

Editors' preface: themed section on unsettling anthropocentrism

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Marxists, especially ones who retain the adjective “revolutionary,” spend a lot of time beating up on liberals and social democrats. Two groups that claim to share most of “our” goals and principles—equality, sorority, liberty, secular humanism, etc.—they certainly do not share the same strategies or tactics. In fact, we typically wonder if they share our principles or simply pay lip service to them. So, we ally with them and beat up on them, in equal measure—or at least in the ratio that we believe is necessary for drawing out their contradictions.

They are against imperialism, but every time the US army goes into Haiti, they seem to believe it will play a progressive role. They claim to be for an ethos of “to each according to his or her needs and from each according to his or her abilities” but they believe that free university education in the USA is too maximalist to discuss. They supported the Chileans in voting out capitalism in 1970–1973, but did not want the *cordones industriales* in Santiago to be armed for self-defense. They believed in the unity of interest of the world working class in 1914, but refused to oppose the colonial projects of their respective ruling classes and then helped defend these projects in the first inter-imperialist war. And, of course, they are well known for preaching socialism out of one side of their mouths and ordering extrajudicial killings out of the other—think Rosa Luxemburg and Venezuelan protesters in the 1989 *Caracazo*, just to name two incidents that come to mind. As the late American folk singer Phil Ochs sang back in 1966:

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I cried when they shot Medgar Evers
 Tears ran down my spine
 I cried when they shot Mr. Kennedy
 As though I'd lost a father of mine

But Malcolm X got what was coming
 He got what he asked for this time
 So love me, love me
 Love me, I'm a liberal...

I vote for the democratic party
 They want the U.N. to be strong
 I attend all the Pete Seeger concerts
 He sure gets me singing those songs

And I'll send all the money you ask for
 But don't ask me to come on along
 So love me, love me
 Love me, I'm a liberal

We understand such contradictions to be at best confusing to achieving the goals we seek and at worst a permanent roadblock, as in the case of activists serially entering and never leaving the US Democratic Party in Presidential election years, because it poses itself as the left wing of the possible. However, beating up on the same group of deer caught in our methodological headlights can get sterile and actually weaken our tools for grasping the cosmos for the trees. It is for this reason that the editors of *Dialectical Anthropology* have decided to open our pages to an environmental-themed section on the radical rejection of a human-centered worldview. We hope to expand our dialog, sharpen our knives in new ways, find new perspectives on our own epistemology, and perhaps develop new targets for that old combination of alliance and pugilism.

In 2014, the Canadian-based annual *Anthropology and Political Economy Seminar* (APES) was convened in Toronto on the day before the Canadian Anthropology meetings. The leader of the first discussion began by suggesting that the most dynamic political forces with the most potential points of intersection for alliance (and pugilism) in Europe are “slow-growth,” “anti-growth,” uncertain about their commitment to humanism, and typically deaf to the sound of proletarian politics. After his comments, we spent nearly 2 h on a rainy morning in Toronto, practicing allying and beating up on these forces. We watched ourselves in the intellectual mirror to gauge how such an engagement might occur and where it might lead. The results, as might be expected, were equivocal. However, for many in the room, this was more a mid-term evaluation than a prolegomena, suggesting why it might be useful for us to think about the human-dominated epoch some are calling “the Anthropocene”—for better and worse.

In the current world where global warming dominates nearly every environmental discussion, sucks down much of the funding, and consumes nearly all of the enviro-political space at the elite levels of governance much of what constitutes contemporary mass politics is about global warming, often to the exclusion of

nearly everything else that concerns the Marxist view of “humanity.” You don’t need to reread Rosa Luxemburg and Samir Amin to realize that a huge percentage of the placards being carried at “the largest climate change rally ever,” in New York City in September of 2014 were more concerned with meat than Marxism.

The editors of *Dialectical Anthropology* believe that it is high time that we have a serious talk with those who advocate for this worldview. They may hate the Anthropocene that we, as the true inheritors of eighteenth century enlightenment liberal humanism, believe we are most suited to defend and reconstitute, but they are radical in their opposition to the world created by contemporary capitalism. They understand that social democrats and liberals are confusing and put up impediments to change. They understand that capitalism is a dead end that must be halted sooner, rather than later. They share the concern that global warming has displaced far bigger and more fundamental challenges facing the planet we live on. And they typically have some of the most effective and withering criticisms of the current regime of sustainability, which seeks to delay the moment of change and institutionalize the current crisis of capitalism forever.

Make no mistake; these are not the usual social democrats we have grown used to beating up on. They are radicals who are, as we claim to be on our journal masthead, “dedicated to the transformation of class society,” but in what ways we are not sure. Are these comrades, the competition, or just ships passing in the night—and if so, in what measure? For this reason, we welcome them to *Dialectical Anthropology* as colleagues, if not comrades.

Marx dedicated *Das Kapital* to Charles Darwin and was deeply concerned with environmental and ontological questions connected to “the species-being.” However, as the nineteenth century’s best recycler of eighteenth century liberal humanism, we suspect that this was in a very different way than those who seek to confront the subjugation of the natural world, by *anthropos*, as the core issue of our time. Most proposed visions of communist/socialist life share with capitalism an acceptance of the dominion of humans over nature, but in a profoundly different way that reorganizes the dominion of humans over each other.

In the name of making new connections and sharpening our knives in new ways, Eileen Crist and Helen Kopnina have generously agreed to take us on a trip into their episteme and give us a brief view of the alienation and destructive logic of anthropocentrism, the importance of wild nature and what their episteme has to offer in developing a path from thought to action. Next year, we hope to present a critical forum discussing their work, its position in relation to contemporary crises in the mode of production, the nature of humanism, progress and its critics, and what is to be done.