

**“Humanity to animals should be particularly inculcated as a part of national education, for it is not at present one of our national virtues. ... [H]abitual cruelty [to animals] is first caught at school, where it is one of the rare sports of the boys to torment the miserable brutes that fall in their way. The transition, as they grow up, from barbarity to brutes to domestic tyranny over wives, children, and servants, is very easy. Justice, or even benevolence, will not be a powerful spring of action unless it extend[s] to the whole creation; nay, I believe that it may be delivered as an axiom, that those who can see pain, unmoved, will soon learn to inflict it.” (Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 203)**

**“All our notions of dominating nature stem from the very real domination of human by human. ... As a historical statement [this] declares in no uncertain terms that the domination of human by human *preceded* the notion of dominating nature. (Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, 44, orig. emph.)**

Questions for discussion:

1. Why do deep greens and eco-feminists link hierarchies to environmental degradation?
2. Should ecologists be concerned with practical questions of political and economic organisation?
3. To what extent must deep greens presume to speak for others—and can they do so reliably?
4. Is it possible to know with certainty whether the institutions of cruelty and environmental damage precede social domination, or the other way around? (If the answer is no, does it matter?)

### **The tyranny of the ideal?**

Deep green thought—which we should remember is a portmanteau of several disparate perspectives—is premised on an unimpeachable moral premise. If we can respect the world around us for its intrinsic value, rather than its value as a mere instrument, then we can achieve moral freedom. This is the same basic claim that Kant insisted applies in human reason. But deep greens assert that the Kantian dualism between humanity and nature makes moral respect impossible, because we cannot treat one another as ends while treating the environment as means. To respect the other *as human* simply means that you respect them as inseparable from the natural world and its value. More prosaically (and as a light green ecologist would put it): since a healthy environment is crucial to the other’s flourishing, you cannot respect her right to flourish while simultaneously destroying the environmental prerequisites for that flourishing. Even if we don’t owe anything to the environment *as such*, we have deep and enduring duties to one another, that can only be upheld by transforming our attitude to nature.

Underlying these arguments is the recognition of the other person’s—and even nature’s—moral agency. Moral agency is both straightforward and fiendishly complex. For you to have moral agency, you must be free from my ignorance and prejudice, even if—like Kant—I have good intentions. But if this is not to collapse into a self-defeating libertarianism, how do we *realise* this moral ideal? Is there an ontology, a conception of the good, a set of decision-making rules, or even a claim about the relationship between social domination and the domination of nature, that doesn’t *objectify* the individuals it is intended to describe? As a critique of neoliberalism, this may sound familiar, and compelling: free market experimentalism can only proceed *after* interpersonal relations have been commodified. But doesn’t this problem also affect Bookchin’s localist utopia—which can only proceed *after* interpersonal relations have been socialised? How can the individual’s idiosyncrasies be included in this (prior) process any more than they can be accommodated by (prior) commodification? If, for instance, we need to know in theory how social domination creates environmental damage, so that we can know how to design social institutions, what happens if we encounter, say, a feminist who disagrees? We might, of course, resort to either philosophy, or democracy. But why wouldn’t this simply recreate our problem at a new level? Grandiose ontologies are perfectly capable of neglecting women’s experiences, just as political leaders are perfectly capable of ignoring their voices—unless we put a new, fair, process in place (but what is that?). This may, of course, be an inescapable problem. But are its risks exacerbated by ideologies that seek our environmental salvation in transformative social ideals?