

“[T]o achieve [environmental change], we will need to break with “business as usual,” that is, with the current logic of capital, and introduce an entirely different logic, aimed at the creation of a fundamentally different social metabolic system of reproduction. To overcome centuries of alienation of nature and human labor, including the treatment of the global environment and most people—divided by class, gender, race, and ethnicity—as mere objects of conquest, expropriation, and exploitation, will require nothing less than a long ecological revolution[.] ... It is a revolutionary struggle, though, that must commence now with a worldwide movement toward ecosocialism, one capable from its inception of setting limits on capital. This revolt will inevitably find its main impetus in an environmental proletariat, formed by the convergence of economic and ecological crises and the collective resistance of working communities and cultures—a new reality already emerging, particularly in the Global South.” (John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, *The Robbery of Nature*, ch. 11)

Questions for discussion:

1. What (if anything) distinguishes “second generation” environmental radicals from ecosocialists and ecofeminists?
2. How is the exploitation of the environment linked to *social* exploitation?
3. What social changes would resolve the challenges identified by ecosocialists, antiracists, and ecological justice advocates?
4. Does it matter if we don’t know what would follow the ecological revolution?

After the revolution

On reflection, the end of history, which is nothing more than the end of revolutionary politics, doesn’t appear to have lasted very long. Notwithstanding its perfect suitability as “Exhibit A” of the social scientist’s radical ignorance of the future (ironic, that), the end of history narrative is fundamentally incompatible with our reliance on a changing—historical—natural world. Human culture, ideology, and knowledge, the subjects of Fukuyama’s book, are indelibly affected by environmental change. So when Paul Crutzen proposed that we recognise that the world has entered the “Anthropocene” in 2000, he effectively handed the liberal dream of peace through endless growth its death sentence. The world we now live in is one that is changing all around us—and one that requires that we change with it. And with change, upheaval, uncertainty, and fear, we see the conditions once again for radical, even revolutionary social transformations. It is this context that gives ecosocialist, antiracist, and ecojustice arguments their significance.

Given the likely centrality of environmental change to the decades ahead (unless something worse comes along), it would be foolish for even the most dogmatic of anti-revolutionaries to ignore these arguments. Their demands for inclusion, democracy, and justice as we approach the coming tumult emphasise problems that we cannot ignore. All too frequently, our markets are idiotic, our politics unjust, and our societies prejudicial. Given that growth is one of the key drivers of degradation, it cannot be relied on (with liberals) as a panacea; these problems must be addressed on their own terms. But even if this leads you to question the extreme optimism of liberals, it should not blind you to the less sensational point that liberals arrived at their view by looking upon the world and *seeing something different*. The world does not disclose to us itself, and its future; we must actively interrogate it. But it’s easy to make mistakes when looking for something without knowing what that “something” is. And this is where we might ask a little more of the revolutionaries in our midst. How do *they* ground their claims to knowledge? How do they explain disagreement—do the reasons (or “structures”) they adduce here seem plausible, given our self-knowledge? If not, then how can they *know* that their understanding of society and its hidden causes is the right one? How can they know that the revolution would be more beneficial than costly? It is our (potential) dissatisfaction with the revolutionary’s answers here, not the dream of endless growth, that may ground the strongest defence of liberalism, and its capacity to spread risks, à la Wildavsky. But does this mean we must simply accept its injustices and stupidity—and if so, is that a burden we can accept?