

Humanism and Nature

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Those who aim to construct links between Marxism and the green movement often look to Marx's early work on alienation as a source for a green Marxism.¹ There is an immediate apparent problem with any such attempt to marry the early Marx and the greens, viz. that Marx's early works are humanist. Doesn't humanism necessarily entail that only humans, their states and achievements, have value? And isn't this immediately incompatible with modern green thought which allows that non-humans, their states and achievements, also have intrinsic value?² This argument as it stands is too hasty. The term 'humanism' is an ambiguous one and it need not immediately entail that only the states and achievements of humans have value. Humanism can have other meanings.

Consider Maritain's characterisation of humanism: 'Humanism ... essentially tends to render man more truly human and to make his original greatness manifest by causing him to participate in all that can enrich him in nature and history.'³ Maritain presupposes in this passage an Aristotelian account of humanism: a humanist is one who holds that there is a human essence, a set of characteristic capacities and activities, in terms of which one can grasp what it is for humans to flourish; the practical goal of the humanist is to foster human flourishing. This Aristotelian view of humanism is also that presupposed by Marx in his early works. Humanism in this sense need not commit one to the anthropocentric view that only human states and achievements have value. Maritain does not contradict this Aristotelian starting point in defending a 'theocentric humanism' according to which human flourishing consists in being brought closer to a non-human being of a higher value, God. He goes on to contrast this position with what he describes as Marx's 'anthropocentric humanism'.⁴ Quite clearly Marx would reject any theocentric version of humanism. However, it does not follow immediately, as Maritain assumes, that his position is anthropocentric. There is a third possible position that Maritain fails to consider which one might call 'biocentric humanism' – that is, the view that the good life for humans involves amongst other things a recognition of the value of non-human beings in the natural world and a concern with the promotion of their well-being.⁵

Does Marx defend a purely anthropocentric humanism

or is his early position compatible with biocentric humanism? Does he assume that in characterising the flourishing life for humans, the only objects of intrinsic value to which we need to refer are the states and achievements of humans themselves? I believe it is hard to find an unequivocal answer to these questions. However, there are features of his early work that suggest that he does adhere to an anthropocentric humanism. Marx does seem to assume the same dichotomy between theocentric and anthropocentric humanism that we have criticised in Maritain and in rejecting the former he does appear to commit himself to the latter: 'The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man.'⁶ In overcoming religion humans become the object of value for humans: 'religion is only the illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself.'⁷ These claims might just be taken to be an affirmation of a this-worldly conception of human flourishing. However, there are reasons for supposing that they should be taken more literally – that Marx does conceive of human flourishing in terms of humans revolving around themselves. Running through the early works appears to be a narcissistic view of the relation of humans and nature that Marx inherits from Hegel: according to this view, their instrumental value to humans aside, non-human beings and objects only have value in so far as humans can see in them the embodiments of their own powers. This view is particularly apparent in the normative status that 'objectification' plays in Marx's theory of alienation and his related defence of the humanisation of nature.

If it is the case that the early Marx assumes an anthropocentric humanism then the early works will not prove an easy source for a green Marxism. In the bulk of this paper I examine those points which do suggest that Marx was committed to an anthropocentric humanism and I highlight problems with such a position. In developing this argument I show that the claim in Marx's early writings which is closely akin to claims made within recent green thought, i.e. that nature is 'man's inorganic body', is akin to just that part of green thought that is least satisfactory. It should be noted that it is *not* my purpose in this paper to show that there is nothing of value for green thought in Marx's early works: I believe there are passages in the early manuscripts that are

open to an ecologically benign interpretation and in the last section I will sketch such an interpretation.⁸ My claim is rather that there are central components of Marx's early thought inherited from Hegel which cannot be incorporated into a defensible ecological political theory and that, unfortunately, what is taken to be of value in his early work are often just these parts of his thought which should be abandoned.

Producer and product

Central to Marx's theory of alienation is a quasi-Aristotelian claim – that the capacity for free conscious productive activity is distinctive of the human species, and hence that the realisation of this capacity is a necessary condition for a flourishing human life.⁹ Hence alienation from labour entails that the worker cannot lead a fully human life: he or she acts freely only in the performance of animal functions:

‘Man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal.’¹⁰

It is only through engagement in non-alienated labour that humans are capable of realising those powers which are essentially human.

Central to the positive value placed on the capacity to labour is the claim that through labour specifically human powers take on an external and public form in the object of labour. All labour, in addition to issuing in objects of use-value to others, involves the *objectification* of a person's human powers:

The object of labour is ... *the objectification of the species-life of man*, for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created.¹¹

In his ‘Comments on James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*’, Marx writes of non-alienated labour that:

In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality*, its *specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, visible to the senses* and hence a power *beyond all doubt*.¹²

This view that the product of labour has value as an embodiment of the skills and capacities of the producer is often taken to be an inheritance from Hegel.¹³ However, it has its roots in Aristotle. Aristotle offers the following general account of the relationship of producer to product:

1. Being is choiceworthy and lovable for all.
2. We are in so far as we are actualised, since we are in so far as we live and act.
3. The product is, in a way, the producer of his actualisation.

4. Hence the producer is fond of the product, because he loves his own being. And this is natural, since what he is potentially is what the product indicates in actualisation.¹⁴

For Aristotle, the good life involves the active employment of our human capacities and hence we value the product of our activities since in the product we are able to contemplate the actualisation of our capacities.

The claim that the realisation of specific human capacities is a good for human beings is not one that I wish to deny. Neither do I want to deny that pride in the product of their exercise is often proper and appropriate. This much of the positions of both Aristotle and Marx appears to be right. However, it is impossible to take these claims in a narcissistic direction which is not only ethically objectionable, but also incoherent. There are grounds for thinking that both Aristotle and Marx sometimes do fall foul of such narcissism.

Consider Aristotle's account of the relation of parents to their children. Aristotle uses the relationship of the craftsman to his product as a model for his account of the relationship between parents and children.¹⁵ In both relationships the producers love their products because they are an embodiment of themselves. Just as the craftsman sees in the product the actualisation of his or her own potentialities, likewise a parent sees this in his or her child. In both cases, ‘because the producer loves his own being’, he loves the product as an actualisation of it. Hence the following remark: ‘A parent loves his children as [he loves] himself. For what has come from him is a sort of other himself...’¹⁶ Now while I don't dispute the possibility of a proper pride in one's children, there does seem to be something potentially unsatisfactory about Aristotle's position. An important aspect of a properly constituted relation of parents to children appears to be missing, namely parents' appreciation of their children for what they are in themselves, independently of what they have made of them. Self-love appears as the primary source of parents' love for their children. A parent is fond of his children ‘because he loves his own being’; the child is loved because he is ‘a sort of other himself’. The appreciation of, and love for, a child for qualities which are independent of the workmanship of the parent plays no role in Aristotle's account.¹⁷

It might be argued that the problem with Aristotle's position is an important disanalogy between producing children and producing other objects. Children are independent selves with a potential for autonomy in a way in which the inanimate objects of craftsmanship are not. Hence one can be proud of family in a way that is different from the way in which one can be proud of the products of one's craftsmanship: one is able to be proud of what they have made themselves, and not just or even primarily of what you have made them. To this point one might respond on Aristotle's behalf that there is no necessary conflict between seeing a child as an embodiment of oneself and seeing her as an autonomous agent. The process of moral education is for Aristotle not merely one of habituation to the virtues but also of the development of practical wisdom,

and one sign of persons of practical wisdom is that they do not act merely from conformity or habit, but rather from a decision to perform a virtuous action for its own sake.¹⁸ To see a person as 'a sort of other oneself' is in part to see her as a being capable of autonomy like oneself.¹⁹ But this reply is not entirely satisfactory, for it glosses over a real tension between a child's being autonomous and being an 'other oneself', for to be autonomous precisely entails a freedom to be other than an 'other oneself'. A parent who attempts to both instill autonomy and create in the child an 'other himself' is trying 'to possess a freedom as a freedom'.²⁰ The project is self-defeating. One has either to give up the notion that one's children are objectifications of oneself or surrender the value of autonomy.

However, be this as it may, the problem with Aristotle's position is not simply one of the child's potential for autonomy. Regardless of whether children are one's own work or their own, to value them only as an embodiment of one's own powers reveals a peculiarly narcissistic attitude. It is to treat others simply as a kind of mirror in which we can admire our own capacities and powers. Such an attitude involves a failure of appreciation of the value persons have in virtue of their own qualities. Moreover this attitude is incoherent, for justifiable pride is dependent on such independent value: no proper pride is possible for the production of children who are moral monsters no matter what the skills that went into their making.

This last line of criticism is as true of the relation of workers to their products as it is of parents to children. To value an object simply as an objectification of one's powers and capacities is also peculiarly narcissistic: it is to treat objects simply as mirrors in which we can contemplate our own powers and involves a failure to appreciate the value the objects have independently of their being an embodiment of such powers. This attitude is also incoherent. Justifiable pride felt by a craftsman for his or her product is again dependent on such independent value. If the object is in itself worthless then little, if any, proper pride in being its creator is possible. Thus, for example, a gigantic stack of playing cards embodies great skills, but like many of the achievements recorded in the Guinness Book of Records, the product itself is of little independent value; hence also the limit in justifiable pride in comparison, say, with the skills embodied in the production of the Sistine Chapel. To value an object simply as an embodiment of one's skills is to fail to understand even the value of those skills themselves. The proper relationship is this – 'I'm good because I made this product and it is good' – and not the self-indulgent – 'I'm good because I made this product and it is good because I made it'.²¹

There are two possible rejoinders that might be made to this argument. First, it might be objected that the problem with the Guinness Book of Records achievements is that the kinds of skills involved are normally limited and insignificant. If one assumed that more significant skills were involved in the production of a gigantic stack of playing cards, then my claims would be less defensible. The product would be considered of value, and it would be so simply in

virtue of the skills it embodies. This response fails however: the significance and value we place on different skills itself depends on the value we independently place on the objects in which they issue. Hence, the undoubted physical skills involved in balancing cards one upon another do not count as significant or valuable in the ways that those involved in carpentry do.

Second, it might be argued that what distinguishes significant and insignificant achievements is not dependent on the value of the products in which they issue, but purely the social esteem assigned to different activities. But this reply fails for reasons that Aristotle himself develops. The concept of social esteem, like that of honour, is parasitic on the existence of goods for which such esteem is deserved. We hold in esteem those who have done something worthy of esteem. Correspondingly, the aim of individuals in pursuing honour is 'to convince themselves that they are good'. Hence it is simply incoherent to take honour and esteem to be themselves ultimate goods. They can only be derivative on other goods in virtue of which esteem is received.²²

My arguments this far have focused on Aristotle rather than Marx. However, they apply also to Marx's treatment of labour which follows the same narcissistic direction as that of Aristotle. Marx, like Aristotle, sees the relationship of worker to product primarily as one of self-objectification. The product is valued as an embodiment of the powers and capacities which we can contemplate in it. Thus, in communism 'our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential natures'.²³ The narcissistic treatment of the relationship of producer to product is most clearly apparent in Marx's treatment of the proper relationship of humans to nature. In consequence Marx's humanism takes an anthropocentric turn.

Marx, humans and nature

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, the relationship of the worker to his or her product outlined above is generalised by Marx to provide an account of the relationship of human beings to the natural world. Nature has value in virtue of its possibilities for the objectification of human capacities. Thus Marx writes of objectification that 'through ... production nature appears as *his* work and his reality'.²⁴ In communist society '*all objects* become for him the *objectification* of himself, become objects which confirm and realise his individuality, become *his* objects'.²⁵ Humans live in a '*humanised* nature'.²⁶ These remarks are not among Marx's clearest. In what sense can *all* objects become objectifications of an individual activity? The most uncharitable reading of these remarks would involve ascribing to Marx the view that in communism humans will leave no object untouched by human activity. Given such an interpretation not only is the humanisation of nature undesirable, it is also impossible. Claims about the end of nature notwithstanding, humans are not capable of directly transforming everything in nature. The claim, sometimes imputed to Marx, that 'nature is socially constructed',²⁷ is likewise

false. While it is undoubtedly true that humans have had an enormous influence on the natural world, an influence to be increased still further through the changes to the global climate, it does not follow that nature is a human construction. That A influences B does not entail that B is A's construction.²⁸

Is there a more charitable interpretation of these remarks? One aspect of the humanisation of nature for Marx is the transformation of nature by human industry:

the history of *industry* and the established *objective* existence of industry are the open book of man's *essential powers*. ... We have before us the *objectified essential powers* of man in the form of *sensuous, alien, useful objects*, in the form of estrangement, displayed in ordinary material industry.²⁹

It is in industry that we find the 'actual historical relationship' of nature to man.³⁰ However, it is not only in the actual production of objects that nature is humanised – only a small part of the natural world can be directly shaped by human industry into human products. Also involved is the potential of nature to form the material for objectification. Thus Marx describes nature as man's 'inorganic body – both in as much as nature is (1) his direct means of life and (2) the material, the object and instrument of his life activities'.³¹ However, to ascribe to Marx a view of nature simply as material for industry would be mistaken. Marx explicitly distances himself from a narrowly utilitarian view of nature as the means for the satisfaction of basic material needs: such a view merely reflects the alienated condition of humanity. The humanisation of nature in communist society has an aesthetic dimension, a point Marx develops in his remarks about the 'emancipation of the senses'.

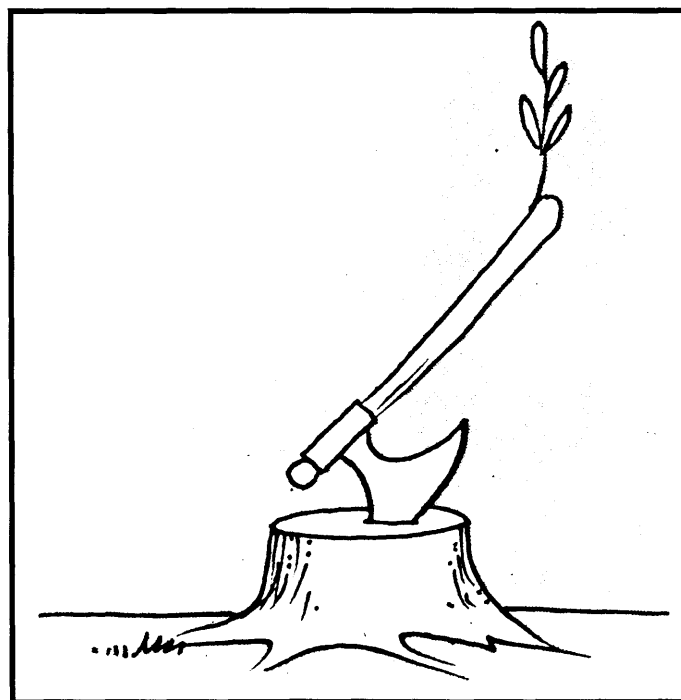
In producing aesthetic objects we develop our senses: we develop a 'human' eye and ear distinct from the 'crude non-human' eye and ear; for example, 'only music awakens in man the sense of music.'³² (Similarly Marx remarks later in the *Grundrisse* that 'an objet d'art creates a public that has aesthetic taste and is able to enjoy beauty'.³³ Individuals driven by poverty to satisfy only basic needs, or by the market to think always in terms of the commercial value of objects are unable to develop the human senses to the full; hence 'the emancipation of the senses' in communism. For Marx, then, it is through the creation of new aesthetic objects that specifically human senses are developed – an aesthetically receptive eye and ear. So how does the development of an aesthetic sensibility humanise nature? Again I take it that Marx cannot be claiming that nature is humanised simply in the sense that it is actually transformed into artistic objects. Only a small part of nature is thus altered. Furthermore, Marx does not deny the possibility of aesthetic appreciation of non-human objects: he refers elsewhere to natural objects 'plants, animals, stones, air, light' as 'objects of art' and hence as part of man's 'spiritual inorganic nature'. What, then, is Marx claiming in these passages?

Marx's point appears to be that the development of the

aesthetic senses through artistic production humanises nature in the sense that it *creates* aesthetic value in natural objects. Natural objects take on aesthetic properties only through human productive activities. In defending this position Marx presupposes an Hegelian account of the aesthetics of nature, that any beauty that can be ascribed to natural objects is derivative on the aesthetic value of works of art.³⁴ There are at least two versions of this claim:

- (1) Only works of art have aesthetic properties properly speaking. We attribute surrogate aesthetic properties to natural objects and scenes by viewing them *as if* they were works of art.³⁵
- (2) Natural objects of aesthetic value are themselves indirect embodiments of the work of artists. To give a standard example often cited in this regard, the English romantic poets and artists on this view did not discover but rather created the beauty of the English Lake District. By making natural objects the object of poetry, painting and other artistic activity they developed an aesthetic sensibility for such objects and *hence* also gave aesthetic value to them. Hence the aesthetic value of nature is derivative on the activities of the artist. Thus, all objects which have aesthetic value exhibit indirectly the powers and capacities of the artists from whose activities their value derives. The English Lake District is in part the embodiment of the artistic activity of Wordsworth.

Both versions of the Hegelian aesthetic are consistent with Marx's view that the natural world is humanised by artistic production. The consequence of this position is that in appreciating natural beauty we appreciate our own powers. As Croce puts it: 'As regards natural beauty, man is like the mythical Narcissus at the fountain.'³⁶ That view, for all its current popularity, is even less convincing than a narcissistic account of the value of the products of human skills. Artistic production may help us notice the aesthetic proper-



ties of natural objects to which we were blind, it may in that sense educate the eye and ear, but it does not follow that artistic production thereby creates such properties. Nor does it follow that we can appreciate the aesthetic qualities of natural objects only by treating them as if they were works of art or the embodiment of the skills of an artist. Such a view is forced. A proper aesthetic appreciation of objects in the natural world is just that – the appreciation of those objects for the aesthetic properties which *they* possess and to which we have learned to respond.³⁷

While Marx's account of 'humanised nature' is not narrowly utilitarian and has an aesthetic dimension, the appropriation and appreciation of nature is still conceived in terms of a response to human productions. It remains the case that nature has value only in so far as it directly or indirectly embodies human powers or forms the raw material on which human powers might be realised. Objects are valued in terms of their potential for the manifestation of human capacities. The claim that nature should be humanised exhibits a 'species-narcissism'³⁸ which is akin to the kind of narcissism to be found in Aristotle's account of the relation of producer to product. Humans value nature as an object in which they can actually or potentially contemplate the embodiment of human capacities and powers. Hence the view, central to much recent green thought, that some non-human entities in the natural world have intrinsic value appears to be ruled out by Marx's position. Marx's humanism is an anthropocentric humanism which does not allow for a biocentric set of values.

Marx, Hegel and Alienation from Nature

Marx's failure to entertain the notion of intrinsic value in natural objects stems in part from his having inherited from Hegel a view that humans need to be reconciled to nature, that the alienness of nature is itself a problem. Humans need to come to feel at home in the natural world. Thus for Hegel, the story of the fall of man is the story of the schism of man and nature,³⁹ and the progress of Spirit is the story of their reconciliation. He writes thus of the aims and nature of the philosophy of nature:

the specific character and goal of the Philosophy of Nature [is] that Spirit finds in Nature its own essence. ... The Study of Nature is thus the liberation of Spirit in her, for Spirit is in her in so far as it is in relation, not with an other, but with itself. This is also the liberation of Nature; implicitly she is Reason, but it is through Spirit that Reason as such first emerges from Nature into existence. Spirit has the certainty which Adam had when he looked on Eve: 'This is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone'.⁴⁰

Now Marx clearly rejects Hegel's idealist solution to the problem of reconciling man and nature. Nature is not an embodiment of Spirit. However, he does not reject Hegel's problem – that there is something wrong with alienation between man and nature, that humans need to feel at home in the natural world. Rather, he offers a different solution.

Reconciliation is possible through the humanisation of nature by means of human labour so that we are able, in reality, to see human powers objectified in the external world.⁴¹ Hence, communism is 'the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature.'⁴²

The problem here is Marx's acceptance of Hegel's problem in the first place. There are a number of real problems surrounding the relation of humans to nature which are becoming increasingly pressing – problems of pollution, the disappearance of species, resource depletion and so on. However, Hegel's problem – that we are alienated from nature in the sense that we cannot see ourselves in it – is not one of them, and the solution to it that Marx envisages, the humanisation of nature, looks more like a contribution to the problems humans face in their attitude to and activities in the natural world than a contribution to a proper relation between humans and nature.

The idea that 'alienation from nature' is a problem that needs to be overcome is one element of Marx's early work that has appeared to be particularly relevant to modern environmental thought, as has one route for solving it – the fuzzing of the boundary between self and nature.⁴³ But what is wrong with alienation from nature? An answer to this specific question demands an answer to the more general question: what is wrong with alienation? The use of the term 'alienation' in a critical sense involves the claim that things which belong together have become separated from each other: correspondingly, overcoming alienation involves reconciliation between divided entities. In considering whether alienation between two entities *x* and *y* is objectionable we need to specify in what sense *x* and *y* belong together and relatedly what is wrong with their having been separated. Consider the case of relationships between humans. Marx, like Hegel, does not criticise all forms of separation between people: specifically, separation in the sense of individuals having a developed sense of their own identity as individuals is not a problem, but rather an achievement of alienation, something that is to be retained when alienation is overcome in the post-capitalist community. The forms of separation that capitalism engenders of which Marx is critical are more specific. They include the following: that people are placed in conflict and competition with each other, that they are hostile to each other, that they treat each other purely as a means to their own ends and not as ends in themselves, that the relations between them are impersonal, that they are indifferent to each other.⁴⁴ Marx's criticisms hinge on the claim that, if it were possible, a social world without such features, but in which individuals retained a sense of their individual identities, is better than both one in which communities are such that individual identities disappear altogether and one in which one's sense of identity is achieved only through relationships having the features noted. In answering the question 'what is wrong with alienation?' we need to consider the specific forms of separation the term is being used to characterise. Thus, in relationships between humans, *prima facie*, conflict and *purely* instrumental relations between individuals are objectionable. On the other

hand, the claim that there is something wrong with relations which are impersonal or involve a degree of indifference between individuals is more problematic: it is true that not all relationships with others should be like this, but that some are of this kind seems harmless if not beneficial.

Turning to the relations between humans and nature, what forms of separation are objectionable here? That we have a clear sense of our own individual identity is as desirable in our relation to nature as it is in our relations with other human beings. However, this entails resisting just that component of Marx's work which appears to be most compatible with recent green thought, that is the claim that nature is our 'inorganic body'. This aspect of Marx's treatment of relations between humans and nature is one that has a strong resonance with some current work in environmental ethics which has appealed to ecology in order to fuzzy the distinction between self and the non-human world. Compare for example the following remarks of Holmes Rolston:

Ecology does not know an encapsulated ego over and against his or her environment. ... The human vascular system includes arteries, veins, rivers, oceans and air currents. Cleaning a dump is not different in kind from filling a tooth. The self metabolically, if metaphorically, interpenetrates the ecosystem. The world is my body.⁴⁵

The treatment of the world as my body provides a simple solution to problems concerning duties to the environment: they become a species of duties to oneself. As Callicott puts it, if ecology implies the 'continuity of self and nature' then: 'If the self is intrinsically valuable, then nature is intrinsically valuable. If it is rational for me to act in my own best interest, and I and nature are one, then it is rational for me to act in the best interest of nature.'⁴⁶ Marx's view that nature is our 'inorganic body' has been employed to similar effect: 'It is natural for man, the conscious social being, to act rationally and consciously for the good of all species, which is his own long range good (since nature is his body).'⁴⁷

However, this solution to the problem of justifying duties to the environment should be rejected on at least two grounds. (1) Nothing in the science of ecology entails that there is no significant division between an individual organism and its environment. Ecology studies the relationships between different populations that are made up of just such individual organisms. It entails no radically holistic ontology. Hence it does not entail that 'I and nature are one' or that 'the world is my body'.⁴⁸ (2) The view is ethically untenable. While it appears to give an easy route to duties to the 'non-human' world, the duties it provides are too weak. Duties to oneself are in significant ways *less* stringent than duties to others. Thus, while it may be foolish, and perhaps also a dereliction of one's obligations to oneself, to smoke, take no exercise, let one's teeth rot and generally abuse one's body, abuse of the bodies of others is an altogether more serious affair. What is permissible in the former case is impermissible in the latter. Likewise, to say



that filling a dump is like filling our own teeth is to permit ourselves much weaker grounds for so doing than if the dump is considered a part of an independent world inhabited by others. It is in virtue of the fact that the non-human beings have separate identities and are not simply extensions of ourselves that we have the duties we have to them. Only such recognition makes sense of environmental concerns. If I am concerned about the fate of a colony of birds it is not because they are an extension of me. It is a concern for individuals for *their* sakes and not my own. To treat nature as my inorganic body is to fail to acknowledge the ways in which individuals in non-human nature have their own identities and their own distinct natures, deserving of treatment appropriate to their natures. Marx's view of nature as our 'inorganic body', together with those 'holistic' components of recent green thought to which it is similar, should be rejected.

Moreover, not only is the non-human world distinct from ourselves, it is also in important senses alien to us in ways that are not objectionable and which we could not overcome even if it were desirable to do so. For example, that nature is impersonal and indifferent to human concerns and needs is not something that humans are capable of changing. As Passmore notes:

The philosopher has to learn to live with the 'strangeness' of nature, with the fact that natural processes are entirely indifferent to our existence and welfare – not *positively* indifferent, of course, but *incapable* of caring about us – and are complex in a way that rules out the possibility of our wholly mastering and transforming them.⁴⁹

Nature's strangeness and indifference to our concerns is not only something that we cannot overcome, but is also something that we ought not even to attempt to overcome. The assumption that the discovery of nature's impersonality and indifference is something to be regretted, a cause of the 'disenchantment of the world',⁵⁰ needs to be rejected. It is based on an assumption that the only entities which we can value are those that are capable of reciprocating such

attitudes to ourselves. The assumption that we can care only for those capable of caring for ourselves reflects an anthropocentric set of values. The depersonalisation of nature represents not a disenchantment of the world but the basis for a proper enchantment with it. Appreciation of the strangeness of nature is a component of a proper valuation of it.

There is in any case a necessary regulation between ethical concern for an object and true beliefs about it: proper concern for an object *x* presupposes the possession of a core set of true beliefs about *x*. This is not just because if one has false beliefs about *x* concerned actions for *x* are likely to be misplaced, true as this is. It is also that if one has systematically false beliefs about *x*, there is a sense in which *x* is not the object of one's concern at all. Hence the justifiable complaint lovers sometimes make on parting: 'You never really loved me; you loved someone else you mistook me for.' A similar complaint can be made of those in green movements who insist on an anti-scientific, mythologised and personalised picture of the natural world: the natural world simply isn't the object of their concern.

Returning to Marx's Hegelian problem – that we do not feel at home in the world in the sense that we do not see in the non-human world embodiments of human powers and capacities – surely this also is not a form of separation about which we have grounds for complaint. It is rather an occasion for celebration. Consider John Muir's opposition to the damming of the Hetch Hetchy Valley on the grounds that wild mountain parks should be 'saved from all ... marks of man's work'.⁵¹ The appeal here is to the value wilderness has in virtue of its not bearing the imprint of human activity. Wilderness, empty mountains, the stars at night, the complex behaviour of non-human living things – all have value as objects of contemplation in part in virtue of their lacking any human significance. Their indifference to our interests, concerns and projects, together with the absence in them of any signs of human presence, is a source of their value. We value the non-human world because we do not want to see in everything the mirroring of human powers or possibili-

ties for human activity. The problem which Marx is concerned to solve by the 'humanisation of nature' is no problem at all. The separateness of nature in the sense in which it is not an embodiment of human powers is not a source of disvalue but of value. There is, in this particular sense, no conflict between man and nature for which communism need be a solution.

Postscript: An ecologically benign interpretation?

In the opening section of this paper I stated that it is difficult to come by an unequivocal answer to the question of the kind of humanism assumed by Marx. In this paper I have argued for a particularly anthropocentric interpretation of Marx's early views on the relation of man and nature. In doing so I have placed particular stress on his remark that in communist society all objects are to become objectifications of human powers, and I have assumed that the humanisation of nature must be read in terms of such a generalised objectification. It is possible however to place a more benign interpretation on the phrase 'humanisation of nature'. Nature might also be said to be humanised in the sense that we are able to understand its properties and appreciate its qualities. We are at home with the world in the sense that we are able to grasp and value the order it exhibits through science and the arts. There are passages in Marx's early work that would support this position. Thus in referring to nature as man's 'spiritual inorganic nature' Marx writes that 'plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc. theoretically form part of human consciousness, partly as objects of science and partly as objects of art'.⁵² Furthermore he writes a few paragraphs later of human production 'applying to each object its *inherent standard*; hence man also produces in accordance with the laws of beauty'.⁵³ The notion that objects have their own inherent standards of beauty that appears to be presupposed by this remark is incompatible with the Hegelian aesthetic I ascribed to Marx earlier and suggests a less anthropocentric position. The passages are compatible with a biocentric humanism according to which to become fully human involves the development of our capacity to grasp nature's qualities and value. Such a position is akin to that found in Aristotle's biological writings which are markedly less anthropocentric and narcissistic with respect to the natural world than are his ethical and political works:

In all natural things there is something wonderful. And just as Heraclitus is said to have spoken to his visitors, who were waiting to meet him but stopped as they were approaching when they saw him warming himself at the oven – he kept telling them to come in and not worry, for 'there are gods here too' – so we should approach the inquiry about each animal without aversion knowing that in all of them there is something natural and beautiful.⁵⁴

It may be, then, that Marx's humanism is open to a more ecologically benign interpretation, and I have developed such an interpretation in detail elsewhere.⁵⁵ The picture of



Marx that emerges is one which allows for considerably more value to the contemplative virtues than is standardly assumed in interpretations of Marx, not least that presented in the rest of this paper. There are some grounds for the complaint that the interpretation of Marx developed in this paper is uncharitable and, it should be added, still stronger grounds for saying that Aristotle receives a raw deal.⁵⁶ And it is well to remember that it is Marx's early notebooks with which we are dealing, not fully articulated and published positions. However, whatever the merits of the benign position thus attributed to Marx – and I believe they are considerable – on the most charitable reading of Marx's works it cannot be unequivocally said to be his. The interpretation is not easy to square with much in Marx's texts and is at odds with the Hegelian context of the early works. Thus even some of the 'benign' passages cited in this section suggest an anthropocentric position: for example, Marx maintains that humans 'must first prepare' nature before it can be enjoyed as part of spiritual life and mention of aesthetics remains tied to a discussion of productive activity. While the view that emerges on a benign interpretation is that we ought to adopt, I am not convinced that it is that which Marx held.⁵⁷

Notes

- 1 See for example D. C. Lee, 'On the Marxian view of the relationship of man and nature', *Environmental Ethics* 2, 1980, pp. 3–16; and P. Dickens, *Society and Nature* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1992), chapter 3.
- 2 On the claim that nature has intrinsic value see J. O'Neill, 'The varieties of intrinsic value', *The Monist* 75, 1992; and *Ecology, Policy and Politics* (Routledge, London, 1993), chapter 2. For arguments against humanism, see S. Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 7ff. and 135ff., although Clark allows that 'true humanism' can be biocentric (*ibid.*, p. ix). Cf. T. Benton, 'Humanism = speciesism: Marx on humans and animals', *Radical Philosophy* 50, 1988, pp. 4–18.
- 3 J. Maritain, *True Humanism* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 5th edition, 1950), p. xii.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 19ff. and chapter 2.
- 5 I sketch a defence of this position in J. O'Neill, 'The varieties of intrinsic value', *The Monist* 75, 1992. Cf. S. Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. vii–x and 183–186.
- 6 K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), p. 182.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- 8 I develop this interpretation in more detail in O'Neill, 'Science, wonder and the lust of the eyes', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* forthcoming, and *Ecology, Policy and Politics* (Routledge, London, 1993), chapter 9. I should add that there is also much in the later writings that deserves more attention than it has received: see O'Neill, 'Future generations: Present harms', *Philosophy* 68, 1993, pp. 35–51, and *Ecology, Policy and Politics* (Routledge, London, 1993), chapters 3 and 10.
- 9 See K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, especially p. 274ff. in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975).
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 227.
- 13 The source is normally taken to be Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in particular in the discussion of labour in the section on the master-slave dialectic (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Miller trans., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 118ff). For criticism of the standard view see C. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
- 14 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. Irwin), Indianapolis, Hackett, 1985, 1168a5–10. 10.1097b24–1098a6.
- 15 *Ibid.* 1167b34ff. See also J. Benson, 'Making friends', in A. Loizou (ed.) *The Good of Community: Essays in Greek Moral and Political Philosophy* (London: Gower, forthcoming) and Milgram, 'Aristotle on making other selves', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 17, 1987, pp. 361–376, both of whom argue that the producer-product model outlined here applies also for Aristotle to relationships between friends.
- 16 *Ibid.* 1161b27ff.; cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 1371b20ff.
- 17 Similar points might be made with respect to Hegel's treatment of children as objectifications of the love of their parents. Thus Hegel writes of the unity he takes couples to realise through marriage that 'It is only in the children that the unity itself exists externally, objectively, and explicitly as a unity, because parents love the children as their love, as the embodiment of their own substance' (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. Knox, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, para. 173, my emphasis). In the addition to this passage, Hegel remarks that, in their children, parents 'can see objectified the entirety of their union. In a child, a mother loves its father and he its mother. Both have their love objectified for them in the child' (*Ibid.*, para. 173A). In their children parents can contemplate in an external and public form their love for each other.
- 18 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a13–20.
- 19 A similar defence might be made of Hegel: the aim of education in the family is to realise the child's potentiality for freedom which brings with it the dissolution of the family (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, paras. 175–177).
- 20 The phrase is Sartre's (J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, London, Routledge, 1969, p. 367).
- 21 My thanks to Russell Keat for this formulation of the argument. This mistake runs through a number of versions of expressivist accounts of art.
- 22 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b24–29. Compare MacIntyre's criticisms of the social world portrayed by Goffman in A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 2nd edition, 1985), pp. 115–117.
- 23 Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 228.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 303.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 302.
- 27 See for example P. Dickens, 'Towards an environmental social theory', paper given to 'Realism and the Human Sciences' Conference, Sussex University, 1991. The claim that nature is a social construction is open to a conceptual reading, according to which the natural world is 'a blank sheet of paper which can be inscribed with any message, and symbolic meaning, that the social wishes' (K. Tester, *Animals and Society*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 46). This kind of conceptual idealism is not relevant here since it is foreign to the work of Marx. I should add that I see no grounds to take it seriously: the arguments standardly presented in its defence provide good examples of use-mention confusions.
- 28 This point is made by V. Routley, 'On Marx as an environmental hero', *Environmental Ethics*, 3, 1981, p. 239. Routley herself does assume the uncharitable interpretation of Marx outlined and rightly rejects it. However, as I show, more charitable interpretations are possible.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 302.

- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 303.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 275–276. Cf. K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), chapter VII, para 1, pp. 173ff.
- 32 Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 301.
- 33 K. Marx, *German Ideology* (ed. C. Arthur) (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p. 133.
- 34 Hegel, *Aesthetics* (T. M. Knox trans.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), chapter II. For a useful discussion of this claim see S. Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 13ff. and R. Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 161ff.
- 35 See for example B. Croce, *Aesthetic* (London: Vision Press, 1967), p. 99. (Hence his odd claim that the landscape appears an ideal spectacle 'if we contemplate it through our legs'.)
- 36 Croce, *Aesthetic*, p. 99.
- 37 Compare I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 84ff. See also Sibley's observation that aesthetic interest in artistic objects is dependent on prior natural responses to everyday objects. It is only on the basis of these that we are able to begin to learn and apply aesthetic concepts. (F. Sibley, 'Aesthetic concepts' in C. Barrett (ed.) *Collected Papers on Aesthetics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1965, p. 86ff.). While art can and does develop aesthetic sensibilities, the non-derivative applicability of aesthetic concepts to natural objects is a precondition for the possibility of aesthetic education.
- 38 The phrase is also used by T. Benton, 'Humanism = speciesism: Marx on humans and animals', *Radical Philosophy* 50, 1988, pp. 4–18.
- 39 Hegel, *Logic*, Part One of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (W. Wallace trans.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, para. 24, esp. p. 42ff.
- 40 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, Part Two of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (A. Miller trans.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970, para. 2462, p. 13.
- 41 Cf. C. Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 550ff.
- 42 Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 296.
- 43 Central to much recent green philosophy has been the idea that ecology, together with the 'new physics', entails a radically new holistic perspective which undermines the separation of self and natural world and provides the basis for a new ethic. See for example C. Spretnak and F. Capra, *Green Politics* (London: Paladin, 1985), chapter 2; and A. Naess, 'The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movements', *Inquiry* 16, 1973, pp. 95–100. See also footnotes 44, 45 and 47. As will emerge below I believe that this component of green thought should be rejected, a point I also develop in O'Neill, 'The varieties of intrinsic value', *The Monist*, 75, 1992. For a powerful statement of the opposite view according to which nature's separation from us is the source of an environmental ethic, see P. Reed, 'Man apart: An alternative to the self-realization approach', *Environmental Ethics* 11, 1989, pp. 53–69. While Reed's position is closer to that defended here, his anti-humanist elaboration of this view is not one I share.
- 44 See C. Gould, *Marx's Social Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1980) and R. Keat, 'Individualism and community in socialist thought' in J. Mepham and D.-H. Ruben (eds), *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, Vol. 4: *Social and Political Philosophy* (Brighton, Harvester, 1981).
- 45 Holmes Rolston, 'Is there an ecological ethic?' in *Philosophy Gone Wild* (New York: Prometheus, 1989), p. 23.
- 46 J. B. Callicott, 'Intrinsic value, quantum theory and environmental ethics', *Environmental Ethics* 7, 1985, pp. 257–275.
- 47 D. Lee, 'On the Marxian view of the relationship between man and nature', *Environmental Ethics* 2, 1980, p. 16.
- 48 For a development of criticisms of recent 'ecological holism' see the excellent discussions in R. Sylvan, 'A critique of deep ecology', *Radical Philosophy* 40 and 41, 1985, especially Part II, pp. 10–12, and A. Brennan, *Thinking about Nature* (London: Routledge, 1988), chapters 5–8.
- 49 J. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, 2nd edition (London: Duckworth, 1980), Appendix p. 8.
- 50 The term is Weber's for whom the process of rationalisation of modern society which includes the development of modern science represents a disenchantment of the world: see, for example, Gerth and Mills (eds), *From Max Weber* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), pp. 139f. and 357.
- 51 Cited in R. Dubos, *The Wooing of the Earth* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), p. 135. Compare Marshall's comment: 'A person might die spiritually if he could not sometimes forsake all contact with his gregarious fellowmen, and the machines which they have created, and retire to an environment where there was no remote trace of humanity' (cited in S. Fox, *The American Conservation Movement*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1895). See V. Routley, 'On Marx as an environmental hero', *Environmental Ethics* 3, 1981, pp. 237–44, for a similar point. This is not to deny that some more humanised parts of nature have value. In Britain, for example, where nearly all of the natural environment bears the imprint of human activity, the result in some places has been complex eco-systems with greater internal diversity than that which would exist without human intervention.
- 52 Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 275.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 276.
- 54 Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, Book I, chapter 5, 645a 16ff. While in the *Politics* (1256b 17) Aristotle defends a clearly anthropocentric view of the non-human world – plants exist for the sake of animals and animals for the sake of humans – there is in Aristotle's philosophical work the foundations of a more ecologically benign position. It is not surprising that some of the best classical writing of the natural world is that of his student Theophrastus whom Hughes, with good reason, has dubbed 'the father of ecology' (J. D. Hughes, 'Ecology in Ancient Greece', *Inquiry*, 18, 1975, pp. 115–125).
- 55 See J. O'Neill, 'Science, wonder and the lust of the eyes', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, forthcoming, and *Ecology, Policy and Politics* (Routledge, London, 1993), chapter 9.
- 56 Hence, it might be said, with some justice, that Aristotle has received less than fair treatment in this paper, that his remarks on production and child-rearing which are central to his arguments have been taken out of context. In particular, the passage in which he argues production is valued as an actualisation of our potentialities (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1168a 5–9) provides just one example of the actualisation of human potentialities. In book x of *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues that human potentialities are realised more fully in acts of contemplation. Moreover, in such acts we are closest to the life of the gods. It might be argued that acts of contemplation can involve precisely the appreciation of what is marvellous in the non-human world. Maritain rightly notes that here is a theocentric component to Aristotle's thought (J. Maritain, *True Humanism*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 5th edition, 1950, p. xi). We might add that there are also suggestions of a biocentric component. I have argued in detail elsewhere that a broadly Aristotelian account of well-being provides the best foundation for a satisfactory view of proper ethical concern for both non-humans and future generations (J. O'Neill, *Ecology, Policy and Politics*, London, Routledge, 1993).
- 57 Earlier versions of this paper were read to seminars at Kent University, Liverpool University and Sussex University. It has also benefited from discussions with members of the philosophy department at Lancaster University. I would particularly like to thank John Benson, Stephen Clark, Andrew Collier, Roger Crisp, Terry Diffey, Russell Keat, Luke Martell, Andrew Mason, Joe McCarney, David McLellan, Sean Sayers and Frank Sibley for their comments and conversations.