises in the decisions as irreducibly relevant. Perhaps we need to keep our minds open to the senses in which tragedy can enter the crossroads of environmental policy, too.

The moral risk for environmental debates may thus consist in the endeavour to picture these debates as purely expert and depriving them of their irreducible political dimension. For it is not simply a political failure – a failure of justice – but a moral one: pretending that one's proposals have nothing to do with any political agenda and that the concern for justice is misplaced here. Especially if one does it with the aim of depriving some affected and afflicted parties of their right to voice their concerns.[18]

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Ondrej Beran

'Ekološki aktivizam lišen ideologije' i snovi o istrebljivanju čovečanstva

Apstrakt

Moj cilj je da na primeru ekološke politike preispitam retoriku stručnosti kao objektivne, neutralne i lišene ideologije. Prvi odeljak uvodi primere uobičajenih retoričkih figura stručnjaka, i ne-ideološke zaštite životne sredine, ističući pretpostavke koje one podrazumevanju. Drugi odeljak uvodi objekte poređenja – karikaturalne predloge o istrebljivanju čovečanstva – sa ciljem da se pokaže da obe grupe predloga pretpostavljaju zajedničku retoriku. U trećem delu razmatraju se neke istaknute odlike raznih predloga 'kontrole populacije', dovodeći ih u vezu sa trenutnim porastom takozvanog eko-fašizma. Cilj je pokazati da svi ovi fenomeni predstavljaju skalu ideja ekološkog aktivizma lišenog ideologije. Završni odeljak raspravlja o iskrivljenom shvatanju stručnosti, ideologije i politike, koji su od ključnog značaja za primere o kojima se prethodno raspravljo, a koji vode ka žalosnom neznanju ili neprikrivenom cinizmu, i stoga rezultiraju moralnim neuspehom.

Ključne reči: ekološki aktivizam, ideologija, stručnost, prenaseljenost