Towards a cooperative autonomy

If the environmental threat looming on the horizon is as great as it appears to be, and if, as we have reason to believe, we are presently trapped within an environmentally hazardous dynamic (or, at the very least, if it would be collectively rational for us to act as if we were so entrapped), then what political practice is required of us? The environmentally hazardous dynamic depicted in Figure 6.1 follows from the State-Primacy Theory (modelled in Figure 4.1). But in identifying the state as the principal problem, and in thereby requiring as a solution its abolition, the theory is an anarchist one. This might suggest that it is some form of anarchist political practice that is required of us.

Unfortunately, ‘anarchism’ has had a very bad press; and not surprisingly, for it is hardly in the interests of the state to have its panoply of ideological apparatuses portrayed in an attractive light. We have seen in the previous chapter that the State-Primacy Theory could employ functional explanations to account for prevailing ideologies. If, as such an extended State-Primacy Theory would claim, the educational system and the mass media1 chosen are functional for the state, then they are unlikely to paint an anti-state approach couleur de rose. And from this perspective, it is unsurprising that a common stereotype of anarchists as bomb-throwing maniacs should predominate. Certainly, a small number of anarchists have, in the past, subscribed to ‘propaganda by deed’. But, historically, it would seem that a far greater number of bombs have been thrown by nationalists, not to mention the uncountable number that have been dropped on civilians by states. Moreover, many anarchists are pacifists. And it would be a great injustice simply to condemn them as murderous terrorists, especially when it has been suggested by more than one historian that the most infamous acts of terrorism attributed to anarchists, such as the Haymarket bombing in Chicago on 4 May 1886, were actually carried out by agents provocateurs.2

Nevertheless, given that attitudes towards anarchism are, in the main, extremely negative, calling a perspective ‘anarchist’ is a sure-fire way of inviting a quick dismissal. Anarchist arguments are frequently dismissed, often far too quickly, because of common perceptions of what ‘anarchism’ signifies. But most common conceptions of ‘anarchism’ are, it can be argued, misconceptions. So, let me begin this final chapter by trying to assuage one or two of the fears and suspicions that the label ‘anarchist’ might evoke. I shall attempt to do this in the course of addressing several philosophical issues which arise as a result of certain claims made by some who describe themselves, or are described by others, as ‘anarchists’. One is the actual definition of ‘anarchism’. A second is the relationship between anarchy and chaos. And a third is the relationship between anarchists and other parts of the political spectrum – in particular, economic ‘libertarians’ such as Robert Nozick.3

7.1 Some comments on ‘anarchism’
First of all, the word ‘anarchy’ derives from the Greek word ἀναρχία, which itself derives from the negative prefix ἀ- (meaning ‘without’) and ἀρχή (meaning ‘rule’ or ‘government’). Just as ‘monarchy’ means ‘government by one’, and ‘oligarchy’ means ‘government by the few’, so ‘anarchy’ literally means ‘without government’ or ‘government by no one’. Hence, an anarchy would appear to be some form of stateless society. It would seem to be a society where no group has sustained power over another group (with possible exceptions, such as children or the mentally disabled).

This much at least seems clear. But ‘anarchy’ is often identified with ‘chaos’. Yet given that ‘anarchy’ derives from ‘without government’, and not from ‘chaos’, the common presupposition that ‘anarchy’ means chaos is not an uncontested definition; rather, it is a political conclusion. ‘Anarchy’ is often assumed to mean chaos because it is usually presumed uncritically that without government, chaos would follow. Put another way, many simply assume that a condition without government would, of necessity, cause chaos. But given that many tribal peoples seem to have lived for thousands of years in some measure of peace and harmony without being subject to anything which most Western political theorists would regard as a government,4 such a political conclusion cannot simply be taken for

1 One frequently heard claim is that, in the West, we enjoy a ‘free press’. But not only are the organs of the media either owned by a small number of very rich individuals (whose interests appear to correspond with those of leading state personnel) or by the state itself, the media is often directly controlled by the state in ways that many members of the public do not seem to realise. In Robin, for example, news items may easily be suppressed by the serving of a ‘D-Notice’ if their publication is deemed not to be in the national interest (read: ‘not in the state’s interest’). I have heard journalists claim that reporting of environmentally-motivated direct action has, on occasion, been suppressed, just as news of race-riots has been. One might suspect, just as in the latter case, in order to avoid the spread of ‘copy-cat’ actions.


granted. However, it is clear in the state’s interests that its citizens do take such a political conclusion for granted.

Of course, from the standpoint of the State-Primacy Theory, extended to incorporate ideological state apparatuses within its complex of functional explanations, it would not be surprising if educational systems and mass media functional for the state were to attempt to inculcate into its citizens the belief that ‘anarchy’ should be defined as chaos, for that would be an effective method of prejudicing them in advance against anarchy. And by conceptually restricting political discourse, ideological state apparatuses could rule out by definitional fiat many of the most radical criticisms which might otherwise be levelled against the state. This suggests that if we are to remain alert to the possibility of exploiting certain radical criticisms of the state, we should resist defining ‘anarchy’ as chaos.

As ‘anarchy’ is thus a contested term, considerable disagreement abounds concerning what exactly an anarchist is (and not least among people who call themselves, or are called by others, ‘anarchists’). Minimally, an anarchist would appear, at first glance, to be one who opposes anarchy. And, as we have just seen, from the standpoint of an extended State-Primacy Theory, it is understandable that many people (including a number who call themselves anarchists) should identify anarchy with chaos. Thus, whereas stators, not surprisingly, often conflate an absence of government with an absence of order, and hence have a tendency to label as ‘anarchists’ many of those whom they disagree with regarding the level of authority which should be imposed upon society, even some self-styled ‘anarchists’ identify anarchy with chaos – the difference being that they happen to like the idea of chaos. But if the presupposition that a lack of government would necessarily lead to chaos is false, then any such notion of what it is to be an ‘anarchist’ is simply confused. In which case, confusion might be avoided by labelling those with a penchant for disorder ‘nihilists’, instead of ‘anarchists’.

Certainly, those who happen to like the idea of chaos could cite, in justification for calling themselves anarchists, an everyday, ordinary language definition of ‘anarchy’ which simply equates it with chaos. But, as we have seen, this might be the result of ideological manipulation. Moreover, the Oxford English Dictionary, which sees some value in identifying the roots of English words, includes the definition ‘absence of government’. Hence, even relying on (what might be viewed as) an establishment-biased definition would still make the advocates of chaos at most only one kind of anarchist. Furthermore, they would comprise a kind with which it is difficult to have much sympathy, for the simple reason that few of us would want to see our fellow human beings subjected to chaos. It is doubtful that many of them would benefit from it.

Restricting the use of the term ‘anarchist’ to those I have suggested would better be labelled ‘nihilists’ seems unhelpful, then, for there is no reason why those who have a predilection for disorder should own a monopoly on the word ‘anarchist’, especially when they may well claim their monopoly on the basis of ideological circumscription, definitional confusion or a lack of familiarity with ethnographies of acephalous societies (or of accounts of Andalusian and Catalonian Spain during 1936 – another case often cited by anarchists as evidence for the possibility of a social order without government).

On the other hand, those who are part of the organised anarchist movement – ‘fully-paid-up anarchists’, as it were – have a tendency to restrict the use of the term ‘anarchist’ to other active members. In other words, they tend to confine the description ‘anarchist’ to members of anarchist groups. Such groups seek to bring about a society in which there is no government – a society which these groups believe will be a considerable improvement on the present one. But limiting the label ‘anarchist’ to members of anarchist groups might also be thought to be too restricting because it does not seem that there is anything self-contradictory about referring to those who oppose the state, yet choose not to belong to an anarchist organization, as anarchists. For example, if someone dislikes those who happen to be in the movement (perhaps because certain misconceptions of ‘anarchy’ attract towards anarchist groups some people with personality disorders), and so does not join an anarchist organization, yet argues for and/or fights for a condition of anarchy, then it seems odd not to call him or her an anarchist just because he or she refuses ‘to join the club’.

However, it is possible to have not just restricted but also wider notions of ‘anarchist’. Having argued against two restricted definitions of ‘anarchist’, I am left seeking a wide definition6 but not wide in the sense employed by several stators. I see no reason for including everyone who is not an outright authoritarian under the rubric ‘anarchist’. It is useful to be able to distinguish between...

5 John Clark prefers what is, perhaps, the most restrictive conception of ‘anarchism’, while allowing that those excluded might be ‘anarchists’ in a looser sense: ‘In order for a political theory to be called “anarchism” in a complete sense, it must contain: (1) a view of an ideal, noncoercive, nonauthoritarian society; (2) a criticism of existing society and its institutions, based on this antiauthoritarian ideal; (3) a view of human nature that justifies the hope for significant progress toward the ideal; and (4) a strategy for change, involving immediate institution of noncoercive, nonauthoritarian and decatatist alternatives.” John P. Clark, “What is anarchism?”, Freedom, Vol. 40, No. 3 (1979), p. 13. Clark is surely right that anarchism as a coherent political philosophy is likely to comprise four such elements. And, admittedly, if the political theory in question is to be regarded as a variety of anarchism, then it must assume that “noncoercive, nonauthoritarian and decatatist alternatives” to the state are possible. But it is doubtful that all varieties of anarchism have to assume that such alternatives can, in practice, be introduced immediately. Surely, one could, conceivably, subscribe to a gradualist version of anarchism. Moreover, couldn’t one be an anarchist of a sort (or liberal, or conservative, for that matter) without having either a coherent or a fully comprehensive political philosophy?

6 Given a wide definition of ‘anarchist’, then anarchists can be divided into many different varieties. Eltsbach, for example, identifies (a) anarchist teachings as in general genetic, critical, idealistic, eudaemonistic, altruistic or egoistic; (b) anarchist prescriptions for the future as federalistic or spontaneous; (c) anarchist notions of law as anomolistic or normistic; (d) anarchist views of property as individualistic or partly doministic (the latter being partly individualistic or partly collectivist); and (e) anarchist strategies as reformatory or revolutionary (the latter being remissive or insistent). See P. Eltsbach, Anarchism: Exponents of the Anarchist Philosophy (New York: Libertarian Book Club, 1966), pp. 200–202.
different political creeds, and lumping together too many different colours of the political spectrum can hardly serve the cause of clarity. Some liberals are not too fond of excessive government; but that does not mean that they are complete opponents of the state.

7.1.1 Anarchism and the minimal state

However, mention of liberals gives rise to an important issue. It is often assumed that anarchists must always be closer to liberals than to state socialists. For example, consider the following remark by Henry David Thoreau: "I heartily accept the motto, - "That government is best which governs least," and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe, - "That government is best which governs not at all". This might be taken to imply that having a minimal state is the next best thing to having no state.

Yet, in a number of ways, many anarchists can be closer to those who desire a very large state than to those who desire a minimal state. Many state socialists desire economic equality. They often seek a large state in order to redistribute wealth and to cater for the needy. Many anarchists are also egalitarian with regard to the distribution of wealth. However, they usually believe that the state exists to protect inequalities or to serve itself. Such anarchists frequently claim that if the state were to be abolished, then great inequalities could not so easily be perpetuated, and society would be much more equal. State socialists are thus criticized by many anarchists because the latter usually believe that if the state is employed ostensibly to create equality, then it will serve its own interests in the process. And equality will not be the end result.  

What is worth noting is that many anarchists thus appear nearer to state socialists with respect to the goal of economic equality than they are to those who desire a minimal state in order to allow the private accumulation of wealth. (This is why it might not be wholly misleading to place most anarchists on the left of the political spectrum.) A state which merely existed to protect property rights, and which did nothing about redistribution towards equality, would probably bring about a situation (namely, considerable inequality) which was far worse than that produced by the welfare state. In other words, as paradoxical as it might at first seen, many anarchists are in a number of important ways closer to maximalists than they are to minimalists.

One implication of this is that it is not true that for all anarchists the less state the better. For those who are extremely concerned about inequality, more state action (if it is a welfare state) could be regarded, in certain circumstances, as preferable to less state action (if it is a state like Nozick argues for - one that is restricted primarily to the protection of private property). But clearly, the most preferable condition for anarchists would be that of no state at all. Nevertheless, regarding economic equality, a condition of 'no-state' could be considered to be closer to one of 'more state' than either would be to one of 'less state'. And that is one very good reason for not confusing anarchists with liberals or economic libertarians - in other words, for not lumping together everyone who is in some way or other critical of the state. It is also a good reason for thinking that calling the likes of Nozick an 'anarchist' is highly misleading. In other words, genuine anarchists do not just argue for less state. Ultimately, they are content with nothing less than no state.

It is also worth noting that just as 'anarchy' is not coextensive with 'chaos', neither does it necessarily imply being able to do anything one likes. There are, apparently, a number of self-styled 'anarchists' who assume that this is precisely what all anarchist doctrines justify. For them, being an anarchist involves doing whatever they please without restriction and without taking others into account. Certainly, if one wishes to be free to do as one likes, then (unless one happens to be at the head of the state) one cannot consistently desire any effective government. But that is not to say that a society without government has to be one in which anyone is free to do anything be or she likes irrespective of anyone else. Just as it is difficult to have much sympathy for nihilists, it is difficult to sympathise with those who regard anarchism as a justification for their own self-centredness.

One reason for having sympathy with the anarchist position is that if anarchists are

9 Kropotkin, for one, regards equality as the fundamental principle of anarchism. See Peter Kropotkin, 'Anarchist morality' in Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets (New York: Dover, 1970).

10 Nozick's minimal state is confined to providing security, enforcing contracts and preserving property. This is only minimal with respect to the number of its functions. In failing to provide welfare, it would most likely require a massive coercive apparatus to protect the inequalities that would inevitably arise. Hence, ironically, a minimal state might end up having more personnel and being more costly than a welfare state. And in being more coercive, a minimal state would be all the more objectionable to anarchists. I am grateful to Jerry Cohen for drawing my attention to this point.

11 See, for example, David Miller, Anarchism (London: Dent, 1984), which is one of the most academically respected books on anarchist thought, yet which includes an account of Nozick. Interestingly, certain Marxists have been content to call Nozick an 'anarchist' and have also been happy to allow him and so-called 'anarchist-capitalists' to appropriate the term 'libertarian'. (On the origins of this term within anarchist discourse, see Chapter 2, note 54, above.) To have anarchists who are economic egalitarians lumped together with Nozick is clearly functional for state-socialism. For just as the 'capitalist state' has an interest in fostering misconceptions of its critics, so, too, does the 'socialist state'.


8 Some also argue that the institutionalization of care is counterproductive, and that a genuine community care would be far more beneficial than anything offered by faceless, professional bureaucrats, who merely do a job without any real feeling for their clients - a point acknowledged, for example, in Peter Singer, 'Reconsidering the sanctity relief argument' in Peter G. Brown and Henry Shue (eds.), Food Policy: The Responsibility of the United States in the Life and Death Choice (New York: The Free Press, 1977). Genuine community care, of course, would be very different from providing no care under the guise of placing care back into the hands of the community.
right in believing that the state causes the major social and environmental problems which we seem to face, then anarchy might allow improved relations between people and their environment. And wanting that is rather different from not wanting to have to take others into account.

7.1.2 An alternative conception of ‘anarchism’

How, then, ought we to understand the term ‘anarchism’, in the sense of a political belief system? As ‘anarchy’ literally means ‘without rule’ (thus signifying a situation in which no person rules over another), then a condition of pure anarchy might be thought to consist in a complete equality of political power – perfect political equality, as it were. But, many would object, if anarchists seek pure anarchy in this sense, then, quite simply, they are seeking the unattainable. In any practicable social arrangement, some people are bound to possess more power than others.

However, anarchism is not the only political belief system which appears at first sight to be incoherent in so far as its adherents seem to be seeking the unattainable. Egalitarianism has been dismissed on similar grounds. If egalitarians are seeking perfect equality (which, it is often assumed, means that everyone is to be made exactly the same), then, many would object, they are seeking the unattainable. However, John Baker has challenged the view that egalitarians are seeking perfect equality (in this sense). Rather, in his view, egalitarians merely oppose certain substantive inequalities. And if ‘egalitarianism’ is construed as the opposition to certain substantive inequalities, then it is not so easy to dismiss.

Perhaps, then, ‘anarchism’ should be interpreted in a similar way. Perhaps, not all anarchists should be dismissed out of hand for attempting to bring about pure anarchy. Rather, anarchists might perhaps be more profitably viewed as those who oppose certain substantive political inequalities, and not merely economic ones. For anarchists usually most oppose certain inequalities in political power, just as ordinary egalitarians usually most oppose certain inequalities in economic power. And the most significant political inequalities, for

12 The principles of equality which, according to Baker, egalitarians generally wish to defend are the following: First, everyone’s basic needs ought to be met. Second, everyone deserves sufficient respect for mobility and patronizing attitudes to be unacceptable. Third, massive income differentials should not exist, and some should not be forced to spend their lives confined to unpleasant work. Undesirable tasks ought, instead, to be shared out. Fourth, power should be more equal so that those who are presently powerless have greater control over their own lives. Fifth, different treatments based on colour, sex, culture, religion or disability ought to be opposed. In Baker’s opinion, egalitarians usually wish to defend these five principles. Thus, in his view, the demand for equality is not a demand for one simple thing, such as the same income for everyone. Rather, it is a demand for a number of substantive inequalities to be removed. See John Baker, Arguing for Equality (London: Verso, 1987), pp. 4–5. However, while Baker does mention inequalities in power, which includes political power, most egalitarians have tended to focus their opposition on inequalities in economic power.

anarchists, would seem to be those which flow from centralized, authoritarian forms of government.

This suggests that ‘anarchism’, as a political belief system, might best be construed as having both a normative and an empirical component. Anarchism could be viewed as containing a normative opposition to certain substantive political inequalities, along with the empirical belief that political equality (in the sense of an absence of specific, substantive political inequalities) is inevitably undermined by state power.13 Given the normative component, anarchism can thus be regarded as a form of egalitarianism – political egalitarianism. However, many of those who advocate representative democracy would also regard themselves as political egalitarians. It is the second feature which would distinguish anarchists from others who claim to value political equality – namely, the empirical belief (which most of those who describe themselves as ‘anarchists’ tend to hold) that centralized, authoritarian forms of government (including varieties of representative democracy) cannot deliver political equality.

Thus, given the conceptualization of ‘anarchism’ proposed here, for an individual to be an anarchist, he or she would have to hold both the normative opposition to certain substantive political inequalities and the empirical belief that they principally derive from, or are preserved by, or are embedded within, certain centralized forms of power.14 Hence, all anarchists, on the proposed definition, oppose the state. But that should not be confused with an opposition to society. Nor should it be confused with a rejection of all of the rules that a society might need – for example, moral rules. In fact, most anarchists are highly moral.15 Consequently, when discussing anarchism, it is extremely important to realize that ‘without rule’ does not have to signify ‘without rules’, nor does it have to mean a lack of structure. What is surely crucial to any version of anarchism worth its salt is that

13 It is interesting that Joseph Raz should emphasize ‘the intrinsic desirability of people conducting their own life by their own lights’, and then proceed to admit that ‘the validity of a claim to authority . . . is hard to make’. However, as he immediately adds, ‘if anarchism is right to think that it can never be made, this is for contingent reasons and not because of any inconsistency in the notion of authority, nor in the notion of authority over moral agents’.

14 And it seems to me that this conception of what it is to be an ’anarchist’ captures all of the classical anarchist theorists, including William Godwin, Max Stirner, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, as well as more recent anarchists such as Paul Goodman, Noam Chomsky, Colin Ward, Nicholas Walter and Murray Bookchin. Moreover, it avoids anarchists having to offer attempted defences of seemingly indefensible views, such as feeling compelled to advocate a society without any power relations or authority whatsoever.

15 For one interpretation of several of the major anarchist theorists which stresses the central role of morality in their thought, see George Crowder, Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991). However, Crowder’s claim that the classical anarchists subscribed to the positive conception of freedom seems to me to be mistaken. See my review of Crowder’s book in Political Studies, Vol. 43, No. 3 (1995), p. 216.
the anarchist structures it proposes be empowering to those within them, and do not lead to a centralization of power or decision-making. Even with those restrictions, the possibilities for anarchist social organization are clearly far greater than those of anarchism as commonly portrayed in popular stereotypes of anarchist practice.

7.2 Creating cooperative autonomy

Let me then, turn to the question of anarchist social organization. A common view of anarchism is that, as it assumes that we would have a far better society without a state, then it is a political philosophy which concludes that in order to bring about a desirable society, it is merely sufficient to abolish the state.16 This is an assumption which deserves examining, as does a closely related one — namely, that the state must be abolished prior to any effort at embarking on the formation of a truly desirable society.

Anarchists have forwarded impressive reasons in defence of the claim that a society without a state would be preferable to the one which we presently inhabit. They have provided telling criticisms of statist societies and statist solutions to social problems.17 They have pointed out that when states are employed to provide a solution, they usually give rise to far greater problems than they are designed to solve. Many states have argued that without a state, it would be impossible to settle disputes. Anarchist theorists have replied that there are far simpler solutions to such problems (for example, by rotating arbitrators), and that permanently armed bodies charged with the task of settling disputes inevitably settle them in a way which is to their own advantage and to the disadvantage of those who are subsequently rendered powerless.18 Many authoritarian states have argued that without a state there would be nothing to keep order, and violence would be widespread. Anarchists have justifiably insisted that it is difficult to imagine greater violence or disorder than that resulting from warring states. Institutionalized violence is probably the most worrying kind. Besides, the study of

16 This is a perception shared by a number of those who today call themselves "anarchists". It is particularly common among those who have a very limited understanding of the complexity of anarchism. Moreover, given that this is a popular stereotype of anarchism, it merits consideration.


18 Anarchists would add that this problem is not merely confined to the concentration of coercive forces in a few hands. It also extends to the concentration of expertise. As Bakunin writes: 'A scientific body to which had been confided the government of society would soon find itself no longer to science at all, but to quite another affair; and that affair, as in the case of all established powers, would be its own eternal perpetuation by rendering the society confined to its care ever more stupid and consequently more in need of its government and direction.' Michael Bakunin, God and the State (New York: Dover, 1970), pp. 31–2. Bakunin had in mind socialist state-planners, but his criticism might equally apply to a body of ecological experts in whom society had entrusted its governance.


20 It can also be argued that the commodity of previously altruistic social relations can undermine them. See, for example, Richard M. Titmuss, The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970). Also see Peter Singer, "Aversion and commerce: a defense of Tiitmuss against Arrow", Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1973), pp. 312–20. To the extent that the state plays a role in such commodification, anarchists could legitimately deploy this argument.
destroy its old form. Creation necessarily implies destruction. We cannot create without destroying. In order to create, it is necessary to destroy. This seems uncontentious. The mistake that can be made lies in assuming that this truism necessarily refers to a chronological, rather than to a logical, order. The fallacy arises when one jumps to the conclusion that if one is to create, then one must first destroy. But that is not entailed by the proposition:

(D-C) In order to create it is necessary to destroy.

This proposition does not entail that destruction must precede creation, for the reason that the old form could be destroyed quite simply by an act of creation. It is not that one must be destructive before one can be creative, because one can be destructive by being creative.21 Of course, it might be the case that certain institutions prevent the creation of a new form, and that the only way that a new institution could arise is by first destroying the restricting institution. But whether or not this is so is an empirical matter. It cannot be presumed a priori that all of the old institutions have to be destroyed before a new form can arise, simply because creation necessitates destruction. In certain cases, it is conceivable that the prior destruction of the old form would make it more difficult, if not impossible, for a particular new form to arise.

Are certain self-styled anarchists right, then, to presuppose that destruction of the old social order must precede, rather than be an aspect of, the setting up of a new social form? They are not right to presuppose it a priori on the basis of creation necessitating destruction, as we have seen. What empirical claims, then, could they offer in support of their belief that destruction must precede creation?

One argument common amongst many anarchists is that human beings are naturally good or cooperative, and that they are only evil or uncooperative because of the society in which they live.22 Specifically, the existence of the state is argued to engender uncooperative behaviour. To take one example, the state protects private property, and the institution of private property can be argued to result in persons viewing each other as isolated property holders, rather than as sharing members of a community. Private property and the market can easily be argued to result in competitive and uncering behaviour. Were the state (which enforces the institution of private property) to be removed, so the argument goes, then people would naturally cooperate. Or, to take another example, people are not usually made more caring and cooperative by being conscripted into an army and then trained to hate and kill other people.

However, if we are to feel confident that just abolishing the state is adequate for a new and desirable order to arise safely, then we would have to know that people are naturally cooperative, otherwise something which is even worse than a statist society might arise in its place—perhaps real chaos. But how could the claim that people are naturally cooperative be established? We do not have any examples of individuals outside of any society (except, perhaps, for children who have been brought up by wolves—though they seem more to exhibit the characteristics of wolfish society than natural human behaviour, whatever that is). How, then, can we ascertain what a 'natural' human being is like? More to the point, if people are made competitive because of the state, as this anarchist argument suggests, then social forces must affect human behaviour. Furthermore, the fact that people in different cultures behave in a different manner must suggest that socialization plays, at the very least, a significant role in character formation. How, then, can it be presumed that were the state to be abolished, people would be naturally anything other than that which the state had encouraged them to be while it existed—namely, as many anarchists allege, uncooperative, hierarchical and authoritarian?23 Hence, the problem is that if competitive and statist societies produce uncooperative people, how can it be assumed that, merely by smashing the state, such products of undesirable societies will automatically cooperate? One possible argument is that, even in competitive societies, a great deal of cooperative behaviour takes place when institutions do not get in the way.24 There certainly are impressive examples of cooperation without, and even in spite of, the state. Unfortunately, any number of positive examples is insufficient to prove that without a state people would be able to cooperate satisfactorily. This is because the logic of the social situation is such that one bad example seems to weigh far more than a hundred good ones. Consider the need for mutual trust and honesty if a society is to operate in an acceptable manner. Today, in our society, we cannot leave our doors unlocked just because a large number of our neighbours reveal a remarkable degree of honesty. One dishonest neighbour is sufficient to ensure that distrust, rather than trust, abounds. Similarly, any number of impressive examples of cooperative behaviour are insufficient to establish that, without the state, people would naturally cooperate to the necessary degree.

As examples of cooperative behaviour are insufficient to establish that abolishing the state is all that is required, where does that leave us? If people are not all

21 In Hindu mythology, the Dance of Shiva signifies the perpetual round of destruction and creation, and 'Maya' means the illusion of the world. Hence, if the Dance of Shiva is presumed by necessity first to have destructive and then to have creative movements, it would indeed appear to be a form of Maya.

22 See, for example, Peter Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution (Boston: Extending Horizons Books, n.d.).

23 Kropotkin argues: 'Equality in mutual relations with the solidarity arising from it, this is the most powerful weapon of the animal world in the struggle for existence.' Kropotkin, 'Anarchist Morality', p. 99. According to Kropotkin, for the species to survive, people have naturally evolved into cooperative individuals. Thus, a sense of solidarity would prevail were it not for the social structures that we inhabit and which prevent us. But this is to acknowledge that we are, to some extent at least, socially conditioned. In fact, Kropotkin clearly admits this when he discusses the case of Jack the Ripper, whom Kropotkin sees as the product of circumstances. But in this case, how are we to ascertain what is natural? If people are to some extent the product of social circumstances, how are we to know what they would be like naturally?

24 See Kropotkin, Mutual Aid. Also see Colin Ward, Anarchy in Action (London: Freedom Press, 1982).
naturally good and cooperative, that doesn’t mean that they are naturally evil and uncooperative. Surely, the many examples of cooperative societies show that this is not the case. People appear to be socialized into being either cooperative or uncooperative depending upon the social structures into which they are born and in which they live and work— in other words, depending upon how other members of their society relate to them. In our society, most people are socialized into being very uncooperative. In that case, it does seem rather utopian to assume that such individuals will naturally cooperate once the state is smashed.

7.2.1 Anarchism and pre-figurative forms

Ought we, therefore, to reject anarchism? That would be far too hasty. Certainly, we ought to doubt the assumption made by some who claim to be anarchists that smashing the state is sufficient for a cooperative anarchist society to emerge. When most of the great anarchist theorists were writing— such as Godwin, Proudhon and Bakunin— the majority of Europeans were peasants, and the state played a relatively insignificant part in their lives. As their behaviour at harvest time indicates, peasants were obviously able and willing to organize themselves cooperatively. That is not obviously true of most of us today. Society has changed fundamentally since the middle of the nineteenth century. We have all been subject to state education, for one thing. For another, we are all used to state provisions for health, as well as state provisions for security. And interestingly, such state provisions are clearly functional for the state in so far as they encourage its citizens to believe that the state is essential for their well-being.26 Thus, many individuals, faced with the collapse of the state, would undoubtedly want nothing better than for a new one to arise, and would probably fight to establish a new state. But even so, that does not leave anarchists in a hopeless position. All it means is that anarchists ought to think carefully about the destruction of the state.

Let me return to the assumption that in order to create one must first destroy. I argued that one can, instead, destroy by creating. And there, perhaps, lies the answer. By creating prefigurative anarchist forms— by creating new social organizations which incorporate anarchist social relations— then the old order could, perhaps, be challenged. In short, to the extent that particular social forms were effective in socializing people towards cooperation and autonomy, then they could be expected to develop individuals who would neither support the state nor seek a new one should the present order be abolished.

So, although the destruction of the state is unlikely, on its own, to result in a desirable anarchist society, the creation of social forms which socialized people towards cooperation and autonomy could allow them to evolve into precisely the sort of individuals capable of creating a viable anarchist society.27 If individuals seek their own autonomy, but in asserting their autonomy find themselves incapable of working together, then their desire for an anarchist society is bound to be frustrated. Just as any attempt to set up a participatory democracy seems to require of us that we learn democratic skills, any workable anarchy seems to require the acquisition of cooperative skills. If people are not naturally cooperative anarchists, then perhaps what anarchists should be doing is not just trying to smash the state, but, instead, organizing alternative social structures which socialize people towards cooperation and autonomy. In other words, anarchists might actually serve anarchism more effectively by constructing social structures which would enable those individuals who chose to enter them voluntarily to cooperate together on a free and equal basis. If people are not naturally cooperative anarchists, then simply abolishing the state would not be the fundamental task for anyone sympathetic to anarchism. Rather, it would first be to create the conditions most appropriate for a desirable form of anarchy— what might be called a ‘cooperative autonomy’.

What prefigurative anarchist forms might serve such a purpose? Possible candidates for appropriate organizations and structures are workers’ cooperatives, communes and municipal direct democracies, where individuals can freely choose to organize themselves on a cooperative basis, and where many serious anarchists are active. These structures could, conceivably, provide the preconditions for a workable anarchy.28 But one condition that is likely to be raised against this line of reasoning is that the state would, as a matter of empirical fact, prevent the emergence of prefigurative anarchist forms. The state does not, at present, prevent the formation of workers’ cooperatives or communes. But that is not to say that, were the anarchist potential of these cooperatively autonomous forms to become more evident, the state would not inhibit their formation.

However, if such cooperatively autonomous structures were seen by the mass of the population as offering the only viable escape route out of the environmentally hazardous dynamic portrayed in Figure 6.1, then the state might be unable to prevent their proliferation. On the other hand, if the state deliberately and overtly inhibited the growth of prefigurative anarchist structures, then the

26 C.f.: “That government is best which governs not at all,” and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.” Thoreau, ‘Civil disobedience’, p. 88.

people might feel that they had no alternative but to reject the state. In order to survive, they might feel compelled to abolish it, or, at the very least, to resist it through engaging in civil disobedience.

Most importantly, collective civil disobedience directed against the state — for example, environmentally-motivated, non-violent direct action (NVDA) — could conceivably empower those engaged in it while simultaneously disempowering the state. When practised in a certain way, engaging in NVDA can, by itself, lead to autonomous cooperation becoming the norm among activists. One means of engaging in civil disobedience which has been favoured by many within the environmentally motivated direct action movement, and which might be thought especially appropriate for socializing individuels towards cooperative autonomy, is participation within "affinity groups" — small groups of activists who know each other well, reach collective decisions about actions, and who offer each other mutual support. As Graham Baugh, one proponent of such groupings, writes:

While the affinity group constitutes the most basic unit of an ecological society, direct action constitutes the social practice by which individuals assert their ability to control their own lives. Direct action is not just a tactic, but the political expression of individual competence to directly intervene in social life and manage social affairs without any mediation or control by bureaucrats or professional politicians. The individual takes direct action instead of relying on someone else to act for him or her. The action encompasses a wide range of activities, from organizing cooperatives to engaging in non-violent resistance to authority. The affinity group is an excellent vehicle for direct action, which places moral commitment above positive law. It is not meant to be a last resort when other methods have failed, but the preferred way of doing things. It enables people to develop a new sense of self-confidence and an awareness of their individual and collective power. Founded on the idea that people can develop their social competence and ability for self-rule only through practice, it proposes that all persons directly decide the important issues facing them.28

28 Graham Baugh, 'The politics of Social Ecology' in John Clark (ed.), Renewing the Earth: The Promise of Social Ecology (London: Green Print, 1990), pp. 100-101. And as Baugh adds: 'In the political sphere, this implies the practice of direct democracy. Instead of relying on elected representatives, people make political decisions themselves in general assemblies.' Ibid., p. 101. Some of the advantages affinity groups offer those engaged in non-violent direct action are the following. When individuals act within a team of friends sharing similar views, who remain in very close proximity to each other during an action: (1) it is less likely that individuals will be picked off by police or security guards and arrested or assaulted; (2) it is far more difficult for agents provocateurs to infiltrate an action or, should they successfully join an affinity group, cause trouble while participating in the action, as they would more likely be contained by the rest of their affinity group; (3) it is less likely that the level of violence would escalate, as activists would not feel lost and isolated within a hysterical crowd and would be far less likely either to panic or to engage in inappropriate displays of bravado; rather, they could expect to experience mutual support from the rest of their group; and (4)

In short, self-organized environmentalist opposition to the state can, in the process, generate prefigurative anarchism forms capable of socializing individuals towards a cooperative autonomy.

All of the above argument is consistent with anarchist goals, even though it raises a number of objections to certain assumptions held by some self-styled anarchists. But are the above considerations consistent with the major tenets of anarchist political theory? Probably the most central theoretical claim made by numerous anarchists is that the state is the cause of the major social ills which we encounter. But does the claim that it is not necessarily sufficient to smash the state entail that the state is not, in fact, their cause, and, therefore, that anarchist theory is mistaken? No, because the state may well be the immediate cause of major social problems, even if it is not their ultimate cause.

Causal relations are, ordinarily, transitive. If A causes B, and B causes C, then it is usually permissible to regard A as causing C. Hence, anarchists may well be right to consider the state as the cause of major social problems. But it might also be the case that the state itself is the effect of other factors. And these factors could well cause the state to arise, which, once having arisen, would then be the cause of the major social ills. If this is in fact the case, then abolishing the state (the immediate cause) without getting rid of the ultimate cause may prove to be an ineffective strategy. For such an ultimate cause could either reconstitute the state, or give rise to even greater problems than those which we currently experience. In which case, any effective strategy would need to focus on the ultimate cause, for doing so could simultaneously address both the immediate cause (the state) and the problem of the re-emergence of those social problems which the state itself causes.

Well, what might be the ultimate, rather than the immediate, cause of social ills? What is it that gives power to the state? It would seem that there are a number of factors, rather than one straightforward ultimate cause. One possible factor underpinning state power is the authoritarian and hierarchical attitudes which prevail in our society. Not only do these attitudes support the state, their persistence would most likely lead to the re-emergence of the state or some even worse phenomena were the state just simply to be smashed without such attitudes being transformed. Hence, it is not surprising that anarchists have laboured hard to challenge authoritarian and hierarchical attitudes, especially through their work in the field of libertarian education.29

Another possible factor underpinning state power is the situational logic which the more volatile individuals would tend to be calmed down by the more sober group members. For a brief account of the useful role affinity groups can play in civil disobedience, see the direct action handbooks produced for the attempted occupations of the construction sites of the Sahlens nuclear power station. For a comprehensive account of the theory and practice of NVDA, see Gene Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action, 3 vols. (Massachusetts: Porter Sargent, 1973).

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the more volatile individuals would tend to be calmed down by the more sober group members. For a brief account of the useful role affinity groups can play in civil disobedience, see the direct action handbook produced for the attempted occupation of the construction site of the Searborough nuclear power station. For a comprehensive account of the theory and practice of NVDA, see Gene Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action, 3 vols. (Massachusetts: Porter Sargent, 1973).
appears to act upon state personnel. Even those in a conscript army usually feel obliged to obey their commanders. This might be the result of the individual isolation which individuals can find themselves experiencing within such organizations. Hence, those occupying powerful positions within repressive state apparatuses might ordinarily be able to rely on each subordinate disciplining any other because of their mutual "diffidence" (to borrow a term from Hobbes). If no one can trust anyone else not to report him or her out of fear of also being reported (and then executed), who would dare suggest rebellion? Consequently, it is not surprising that many anarchists have worked within the pacifist movement, promoting non-violent alternatives to militarized forms of "defence".

Yet another possible factor underlying state power is the technology, and the desire for the technology, which the state can utilize. Not only does weapons technology support state power but also certain "peaceful" forms of technology seem to have statist implications. An anarchist society based on nuclear power would strike few of us as being particularly feasible. There is little doubt that the nuclear police, with the special powers they have been granted, are not a purely accidental phenomenon. The risk of terrorists seizing plutonium, for example, appears to justify repressive measures and levels of secrecy that would be difficult to defend otherwise. Indeed, given the clear social implications of "peaceful" nuclear technology, it is not surprising that the state should actively support the development of it, in appearing to demand a secret, 'expert', hierarchical state, it is functional for just such a state. Not surprisingly, therefore, many anarchists have been active in the 'alternative technology' movement, and in environmental politics generally.

Each of these factors — ideology (which can be fostered through certain ideological apparatuses, such as the state educational system), situational logic (which pertains to the state's repressive apparatuses), and particular forms of non-convivial technology — appears to be functional for the kind of state which could be expected to be implicated in the environmentally hazardous dynamic of Figure 6.1. Their presence would thus seem to require the acknowledgement of additional interrelations within any theory attempting to model the state system, for state power can be argued to be perpetuated by all three factors (see Figure 7.1). And anarchists thus have grounds for opposing each of them.

What all of the above suggests is that if we want to be sure of surviving within a society comprised of autonomous, cooperating individuals, living in an environmentally benign and sustainable way, then not only would we have to reject the state, we would also have to render inoperative whichever factors give rise to it and perpetrate it. It thus seems that we would have to undermine authoritarian and hierarchical notions. It seems that we would have to build up trust and community so that it would be more difficult for the powerful to base their power on our mutual diffidence. And it seems that we would have to think very seriously about what kind of technology is appropriate not just to an environmentally sustainable society but also to an anarchist one. Without the factors that support the state, it is difficult to see how the state could persist. With such factors remaining in play, it is easy to see how a state, once dismantled, could later reconstitute itself. But then, if indeed we are entrapped within the environmentally hazardous
dynamic depicted in Figure 6.1, the reconstitution of the state would start the
dynamic rotating all over again.

Hence, should we respond to these factors? As there is reason to think that
they would tend to be undermined by the prefigurative anarchist forms men-
tioned earlier, then if we are to reduce the risk of any continuing enslavement
within an environmentally hazardous dynamic, it seems that we ought to promote
such forms. Participating in both workers’ cooperatives and environmental direct
action, for example, can lead to the rejection of authoritarian and hierarchical
attitudes and practices. It can create mutual trust and overcome the diffidence we
feel towards each other.

In short, that a desirable anarchist society could be created by merely smashing
the state without first creating such prefigurative forms, or, more realistically,
without employing them in the process of dismantling the state, would seem to
be wishful thinking. By creating such prefigurative anarchist forms, we may well
thereby dismantle the state. But were we to dismantle it without creating such
prefigurative forms, we would probably just end up producing another state.
Thus, instead of asserting that we must destroy in order to create, certain self-
styled anarchists might serve the anarchist cause better by directly seeking to
create. And that is something which several of the classical anarchist theorists
seem to have been well aware of.

7.3 A green vision
What kind of a society, then, should we be trying to create? In order to elide the
environmentally hazardous dynamic depicted in Figure 6.1, and on the basis of
the arguments deployed in previous chapters, it seems that we require a society
which is simultaneously libertarian and egalitarian. Only such a society would
appear to be a genuinely environmentally benign one. But is such a society even
conceivable? To many people, the epithet ‘libertarian’ seems to suggest an indi-
vidualist society, while ‘egalitarian’ suggests a collectivist one. Can this apparent
contradiction be reconciled? I suggest that it can, but only within a genuine
cooperative autonomy.

Political individualism has, of course, stressed the importance of the individual.
Individualist political philosophers have tirelessly defended the individual and his
or her rights against the incursions of oppressive and interfering governments or
trade unions. But many in the individualist tradition have not stressed the impor-
tance of all individuals. Individuals have often been treated in isolation. And this
has had disastrous consequences for some of them. As was argued in Chapter 3,
the relations which obtain between individuals tend not to be given sufficient
weight by individualists. Thus, individualists often espouse conceptions of free-

32 But, clearly, whatever structures anarchists might create with the intention of prefiguring an
anarchist society, if they are to have any chance of successfully leading to such a society, then
they cannot embody power relationships that would prove to be problematic later.
relations, nor can we afford to make such a god of the collective that individual people no longer matter. What we seem to require, instead, is an approach which values individuals within their relationships. But, surely, we would also need the relationships between individuals to be valuable, and for individuals to value each other. But if individuals are to value each other, then, it can be argued, they must respect each other's autonomy. But, on the other hand, how many people want to live the life of a hermit? A cooperative autonomy may well provide the solution to this apparent dichotomy. How? By each individual autonomously choosing to cooperate with others, while retaining his or her individual autonomy and respecting theirs. But what might count as living within a cooperative autonomy?

One possibility is living within a society where access to the land and to the means of production is individually enjoyed on a subsistential basis. An individual could then produce what he or she needed and share his or her work and its products with the others in the community. Individuals would thus be able to retain their autonomy at work, while enjoying the possibility of free cooperation. And within such an arrangement, it would no longer make sense to produce goods which had obsolescence built into them. Who would choose to waste his or her life working all day to produce things that others would soon have to replace so that he or she could buy their equivalent soon-to-be-replaced products? It would no longer make sense needlessly to squander resources and pollute the environment. Individuals who produced primarily for themselves and their local community wouldn't need such contrivances as fashion, for they would not depend upon getting others to throw perfectly good things away so that more of their goods could be sold.

In short, individuals living in a community which they controlled themselves would have no need to engage in completely unnecessary work. They would have no need to work in a factory that was unnecessarily poisoning the air they breathed or on a farm that was unnecessarily destroying the fertility of the land they require to survive.

Perhaps work and other aspects of living might have to be institutionalized a little more than this. But there is no reason to think that a state is required to provide what is necessary for social reproduction, as Boris Frankel, for one, appears to assume.6 In the 1980s, in its heyday, some of the most successful industries in Spain belonged to the Mondragon group of workers' cooperatives. They had their own bank, their own university, their own technical college, their own schools, their own research institute and their own social security system. The workers controlled the factories themselves and they enjoyed an extremely egalitarian pay-structure. Institutions which supplied the factories with services, such as the bank, the university and the research institute, were second-degree cooperatives. Whereas all the board of directors of an industrial coop in the Mondragon group were elected by that cooperative's workers, a second-degree coop had some of the board elected by its workers, but the majority were elected by the industrial cooperatives which it served.

This successful model of second-degree cooperatives could provide a possible alternative to the capitalist system. Workers' coops are usually far more benign than ordinary factories. But they could, in principle, be just as polluting if the workers were desperate to remain competitive in a free market.7 This notwithstanding, that the workers were in control of their own factories in the Mondragon group, and also benefited from relatively equal wages, was, in the view of many, a clear advance on capitalists' exploiting employees for profit. Today, while many of the original features of the Mondragon group still remain, the rates of pay display greater differentials than previously. This appears to have been a result of trying to attract and retain certain professionals. Such a problem is likely to persist while cooperatives have to work within a capitalist economic structure. And the problem of being forced to pollute in order to stay competitive is also likely to persist within such an economic structure.8

So, consider the following alternative: the second-degree cooperative structure is extended to all production units within a society so that the workers within each workplace, producing its share of the community's subsistence requirements, elect a minority of its board to represent their interests, while the community elects the majority to ensure that in doing the best for the workers, the enterprise does not, at the same time, harm the community or the environment. Such a structure might then meet the working requirements of its workers and the needs of both the local community and its environment.

Well, what kind of technology would such a self-directed community comprising such workplaces choose? Would it choose a form that contaminated the land and poisoned its children? Would it choose machines that individuals couldn't understand and which left them at the mercy of experts? Or would it prefer, instead, a technology that was 'user-friendly' and easy to repair and maintain? Would the technology chosen squander finite resources? Or would it tap the free, non-polluting energy of the sun, the wind and the sea? Would it pipe its waste onto its beaches? Or might it prefer, instead, to store it in biogas tanks, and then put it to use as fertilizer and as a source of energy?

Where would the members of such a cooperative autonomy choose to work? Would they choose to travel for hours each week just to get to their workplaces, and needlessly build roads all over the country in order to do so? Would they happily continue threatening to alter the global climate so that they could waste so much time getting nowhere in a permanent traffic jam? Would they build even

8 Moreover, a particular cooperative, being a collective, could turn out in practice to be a tyranny of the majority. Nevertheless, democratic control of production does at least allow the possibility of meaningful self-management, which is not the case with the economic dictatorship workers usually confront.
9 See Neil Carter, 'Worker cooperatives and green political theory' in B. Doherty and M. de Geus (eds), Democracy and Green Political Thought: Sustainability, Rights and Citizenship (London: Routledge, 1994) for several criticisms of Mondragons from a green perspective.
more roads to supply themselves with some product in significantly different from their own? Or, instead, would they live close to their work and close to the land, meeting their own needs as far as possible themselves? How would the members of such a community under their own control choose to work? Would they spend all day long in the same mindless routine within a working environment that excludes children and is therefore prejudiced against parents with infants? Or, instead, might autonomous individuals cooperating together prefer a less formal working arrangement? But to respect each individual's autonomy while facilitating their cooperation, the community would seem to require as participatory and consensual an approach to decision-making as possible—an approach that valorizes both autonomy and the desire to cooperate. But for this, a community would surely need to display certain characteristics. It would most likely have to be small, face-to-face and as self-sufficient or self-reliant as possible.

Moreover, there is no reason why such autonomous communities couldn't choose to cooperate with other communities, and they could, in principle, cooperate together by means of a structure paralleling that of their own internal social relations. For example, each community could send delegates to seek cooperative agreements with the other communities, subject to individual ratification. The communities would thereby voluntarily comprise a confederal system in which all the communities were respected as equals, as autonomous, and as willing to cooperate for the mutual benefit of all. And where might the mutual benefit of all be expected to lie? Surely, it would be found in a sustainable way of life that respected the integrity of the ecosphere upon which all depend. In short, such a cooperative autonomy would exhibit the ecological values of diversity and symbols. Such a way of life would be simultaneously green, anarchic and communist.

7.4 Two justifications of civil disobedience

But, of course, such a green anarcho-communist vision has not yet been realized in modern societies. What, then, should individuals do now, faced, as they appear to be, with an approaching environmental catastrophe? Earlier, it was claimed that environmental activism can provide a training ground for cooperative autonomy. Engaging in environmental protest can empower individuals and create a sense of solidarity between them. In other words, were it sufficiently widespread, environmental protest might provide the foundations required for the proliferation of green anarcho-communes, while simultaneously halting the most environmentally damaging developments. Perhaps, then, it is in individually motivated, cooperatively organized, non-violent civil disobedience that our future salvation lies.

However, there is a moral and political problem of paramount importance which this suggestion immediately gives rise to. Certainly, in the face of unjust and oppressive political regimes, the long tradition of non-violent civil disobedience has often been viewed as a noble one, with such milestone advocates as

Thoreau, Tolstoy and, of course, Gandhi. In recent times, the question of civil disobedience re-surfaced dramatically during the 1960s, first with the civil rights movement in the United States, and then with widespread opposition to the Vietnam War. Civil disobedience played a prominent role in the transformations in Eastern Europe in 1989. Presently, non-violent civil disobedience is practiced in Britain by animal liberationists, most notably in opposition to the export of live animals and to bloodsports such as fox-hunting, and by environmentalists more widely construed, especially in protest against further road-building.

The problem is this: Many people today would regard opposition to racist regimes as justifiable. A large number would sanction the refusal to fight in an unjust war. The majority would approve of the refusal to cooperate with a totalitarian dictatorship. But many of the protests currently being undertaken by environmentalists are directed against seemingly just and democratic institutions within liberal societies. In the West, few people regard themselves as living under oppressive regimes. If liberal democratic polities choose to degrade their environment, isn't that up to them? Isn't it their choice and no one else's business? In a word, can the often extreme disobedience undertaken by environmental protesters really be justified? In particular, do currently respected justifications of civil disobedience adequately support environmentally-motivated protests or, if such protests are indeed morally praiseworthy, is a new justification required?

7.4.1 A justification of the grounds of fairness

Probably the most prominent recent justification of civil disobedience is that propounded by John Rawls. And if anyone is widely regarded as having provided the theoretical underpinnings for modern liberal democratic societies, it is Rawls. His discussion of civil disobedience would therefore seem to be the obvious place to start.

By 'civil disobedience' Rawls means 'a public, nonviolent, and conscientious
act contrary to law usually done with the intent to bring about a change in the policies or laws of the government. In order to see why Rawls thinks that civil disobedience is justifiable in certain circumstances, we first need to consider his account of political obligation, for civil disobedience can be argued to be, in effect, a conditional denial of political obligation. In other words, to justify such a denial, it seems that it is necessary to understand the limits of political obligation. Clearly, this is an issue of central importance to anarchists.

Why, then, ought we to regard ourselves as falling under political obligations? Rawls answers as follows:

We should comply with and do our part in just and efficient social arrangements for at least two reasons: first of all, we have a natural duty not to oppose the establishment of just and efficient institutions (when they do not yet exist) and to uphold and comply with them (when they do exist); and second, assuming that we have knowingly accepted the benefits of these institutions and plan to continue to do so, and that we have encouraged and expected others to do their part, we also have an obligation to do our share when, as the arrangement requires, it comes our turn.

But when are social arrangements just? In Rawls' view, when they accord with the principles that each would choose under a 'veil of ignorance' -- in what Rawls calls 'the original position'. The core idea is that a society is just if the principles assigning those goods which are necessary for whatever plan of life a person might decide upon are fair. And their fairness can be established by their acceptability to all who do not know what social position they will come to occupy or what talents luck will allocate to them or even what their preferred plan of life will turn out to be. Thus, the original position, from which the principles governing social institutions are hypothetically chosen under a veil of ignorance, is designed to rule out all bias, and the principles chosen in such a situation will therefore be fair.

46 Ibid., p. 126. The second reason is Hare's 'mutuality of restrictions', which can be regarded as giving rise to special rights. See H. L. A. Hart, 'Are there natural rights?' in Anthony Quinton (ed.), Political Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). Rawls' views on political compliance have since undergone a process of evolution, culminating in John Rawls, Political Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Sadly, the implications of his recent work seem to be less liberal and more of a justification of the status quo than Rawls would care to admit. Unfortunately, it would involve too much of a digression to defend this charge here.
48 In Rawls' view, the following principles would be chosen in the original position and would be fair (hence just) because everyone ignorant of their share of talents or social standing would, he assumes, agree to them: first, each person is to have an equal right to the most

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On the basis of such principles, we are able to judge whether the laws which have been passed in a democratic society are just or not. Unfortunately, in Rawls' view, even the best practicable political procedure could result in the enactment and enforcement of unjust laws and policies, for he assumes that 'the best constitution is some form of democratic regime affirming equal political liberty and using some sort of majority (or other plurality) rule'. Clearly, if we have to rely on majority rule, then unjust laws could very easily be passed, because majorities are far from infallible. In short, because their sense of justice is imperfect, the majority can occasionally pass laws which exceed acceptable limits. Should this happen, Rawls argues, civil disobedience may be permissible. And when it is, conscientiously contravening the law serves to improve the majority, by appealing to its sense of justice, to reconsider its decisions. Furthermore, it acts as a warning that the dissenters firmly believe that the conditions upon which social cooperation rest are being contravened.

This defence of civil disobedience thus takes protestors to be addressing the shared conception of justice upon which the democratic constitution is, supposedly, premised. Civil disobedience is justified, in Rawls' view, when constitutionally valid decisions gravely flout that shared conception of justice, because that nullifies the basis for the obligations protesters would otherwise have to the constitution. Consequently,

persistent and deliberate violation of basic liberties over any extended period of time cuts the ties of community and invites either submission or forceful resistance. By engaging in civil disobedience a minority leads the majority to consider whether it wants to have its acts taken in this way, or whether, in view of the common sense of justice, it wishes to acknowledge the claims of the minority.

Moreover, in Rawls' opinion,

if the appeal against injustice is repeatedly denied, then the majority has declared its intention to invite submission or resistance and the latter may

extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all; second, social and economic inequalities (as defined by the institutional structure or fostered by it) are to be arranged so that they are both to everyone's advantage and attached to positions and offices open to all. 'Rawls, The justification of civil disobedience', p. 128.
49 Ibid., p. 130.
50 Rawls thinks that those who engage in civil disobedience, even when justified in doing so, should expect and accept both arrest and punishment without resistance because, by their willingness to pay the penalty for their actions, they manifest their respect for legal procedures. By willingly submitting themselves to legal retribution, dissenters show that their opposition to a law remains faithful to law, thereby demonstrating that their actions are intended to address the sense of justice of the majority, follow from sincerely held convictions and are undertaken for conscientious reasons.
51 Ibid., p. 132.
conceivably be justified even in a democratic regime. We are not required to
acquiesce in the crushing of fundamental liberties by democratic majorities
which have shown themselves blind to the principles of justice upon which
justification of the constitution depends.52

There seems to be no reason why we could not extend this argument to those
cases where persons suffer harm as a result of others' polluting activities. Thus,
there would come a time when a refusal to desist from those activities would
involve justifiable resistance. And one such form of resistance which Rawls' argu-
ment so far outlined would thus appear to justify is ecologically-motivated sabotage -
"ecotage".

However, Rawls proceeds to spell out three conditions which he insists must be
met if one is to be justified in engaging in civil disobedience. The first is that the
injustice protested against must have been more or less deliberately inflicted for
some length of time in spite of the protesters having already followed more con-
ventional routes for expressing opposition to that injustice (for example, by
lobbying politicians). The second is that the injustice must clearly violate the
liberties involved in equal citizenship. And the third is that unacceptable conse-
quences should not result from a general tendency to engage in civil disobe-
dience whenever a case of similar standing arises. If there were too great a tendency
to be civilly disobedient, then social cooperation would be impossible.

Nevertheless, if an instance of civil disobedience were to satisfy all three condi-
tions, then, in Rawls' view, it would be legitimate. In other words, if the con-
ditions of social cooperation are persistently flouted through the violation of
liberties which are necessary for equal citizenship, and when the usual channels
for expressing disapproval have been exhausted, then civil disobedience may be
permissible - but not to the extent that a willingness to resort to it would make
social cooperation too difficult, and thereby itself undermine the conditions
of social cooperation.

In addition, Rawls argues that justified civil disobedience not only leads to
greater fairness, it actually plays a stabilizing role in democracy, for

52 Ibid., pp. 133-6.
53 Ibid., p. 136.

If straightaway, after a decent period of time to make reasonable political
appeals in the normal way, men [and women] were in general to dissent by
civil disobedience from infractions of the fundamental equal liberties, these
liberties would, I believe, be more rather than less secure. Legitimate civil
disobedience properly exercised is a stabilizing device in a constitutional
regime, tending to make it more firmly just.54

Of course, those who exercise political power tend to regard civil disobedience as,
at best, a disturbance of the peace - which should come as no surprise, given that
disobedience is usually directed against those in power and constitutes a challenge
to their authority. But in Rawls' view, 'if civil disobedience seems to threaten civil
peace, the responsibility falls not so much on those who protest as upon those
whose abuse of authority and power justifies such opposition.'55 Rawls thus seems
to have gone quite a long way in justifying civil disobedience.

7.4.2 A justification on the grounds of non-participation and a
failure of compromise

However, Peter Singer thinks that Rawls hasn't gone far enough, and offers an
even more extensive justification of civil disobedience. He sees two problems with
Rawls' account which lead to it being too limited.

The first problem is that Rawls thinks that dissenters have to appeal to the
community's shared sense of justice. But Singer wonders why any such appeal to
the community must be restricted to the principles of justice which it presently
accepts. If its sense of justice is imperfect, surely civil disobedience could be
undertaken not merely to induce the majority to reconsider whether or not its
decisions satisfy the principles of justice it currently values but also to reconsider
whether or not its conception of justice is adequate. As Singer is one of the
foremost defenders of animal liberation, then one area where he strongly feels
that our society's conception of justice is defective is in its lack of regard for the
welfare of non-human animals. And some humans might firmly believe them-
selves to be justified in engaging in civil disobedience in order to induce the
majority of our community to reconsider its attitude to, and treatment of, other
species. Moreover, in protesting on behalf of other species, such humans clearly
would not be acting in their own self-interests, but conscientiously.

The second problem with Rawls' account is that he thinks that civil disobedi-
ence is justified in terms of justice, rather than in terms of a wider morality. If we
consider the case of non-human animals again, he seems to believe that although
cruelty to animals is immoral, this notwithstanding, humans cannot treat them
unethically. But as Singer remarks: "If we combine this view with the idea that the
justification of civil disobedience must be in terms of justice, we can see that Rawls
is committed to holding that no amount of cruelty to animals can justify dis-
obedience.56 Yet clearly there are a large number of people, Singer being one of
them, who feel that non-violent direct action in defence of animals is legitimate.
But Rawls' account of civil disobedience is incapable of allowing such protest.
Hence, it is not surprising that Singer should want to go further than Rawls in his
defence of civil disobedience.

To this end, Singer focuses upon the question of whether or not civil disobedi-
ence is less justified in a democratic society than in an undemocratic one. This is
surely a key question, for many feel that, while undemocratic societies are often
illegitimate, democratic ones ought to command our allegiance. Justifications of political obligation which provide no reason for being more obedient to a democratic than to an undemocratic regime would seem to oblige one to any effective regime, no matter how unsavoury - a conclusion few rational people would accept.56

However, Singer thinks it is clear that the obligation to obey the laws of even a democratic society cannot be absolute; for, as he asks: 'Could anyone plausibly maintain that if the Nazis had received majorities in free elections, and allowed freedom of speech, association and so on, this would have made it right to obey laws designed to exterminate Jews? To maintain this would require fantastic, and surely misguided, devotion to democratic laws.'57 Thus, in Singer's view, the obligation to obey the law is prima Facie (or, perhaps better, pro tanto). We must attach some importance to political obligation, but any such obligation is defeasible. It is an obligation which can be overridden, rather like the way a promise can be overridden, by a more important moral consideration.

What, then, would count as a good reason for obeying the laws of a democratic society?58 One reason which Singer believes to be valid is the following: The problem of a disserter refusing to obey the law and deliberately flouting what the majority have decided is that the disserter has, in effect, a greater say than the others. But the rest could equally demand a greater say. If everyone is sincere in his or her opinions, and if they cannot reach agreement, then it is far preferable that some compromise is accepted, rather than everyone doing what they individually decide is best. Anything other than accepting a compromise would be unacceptable to some, and would undermine any peaceful decision procedure.

56 For a powerful refutation of Hobbesian arguments concerning the supposed need for an authoritarian, centralized power in order to ensure cooperation, see Michael Taylor, Anarchy and Cooperation (London: Wikey, 1976).

57 Singer, Democracy and Disobedience, p. 6.

58 Singer categorically rejects the threat of law and order breaking down, the receiving of benefits from society, the existence of settled methods for promulgating and enforcing laws, and tacit consent as reasons for being under an obligation not to disobey the law (see ibid., pp. 6–24). Among other problems with these attempts at establishing political obligations, they fail to the following objection: if successful, they would all justify too much - namely, obedience to any regime, no matter how undemocratic. Perhaps the most plausible reason for obedience in a democratic society rests on the widely held assumption that all persons equally have the right to govern themselves. Hence, only those political forms which grant to each an equal say ought to be obeyed. Unfortunately, as Singer points out: 'equality is not a completely satisfactory basis for explaining why we ought to obey the law in a democracy. For the assumption on prescription can be turned against the purpose for which it is being used. It can be taken to showing, not that there is a special obligation to obey democratic authority, but that there can be no obligation to obey any authority except oneself. In other words, it may be denied that the equal rights of all to govern themselves are satisfied by majority government over the minority. What reason is there for supposing that "equal rights" can be added up in such a way that the side with more has the right to prevail over the side with less? Equal rights to a cake would not be satisfied if the majority walked off with the whole cake.' (Ibid., p. 28.)
election serves to enable a group decision to be reached, and who voluntarily participates in the voting procedure to decide an issue, thereby leads the others to believe that he or she has accepted the voting procedure as an appropriate means for arriving at a group decision. In this way, participation in a decision-procedure, something much more common in democratic than in undemocratic societies, incurs an obligation to accept and obey its outcome — or so he argues. Hence, Singer concludes that both fair compromise and participation can provide greater reasons for disobeying democratic rather than undemocratic laws.

However, Singer points out that there are clear limitations to any such obedience. If a fair compromise is not the outcome, then one may legitimately engage in disobedience with the aim of obtaining a more appropriate decision-procedure — one in which a fair compromise would be represented. And when there is a permanent minority, for example, then majoritarian voting procedures relying on equal voting rights will not guarantee a fair compromise between all interested parties. The permanent majority will be able to do virtually what it likes, and no compromise will obtain between their preferences and those of the minority. In other words, whenever there is any systematic tendency towards unfairness regarding the passing of laws or their operation, those who suffer that unfairness lack the reason fair compromise would otherwise provide for obedience.

Hence, Singer argues, minorities (or those otherwise disempowered, or potentially disempowered) need to have rights against the majority. If there is any restriction on their freedom of speech, for example, then fair compromise would not obtain. If some cannot argue their case, then there is less chance that others will be converted to their view and vote for their preferred choice, or even take it sufficiently into account. The same is true of any other right that would need to be safeguarded for a democratic decision-procedure to arrive at a fair compromise. This would include rights such as "the right to vote or stand for office, or the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly", among others. Should anyone's democratic rights be violated, then he or she would be justified in engaging in civil disobedience, because the reasons for obeying the outcome of the democratic process would no longer apply.

Civil disobedience may also be justified, in Singer's view, when one side of the debate on an important moral issue has failed to receive a fair hearing. Civil disobedience, in this case, attempts to remedy the defects in the political system by striving to bring about a more equal presentation of views — something which is essential if a fair compromise is to be reached. However, Singer thinks that any such protest must be non-violent, otherwise it would be a case not of persuasion, but of coercing or intimidating the majority.

Civil disobedience may also be justified, Singer holds, in order to make a plea for reconsideration. Democratic procedures can fail to take into account the intensity of feeling of different groups. The intensity of the minority's feelings can be revealed to the majority by the minority engaging in civil disobedience. As Singer remarks:

A majority may act, or fail to act, without realizing that there are truly significant issues at stake, or the majority may not have considered the interests of all parties, and its decision may cause suffering in a way that was not foreseen. Disobedience, and especially disobedience followed by acceptance of punishment, may make the majority realize that what is for it a matter of indifference is of great importance to others.

Civil disobedience, in this case, too, attempts to remedy a defect in the political system.

The justifications of civil disobedience which Singer expounds would apply even to the most democratic of societies — for example, societies which were direct and participatory — never mind representative democracies. But as Singer regards the democratic credentials of the existing 'democracies' to be dubious in the extreme, then, in his view, civil disobedience is certainly justified in the present circumstances in order to obtain a fair compromise. In the so-called democracies, the electorate is presented with a small number of 'package deals' by the major political parties (which are highly oligarchical organizations possessing considerably more power than is compatible with a fair compromise being reached), and none of the package deals on offer might accord with the actual preferences of the electorate. In addition, as the control of newspapers, or simply great differences in wealth, cash out into considerable differences in the ability to fight elections or to apply political pressure, then, in Singer's opinion, the so-called democracies are a long way from offering the prospect of a fair compromise.

All of this suggests that any obligation to obey the laws of the so-called democracies is highly doubtful. None of us lives in anything like as democratic a society as would provide us with the reasons Singer offers for obeying the laws. Our present societies are, evidently, nowhere near the embodiment of a fair compromise and, consequently, cannot justifiably command our obedience. Hence, if political obligation is as weak as Singer appears to have established, then civil disobedience is easily justified, and anarchism rests on far stronger moral grounds than might otherwise have appeared to be the case.
7.5 A duty of radical disobedience

Perhaps, though, it is possible to develop an even more powerful and extensive justification of civil disobedience than Singer's. On his approach, it would seem to follow that if one were to participate voluntarily in a genuinely democratic process which constituted a fair compromise between all participants, then one could not, with justification, act disobediently. However, there is an indeterminate class of people who cannot participate in any democratic policy we might construct. Yet we can affect that class even to the point of determining its size. At one extreme, it could be as large as the present human population. At the other extreme, it could conceivably be infinite in number. I am, of course, referring to those humans who have not yet been born (never mind to future generations of both human and non-human animals). We could ensure that the class is at the small extreme by destroying the planet within a generation. Or, by living sustainably, we could allow that class to be unimaginably large, for it would then comprise generations into the indefinite future. The decisions which we might make democratically could ensure that future generations live well or die horribly in an environmental nightmare. Their lives and their well-being are in our hands. Yet not only do they lack a say in any democratic policy we might devise, they cannot conceivably have any say in it whatsoever.

The interests of future generations can only be advocated now by those who are prepared to take their side. If non-human animals appear defenceless and in need of animal liberators, future generations are even more defenceless. Like non-human animals, they cannot plead their case. But unlike non-human animals, it is impossible for future generations even to retaliate against us. To them we are completely invulnerable.65 If democratic policies were intent on pursuing a course of action that would harm the interests of future generations, then disobedience on their behalf might require an even more radical justification than that offered by Singer. This is because, inadvertently, he seems to have established that participants in a genuinely democratic decision procedure, generating a fair compromise between them, are bound by it.66 That would have to include those who wished to act on behalf of future generations. Yet it is impossible for future generations to be civilly disobedient now on their own behalf, just as it is impossible for them to participate in our present decision-procedures.

Why is the fact that future generations cannot participate in any democratic procedure to be taken as signifying that one has consented, in accordance with the collective decision, to forgo having some of one's individual interests satisfied?67 It is that apparent consent which could, conceivably, justify the rest of a collective (carrying out democratically arrived at decisions) acting in a manner that goes against some of the interests of the collective's individual members. But as future generations cannot now participate, it cannot be presumed that they have consented. In fact, it is impossible for us to obtain their consent to our acting against their interests. Hence, it could be argued, we have no justification for acting against their basic interests when it is unnecessary for meeting our own.

But, it might be objected, the fact that future generations cannot participate in our institutions does not lead to constraints on our actions, rather to the converse. Future generations cannot participate because they do not exist. Hence, they are not persons. As it is the interests of persons that matter, and as future generations are not at this moment persons, their interests (if, indeed, it can intelligibly be said they have any) do not matter. In fact, as future generations do not exist, then they cannot have interests. Consequently, we cannot act against their interests. In short, we cannot harm future generations.68

Certainly, future generations are not, at this moment, persons. They could, however, be regarded as potential persons. Nevertheless, it might then be objected, only persons matter, and potential persons do not now exist as persons. Quite simply, potential persons are not the sort of entity that matters.69 But, in response, we could distinguish between two kinds of potential person: those that

65 This claim has been challenged by John O'Neill, who argues that future generations are harm us—for example, by acting so that the narrative account of our lives ends badly. See John O'Neill, Ecology, Policy and Politics: Human Well-Being and the Natural World (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 25-36. But few seem to be convinced by O'Neill's argument. Perhaps the most obvious way in which future generations might be thought to harm us is by harming our reputation. However, this could not be used to provide a foundation for obligations to future generations by showing that humans' circumstances of justice obtain—in particular, the possibility of mutually inchoate harm. First, harm to our reputation is hardly the end of the world for us, but what we can do to future generations might, literally, be the end of the world for them. In short, there is no genuinely reciprocal relationship here. Second, and more important, what matters to us is our reputation among those who matter to us. If we do not care about future generations, we do not care what they think about us. But if we do care about them, what they think about us will not be our motive for taking them into account. In short, concerning how we treat future generations, our reputation among them does little or no work. Third, and most important, with respect to our reputations, to stop future generations from harming us, all we have to do is stop caring about them. But this is not what an obligation consists in. The whole point about obligations is that they do not disappear the moment we stop caring about those to whom we owe obligations. So, whatever lies at the basis of our obligations to future generations, it surely cannot be dependent upon how much they matter to us. (And these objections seem equally applicable to O'Neill's argument on the basis of narrative accounts.)

66 I say "inadvertently" because Singer's conclusion seems to rule out many of the activities animal liberators might feel morally obliged to engage in should a genuine democracy arise which lacked a deep concern for the welfare of non-human animals.

67 This could be argued to be the intuition lying behind the social contract tradition.

68 For a convincing challenge to this objection and a defence of both the "concessional view" that future generations have rights now and the "concessional view" that it is impermissible for us to act now in a manner which will violate the rights which future generations will have, see Robert Elliot, 'The rights of future people', Journal of Applied Philosophy, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1989), pp. 159-69.

69 For the most respected argument against 'the potentiality principle', see Michael Tooley, 'Abortion and infanticide' in Peter Singer (ed.), Applied Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
will, as a matter of fact, be actualized; and those that, as a matter of fact, will never exist— the latter being what Mary Anne Warren terms "merely potential people". 76 If we were to destroy the planet in one hundred years from now, those who would have been born after that time had we, instead, chosen to live sustainably, will never exist. But because they would exist if we choose to live sustainably, then they are potential persons. If, as a matter of fact, we do destroy the planet in one hundred years time, they will never exist and, as such, are merely potential persons.

Clearly, merely potential persons cannot possibly be harmed. But it could be argued that potential persons who will be actualized can be. Moreover, regardless of what one thinks about potential persons, it is surely indisputable that a person can be harmed after having been actualized. And if we act in a certain way, in the future real, live persons will be harmed by our actions. It is this fact which is morally important. Harm rarely occurs at the exact moment that the harmful action is performed. If I pull the trigger of a gun that I am aiming at you, surely I cannot excuse my action by saying that it did not harm you, for you were harmed when the bullet struck you, which was after my action of pulling the trigger (albeit only a fraction of a second later). If I fire a nuclear missile at you which strikes in seven minutes time, surely I cannot use that time-delay to deny with any success all responsibility for the harm that ensues. And if I plant a landmine, which is detonated by a passer-by in one month's time, then for me to claim that my action of planting the mine is not harmful, for it is presently harming no one, surely lacks any cogency. Similarly, if I now leave a bomb lying around timed to explode in one year, surely I cannot excuse myself on the grounds that my action is not harming anyone at this precise moment. Rather, isn't it the case that the act of arming the bomb is morally wrong now if someone is likely to be harmed when the bomb explodes next year?

But what if the person who is harmed in a year's time by the explosion has not yet been born? It would not be too controversial to claim that there is little, if any, moral difference between the bomb's harming a two-year-old and its harming an infant of nine months. Surely, the date of birth of the victim is morally insignificant. 77 The fact that the infant was not born when the bomb was planted seems to make no moral difference whatever. Yet it is highly probable that some of our present actions will, as a matter of fact, harm persons who will exist in the future. And if our present actions lead to the destruction of the life-support systems of this planet, billions of people who do not yet exist are certain to die in horrific conditions. As they do not yet exist, they have, as of yet, not undertaken any actions. In a word, they are wholly innocent. And to harm, needlessly, wholly innocent persons is widely regarded as morally wrong.

However, it might be objected that future generations could turn out not to be innocents. But while they might, in fact, not be innocents at the time they suffered harm, they are certainly innocent at the time some of the actions harmful to them are performed. And surely one cannot justifiably unleash a punishment on someone in advance of a wrong that they might commit. Moreover, that none of them would turn out to be innocent at the time the harm befall them is extremely implausible. Some of them would, at that time, be infants. And it is certainly highly immoral to inflict harm gratuitously on innocents such as young children. 78

There is, however, an argument put forward by Thomas Schwartz which implies that we cannot possibly harm distant, future generations. 79 If a government were to embark on a long-range environmental protection policy, then different individuals would be born in the distant future than would have been born had that policy not been adopted. If harming someone consists in making him or her worse off than he or she would otherwise have been, then failing to protect the environment would not harm any people in the distant future. They would not be made worse off because, had our government chosen to enforce an environmental protection policy, they would not have existed.

This argument might, conceivably, apply to states, who might well possess the power to determine the existence (or non-existence) of every future person. But does it apply to individuals? If I, individually, were to act in a certain way, then, in the distant future, Rosalind might be born rather than Sebastian. But if my action affects Tania, whose existence is not dependent upon that action, then it appears that I can harm Tania. How could I possibly know that there will be no one whose existence is not dependent upon my, as opposed to our collective, environmentally damaging behaviour? If the existence of Tania has resulted from your environmentally damaging activities rather than mine, my environmentally damaging actions can still harm her.


71 Tooley, however, argues that only those who have the capacity to conceive of themselves as continuing subjects of experiences have a right not to be killed. See Tooley, 'Abortion and infanticide'. This implies that one's age begins with this significant. It could also be taken to imply that it is morally permissible to act in a way that will lead to the premature deaths of members of future generations, for they do not, at present, possess the requisite conceptual capacity to count in our moral calculations. For a critique of the claim that it is permissible to kill anyone lacking the capacity to conceive of himself for herself as a continuing subject of experiences, see Alan Carter, 'Infanticide and the right to life', Ratio (new series), Vol. 10, No. 1 (April 1997), pp. 1-9.

72 On this point, see Richard Wasserman, 'War, nuclear war, and nuclear deterrence: some conceptual and moral issues' in Russell Hardin, John J. Mearsheimer, Gerald Dworkin and Robert E. Goodin (eds), Nuclear Deterrence and Strategy (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985). For a powerful response (on the basis of not inflicting gratuitous harm) to a number of objections against our having obligations to future generations, see Richard Routley and Val Routley, 'Nuclear energy and obligations to the future', Inquiry 21 (1978), pp. 133-79.

Certainly, an individual would be unable to harm any future person if every future person's existence was dependent upon every one of his or her otherwise harmful actions. But it is surely absurd to think that any individual has the power to determine the coming into existence of every future person. Moreover, a person would only be unable to harm any future person if, for every otherwise harmful action which he or she might perform, the existence of every person who would otherwise have been harmed by the action in question was dependent upon that particular action. As it is highly implausible that every one of an individual's environmentally damaging actions which will result in, or contribute towards, future suffering are necessarily of that sort, then it seems that each of us is quite capable of harming even the most distant of future people by our present environmentally damaging activities, for each of us can make them worse off than they would otherwise have been.

In short, Schwartz's argument seems to depend upon regarding people as collectivities. We, viewed as a whole, can be considered responsible for the existence of every member of whichever group of people might live in the far, distant future. And that seems to imply that we could not possibly harm them, for were it not for our actions, they would never exist. But the conclusion that none of us is able to harm distant, future generations can be seen to fail the moment environmentally-damaging activities are disaggregated. Hence, it appears that we cannot evade our individual responsibilities as easily as Schwartz's argument might at first suggest. Moreover, any environmentally-damaging actions that would, as a matter of fact, determine the existence of future generations are bound to harm nearer generations whose existence would not be dependent upon those actions.

7.5.1 Extending our obligations

But do our obligations to strangers only go as far as demanding that each of us refrains from harming innocents? Singer has presented a powerful argument which appears to demonstrate that we have a further obligation to innocents — namely, to come to their aid. He offers the analogy of an adult passing a shallow pond into which a child has strayed. The child, being small, is drowning. The adult, being tall, could easily save the child, although it would cost him or her a trip to the drycleaners. Clearly, most of us would agree that, if one is the adult in this scenario, one has a moral obligation to wade in and save the child, even though one would get one's clothes wet and muddy.

However, what if I were one of a group of twenty adults passing by the pond? Would that make me only one-twentieth as responsible for saving the child as I would have been had I been the only adult passing by? James Rachels advances an argument which suggests otherwise. Imagine one of the vicious characters the actor Jack Palance has played so well in the movies. Imagine that one such character is watching a child who is sitting next to him slowly starve to death, and he can't even be bothered to pass her the sandwich he is eating. If he invited nineteen of his friends into the room to watch the child die, would he become one-twentieth of the moral monster he would otherwise have been? Similarly, to return to Singer's analogy of the child in the pond, would I reduce my responsibility for saving the drowning child to a fraction of what it was previously by calling a number of my friends over to the side of the shallow pond to watch her drown?

What, though, if there were two drowning children? To transpose another of Rachels' arguments, what if I waded in to save one of them and then left the other to drown, attempting to justify my action on the grounds that one of the friends I summoned over should have saved her? Did I do my bit or, if no one else was prepared to wade in, should I have saved the other child as well? These sorts of examples strongly indicate that each of us is wholly and individually responsible for saving as many innocent persons from harm as we can, irrespective of the indifference displayed by others.

But let us now extend Singer's analogy. Suppose, instead, that the child hasn't simply strayed into the pond. Suppose that the child is being drowned by an adult for no other reason than the adult in question simply couldn't care less whether the child lives or dies, or because the child's life is an inconvenience to the adult. Would one be under as equally strong an obligation in this situation as in the earlier one to wade in and go to the child's assistance? Surely one would. Yet there is strong reason to think, whether we like it or not, that this is the situation we adults are now in. If environmentalists are right, the present generation is acting

74 This is why I say 'every one of his or her otherwise harmful actions' and 'every one of his or her environmentally destructive activities', because even if anyone were able to affect the identity of every person in the distant future, it would not follow that he or she could not harm any of them. For example, I could still harm a future person whose identity I determined as long as one of my actions made him or her worse off than he or she would otherwise have been — in other words, as long as that harmful action was not the action which determined his or her identity.

75 For example, imagine that Tania's ancestors, who are our contemporaries, move into a sealed 'biodome', and that, in the far distant future, a minor earthquake causes a breach in its protective skin, letting in the polluted air still remaining from our polluting activities, which proceeds to harm Tania. Clearly, our polluting activities would not have been responsible for Tania's existence, but they would certainly harm her.


so as to ensure that future children will 'drown', as it were, in a sea of life-threatening pollution. In short, it appears to be morally incumbent upon us to prevent careless harm befalling innocents, then it appears that it is our duty to interfere in others' actions when by so doing we prevent such harm. In other words, it seems that if the present generation, through its polluting activities, is harming future generations, then it is our moral responsibility to prevent those among our contemporaries who are responsible from continuing to do so.\footnote{\addcite{Kagan} It might be objected that this would be to accede to extraordinary moral demands. For a powerful and relentless critique of the shortcomings of ordinary moral thinking, see Shelly Kagan, The Limits of Morality (New York: Clarendon, 1991).}

But it appears that our moral obligations to future generations extend even further than that. For it is not only widely regarded as immoral to harm innocent people. It is also widely regarded as immoral to put their lives at serious risk. If it is our moral obligation to 'save' innocent people in so doing we would prevent harm befalling an innocent, then it is, surely, also our moral obligation to 'save' when one person is acting so as to endanger an innocent person's life. So, while the evidence displayed in Chapter 1, above, might not prove beyond all doubt that we are acting so as to inflict serious harm upon future generations, it is surely incontrovertible that we are presently acting so as to be running a significant risk of so doing – indeed, acting so as to be running a significant risk of causing billions of future people almost unimaginable suffering. But that is surely immoral.\footnote{Even if the risk were far less than that which Chapter 1 suggests, given the billions of future people who could suffer as a result of our actions, then our environmentally damaging activities would seem to be highly immoral. For as Parfit concludes: 'When the stakes are very high, no chance, however small, should be ignored. . . . We can usually ignore a very small chance. But we should not do so when we may affect a very large number of people, or when the chance will be taken very large number of times. These large numbers roughly cancel out the smallness of the chance.' Parfit, Reasons and Persons, p. 75. For an important discussion of how common moral views have become inadequate for dealing with environmental problems in today's world, see ibid., pp. 75-86.} All of this suggests, then, that we are morally obliged both to prevent harm befalling future generations and, whether we like it or not, to lessen the risk of any harm befalling them. But as there can be no doubt that we are running a significant risk of inflicting almost unimaginable suffering on future generations, then each of us is under a moral obligation to 'save' in and change the present situation.

But is it really the case that our generation is, in fact, running a significant risk of causing extensive harm to future people? Well, we have seen that the State-Primacy Theory is not wholly implausible. And we have also seen that, in the modern world, it cashes out, not implausibly, into the environmentally hazardous dynamic depicted in Figure 6.1. But if what environmentalists tell us about environmental tolerances is right, then such an environmentally hazardous dynamic would threaten the life-support systems of our planet. Consequently, in so far as our societies can plausibly be characterized as being entrapped within an environmentally hazardous dynamic, we are running a very real risk of inflicting appalling suffering on future generations.

In short, there is a real chance that the State-Primacy Theory accurately describes the outcomes of epochal transformations. Thus, there is a very real chance that we are located within an environmentally hazardous dynamic (for, as was argued in the previous chapter, the soundness of the State-Primacy Theory seems to provide a sufficient rather than a necessary condition for the justified belief that we are entrapped within an environmentally hazardous dynamic). And there is certainly no reason to think that, if we are within such a dynamic, then it would result in the extinction of our own species (never mind the extinction of other sentient life forms). Hence, we certainly risk causing horrendous suffering to billions and billions of innocents. And that is, surely, the very height of immorality.

Now, if we are morally obliged to interfere when someone is harming an innocent, and if we are also obliged to interfere when someone is running a significant risk of harming an innocent, then it seems that we do not distort the situation, and that we lose nothing, by treating the significant risk of harm posed by our possible entrapment within an environmentally hazardous dynamic as if it were a case of harm. More to the point, it can be argued that, irrespective of whether or not we are, indubitably, entrapped within such a dynamic, we should act as if we were so entrapped, and that we should do whatever would be necessary to escape or elude that dynamic. Anything less, would be to renounce our moral obligations to future generations.

What, then, more specifically, is morally required of us? This question can, perhaps, be most easily answered if I first summarize several of the core arguments contained in the previous chapters.

\subsection{Eco-reformism, eco-Marxism and eco-authoritarianism revisited}

The interrelationships between the political relations, the political forces, the economic forces and the economic relations described by the State-Primacy Theory can be argued to result, in practice, in an environmentally hazardous dynamic. In order to remain militarily competitive with neighbouring states (and if it fails to do so it might not survive), a state (with specific structures of political relations) needs a growing military capability (the development of its political forces). That requires ever-increasing military needs (for example, in present circumstances, nuclear power stations in order to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons). This also involves an ever-expanding surplus to pay for a standing army. In short, there is reason to think that the state's requirements cannot be met without an economic structure (a structure of economic relations) appropriate to developing technology and productivity on an ever-increasing scale.

The result today can thus be argued to be an environmentally hazardous dynamic (portrayed in Figure 6.1) which requires a massive consumption of finite resources.
resources and which generates a frighteningly high output of pollution. The dynamic also threatens war – and today that could mean nuclear war, conceivably the ultimate environmental catastrophe. It is precisely this dynamic which, it can be argued, is driving our societies to cause so much harm to future generations. And as those who have not yet been born cannot justifiably be thought to deserve such harm, then it is our moral obligation to prevent any such harm from occurring. This means that we have a duty to escape from the environmentally hazardous dynamic if we are presently trapped within it. But more: because of the chance that the above argument is sound, we currently run a significant risk of inflicting serious harm upon billions of innocents. Consequently, to reduce that risk – and it is morally incumbent upon us to reduce it – we are morally obliged to act in a manner which, if we were within an environmentally hazardous dynamic, would allow us to escape from it.

How, then, might we act so as to escape from the environmentally hazardous dynamic depicted in Figure 6.1 – a dynamic that can be argued to be driving us towards collective suicide? Reformists, Marxists and right-wing authoritarians each offer different strategies for averting the environmental catastrophe seemingly hastening towards us.

Eco-reformists seek a gradual transformation of the political relations, and they seek it from within the present structure of legal and political institutions. But even eco-reformists propose policies (see Appendix A) which state personnel would most likely find extremely radical. Consequently, the major problem for reformist greens – one which they have tended to ignore – would seem to be this: How can the state apparatus be emancipated from such radical policies while its whole complex structure appears to have been developed in order to pursue as effectively as possible the opposite course to that demanded by greens? As Marx writes with respect to the class dictatorship of the proletariat: "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes." This observation that the state cannot be steered in any direction that one likes seems, in important respects, to be even more applicable to radical greens than to Marxist revolutionaries. For at least 'capitalist states' and the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' are thought to share a common interest in greater productivity.

Moreover, if the ostensible means for bringing about a transformation of the political relations is simply electing a greener government which still had to act within a system of competing states, then it would seem to be a wholly inadequate response to the problems that environmentalists claim we face. In most parts of the world, if a genuinely green government operating within this system of militarily competing states tried to leave the dynamic by abandoning the requirement of military competitiveness, it would most likely face a military coup. In other words, any change in the political relations that went against the interests of the political forces would more likely than not incur military intervention. This threat could be reduced significantly by safeguarding the interests of the military through continuing to invest in the nation's coercive capacity and thereby remaining militarily competitive. Accordingly, in order to retain power, a green government would most likely find itself having to remain firmly locked within the environmentally hazardous dynamic.

But is it really plausible to insist that the military poses such a threat in a liberal democratic society? Well, imagine a green government deciding to transfer all military personnel into socially useful production – which seems to be a requirement of a genuinely green society. Would senior military personnel agree to this quietly? Would they take this lying down, when all their training and years of service make them proficient in only one sphere of employment? The military are surely far too powerful for any government to ride roughshod over their interests. And military coups are not unknown even in Europe. Thus, it is likely that any government would inevitably find itself granting considerable concessions to its armed forces in order to placate them. But this in itself is likely to be sufficient to pose a threat to neighbouring states. Consequently, it can be argued that it is simply not possible to escape from the environmentally hazardous dynamic while a society retains a military apparatus, and that no green government on its own would have sufficient power to abolish it. Most importantly, it seems that present political systems are such that governments only have power while they preserve their repressive apparatuses. That centralized governments should wish to abolish them is, therefore, implausible in the extreme. Reformist approaches – even those granting the present system for granted, and attempt transformations from within it – thus appear doomed to failure. Moreover, eco-reformism only retains its appeal just so long as the environmental threat is regarded as far less menacing than many informed environmentalists adamantly insist it is.

An eco-Marxist might make one of two responses. Regarding the first: Marxists generally believe that capitalist economic relations are the cause of all major social

83 It can be argued that the limitations of governmental power are often overlooked because of a confusion between state power and governmental power. As Miliband writes: "the treatment of one part of the state – usually the government – as the state itself introduces a major element of confusion in the discussion of the nature and incidence of state power; and that confusion can have large political consequences. Thus, if it is believed that the government is in fact the state, it may also be believed that the assumption of governmental power is equivalent to the acquisition of state power. Such a belief, resting as it does on vast assumptions about the nature of state power, is fraught with great risks and disappointments. To understand the nature of state power, it is necessary first of all to distinguish, and then to relate, the various elements which make up the state system." Ralph Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society (London: Quartet, 1973), p. 46. And as he adds: 'the fact that the government does speak in the name of the state and is formally invested with state power, does not mean that it effectively controls that power.' Ibid., p. 47.

84 As Bakunin asks: 'Has it ever been witnessed in history that a political body – committed suicide, or sacrificed the least of its interests and so-called rights for the love of justice and liberty?' Michael Bakunin, The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Autarkism, ed. G. F. Maximoff (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 217.
and political ills, and that replacing capitalist economic relations with communist ones would suffice to solve all of our major problems, including the environmental ones. It is not surprising, then, that most eco-Marxists tend to focus on the economic relations. But, from the standpoint of the State-Prinicy Theory, focusing almost exclusively on economic relations and seeking transformation there would inevitably fail, for states would simply replace economic relations which were dysfunctional for them with ones that were functional. And there is evidence to support this claim, for this is precisely what Marxist revolutionaries at the head of the Bolshevik state were forced to do. And any 'fair compromise' economic relations, in not being exploitative, would surely fail to extract the surplus required by any state needing to remain militarily competitive.

The alternative response that an eco-Marxist could make is the following: If it is technological development which has explanatory primacy with respect to the outcome of epochal change, then that development might result in a desirable future society. Marx, for example, assumed that the preconditions of post-capitalism would be created within capitalist society. So, perhaps we can rely on some environmentally benign technology being developed that will solve the environmental problems we are creating. But if that technology implies less consumption (which, surely, it would have to in order for it to be environmentally benign), then capitalists do not have an interest in developing or promoting it, for it would reduce their profitability. And if it did not generate the high productivity an expanding military capacity requires (and, surely, if it were genuinely environmentally benign, it would not), then the state would not have an interest in developing or promoting it, either.

In short, the kind of technology which is developed in accordance with the military needs of modern states and that is developed to make profits for industry seems wholly inappropriate to an environmentally sustainable society. For such a society, we would surely need a very different kind of technology, and we cannot expect it simply to arise within the present system.

85 Marx himself subscribed to the view that 'the economical subjection of the man [and woamn] of labour to the monopolizer of the means of labour, that is, the sources of all life, lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of all social misery, mental degradation, and political dependence'. Karl Marx, 'Provisional rules of the International' in The International, and After, ed. by David Fernbach (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 82. This view was not confined to his later years. A quarter of a century earlier he had claimed that 'the whole of human servitude is involved in the relations of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are nothing but modifications and consequences of this relation.' Karl Marx, 'Economic and philosophical manuscripts' in Early Writings, intro. L. Colletti, transl. R. Livingstone and G. Benton (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 888.

86 For a sustained critique of this perspective, see Crockett, Radical Critique, passim.

87 Consider the technology of entertainment: the recent video games revolution has resulted in a privatized form of entertainment whereby individuals, while playing, relate to machines and a virtual reality rather than to other persons. More worrying still, the games themselves seem most suited to training the next generation of soldiers and fighter pilots. They are certainly not cooperative games designed to develop the skills needed for participating democratically in group decisions.

Furthermore, Marxists have traditionally advocated an abundant socialism based upon a highly productive technology. In fact, Marx went so far as to claim that post-capitalism would not be established until capitalism had developed technology as far as it was capable of doing. This would greatly reduce the length of the working day—a precondition, in Marx's view, for real freedom. But G. A. Cohen, for one, at least accepts that if the 'crisis of resources' is as serious as some say, it is a genuine threat to the realization of forms of communism which depend upon a radically reduced working day, for those forms require astronomically high levels of productive power.

However, the problem would seem to be even greater than this suggests, for a more serious limitation on technological expansion than finite resources is, surely, the limited capacity which the environment has for acting as a sink for pollution without its life-support systems being seriously compromised. In fact, Marxism appears to be singularly unsuited as an answer to environmental problems, given its faith in massively increased productivity as the essential precondition for socialism. In a word, a more utopian socialism than Marxism is hard to imagine. Thus, it appears that any variant of eco-Marxism which put its faith in technological development—the economic forces—would provide no solution, either. Thus, neither of the two eco-Marxist responses seem to provide a solution to the problems we appear to be unloading onto future generations.

What then of a right-wing, eco-authoritarian approach? Eco-authoritarians assume that people will have to be coerced into behaving in an environmentally benign manner. Thus, they place their faith in the power of the political forces. But, as the State-Prinicy Theory highlights, any emphasis on the political forces and their capacity will pose a threat to neighbouring states, and those states would then, most likely, feel driven to develop their military capacity even further, which the eco-authoritarian state would, in turn, have to respond to if it is to remain secure. (See Figure 6.8.) In other words, replacing the present system with something even more authoritarian would pose such a threat to neighbouring states that not only would they most likely find themselves trapped within an environmentally hazardous dynamic, but any such dynamic would, surely, be given an even greater impetus. Thus, there are strong grounds for thinking that eco-authoritarian responses would accelerate the problem, rather than provide a solution.

88 This claim can be found in Karl Marx, 'Preface to a critique of political economy' in Selected Writings, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 896.
90 It is interesting that one of the fathers of eco-authoritarianism, Robert Heilbroner, believes that we are trapped within a 'vicious circle', from which 'we present there is no escape', because of the problem of war—threats which themselves 'justify' the need for nation states. And it is, of course, nation states which threaten war. See Robert L. Heilbroner, An Inquiry into the Human Prospect (London: Calder and Boyars, 1975), p. 46. Yet Heilbroner's recommendations for 'iron governments' (ibid., p. 39) to solve environmental crises. As the threat of war appears to have contributed as much to the environmental predicament we now seem to find ourselves in, and as 'iron governments' pose an increased threat, then Heilbroner's ostensibly 'solution' would, surely, worsen the problem.
7.5.3 Eco-anarchism

So, armed with the State-Primacy Theory, we can now see more clearly what appear to be the fatal flaws in eco-reformism, eco-Marxism and eco-authoritarianism. Each, it seems, would fail to stop us harming future generations. And the reason why none of these responses appears adequate is because each fails to be genuinely interrelational. Each focuses upon only one element of what could well be an environmentally hazardous dynamic. Either the focus is on the political relations, the economic relations, the economic forces or the political forces. The problem is, unfortunately, that if we are within an environmentally hazardous dynamic, then it is mutually reinforcing and self-sustaining (at least, possibly, to the point of ecological collapse!). If we are in such a dynamic, and there is ample reason to believe that we are, then the nature of the dynamic is such that changing one element in isolation cannot provide a long-term solution, because the rest of the dynamic will ensure that the transformed element eventually comes back into line. Alternatively, the other elements would simply re-constitute it in a form which is appropriate for serving their purposes. Consequently, every element of this interrelational dynamic would have to be transformed in order to allow long-term sustainability. In other words, every element of the environmentally hazardous dynamic has to be opposed if we are to reduce the risk of our societies being driven to inflict major harm on future generations.

This conclusion also bears on the viability of anarchism. The environmentally hazardous dynamic has been identified by the State-Primacy Theory. This theory accords explanatory primacy to the state. If states pose the fundamental problem, and if they are ultimately responsible for accelerated environmental deterioration, then surely, it might be assumed, anarchists would be right to see the answer simply in terms of the abolition of states. But, in fact, an effective eco-anarchist response would have to go considerably further than merely demanding the abolition of states if it is to stop an environmentally hazardous dynamic. As we have seen, focusing upon one element in isolation would seem to be the flaw in eco-reformist, eco-Marxist and eco-authoritarian approaches. Anarchists would also fail to provide an effective strategy if all they focused upon was the state. Such an exclusive focus would equally ignore the interrelational nature of the environmentally hazardous dynamic. It would therefore seem that eco-anarchists must, as well as opposing hierarchical political structures, reject the economic relations, the technology and, in general, the coercion characteristic of modern societies.

So, if the environmentally hazardous dynamic of Figure 6.1 broadly depicts our present situation, which many would agree that it does, and if it is as putrid as it seems, bow, then, do we stop our societies rolling in it? The answer would appear to be for our communities to move to the environmentally benign interrelationship portrayed in Figure 6.4. Hence, it would seem, the most appropriate social and political form is a decentralized, participatory democracy, utilizing non-violent methods of social control, which incorporates egalitarian economic relations employing convivial technologies. For only such a society as this appears to be sustainable.

Of course, such an egalitarian, decentralized, participatory democracy would not be a sufficient condition for ending wide-scale pollution or resource depletion. But it does seem to be a necessary condition. A self-sufficient community in economic and political control of its own affairs might choose to degrade its environment; but it would not be compelled to do so. It would not be forced to over-produce and over-consume, as present societies seem to be, in order to meet the requirements of an economy that is functional for a militarily competitive, hierarchical state.

In short, there are compelling reasons for believing that we are presently ensnared within an environmentally hazardous dynamic resulting from the interrelationships we now occupy, and that this has given rise to global ecological deterioration which threatens our very survival. And only by ending that dynamic will it be possible for our species en masse to escape being impelled towards collective suicide.

Equally, there are compelling reasons for thinking that if we are to escape the environmentally hazardous dynamic, we must move towards egalitarian, decentralized, participatory democracies. Within a community taking such a form, the decisions reached would not be determined by inequalities of power. Therefore, environmental concerns are more likely to be raised and taken into consideration by such a society than by present ones, where those people who most suffer from environmental deterioration have the weakest voice. An egalitarian, decentralized, participatory democracy would also allow those who care passionately about the rest of nature to argue their case on equal terms with everyone else. So, although such a society, striving towards consensus, could, in principle, decide to behave in a manner which was not environmentally beneficial.

91 And this, it would appear, is one very good reason why Nietzschean economic libertarianism ought to be rejected. For while it might be critical of certain states, it is uncritical of the kinds of economic relations that seem to be so environmentally destructive.
7.5.3.1 Freedom and environmentalism

Egalitarian, decentralized, participatory democracies, orientated towards an environmentally sustainable way of living, could also provide the most effective answer to the charge that environmentalism, inevitably, prove to be enemies of freedom. To see fully how this charge might be answered, and to make explicit how the various components of the argument presented here fit together, allow me to glance back, very briefly, over the terrain we have traversed.

Chapter 1 noted some of the features of the catastrophic threat to human survival which environmentalists claim to have identified, as well as noting a few of the more elementary principles of ecology which have informed their thinking. Chapter 2 argued that the adequacy of the prevailing political approaches appears to be sufficiently in doubt to justify the suspicion that a new political theory is required if that threat is to be addressed effectively. Some of the conceptual groundwork necessary for an alternative political theory was laid in Chapter 3. An interrelationalist approach seems most homologous with an ecological perspective. However, having to act within ecologically defined limits is precisely what might be presumed to constitute an unjustifiable restriction on freedom. But what do we mean by this essentially-contextual, political concept? The most adequate conception of freedom would seem to be a triadic one. This includes not only the freedom to act but also freedom from certain constraints. When such constraints are imposed by other individuals, they exercise power over us. And the most adequate conception of 'power' would seem to be a 'four-dimensional', counterfactualist one.

Power over others is exercised both politically and economically. How do economic and political power interrelate? Chapter 4 argued that the relations structuring political power stabilize those relations structuring economic power which, on the one hand, are able to finance the political forces and, on the other hand, are conducive to developing those economic forces which the development of the political forces requires. However, this characterization of the complex of interrelationships obtaining between the political and economic relations and forces might appear to be implausible in an era of so-called globalization. Chapter 5 argued, to the contrary, that the theory offered here -- the State-Primacy Theory -- has no difficulty in explaining global political developments. Indeed, it seems to offer a more comprehensive explanation of them than the most widely supported, alternative theories.

But the theory also enables us to explain the causes of the alarming environmental threat which we now seem to face. As Chapter 6 argued, the State-Primacy Theory reveals that the interrelationships between the political relations, the economic relations, the political forces, the economic forces and the environment would seem to constitute an environmentally hazardous dynamic. And while the State-Primacy Theory exposes this dynamic, the plausibility of the latter is not dependent upon the cogency of that theory. Most importantly, it is this environmentally hazardous dynamic which would appear to be driving us towards our own collective suicide; or, at the very least, the dynamic poses a very significant risk of so doing.

But if green anarcho-communes -- organized as egalitarian, decentralized, participatory democracies -- offer the only escape route from this dynamic, as the analysis of Chapter 6 suggests, then the charge that environmentalism is inherently authoritarian is surely answered. For, while simultaneously providing the communal resources (both social and economic) needed for individuals to engage in cooperative and autonomous action of their own choosing, a green anarcho-communist society could be expected to minimize the (counterfactually construed) power exercised over individuals, because, in such a society, individuals would be empowered to act creatively without being impeded by any centralized, coercive apparatus and without being subject to exploitative economic relations -- both being the major loci of power in modern societies. In other words, whereas environmentalism has often been presumed to be inherently antagonistic to freedom, an environmentally sustainable, anarcho-communist society would, it seems likely, maximize the (triadic) freedom94 capable of being enjoyed by all generations, while providing the only solution to the environmental threat standing in our path.

Of course, any such maximization of freedom would not include the maximization of all freedoms, such as, say, the freedom to drive one's car whenever one pleased irrespective of the consequences.95 However, while this caveat might appear to be an intolerable restriction on freedom, it could be argued that anyone who insists on such a freedom for himself or herself does not, in fact, genuinely value freedom.

93 Striving for consensus would seem to require a deliberative or discursive democracy, although not all those who advocate such a democratic programme see consensus as the goal. In recent years, there has been considerable discussion, especially amongst green political theorists, of the need for a deliberative or discursive democracy. See, for example, John S. Dryzek, Rethinking Environmental and Political Economy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987). Also see the contributions by Andrew Dobson, Robyn Eckersley and John Barry in B. Doberry and M. de Groot (eds), Democracy and Green Political Thought: Sustainability, Rights and Citizenship (London: Routledge, 1990).

94 As the triadic conception of 'freedom' advocated in Section 3.2, above, includes freedom from the potential constraints that might be imposed by a centralized source of power (counterfactually construed), it is therefore, in Joel Feinberg's terms, a 'dispositional liberty' or 'breathing space' conception -- which, he claims, is closest to what we ordinarily take 'freedom' to mean. See Joel Feinberg, Social Philosophy (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 5-7.

95 At times, in the eyes of Margaret Thatcher, at least, this opportunity for those fortunate enough to own a motor car (which, let us not forget, is a relatively recent invention) appears to have been viewed as if it were the principal human freedom and as if it were a natural right, to boot.
freedom at all. For if our unrestricted polluting activities result in serious harm befalling future generations, then future freedom will, in consequence, be severely curtailed. As with maximizing happiness, the greatest total quantity of freedom which could conceivably be attained is surely not within any single generation, but across time so as to include many, many generations. There would, therefore, be a far greater quantity of freedom enjoyed were human life to be allowed to continue into the indefinite future than if it were to die out within a generation or two because of the collapse of planetary life-support systems. Moreover, how much freedom would be left the last generation alive were they reduced by our profligate actions to a desperate attempt to survive in the midst of ecological collapse?

Arguably, then, the freedom to act so as to compromise ecological integrity is, in the long run, freedom-inhibiting. Hence, the freedom to act so as to destroy the planet and thereby restrict future freedom is, surely, not what anyone who truly valued freedom would demand. The highly selfish activities of the affluent of today are unlikely to be the sorts of things which anyone who genuinely valued freedom would applaud, never mind defend. In a word, anyone who truly valued freedom would surely wish to see freedom enjoyed by future generations, rather than see them fated to suffer horrendous deaths as a result of an environmental catastrophe of our making.

However, all this could easily be argued to have missed the point. For what those who love freedom really value, it might be objected, is their own personal freedom. But there have been many who truly valued freedom for whom this claim would be quite untrue. Under the flag of freedom, many have risked their lives—indeed, freedom is a cause for which many have willingly given their lives. But those who were prepared to sacrifice themselves in the name of freedom could not have been wholly preoccupied with their own personal freedom, for (unless one subscribes to rather strange sociological views) it is doubtful that one’s personal freedom is ever increased by the loss of one’s life. Evidently, then, it must have been the freedom of others or the abstract ideal of freedom which many heroic individuals have admirably sought to further. But the demand for this freedom to destroy the planet and thereby curtail the freedom of future generations fails to take all others sufficiently into account and hardly constitutes a consistent political ideal. Thus, valuing freedom as a political ideal, for example, is surely not the same as the selfish demand for the freedom to do whatever one wishes irrespective of whether or not it violates the freedom of others. Freedom as a political ideal can be argued to be coherent only when it consists in maximizing the freedom of all. But the freedom of future generations would seem to be no less morally significant than that of our contemporaries.

Consequently, if freedom is to be a convincing political ideal, it appears that it ought to mean maximizing the freedom of all generations. But then, no one who genuinely and consistently valued the freedom of all, including that of future generations, would knowingly and willingly choose to act so as to curtail future freedom by behaving in a manner which contributed to the undermining of ecological integrity. For future persons, and therefore their freedom, depend upon an uncompromised ecosystem. In short, then, we are required to live sustainable lifestyles if all persons (both present and future) are to be maximally free. But only the vision of a green anarcho-communist society seems to hold out any possibility of maximizing freedom by securing its basis into the indefinite future so that it may be enjoyed by an uncountable number of generations to come. Only an anarcho-communist society appears capable of escaping the power of the state and, with it, imprisonment within the environmentally hazardous dynamic in which the state seems to be centrally implicated. In a word, the maximization of our own freedom, along with that of future generations, appears to necessitate green anarcho-communes.

One thing seems clear, then: if the argument advanced here is sound, then a sustainable society is radically different from our own—and considerably more so than either eco-authoritarianism, eco-reformism or even eco-Marxism realises. Only an anarcho-communist political theory reveals the full extent of the changes that may well have to be made if we are to survive as a species. Some will find the way of life that it advocates attractive. Some will not. The question which the latter must address, therefore, is what else could provide a long-term, workable answer to the problem of human sustainability? From the standpoint of the State-Primacy Theory, it is abundantly clear that nothing could. Only within green anarcho-communist societies could our species survive well into the future. But at first glance, however, many people would assume that suggesting any such alternative system is far too utopian and that it couldn’t possibly work—except that, in the view of numerous social anthropologists, societies relevantly similar have worked. What is more, they seem to have worked for thousands and thousands of years. The most environmentally benign societies that anthropologists claim to have discovered, which appear to have existed relatively unchanged for far, far longer than any centralized state has been on this Earth, are non-militaristic, decentralized, participatory, egalitarian societies using convivial
technologies (such as the Mbuti,\textsuperscript{99} to cite just one example). In other words, the environmentally benign interrelationship depicted in Figure 6.4 appears to have persisted perfectly well for countless years in many non-literate societies. This is not to argue that we should return to the stone age. It is not to argue that we should do without technology; only that, collectively, we ought to develop technologies which are environmentally benign, as well as their political, economic and social prerequisites.

Hence, the big issue, it seems, is not whether the environmentally benign interrelationship would work or not. Rather, it is how we might move from the environmentally hazardous to the environmentally benign. And what all of this means for the individual is the following: One’s moral obligation not to cause harm to future people, one’s obligation to defend them from being harmed needlessly, and one’s obligation to defend them from those who are running a considerable risk of harming them entail that one cannot merely oppose government policy. For one cannot, morally, continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents. Nor, morally, can one continue to participate in any element of a dynamic that is so deadly to innocents.

In other words, one must refuse to cooperate not only with the prevailing political relations but also with their political forces, with the predominant economic relations, and with the use and development of their economic forces. In fact, one seems duty bound to go even further. One’s obligation to prevent harm to future generations appears to extend to the shutting down of major sources of pollution - by ‘ecocide’, if need be.\textsuperscript{100} I shall term all of this ‘radical disobedience’.

99 See Colin Turnbull, The Forest People (London: Picador, 1961). Of course, this is not to deny that certain other non-literate peoples have failed to act in an environmentally benign manner.

100 However, as the obligation to engage in ‘ecocide’ or ‘mosquey wrenching’ has been derived from the obligations to persons to harm to others, then only forms of ecologically-motivated sabotage which did not cause harm to persons would be justified. One famous example of ‘ecocide’ is tree-spraying, where ceramic spikes are nailed into trees high up their trunks. The result is that, whereas those who cut down the trees with chainsaws are not harmed (because the spikes are inserted above the height at which they work), the blades of the saws are destroyed by the spikes when the logs are sawn into planks of wood. And because of the safety-guards on the blades, no workers are physically harmed.

Thus, tree-spraying penalises logging mills with a rapsous demand for trees - the consequences of such demand being, among other things, the causing of harm through climate change to future generations. Or so environmentalists maintain.

101 It might be thought that Rawls’ approach to ‘intergenerational justice’ could justify radical disobedience on behalf of future generations. Rawls’ view is that each generation ought to preserve the benefits of its civilization, maintain its just institutions, and provide posterity with a capital accumulation greater than it inherited from its ancestors. John Passmore continues the letter as requesting of each generation that it ask itself what a society could reasonably expect from its predecessor. ‘If it then acts upon the answer at which it arrives, each generation will be better off than its predecessor but no generation will be called upon to make an exceptional sacrifice.’ John Passmore, Man’s Responsibility for Nature: Ecological

However, it might be objected that engaging in any form of morally-motivated disobedience is the height of arrogance, for protesters are fallible, and what makes them more likely to be right than the government? That future generations will need the resources many of us presume they will need is open to doubt. The government might finance research which would free future generations from a reliance on scarce resources. But any suggestion that future generations will be invulnerable to any harm from a polluted environment is highly improbable. And it is clear that, when governments produce nuclear waste without any clear idea of how they will be able to dispose of it safely, then the harms which they are likely to inflict upon future generations are being disregarded. In such cases, protesters are more likely to be right than the government, for the government obviously does not care about the harms to future generations it is responsible for. Hence, certain protests in defence of future generations would seem to be unproblematic.

But, more importantly, the analysis offered here in fact side-steps the objection that protesters are fallible. For it provides reason to believe that we are all, including our governments, at present trapped within an environmentally hazardous dynamic, and that this dynamic is driving us to harm future generations. Before we could be free to decide on, and then implement, the morally right course of action with respect to future generations, we would need to escape the environmentally hazardous dynamic. In other words, radical disobedience would be the moral pre-condition for any morally acceptable outcome.\textsuperscript{102}

Thus, in conclusion, radical disobedience is not merely permissible,\textsuperscript{103} nor (because of an unquestioned assumption that civil disobedience on behalf of others is supererogatory, at best) it is merely commendable. With the aim of

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\textsuperscript{99} Problems and Western Traditions (London: Duckworth, 1980), p. 87. However, our generation seems to be in the situation of leaving to its successors a planet which has been so harmed that the radical disobedience now apparently required on their behalf would require us to make just such an heroic sacrifice. But, as Passmore argues, given that ‘Rawls’ theory is based on the concept of justice, fairness, equal shares’, then ‘it leaves no room for the heroic sacrifice.’ Ibid.

\textsuperscript{100} If we are, indeed, entrapped within the environmentally hazardous dynamic, then it is driving us to harm not only future generations of humans but also future generations of non-human animals, as well as presently existing human and non-human animals. It would also be driving us to compromise the integrity of the ecosphere as a whole. The risk of any of these ‘harms’ could be employed as a basis for radical disobedience. But given the ‘specieism’ of most humans, and rather than rely on any (possibly dubious) argument about our responsibilities to the ecosphere or nature as a whole, I have confined my defence of radical disobedience to what appears to me to be the responsibility existing to defend, namely, our obligations to other human persons - except in this case, it is to future human persons.

\textsuperscript{101} Radical disobedience might be thought to be impermissible because of a legal duty to obey the laws of the state. But if we are not prepared to accept as excuses for the most monstrously immoral acts utterances like ‘I was only obeying orders’, then, surely, we must accept that one can never abdicate one’s moral responsibility, no matter what any state might insist one’s onerous legal responsibilities consist in. See Robert Paul Wolff, In Defense of Anarchism (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), passim.
Appendix A
Green policies and core green values

A serious concern for the environment would have to lie right at the very heart of any cogent political theory with a legitimate claim to being 'green'. Moreover, a genuinely green political theory would need to be capable of spawning effective strategies for preserving the ecosystems which our polluting activities appear to threaten. But such a theory is unlikely to be greeted enthusiastically unless something of a 'green ideology' were to become more prevalent.

However, given that the majority of people do have some concern for their own offspring at least, and given that the latter will require the natural environment to be preserved to some degree, an environmental sensibility could, conceivably, come to be felt universally. And should it eventually dawn on the majority that, rather than continuing to pursue an arrogant Prometheus attempt at the complete mastery of nature, humbly living within the bounds of ecological sustainability is probably the precondition for our own continued existence as a species, then environmentalist attitudes might be expected one day to blossom.

But if we are to be certain of surviving the environmental crises that we seem to have precipitated, then we must begin to comprehend how ecosystems (upon which we all depend) can be adversely affected by our actions and how they can be sustained. Only then could the specific political, social, economic and ideological preconditions for both ecological sustainability and for our own continued existence as a species become clearly discernible. Thus, Robert Pachlke is surely right when he observes: "The basic building blocks of an environmentalist ideology are the twin issues of conservation and pollution. Both rest on an understanding and appreciation of nature and ecology, and both require that one see human society as intertwined with the ecological web of life."1 None of the traditional political ideologies seems to have come anywhere near to meeting this requirement, yet its successful accomplishment, many environmentalists would insist, has now become essential for our very survival. Hence, there are reasonable grounds for concluding, as Pachlke does, that '[e]nvironmentalism . . . has the potential to

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