



Loggerhead Sea Turtle

Introduction

The Demonic Effect of a Fully Developed Idea

Over the past twenty years, a central point of exploration for CAE has been revolutions and crises related to the environment, including the operational impact of molecular biology, climate change, struggles against the extraction industries, species extinction and rescue, environmental injustice, conservation strategies, internaturalism, and so on. As long as the intervention or project made tactical sense, we would move forward, guided as much by affect as we were by reason—generally a very potent cocktail of human possibility. This method of action appeared to us as the standard for activists and people concerned with this great variety of environmental issues. As environmentalism fractured into a huge spectrum of specialized causes, the discourse and the actions among concerned, more specialized populations were also divided both philosophically and technically (also usually a good thing for a many-faceted resistance trying to establish itself and attempting to find its way in very difficult terrain). Be that as it may, certain questions, facts, and principles keep haunting us, as people work for environmental amelioration from the narrow perspective of their own primary issue or set of related issues. Among the problems that has bothered us most is the absence of explicit necropolitics from strategic and tactical plans that clearly

have an implicit, often unspoken, necropolitical dimension. For example, take the *Deep Ecology Platform* (1984), written by two luminaries of the environmental movement, Arne Naess and George Sessions, as a condensation of fifteen years of environmentalist thinking:

1. *The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth, intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.*
2. *Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.*
3. *Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.*
4. *Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.*
5. *The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.*
6. *Policies must therefore be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.*
7. *The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.*
8. *Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.*

CAE would think that anyone with a heart would enjoy the poetic elegance of these statements, and sympathize with the affect they induce—but do they make sense? For us the text is problematic. We know that humans, in any concentrated form, have never been good for a healthy environment for humans or for most nonhuman creatures (with the exception of our microbiome). Not since pre-agrarian social formations, and with a total of 250 million humans or fewer on the planet, have we, by accident of circumstance, not harmed the environment, which makes CAE a little worried when we read principle five.

CAE also has to ask what is meant by “well-being and flourishing.” Other than associating it with utility (which lends itself poorly to poetry), it appears that the reader is invited to project any meaning that suits their interests or desires. The same could be said for “vital needs,” which apparently give humans some necropolitical rights in regard to the nonhuman. The fantasy engine of consciousness is invited to rev up and complete this open-ended text.

The next phrase, the declaration that human and nonhuman life have “value in themselves,” is also a problem. Values are hierarchical conceptual constructions produced by humans and shared by humans (or imposed upon them). They are not objects waiting to be discovered.

“Diversity” is the next over-aestheticized word within this manifesto. Diversity in *social* and *cultural* formations is certainly a characteristic to be desired, as it enriches human experience and opens new possibilities and potentials in those who participate in these diverse formations. But do we need an ecosystem that maximizes diversity? The perspective necessary for the answer to be yes is an anthropocentric one (just as with culture). If the world were once again populated by nothing more than single-celled creatures, neither they nor the earth nor the universe would care one bit. Diversity in the natural world appears to CAE as an aesthetic and/or economic value. Since only humans care for economy and aesthetics, negative views of anthropocentrism (a spillover from science) need to be reconsidered. In other words, there is no *scientific* reason why biodiversity is valuable, as such judgments are beyond the limits of science.

But soon we get to what this platform is really about: a substantial decrease in the human population, which is presented as an ideological adjustment rather than the massive material cataclysm that such an imperative would entail! How do you eliminate billions of people from the planet? Who has to kill their germ line, and who gets to reproduce? Which cultures are eliminated? All of them? Does accepting these principles necessitate participation in eco-nihilism? Various forms of eco-nihilism such as that suggested here are becoming givens among radical environmentalists. The one element this drastic proposal does bring to light is that producing life and producing death—biopolitics and necropolitics—are indivisible opposites. The real challenge lies in balancing the critique of the two. Currently, discourse is skewed toward biopolitics in both its negative and positive forms, while necropolitics remains rather neglected. After all, promoting life is so much easier than taking a stand on what should die, and how death

should be operationalized. Moreover, once necropolitics is more than just acknowledged, but made visible, the company in which we find ourselves is quite unpleasant. Moving into active planning within the parameters of a zero-sum game puts a person at the table with Malthusians, Spence-rians, colonialists, fascists, corporatists, developers of total war, and most worrisome of all in its unexpectedness, a variety of everyday bureaucrats, technocrats, and policymakers just doing their jobs. If nothing else, CAE has to admire the courage of Naess and Sessions in saying that humans are the problem, and that we need to rid ourselves of as many as possible. Unfortunately, they do not have the courage to explain how we should do this. Other radical greens do, as we shall see—but they leave the tactical choices up to the revolutionaries involved.

For CAE as well, we do not have a plan on how to activate necropolitics in a manner that makes sense. We are stuck outside the ramparts, unable to proceed any further, and until a language(s) is developed to acknowledge necropolitics and develop policy through democratic means (although environmentalism and democracy may be incompatible), the population of environmentally conscious actors (we hesitate to call it a movement) will only be able to continue to “save” life guided by aesthetic choice in a fragmented, tactical manner (which in so many cases is only a deferral rather than a saving). As a result, the real environmental crises will remain unaddressed. Obviously, CAE does not have an answer here either, and many of the criticisms, contradictions, and concerns contained in this book are aimed at ourselves as much as anyone else. We hope to name some of the conceptual demons hiding within us, so we may at least get to the point of exorcising those that paralyze us and cause as much internal discomfort as the external environmental degradation we are witnessing.