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Is Environmentalism a Humanism?

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ABSTRACT

Environmental theorists, seeking the origin of Western exploitative attitudes toward nature, have directed their attacks against 'humanism'. This essay argues that such criticisms are misplaced. Humanism has much closer affinities to environmentalism than the latter's advocates believe. As early as the Renaissance, and certainly by the late eighteenth century, humanists were developing historically-conscious, hermeneutically-grounded modes of understanding, rather than the abstract, mathematical models of nature often associated with them. In its twentieth-century versions humanism also shares much of the mistrust of consumerism, instrumental reason, and 'worldlessness' that marks environmentalist literature. Nevertheless, humanism is indeed committed to the principle that human beings are and ought to be free, and opposes theoretical approaches that suppress freedom. Reconciling humanism and environmentalism thus involves two steps: resisting the former's tendency to treat nature and freedom as metaphysical polarities, and drawing environmental theory away from flirtation with deterministic, biologicistic worldviews. The essay concludes by suggesting Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* as the paradigm case of environmental thought with roots in humanist approaches.

KEYWORDS

Environmentalism, humanism, hermeneutics, phenomenology

'After accepting environmental ethics, you will no longer be the humanist you once were'.

Holmes Rolston III¹

INTRODUCTION

Within the past thirty years a significant current of opinion in environmentalist circles has chosen to repudiate what its adherents call 'humanism'. Setting aside for now the question of what they mean by this term, we should ponder the implications of such a seismic shift in intellectual orientation. Whatever else it may have been, humanism is usually associated with the project of liberating the individual person as well as the 'collective subject' of society from traditional forms of authority, i.e., ones whose validity claims do not spring from individuals' conscious assent and knowledge. As we shall see, humanism has typically risen to prominence when certain forces—religious, scientific, bureaucratic—seemed on the verge of reducing people to mere objects devoid of will, dignity and choice. Nearly always it has been a movement of resistance, a campaign to preserve or recover something deemed essential to our humanness that appeared in jeopardy of being extinguished.

The recent campaign to sever ties between humanism and environmentalism, then, has potentially serious implications. On the level of theory, it may obscure some original connections between humanism and environmental preservation, thereby threatening the coherence of environmental philosophy itself. But there may be practical implications as well. We understand ourselves, our situation, and our political alternatives in light of narratives that we construct linking past, present and future. The anti-humanist narratives now on the market weaken the links between environmentalism and many of humanism's outstanding accomplishments, including the notions of individuality, dignity, autonomy and self-government. Without invoking at least some of the intellectual underpinnings of traditional humanism, can we still persuasively defend or sustain a commitment to such aims? An environmental movement uncoupled from humanism might, in other words, drift in troubling directions: toward obscurantism, mythology, nostalgia for an idealised past, anti-cosmopolitanism, anti-politics.

This essay endeavours to arrest and if possible reverse the growing estrangement between humanism and environmental thought. First, it proposes that the image of humanism held by many environmental thinkers misrepresents the actual convictions and arguments of self-professed humanists. A review of the latter's writings past and present will reveal a certain continuity of themes and approaches. Moreover, humanism will prove to have closer affinities with environmentalism than the latter's adherents would care to admit. It may be too much to say that environmentalism is a humanism, but it is accurate to suggest that they occupy a great deal of common ground. Nevertheless, both sides cling

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to certain propositions that stymie any rapprochement between them. We shall briefly examine whether and how these might be revised without either side's abandoning its core commitments.

IMAGE AND REALITY OF HUMANISM

By 'humanism' some ecophilosophers simply mean homocentrism, the conviction that human interests should always take precedence over the interests of other species. But there is a deeper and more complex critique implicit in many of the best essays in environmental theory, one that can be reconstructed as a historical narrative. It imagines a primordial age (perhaps still alive in a few isolated regions) marked by 'vitalistic monism' (Jonas 2001: 12). Then, human beings still felt keenly their 'embeddedness in nature' (Eckersley 1992: 112) and did not rank themselves above other creatures; instead they felt a kinship with the earth, its creatures and divinities. But at some point in Western civilisation, perhaps even as early as Plato, philosophers began to exalt human beings above the rest of nature, depicting mind as both a separate substance and as the repository of a higher, truer reality (Hargrove 1989: 27–9). This new dualism eventually led to 'representationalism', the view that the empirical world can be resolved into the ideas or representations of it given to, or generated by, the understanding (Berthold-Bond 1994: 284). Thus, the mind attains a sort of sovereignty over nature and, eventually, begins to impose on it a grid of concepts and mathematical relationships – sometimes called 'Galilean nature' (Evernden 1992: 60) – designed to promote human interests, especially those amenable to scientific and technological control. Humankind conceives of itself as the 'lord of beings', and defines these entities as a 'standing reserve' of fungible objects and properties (Krell 1977: 221). Seen in this light the contemporary environmental crisis appears to reflect a deeper-lying malaise in the Western intellectual tradition conveniently epitomised as 'humanism'. Allegedly, the price paid for this sort of dualistic and manipulative approach to the earth is steep. We no longer feel that the land is our true dwelling place (Berthold-Bond 1994: 274, Rolston 1975: 107–8). Nature has become an artefact of our cognitive processes instead of the rich, encompassing, value-bestowing matrix it once was felt to be.

Humanists supposedly claim that sovereignty over nature frees us from the thrall of determinism, since we can now create values for ourselves and no longer suffer 'slavery' to ineluctable necessity (Evernden 1992: 60). But many environmental theorists see this freedom as an illusion (Ehrenfeld 1978: 228, Ophuls 1997: 216, Eckersley 1992: 112). There is something defective, they argue, in a notion of liberty that exalts individuals at the expense of their constitutive ties to the natural and cultural settings that give life meaning. Paradoxically, humanists treat humankind as a collective god destined to legislate values; but they do not explain how this legislating can be done in a world reduced to instrumental

relationships (Ophuls 1997: 194). We are condemned to 'solitude' (Ophuls 1997: 227, Evernden 1992: 64) and solipsism; meanwhile, reductionistic, mechanistic sciences threaten to extinguish, both in theory and in practice, the very autonomy we were uniquely supposed to possess (Evernden 1992: 91–2).² Moreover, humanism is for them associated with a style of technocratic management that offers just the wrong approach to environmental recovery. Instead of trying to solve isolated problems, we should opt for a holistic transformation of economy, society and culture in the direction of sustainability or balance. Frequently, critics of such technocratic humanism insist that we are citizens first, not consumers or objects of administration (B. Taylor 1992: 72). The most desirable alternative, many claim, is to dismantle the modern state, decentralise the economy and adopt the practices of small independent nations like Bhutan or isolated communities like the Amish (Berry 1977: 210–17, Evernden 1992: 262, Ophuls and Boyan 1992: 263). In this way civic virtue and local governance, rather than administration and technocratic control, will engage the energies of most people (Ophuls 1997: 302–5, Worster 1993: 143, Worster 1985: 333, Sale 1991, Kemmis 1990, Devall 1988, McKibben 1989). Clearly, such criticisms are not the exclusive province of environmental theory, but they indicate the sorts of rhetorical alliances many ecophilosophers have tried to forge in their historical metanarratives.

To be sure, the more sophisticated among them recognise that humanism is a complex phenomenon, a 'tapestry of ideas', some of which are actually consistent with the aims of environmental preservation and sustainability (Eckersley 1992: 56).³ Nevertheless, the composite narrative pieced together from their writings seriously misrepresents humanism as a whole, while influencing us to draw political and ideological lines in the wrong places. In the following section I examine the testimony of self-professed humanists and their allies with an eye to identifying the core components of humanism.⁴

Environmental philosophers might raise several preliminary objections which, if valid, would undermine the approach proposed here. First, they could claim that humanism is not an explicit doctrine defended by named individuals in specific books and articles, but a world view that pervades everyday life and implicitly informs all of our attitudes and choices: 'You are a humanist; Joseph Stalin was a humanist... Humanism is at the heart of our present world culture' (Ehrenfeld 1978: 20).⁵ Maybe so, but humanism also has a history traceable to and embodied in the writings of certain philosophers and creative artists. To disconnect philosophical terms from their historical context is to invite misunderstanding and arbitrariness, as well as to lose a sense of the depth and resonance they evoke. Would it be intellectually responsible to talk about liberalism without examining the texts of, say, Locke, Mill, Isaiah Berlin and John Rawls? Besides, the convictions that inform everyday life usually turn out to be less rigorous versions of doctrines that have been articulated in formal treatises and essays. If one wants to attack a particular mode of thought, one should confront

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its most coherent, well thought-out embodiments, not its vaguer 'popular' forms.

Second, it has been suggested that the humanism of today has nothing in common with its antecedents, which by now are 'obsolete' and thus irrelevant (Ehrenfeld 1978: 6, Barthes quoted in Evernden 1992: 27). In one sense this is certainly true. Self-professed humanists today do not share the passions of their Renaissance counterparts to rediscover classical texts and statuary, or to provide more historically accurate translations of the Bible. Still, it may be possible to uncover continuities and unexpected connections between humanism past and present if we reflect on why the literati of earlier centuries were preoccupied with such matters. In any case the emphasis here will be on contemporary versions of humanism since they are the ones most frequently assailed by environmentalist critics.

The humanism of the Renaissance appears passé to some because, as noted, its devotees were engaged in the revival of classical learning, an enterprise that today attracts few followers. But we ought to recall the context in which this early version of humanism emerged. First and foremost, it was a protest against scholasticism, an endeavour to find some more direct access to the world than through arid syllogisms and priestly pronouncements. Classical languages and literature, the rhetorical tradition, the figure of Socrates, and above all nature itself – all these excited fascination because they conjured up an entire world that seemed far more civilised, urbane, and cultivated than anything the Middle Ages had to offer. Inspired by the recovery of classical sources, Renaissance humanists endeavoured to mark off an intellectual space free of the categories and preoccupations of the Christian Church. The figure of the great Leon Battista Alberti (1404–74), as portrayed by Jacob Burckhardt, exemplifies the new forms of humanity that Renaissance humanism had in mind, as well as their evident links to the notion of nature. Alberti was the icon of the Renaissance 'all-sided man', excelling in everything from architecture and inventions to philosophy, aesthetic theory and prose composition. Yet,

The deepest spring of his nature [was] the sympathetic intensity with which he entered into the whole life around him. At the sight of noble trees and waving cornfields he shed tears; handsome and dignified old men he honoured as a 'delight of nature', and could never look at them enough. Perfectly formed animals won his goodwill as being specially favoured by nature; and more than once, when he was ill, the sight of a beautiful landscape cured him. (Burckhardt 1958: 150)

Alberti does sometimes say the kind of things that one associates with the arrogance of humanism, including his *bon mot*: 'Men can do all things if they will'. However, his engagement with the world does not strike the reader as arrogant and manipulative, but rather as overflowing with the delight of mind and senses in a world too long dismissed as a vale of tears. In this sense his affirmation of nature presupposed the opening up of the 'mental space' in which

both human beings and their environment could appear as they really were, freed of the stigma of sin and corruption. In Alberti we sense not a Renaissance James Watt, but the forerunner of Wordsworth, Thoreau and Muir.

Run-of-the-mill humanist scholars may not have shared Alberti's intense engagement with the world, but all embraced his dedication to the study of ancient languages and cultures. Yet their interest was more than merely antiquarian. Something else was emerging in their philological research: the discovery of history. Rejecting the scholastic approach to Aristotle and other classical writers, the humanists tended to

exalt philology, the attempt to find out what the documents actually contained, what the words actually meant, what the philosopher, orator, historian, or poet had actually said...The epistemological and, ultimately, the philosophical consequences were drastic. The more it was stressed that an author long dead was speaking to us in the present, and the less we made of any structure of timeless universals through which his voice was mediated, the more conscious we must be of communication across time and of the time-space separating him from us (and)... the temporal, social, and historical circumstances in which he had expressed his thought. (Pocock 1975: 60–61)

Renaissance literati, in short, started to think of antiquity as an entire civilisation, a 'different world, ... immeasurably superior to their own' (Bullock 1985: 14). To absorb its lessons implied clearing pathways between that past world and the present one, i.e., reflecting on both the differences and similarities between one's own time and place and the ancient ones, striving toward a 'fusion of horizons'.

Early humanism thus veered from the intellectual trail that would eventually culminate in the construction of the mathematically based physical sciences (what critics of humanism call 'Galilean science'). Instead, it pursued a course that would lead via Vico and Herder to Dilthey's conception of the humanities as methodologically distinctive, guided by an empathetic grasp of human action 'from the inside' (*Verstehen*) and oriented to historically and geographically specific cultural forms. As H. G. Gadamer summarises the unique concerns of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*):

historical research does not endeavor to grasp the concrete phenomenon as an instance of a universal rule. The individual case does not serve only to confirm a law from which practical predictions can be made. Its ideal is rather to understand the phenomenon itself in its unique and historical concreteness ... how this man, this people, or this state is what it has become, or more generally, how it happened that it is so. (Gadamer 1993: 4–5)

Later we shall investigate the ways in which this approach intersects with that of ecology and environmental philosophy. But we can already discern one implication by comparing humanism's historical approach with Eugene

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Hargrove's reconstruction of the origins of environmentalism: 'Modern environmental attitudes are the product of several centuries of changing attitudes toward nature and are most closely associated with nineteenth-century developments in the natural sciences of botany, biology and geology' (Hargrove 1989: 78). The latter generated historical statements that were 'singular, contingent and historical' (Hargrove 1989: 39) and conveyed knowledge of so-called 'secondary properties', those that were more concrete and senses-oriented than the ones favoured by geometric science. In sum, we can trace a line of development that runs from Renaissance humanism to both the historical natural sciences and ecology as well as to the humanities, while distinguishing both from sciences in search of abstract, universal laws.

But there is another side to early humanism that many environmentalist critics have downplayed or ignored: its 'civic' emphasis. When humanist scholars set about retrieving the heritage of classical antiquity, they could scarcely help noticing the long periods of republican rule in Rome and the institutions of direct democracy in Athens and other Greek city-states. This knowledge, along with the republican revival in the independent cities of Italy and northern Europe, encouraged some of them to express renewed confidence in the human capacity for self-rule. But the sources of civic humanism are more subtle still. As Pocock points out, there is an affinity between the experience of conversation with the minds of ancient writers in philology and of conversation with one's peers in a republican assembly. One results in knowledge, the other in decision and law, but both 'take place between particular men, located in particular moments in time' (Pocock 1975: 62). This aspect of the humanistic tradition thus appears to favour neither a leviathan state nor technocratic problem-solving approaches; instead it gives sustenance to those environmentalists who imagine small-scale, local Jeffersonian communities of equal citizens in face-to-face conversations about their common affairs. The Jeffersonian ideal, even in the 'green' version championed by many ecophilosophers, is thus rooted in Renaissance civic humanism.

According to one of the twentieth century's leading humanists, Karl Jaspers, the '*Goethezeit*' in Germany (i.e., roughly from the latter part of the eighteenth century until the 1830s) witnessed a resurgence of these Renaissance ideas (Jaspers 1951: 22, Krell 1977: 201). The word humanism itself was not used until 1808, but earlier philosophers and poets in Germany often spoke of *Humanität* or *humanitas* as their moral and pedagogical lodestone.⁶ So this period, like that of the Renaissance, should offer opportunities to locate the historical core of humanism. Roughly speaking, two impulses defined the period: the philosophy of Kant, and romanticism, which tried to 'overcome' the dualisms of his *Critiques*. Indeed one commentator has called this entire period the age of 'romantic humanism' (Hodges 1949: 2).

Kant's aim in writing the *Critique of Pure Reason* was, of course, to investigate the scope and limits of reason. In effect, he demonstrated that

Galilean or geometric science had staked valid claims to knowledge, while metaphysics had not. Moral philosophy, the metaphysics of ethical life, provided *a priori* knowledge of the moral law, but could not explain how it could guide human conduct in a world where all events were determined by antecedent material causes. The *Critique of Judgment* indicated that teleological accounts of nature and aesthetic judgments were indeed possible, but that they could not claim the same objective validity as could scientific (causal) explanations. In short, Kant appears to have inaugurated (or at least furthered) some of the features of humanism most decried by environmental writers: dualism, especially the notion of human freedom set off against 'dead', mechanical causation, representationalism (albeit with a transcendental twist) and the conception of autonomy as a struggle to overcome nature.⁷

But once Kant's writings have been situated in the context of eighteenth-century philosophy, it becomes apparent that he was trying to rescue humanity from what he considered the degradation lurking in the mechanistic theories of mind and morality current in his day. Kant's moral philosophy aimed above all to preserve ethics from the associationist psychology and proto-utilitarianism of Hume. His third critique was intended to authenticate our judgments of beauty and purposiveness (including those about nature) as involving more than purely subjective feelings. In other words, there were good reasons for Kant's dualisms. They were supposed to create a theoretical space in which human beings could articulate insights about themselves and nature that did not fit into the straitjacket of Galilean physics and associated empiricist philosophies. Let us note one other feature of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: it draws on the humanist traditions of the Renaissance, albeit in an attenuated form, to account for aesthetic judgments. Notions of taste, cultivation, and common sense, all current in the earlier humanism, form the backdrop of Kant's theory of aesthetics (cf. Gadamer 1993: 9–42). There is thus considerable continuity from Renaissance humanism to that of the age of Goethe, and from there, as we shall see, to the humanistic thought of our time.

The second phase of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century humanistic development emerged in the wake of Kant. He bequeathed to generations of Romantic and post-Romantic writers the bundle of dualisms already discussed, and they immediately set about trying to transcend them. Herder, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and later Feuerbach and Marx all directly or indirectly took their cues from Kant's bifurcations. Here we may take Herder as a representative figure. Reviving the older idea of *humanitas*, or cultured, educated humanity, he proposed that individuals and collectivities needed to undergo a process of *Bildung*, the cultivation of their humanity, by discovering and developing their own unique natures and bringing them to mature expression.⁸ Herder's stance differed from Kant's in that he did not emphasise one single universal ethical imperative, valid for all persons or nations at all times, but acknowledged the uniqueness and unrepeatability of each culture and age. Moreover, Herder

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emphasised that, 'not one of us becomes a human being autonomously. An intellectual genesis, that is, education, connects the entire formation of an individual's humanity to ... the whole chain of the human race' (Bunge 1993: 50). If there is a rule implicit in Herder's approach, it is to let each culture flourish in its own way, allow it to develop its full potential and enrich humanity with its creations, and not to impose a monoculture everywhere, as he believed the Enlightenment sought to do. Here, as in the Renaissance, humanism protests against abstract universality, stresses the development of persons and cultures toward goals immanent in them yet still inchoate, and comes out in favour of the unique, the local, the historically contingent. That approach would eventually form the ethical background of the environmentalists' commitment to both biodiversity and cultural pluralism. Humanist historicism has bequeathed to us a sensitivity to the uniqueness of species, languages and cultures; to lose any of them means losing an irreplaceable treasure, an entire mode of being that arose spontaneously and can never be recreated by artifice. Herder, the romantic humanist, was the first to articulate the ethical imperative of preserving historical uniqueness.

Taking stock of this entire second wave of humanism, we notice again that it is a protest against ideas, institutions, and practices that appear to impose an alien yoke on human beings, to deny their freedom and creativity. For Kant, dehumanisation in practice involved treating other persons merely as means and not as ends in themselves. In theory it meant depicting human conduct in ways that seemed to deny moral freedom and reduce ethical action to mere habits or feelings ('behaviour') woven into the fabric of causality that connected all other phenomena. For Herder it was the aspiration toward universal culture, especially of the Enlightenment, that threatened to submerge particular historical formations in a grey sameness much like our own globalising 'McWorld'. I will argue that this element of protest, the quest to preserve or enhance certain qualities deemed quintessentially human, re-emerges in a great deal of twentieth-century humanism.

WHAT HUMANISM IS TODAY

The most elaborate defences of humanism in the previous century flowed from the pens of thinkers directly influenced by the historical bent that characterised its earlier manifestations. Phenomenology, existentialism, and hermeneutics originated in the efforts of Dilthey, Husserl, Gadamer, Heidegger, Cassirer, Jaspers and Sartre (among others) to ward off the assimilation of the humanities by the natural sciences, to warn against the dystopias of technocratic reason, and to articulate the distinctive approaches and contents that set the human sciences apart.⁹ The Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School adapted many of the themes and analyses of phenomenology, grafting them onto the rather different 'dialec-

tical humanism' of Hegel, Feuerbach, and the young Marx (Toews 1980). As before I will compose an ideal type of contemporary humanism out of the materials provided by these and other theorists.

First, contemporary humanists, following Kant, Hegel, Fichte and other writers of that epoch, define human beings as free and/or autonomous.¹⁰ They interpret freedom in radically different ways, but all concur that it forms the point of departure for any humanism, and that its preservation is the most urgent task of philosophy. In all renditions, freedom for humanist writers at least means that we will not have understood or correctly valued human existence if we see it simply as the product of external influences. As Sartre (Kaufmann 1966: 302–3) remarks, 'This theory alone [i.e., of existential freedom] is compatible with the dignity of man, it is the only one which does not make man into an object ... a set of pre-determined reactions in no way different from the pattern of qualities and phenomena which constitute a table or a chair or a stone'. Like Sartre most other humanists attempt to concretise and draw out the implications of the postulate of freedom. In this respect twentieth-century humanism hearkens back to its Renaissance prototype. Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), for example, in his *On the Dignity of Man* had already written of human freedom in a way strikingly similar to the contemporary existentialists' idiom. His God speaks to Adam as follows: 'Thou...art the moulder and maker of thyself; thou mayest scuplt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer' (Pico della Mirandola 1965: 5).

In contemporary humanist writings one senses a pervasive fear of so-called 'mass society' and its tendency to assimilate the individual to the type or norm. Jaspers sounds this note in his complaint that the masses are our 'masters', bent on making us as 'automatic as ants' (Jaspers 1957: 72). He links mass society to what he calls the 'universal life apparatus', the economic system in which every individual finds a role as a wage earner and consumer and performs a definite function in producing the goods and services modern economies require. Hannah Arendt (1998: 321–2) makes a similar criticism when she describes the emergence of a 'labouring' society in which we are defined—and increasingly define ourselves—in terms of our roles as consumers, participating in a vast life process that erodes the products of work (durable things) and action (self-revealing words and deeds). Both fear that we may someday lose contact with the language, even the experiences, that once allowed us to think what we are doing in some other terms than those of labour, consumption, and the life processes. To shift responsibility for one's own existence to an anonymous mass would mean, for existential humanists, the loss of one's very humanity, the unrepeatable uniqueness of each individual (Jaspers 1951: 72, Heidegger 1962: 164–8, Arendt 1998: 56, 322 and 1973: 438, Sartre in Kaufmann 1966: 295, 301, Ortega 1957: 54–67).

Closely connected with humanist philosophers' campaign against mass society is their aversion to naturalism, biologism, and behaviouristic social

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science. Jaspers (1951: 26), for example, asserts that, 'if I see man only as objectively knowable nature, then I give up on humanism in favour of hominism – I see him only as a natural species-being'. By 'objectively knowable', Jaspers means that human beings would be described – and their behaviour explained – exclusively 'from the outside', as if there were nothing more to their existence than what could be expressed in causal explanations or correlations. Sartre (in Kaufmann 1966: 295) concurs, urging that human action cannot be explained by reference, say, to psychological or biological facts about a person, nor can anyone cite heredity or even environment as the cause of his or her (in)action: 'there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom'. Sartre surely intended to attack behaviouristic theories such as those of John B. Watson, for whom a human being is simply an 'organic machine, ready to run' (cited in Matson 1976: xvi.). Marcuse's 'one-dimensional man' thesis claims that 'total behaviourism' closes off alternative modes of thought and life by reducing human existence to that which can be manipulated and controlled. Only operationalisable statements are allowed to raise truth claims; everything else is dismissed as emotion, nonsense or religion (Marcuse 1964: 12–13). Arendt, finally, goes even further, suggesting that the rise of statistically based behavioural science actually mirrored the triumph of behaviour over action. Human beings *began to seem* herdlike and predictable in the aggregate, because they were in fact *becoming* so, engaging in behaviour rather than action. In her view, behaviourism is just the intellectual counterpart to mass society itself. But of course, behaviourism does not give a true picture of human possibilities, which emerge only in the category of natality and in action, the words and deeds that reveal who – rather than what – a person is (Arendt 1998: 40–45 and 1973: 45–57). While none of these denunciations offers a sophisticated, carefully crafted refutation of behaviourism, taken together they evoke a certain mood of protest and indeed desperation on the part of contemporary humanism. At all costs, they are saying, we must preserve the core of *humanitas* from complete objectification, lest we end up saddled with a 'soft' totalitarianism that cannot be overthrown because no one any longer has any objections to a regime of thoroughgoing manipulation and control. As one scholar put it, 'humanism ... is distinguished by its commitment to the search for freedom of man in the machinery of social systems' (Gella et al., 1978: vii).

The totalitarian shadow cast by behaviourism is, for these critics, deepened by positivism and 'operationalism'. They use the term 'positivism' loosely to characterise a variety of positions, including pragmatism, ordinary language philosophy, logical empiricism, and positivism more narrowly construed after the manner of Comte. What they decry in these approaches is the reduction of the knowable to immediate sense-experience (or logical and mathematical relationships), and the consequent branding of non-empirical claims as meaningless. Marcuse and Adorno, for example, argue that the language of art (and of Critical Theory) offers an alternative to the discourse of everyday life, speaking of *choses*

absentes, depicting the Kafkaesque reality of bureaucratic mass society and holding out the promise of genuine happiness, rather than the simulacrum offered by empty consumerism. But art cannot raise truth claims if truth is merely 'what works', or if words are reduced to their functions in speech (Marcuse 1964: 64–71). Nature likewise offers a haven and exit-point from one-dimensional society. Like art it is an 'unconquered' remnant of a richer, less 'positive' world of experience, although natural science has done its best to reduce it to the 'stuff of control and organisation' (Marcuse 1964: 153). Jaspers too objects vigorously to positivism's alleged functionalism, its tendency to transform existential questions into glitches in language that can be resolved by the careful technical analysis of words. Eventually, he prophesies, language will have been purged of its ambiguities and philosophy of its pseudo-problems. Then there will ensue 'a dumbness which is not the profundity of silence but merely an expression of vacancy' (Jaspers 1957: 180). Once again the humanists' arguments are simplistic, yet they convey the urgent demand that nature, humanity and art not be thoroughly reified, such that we could no longer speak or think about what might transcend the sphere of our (administered, manipulated) everyday lives.

The humanists' comments on behaviourism and positivism have such a sharp edge because, they fear, we are not only 'losing' art, nature, and (critical) philosophy; we are also losing history, or rather the continuity between past and future that once formed the unspoken premise of historical thinking: 'oblivion is the basis of such a life, whose outlooks on past and present shrink so much that scarcely anything remains in the mind but the bald present. Thus life flows on in its course devoid of memories and foresights ... love for things and human beings wanes and disappears' (Jaspers 1957: 50). We need to recall that Renaissance humanism had already developed a historical consciousness, a sense that one could converse with the cultures of antiquity through the artefacts, especially texts, that they bequeathed to us (what Gadamer calls a 'fusion of horizons'). Kant (to some degree) and certainly Herder had made history into an explicit theme of humanism. What twentieth-century humanism dreads is the prospect that our temporal horizon will shrink to almost nothing, that we will no longer hold any 'conversations' with the past. Humanism is linked through art and literature to 'pre-technological culture' (Marcuse 1964: 56). If we lose vital touch with that art, culture and literature, we will have no context in which to locate life as we know it today. Jaspers expresses this anxiety when he asks rhetorically whether human beings can cut their historical roots, lose contact with their past, and subsequently 'be' anything except another biologically determined life form. To be sure, our nature as instinctually conditioned, desiring, consuming animals is irrepressible. But to obtain distance from and perspective on our desires and needs, to see them in context, and to review them critically requires a clear sense of time and history. As Jaspers (1951: 36) concludes, 'man must recognise himself in what he was in order to come to presence. What he has been historically becomes an indispensable and

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foundational factor in what he will be’.

The contracting temporal horizons of modern societies have their spatial analogue in the loss of what phenomenologists call the ‘life world’. This is the dense network of personal relationships, engagements, local ties, folk beliefs, dialects, and pre-scientific perceptions that constitutes the fabric of experience—or used to. The insight of phenomenology had been that the scientific view of the world was an abstraction from the richer context of everyday life, an artificial, mathematicised construct that sometimes was taken by scientists and their philosophic allies as reality *tout court*. The phenomenological approach was designed to get us ‘back to the things’, i.e., as they were spontaneously experienced ‘before’ metaphysics, positivism and ‘method’ pressed them into more precise, but impoverished language and categories. Of course, for some (especially Heidegger) that meant trying to recover the understanding of Being that had been alive in ancient Greece before metaphysics distorted it, and still flared up occasionally (e.g. in Hölderlin). For many contemporary humanists, science and technology have been implicated in the loss of the life world. Arendt (1998: 118–19) argues, for instance, that we have become ‘worldless’, partly because the once quasi-permanent setting of fabricated things around us has been gradually supplanted by an environment of disposable, mass-produced items never really intended to endure.

Jaspers anticipates Arendt in his observation that modern society tends to undermine the private sphere that once gave life solidity and meaning: the domain of family, marriage, and intimacy. We are more and more herded into work ‘barracks’, while home becomes a mere dormitory. Likewise, daily life has become ‘technicised’ to the point that people take little interest in the concrete specificity of their life worlds, readily exchanging one for another since none has much significance in any case (Jaspers 1957: 58–59). For Jaspers such indifference to the human life world easily slides into indifference toward the natural environment, a crucial theme for our purposes. The ‘technical apparatus uses up the planet’ until scarcely any ‘independent being’ remains. We are left with an ‘artificial landscape’ in which virtually everything has been moulded by the apparatus of production (Jaspers 1957: 71). There is nothing left that is ‘mysterious, wonderful and remote’ (Jaspers 1957: 46). Humanism’s admonition that we need to ‘master technology’ does not so much target the usual environmentalist worries that we have built an unsustainable economy destined to collapse; rather, it emphasises the fraying of the ties that had bound human beings to their life worlds throughout most of history. What sort of *meaning* will existence have if we are ‘worldless’?

Finally – and to summarise – humanism involves ‘critique’ (Marcuse 1964: 181). From its inception in the Renaissance to its twentieth-century instantiations, it consistently sought to protect the supposed core of our *humanitas* from reification and trivialisation. Early humanists struggled to reconnect their generations to classical antiquity by opposing the scholastic project of reading

texts as ahistorical, logical ciphers. The Romantic humanists insisted that the Enlightenment, especially in its most mechanistic, materialist versions, denied human freedom and imposed an arid uniformity on the historical richness of social and cultural forms. The 'new humanism' (Matson 1976: 10) of our own day appropriates and develops these same themes while adding others that confront more directly the erosion of humanity at the hands of bureaucratic, technologically advanced, consumer societies. Humanism is obviously a very different sort of enterprise from the one that most environmentalists denounce.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

In this section I will defend two claims. First, humanist and environmentalist critiques of modern society overlap, despite sharp differences on certain issues. Both are essentially trying to preserve their supreme concerns – *humanitas* and freedom, or nature, the land, biodiversity, and wilderness—from objectification and reification. Both resist the way in which these concerns have been drawn into a world of commodities, and forced to justify their existence before the bar of functional utility within the vast 'life apparatus' of a modern economy. Second, both can be reformulated so as to shed their most objectionable features. Humanism does not need to denigrate nature and treat it as a sphere of heteronomy in order to validate freedom. Nor does environmentalism have to embrace a reductionist naturalism and biological determinism in order to discourage *hybris* and reintegrate people with nature. In short, ideological and political lines should not separate humanism from environmentalism, but should range both of them on the same side against these objectifying, reifying forces, both theoretical and practical. Some environmental theorists have already begun to recognise this and warn against anti-humanist biases (Hargrove 1989: 1, Eckersley 1992: 42).

Let us consider for a moment some obvious convergences. Humanists worry about the destruction of the life world ('worldlessness') as forces of homogenisation and economic rationalisation besiege this last refuge against one-dimensional, 'mass' society. Environmentalists express many of the same fears. Berry (1977), for example, has lamented the eclipse of the family farm and the way of life that goes with it. Norberg-Hodge (1992), among others, has documented the destructive effects of 'modernisation' on the life world of traditional societies such as that of Ladakh. Borgman (1984) has depicted the transformation of focal things that once intertwined with people's whole lives into unobtrusive, background 'devices' that merely produce 'commodities' without engaging the whole person or family.

Likewise, the humanist critique of modernity laments the erosion of time horizons, the loss of meaningful ties to past and future. Some environmental theorists explicitly make the same point, underscoring the perils to our environ-

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ment if words like ‘truth’, ‘beauty’, and ‘health’ no longer have meaning because we cannot recapture the experiences that once made them comprehensible (Worster 1993: 175–80). Others argue that an ecologically sound society would have to maintain a steady-state economy, and thus strive to preserve the virtues and ways of the past (Ophuls 1997: 266–71). Höslé, a leading German philosopher, epitomises this claim: ‘Only knowledge of a world different from our own, but real, can help us to distance ourselves from the deficiencies of our own time ... Only the past can give us this knowledge. Whoever is not rooted in a tradition will not be able to shape the future’ (Höslé 1994: 41).¹¹ Furthermore, he writes, ‘the development of feelings of piety toward our own past may awaken a sense of our own obligation toward generations yet to come: it is humanity, the idea of a human being, that lays claim to be realised in coming generations as well’ (Höslé 1994: 76).

Humanists have decried the ‘disenchantment’ of the world, the waning of mystery, awe, and unrepeatable, ineffable experience, attributing it to the triumph of instrumental reason and a logic of identity that they believe positivism and behaviourism have abetted (Marcuse 1964: 144–99, Adorno and Horkheimer 1972: 3–42, Horkheimer 1974: 92–3). Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, some environmental philosophers have argued along similar lines. Evernden, for example, writes: ‘Once named and explained [the things themselves] ... ceased to be themselves ... their primordial givenness is subordinated to their social utility’. So we must ‘return to the world that precedes knowledge’, which turns out to be of singular, ‘one of a kind’ entities, ‘sheer sensory experience’, a ‘divine chaos’ or ‘green chaos’ evoking ‘wonder’ (Evernden 1992: 109–32; see also Abram 1996). While less inclined to blame positivism for the disenchantment of the world, some ecophilosophers do reject what they dub ‘scientism’ (the conviction that ‘empiric-analytic knowledge is the only valid way of knowing’) and behaviourism, which ‘denies subjectivity even to our fellow human beings’ (Eckersley 1992: 51; Höslé 1994: 57)

Finally, civic humanism has had an impact on environmental philosophy that can hardly be overestimated. As noted above, the ideal/idyll of a society made up of small Jeffersonian farms has been a hardy perennial of eco-theorising. Worster (1993) explicitly recommends reviving the classical principle that politics is about educating citizens in virtue and improving their character. Ophuls (1997) argues that an ecologically correct society would be far more political than the societies that now exist. Its citizens would constantly need to reach decisions about how to sustain their values and material support systems, issues that contemporary societies leave to markets or bureaucratic and technically-oriented organisations. In short, the common ground between humanism and environmental philosophy is ample. But what about the divergences?

The two elements of humanism that environmental writers have attacked are the notions of human freedom and the pre-eminence of reason. There are indeed versions of humanism in which both factors are interpreted in such a way that no

deep ecologist and few shallow ones could accept them at face value.¹² However, our survey of humanist thought thus far should have made it obvious that hard-line homocentric definitions of freedom (for example, as control of nature) are outside the mainstream. In the humanism of the age of Goethe, freedom was understood much more often as the quest to be ‘at home with oneself in other-being’ (Hegel). And as Berthold-Bond (1994) has urged, such a notion of freedom is certainly compatible with environmentalism. In the tradition of civic humanism, to which Arendt belongs, freedom is rooted in the capacity for self-revelation inherent in words and deeds, an aspiration that would also enliven the Jeffersonian polities of Ophuls or Worster.

Sceptical ecophilosophers, however, might regard these responses as too clever by half. They could object that freedom, taken as a moral ideal, absolves the moral subject from concrete obligations and restraints, especially toward non-human nature. Moreover, they would continue, subjective freedom issues agents a license to do whatever they please, however destructive to the environment, and allows them to justify it as an expression of personal liberty. This is exactly the concern Charles Taylor has confronted in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, and we should cite his rebuttal of it. He admits that so-called ‘self-determining freedom’, when misunderstood, can tip into self-absorption or anthropocentrism, but he argues that the moral ideal implicit in self-determining freedom would thereby have been sabotaged. Decisions of any real import always take place within a ‘horizon of significance’ or ‘background of intelligibility’ established by institutions and cultural traditions that place demands on the moral agent. Agonising decisions are so because we recognise the claims of competing standards, values, memberships and outcomes on us. Thus, to ignore the moral force of claims emanating from outside the self is to err about the meaning of self-determining freedom. The ‘manner’ of decision is indeed subjective in the sense that *I* decide; I cannot shift my decisions to persons or institutions outside myself (this was of course the ‘existentialist’ point made by Sartre and Jaspers). But the ‘matter’ of such decisions, the substance of the claims I must weigh and balance, is anchored in objective factors, *including* obligations to the natural world. Eliminating this confusion, Taylor says, would help overcome misconceptions about self-determining freedom and perhaps also ‘stave off ecological disaster’ (Taylor 1991: 81–91).

If we probe more deeply into the reasons for environmentalists’ mistrust of freedom as a moral guidepost, we find that it flows from an unnecessarily conservative theory of ‘social capital’, exemplified in Ophuls’s *Requiem for Modern Politics* but implicit in many celebrations of pre-industrial society. Ophuls argues that the authority and moral restraints needed to curb cupidity, inculcate virtue, and sustain a steady-state economy can be generated only by religion and custom conjoined over long periods of time. Once modernity begins to undermine religion, erode moral restraints and weaken authority, the process of dissolution will continue unabated. People will relapse into self-indulgent

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behaviours they justify as an expression of freedom. Out of their own resources, then, modern societies cannot generate authority or make self-restraint attractive. Like eroding topsoil, social capital is gradually exhausted and, for all practical purposes, cannot be replaced (Ophuls 1997: 42–51). Ophuls's theory cannot easily be tested, since modernity, from whenever we date its emergence, is a relatively new phenomenon, the outcome of which remains in doubt. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to reject his account. For one thing, the mere fact that an ecology movement has sprung up worldwide and especially in the (social capital-depleted) post-industrial societies of the West, engaging millions of people in struggles that have no obvious material payoff and may carry high costs in money and time, would suggest that social capital can indeed be created as well as destroyed, that people, out of their own free choices, may impose restraints upon themselves and the wider society. On the other hand, some societies that have preserved much of their traditional structures of authority, religion and social cooperation (e.g., Bali, Nepal) have so far failed to halt rampant overexploitation of their natural environments.

Another ground for rejecting Ophuls's declining social capital argument touches the second dimension of the environmentalist critique of humanism: the status of reason. Humanism in all its forms is indeed committed to the premise that people can find the truth and manage their own affairs guided by their own insight, without relying solely on customs, religious taboos, revealed commandments or charismatic authorities. This commitment to reason does *not* imply that human beings must inevitably try to replace natural, self-organising systems by deliberately designed ones. As DiZerega (2002: 37, 51, 64–70) has argued, human interventions in ecosystems often fail to recognise that the latter have a kind of rational order and balance that has evolved over countless millennia. Deliberate manipulations by 'instrumental' social organisations (viz., well-meaning government agencies) often cause more problems in natural systems than they solve. Reason is thus not the exclusive province of engineers, developers and bureaucrats. It has been variously defined by humanists as objective (Horkheimer), historical (Herder or Dilthey), and dialectical (Marcuse). In all these shapes reason is supposed to reveal the gulf between what the world and human beings now are, what they have been, and what they might eventually become. Ophuls errs, in short, by casting reason as a Mephistophelean force, always negating and denying. Indeed, as Hegel long ago insisted, reason—or at least rational order – can be found in the world of nature as well as in human affairs. What Leopold (1991: 262) called the 'integrity, stability, and beauty' of ecosystems corresponds to what humanists would see as the objective reason immanent in them.

For their part, some ecophilosophers have espoused ideas that would be anathema to humanism. To conclude this essay, we need to identify these and see whether they might be reconsidered without fatally undermining the aims of environmentalism. First, some environmental theorists have been enticed by the

hope that the social order might be made to mimic or dovetail with the natural order (Hinchman and Hinchman 1989: 201–28). This is an intriguing but ambiguous proposal, in which everything depends on exactly *how* the former should follow from the latter. If, to paraphrase Meyer (2001: 44–53), the relationship is derivative, if ‘politics’ henceforth would mean only applying natural laws to social and economic relationships, then some core values of humanism (self-determining freedom, civic engagement) would be infringed. But if the relationship is ‘constitutive’ in the sense that ecological harmony and sustainability establish the framework conditions in which politics goes forward and human freedom is exercised, then humanists should have no objection. To repeat: humanism’s commitment to freedom does not suggest that anyone should ignore the claims that objective factors such as the health of the land, wilderness, or species preservation exercise on moral agents. On the contrary, these are features of the horizon of intelligibility that make political and economic choice meaningful and non-trivial.

But the second and potentially most intractable obstacle in the way of a rapprochement between humanism and environmental philosophy has yet to be named. It is the tendency on the part of ecophilosophers to adopt some version of naturalism, to treat human existence as a seamless extension of the order of nature or what humanists call the ‘life process’. Many regard naturalism (or biologism) as the obvious conclusion from discoveries in the life sciences: ‘Darwin killed dualism and ecologists buried it. Humans were simply one of many members of a greatly expanded biotic community’ (Nash in Callicott 1987: 82). Thus, it seems, ‘man is a natural being and remains subject to nature’s laws’ (Partridge 1984: 113). Or, as Wilson (1996: 107) asserts, ‘culture is ultimately a biological product’. With naturalism as a starting point, ethics can become a branch of biology or indeed, as Wilson and Callicott would have it, of sociobiology (Callicott 1987: 198).

Unquestionably, the humanist philosophers and social theorists we have reviewed here would resist the project of treating ethics as a part of biology. We have already noted their unequivocal condemnation of naturalism, and examined some of the reasons for it. Now we must go further. No one would dispute that human beings are ‘subject to nature’s laws’, or (save a few die-hard creationists) that *homo sapiens* is descended from earlier primates, or even that human intelligence, emotional life and some rudimentary kinds of social behaviour are the products of evolution. The challenge for the life sciences as well as for humanism is to investigate the evolutionary sources of human behaviour without *reducing* the internal, symbolically mediated experiences of human affairs to an external, mechanistic set of explanations. This is a delicate task, in which the proper boundaries between humanities and sciences must constantly be maintained. The humanists cannot simply claim, *à la* Sartre, that human choices are made in a vacuum, for this is patently false. But neither is it helpful when environmental writers suggest that moral obligations to the non-

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human world can be more firmly anchored in biological 'facts' than in cultural accounts (Partridge 1984: 109). A glance at Callicott's demonstration of such obligations suggests just the opposite. He claims that humans have now evolved a special 'public affection' or 'moral sense' that has come to include duties to the entire biotic community. And what about those who, like *The Tempest's* Antonio, either 'do not feel this deity in their bosom' or ignore it? Callicott (1987: 198–9) can only retort that all 'psychologically normal' people have such feelings. In light of the ongoing destruction of the natural environment, we have to wonder how many 'psychologically normal' people there are!

In any case, humanists must reject such arguments not because they fail to ground moral obligations to nature or even people, but because they reify and objectify human existence and, indirectly, that of nature itself. The scientific enframing of ethics, indeed of human life, represents an abstraction, an artificial, detached view of a reality in which we are always already enmeshed and enthralled—as participants, partners in dialogue, speakers of language and choosers of our courses of action. Proponents of sociobiology do recognise that 'human beings live ... by symbols' (Wilson 1984: 74). Yet they hope to prove that many symbols and products of the imagination are grounded in evolutionary history (e.g., fear and awe of serpents and attraction to particular landscapes). Whatever the plausibility of such derivations, they can never completely explain our species' symbolic interactions, since these are *in toto* emergent properties, greatly overdetermined with respect to any possible biological antecedents. The move to objectivise human conduct after the manner of Callicott and Wilson also has a cost: it now becomes difficult to say why anything, human or non-human, has worth or dignity at all, if it is just part of the machinery of evolution, DNA sequences or chemical reactions. To make a case for the dignity and moral status of a human being, or of an animal species or landscape, requires not just showing that we have an instinctive attraction to it, but that such a sentiment is legitimate, rationally grounded and justified, that we ought to have it. That is a question that traditional ethics has tried to answer in manifold ways, starting with Socrates, but which biology by its very methods is incapable of answering. Callicott argues that universal ecological literacy would automatically generate an appropriate moral response to the land. No doubt it would be a good idea to teach everyone the fundamentals of ecology. But there is no more reason to hope that such knowledge would deter ecologically destructive behaviour than to expect that prospective murderers would be swayed by a better understanding of the complexity and frailty of the human body.

Wilson has reflected on this dilemma and offered a way around it. On one hand, he argues for 'consilience', the convergence of humanistic and natural scientific approaches in the human sciences (Wilson 1998: 181–237). But he also suggests that the objectivising, reductionist procedures of science are only stages in a larger movement of thought that, after analysing wholes into their component elements, eventually allows us intellectually to reassemble the biochemical

'parts' of a species' life and behaviour into the ensemble as originally perceived. This 'reassembly', he claims, is the 'ultimate goal of science' (Wilson 1998: 211). The poets take over where the scientists leave off once the 'whole' is there before them. The scientist and the humanist are therefore not adversaries; rather, their different perspectives complement one another: 'humanists are the shamans of the intellectual tribe, wise men who interpret knowledge and transmit the folklore, rituals, and sacred texts. Scientists are the scouts and hunters' (Wilson 1984: 58). In a sense Wilson's characterisation fits with the humanists' own self-understanding; however, he makes it seem as though they could not really learn anything new, but only interpret and conserve what was already known. This does not jibe with our experiences, since interpretation is – or can be – itself a form of discovery and knowledge. If the human environment is essentially constituted through language and symbol, then a new configuration of symbolic content (say an ethical theory, a historical explanation, a legal decision, or a fundamental ontology) has just as much inherent claim to be 'knowledge' as does a sociobiological theory that attempts to base ethics on Darwinian adaptation. Put differently, both humanist interpretation and scientific explanation can make claims to truth and/or validity. A theory such as Wilson's that tries to find a biological origin for altruism does not 'prove' that such conduct is ethically right any more than does one such as Kant's that sharply distinguishes the realm of natural causation from that of ethical obligation. In sum, Wilson's consilience comes at too high a price for most humanists, since it aims to replace philosophy, political theory, and other critical-emancipatory disciplines by biology.¹³ This is the same old Enlightenment-derived, scientific dream that inspired Comte while alarming Herder and Dilthey, only now expressed with greater tactfulness toward the sensibilities of the humanists.

Moreover, the domain of sociobiology, and of environmentalism in the mould of Wilson and Callicott, among others, turns out to be what Arendt and Jaspers would call the 'life process' of society: all that concerns physical survival, reproduction, territoriality, labour, etc. Indeed, the statement that we are 'part of nature' is often taken to mean that the really decisive elements in human affairs are those that have to do with the life process; everything else can be treated as epiphenomenal or derivative. Biological explanations of higher cognitive activities are then invoked to deflate the conceit that human beings can in any sense transcend their hominid ancestry. Humanists would ask at this point whether the environmentalists and sociobiologists have not got things backwards: perhaps it is because experiences that transcend consuming and reproduction have been devalued in contemporary societies that we now find the sociobiological argument so compelling. It will seem obvious to define a human being as *animal laborans* if the kind of society he/she inhabits makes any other way of life exceptionally difficult.

Finally, we have already stressed the environmentalist preference for small-scale, politicised communities that reach decisions by discussion and consensus

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rather than by leaving them to markets and bureaucrats. But the 'space' within which such politics goes on arises when human beings liberate themselves from biological necessity. As Aristotle saw, only when humankind transcends the pressure to satisfy recurrent bodily needs (the endless cycles of labouring and consuming typical of the household) does it enter into *political* life strictly speaking (Arendt 1998: 37). The politicised local community, then, generates a sphere of symbolic interaction in which the unique individuality of each participant comes to light in his or her words and deeds. Ecophilosophers cannot have it both ways: advocating an intensely politicised and democratic way of reaching decisions while dismissing deliberation, critique, and self-revelation as epiphenomena of biological drives and behaviours.

In any case, serious objections can be raised against the project of deducing or explaining environmental ethics on the basis of natural selection. In Darwin's scheme, all adaptations that are selected for have an instrumental value; they contribute to the survival or greater reproductive success of the individuals or genes possessing the trait. It is difficult to see how one could leap from the instrumental or survival value of any specific behaviour (even altruism) to the notion that we should recognise *inherent* worth in nature and should promote such desiderata as biodiversity or wilderness preservation even when our own survival or even our economic interests might be jeopardised by doing so. In fact, the great environmental writers, from John Muir to Edward Abbey, have always encouraged their readers to overcome the narrowly instrumental viewpoint and instead treat the natural world as enmeshed in the symbolic systems of meaning-creation that are the native terrain of specifically human communication and understanding. Ironically, even Wilson (1996: 174), when arguing for the preservation of species that may be useless to humankind, says that their loss would 'impoverish' the world. But, unless this is a mere tautology, he must mean that the spiritual, aesthetic or moral dimensions of human life would lose something of inestimable value if we allowed the current rates of species extinction to go on unchecked, *not* that human survival itself would be imperilled. When addressing ethical appeals to his fellow humans, Wilson recognises that he must make an argument based on metaphors that may possess meaning for his audience (poverty in money equated with poverty of species), i.e., tell them *why* the loss of biodiversity might impair the quality of their lives, instead of appealing merely to their survival instincts.

Aldo Leopold, perhaps the most influential environmental theorist of the twentieth century, points the way toward a different and more humanistic understanding of the relationships between the individual person and his/her 'others', both human and non-human. The full case for the non-scientific character of Leopold's approach has been presented elsewhere (Hinchman 1995); here we shall review only some hints and allusions. When describing his approach to the land, Leopold used some illuminating metaphors: that it was indispensable to 'understand the speech of hills and rivers' (Leopold 1991: 18)

and learn to ‘think like a mountain’ (Leopold 1966: 137–39). His field work as a naturalist led him to look for clues about the land’s past and present inhabitants, their shifting forms of coexistence, and the changes it had undergone over time. Only by knowing the *history* of a specific, local ecosystem could one tell whether its health had improved or deteriorated, all of which required exacting ‘detective work’ (Leopold 1991: 18). Shifting metaphors, Leopold once observed that ‘natural systems and species may be treated like art objects and dramatic performances’ (Hargrove and Callicott 1990: 336). Taken together (and in the context of many similar statements), such remarks suggest that Leopold thought of the land in much the same way that humanists have long depicted the texts, artefacts, and traditions that they interpret. As Oelschläger (1991: 225) points out, Leopold’s ‘vision of ecology must be ... seen as diverging from the mainstream, becoming increasingly critical, qualitative, and historical’. What transpires between the ecologist and the land is something akin to the ‘fusion of horizons’ mentioned earlier, an encounter that draws the investigators ineluctably into the circle of what they are observing and leaves a mark on their identity. Rolston, like Leopold a practicing ecologist as well as environmental philosopher, confirms and extends Leopold’s insights. Scientific laws, he avers, can never capture in individual detail all that goes in a particular place. Ecosystems have ‘history and memories’ that slip through the mesh of scientific generalisation (Rolston in Callicott 1987: 261, 266). Likewise, Worster (1993: 421), after a thorough review of the history of ecological thought, concludes that it is really closer to the humanities as depicted here than to the classical image of science as a march toward timeless truths:

A strong trend in ecology has been apparent over time: its picture of nature has been thoroughly historicised, beginning in the nineteenth century, but especially accelerating in the past two decades, until ecology has become a branch of history.

Returning to our original question, namely whether environmental theory is irredeemably committed to a naturalism or biologism that humanists must spurn, we can now conclude that it is not. We may conceive of the relationship between humanity and the land in a way that objectivises neither. ‘Reading’ an ecosystem seems to evoke many of the same virtues (Leopold especially emphasised ‘perception’) and techniques that humanists bring to bear on texts. Nash is right that ecology buries dualism, but wrong in assuming that what has been buried is the subject pole of the dualism. To the contrary, nature is drawn into the sphere of subjectivity, particularity and history that is just as much the native domain of the humanities. Of course we must and will *also* approach nature from the objectivising, temporally and spatially detached vantage point of scientific observation, but we will realise that in so doing, we are positing, by virtue of our methodological abstractions and simplifications, an object that has been artificially lifted from its highly particular ecological context (its life world in more humanistic language). What we gain by adopting the humanistic/ hermeneutical

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paradigm in ecological studies is not, as Merleau-Ponty enthusiasts might hope, a return to the 'things themselves which precede knowledge' (Abram 1996: 36) or to 'divine chaos' (Evernden 1992: 120). Learning to read the land requires a long apprenticeship in several fields of natural science; the knowledge one acquires in ecology is therefore always of a 'mediated' object suffused by 'constructed' categories. However, those categories do not all have to be ahistorical and abstract, like those of physics. Anyone who has read Aldo Leopold's evocation of the sandhill crane or the silphium flower in *A Sand County Almanac*, or E. O. Wilson's account of the bird of paradise in *Biophilia* will recognise that knowledge of one's environment does not preclude wonder, intimacy and love.

To conclude I would like to point out one last point of convergence between environmentalism and humanism. To recognise it we need to appreciate the sweeping historical project upon which environmentalism is embarked, especially in its deeper green varieties. Essentially that project is to stop and indeed reverse the inertia of industrial development, urban sprawl, profligate energy use, deforestation, soil erosion, global warming, and innumerable other environmental pathologies of modern life that have been gathering force over several centuries. Almost every variant of environmental philosophy envisions a world of lower consumption, more modest aspirations, and greater care and attention to the impact of economic and technological choices on the natural world. If humanism is about freedom, the capacity of our species, by self-reflection and political deliberation, to liberate us from reification and blind, fate-like processes, then the environmentalist project is perhaps the most humanistic ever conceived. To *cease* doing what we have done for so long and *resist* the economic, technological and moral momentum of our accustomed existence will require remarkable acts of self-reflection and self-determining freedom as well as sustained political interaction and power-generating, none of which is remotely comprehensible on the assumption that human beings are *merely* organic machines. To succeed in this project of world-remaking, environmentalism will *have to be* a humanism.

NOTES

¹ Quoted in Gruen and Jamieson (1994: 65).

² He comments elsewhere that we have been led to 'drain the remnants of subjectivity from the corpse of nature' (Evernden 1992: 91–2).

³ Even Ehrenfeld (1978: 5) admits that humanism has its good points.

⁴ It should be pointed out that in the United States a militantly anti-fundamentalist group (the North American Committee for Humanism) has attempted to interpret humanism as atheism or secularism. But this one-sided approach disregards or neglects most of the history of the concept and the views of its most illustrious advocates from the Renaissance

down to our own time (who include, incidentally, Jacques Maritain!). It is a sad commentary on the intellectual life of the United States that humanism is still embroiled in quarrels that should have been concluded a century ago. For their perspective see Tapp 2002.

⁵ In a similar vein Ophuls (1997: xii) urges readers not to evaluate his account of the Enlightenment according to strict criteria of historical accuracy in its details, but instead to judge the overall plausibility of his argument.

⁶ Herder, for example, writes, 'All of your questions about the future progress of our race ... can be answered in one word, *Humanität*' (in Flemmer 1960: 175).

⁷ For a blistering critique of Kant as the embodiment of environmentally incorrect humanism see Hoff 1983.

⁸ Herder writes, for example, 'Perfectibility is no chimera; it is the means and final aim for the development of everything the character of the human race requires and permits – *Humanität*.' In Flemmer 1960: 184. For a discussion of Herder's contributions to modern notions of self-determining freedom see Taylor 1991: 28–9, 61–3. On Herder's role in laying the foundations of the human sciences see Gadamer 1993: 9.

⁹ Including Heidegger on a list of humanists is problematic, since he rejected the term humanism as a way to characterise his own thought. Nevertheless, his opposition to it rested on the conviction that humanism did not sufficiently honour the dignity and uniqueness of human beings, but instead assimilated them to animals in such terms as *animal rationale*. For his reflections on the subject see Krell 1977: 202–4.

¹⁰ Among innumerable others, the following twentieth-century philosophers especially emphasise the convergence of *humanitas* and freedom. See Sartre in Kaufmann 1966: 287–311; Arendt 1998: 177 ('The principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before'); Charles Taylor 1991: 29; Jaspers 1951: 26–8, 43; Regal in Tapp 2002: 80 ('The idea of the pursuit of rational autonomy has long been a keystone for humanism'); Hösle 1994: 70, 78–9; Cassirer 1944: 228 ('Human culture as a whole may be described as the process of man's progressive self-liberation').

¹¹ For example, he calls for the recovery of the classical Greek notion that *pleonexia* is a character flaw that undermines our autonomy, since we become slaves to the excessive desires that drive us to acquire more and more (Hösle 1994: 78–79).

¹² See, for example, Andreas Rosenberg in Tapp 2002: 53,55.

¹³ Wilson, like many a natural scientist, expresses impatience that the social sciences have still not become 'hard' enough and continue to operate with concepts that are not derived from biology (Wilson 1998: 182, 188–90); for a humanist this sort of demand indicates a failure to understand what social science is. For a discussion see Winch 1958: 40–94 and *passim*, and Bernstein 1978: 57–226.

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