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Ecomodernism – defending a new humanist approach to nature

I defend here Luc Ferry's new humanist approach to nature, ecomodernism, outlined in his *Les Sept Ecologies* (2021). Ferry's notion of a "second humanism" takes into account oversights in the Enlightenment thinking, now seen as abstracted from the real life-world of persons, in particular, and arising out of changed conditions of marriage, that of "love-passion" as core value. I first outline Ferry's account of the contemporary ecology landscape. Three anti-humanist approaches to nature are considered: the pre-modern supposition of intentionality in non-human living beings; deep ecology's attribution of an equal functionality to humans and non-humans in the ecosystem; and evolutionary biology's reductionist version of ethics. I then develop a positive account of the isomorphism of the intentionality of humans and all conscious living animals, through an Aristotelian account of sensation as a power of transcendence. The specific condition of human transcendence is reformulated by contemporary commentators through the notion of language, and again through the explanatory notion of self-enactment. This furnishes a foundation for the defence of the new humanist approach to nature.

Keywords: Luc Ferry; ecomodernism; second humanism; Aristotelianism; human transcendence

Introduction

Critical Theory is framed by an awareness of the social factors conditioning human agency. Each person takes up their life not in a complete vacuum but in specific natural and social circumstances. On this basis – remotely sourced in Hegel's phenomenology of mind or spirit – an understanding and valuing of nature can be formulated, different to that framed by a metaphysics of 'man and nature' where the mind is seen as precisely not part of nature. What has to be understood, however, is how the latter metaphysical conception, to the extent that it still has traction, could be seen as a reaction to the reductionist conclusions drawn from the uncovering of the social determinants of human agency, often associated with the so-called 'masters of suspicion' – Marx, Freud, Nietzsche – throwing doubt on all versions of human ideals – and that would be by the logic of things include the new valuing of nature. So Critical Theory has an obligation to respond.

One such doubt about framing one's understanding of things in terms of moral value, or valuing, is found in 'deep ecology', discussed below, which would view human agency not 'from the inside' as it were, but as a functional element in the eco-system. But any such non-anthropocentric ethic, I will argue, is self-stultifying. The driving idea in Luc Ferry's new humanist approach to nature (*Les Sept Ecologies* 2021, "The Seven Ecologies") is the question of the real possibility of persons going beyond their positionality. The anti-humanist ecologies are all framed by one or other version of scepticism about the human powers of self-transcendence – and hence, about ethics as a real rather than supervenient dimension of human living. But how is one to describe this power of transcendence without implying a complete break with nature and an inbuilt disregard of the value of all living things? Ferry notes the loss of faith in the ability of democratic governments to master or exercise control over capitalist development and the extractive economy, a sense of "democratic dispossession" (2021: 50). This would reinforce scepticism about any anthropocentric approach to nature.

This paper puts forward a way of understanding human transcendence as rooted in our ordinary powers of sense-perception – shared with non-human animals. As these powers are affirmed in our ordinary living in the world, they are at the same time implicitly affirmed as operative in all living creatures. The voluntariness in non-human animals is an expression of a certain transcendence of determination by the material world. Anti-humanist ecological approaches downplay human transcendence; the new humanist approach to nature, in contrast, celebrates the transcendence of non-human animals. The unlimitedness of the horizon of human agents (emphasised by Ferry) brings into play the ever-expanding world of ethics as determining, in part, human behaviour, and hence the importance of articulating an ethics of nature.

My point of departure is Luc Ferry's understanding of nature through a "non-metaphysical humanism", outlined in his earlier book, *The New Ecological Order* (1995). Here Ferry notes the challenge of the reductionist conclusions drawn from the uncovering of the social determinants of human agency, throwing doubt on all human ideals. Such doubt has issued in various anti-humanist approaches to nature and the environment, dominating the current politics of ecology; Ferry (2021) later formulates his response in terms of ecomodernism and the circular economy.

I outline Ferry's summary account of the contemporary ecology landscape. I then move to the background philosophical issues. Ferry takes apart two anti-humanist approaches to nature to which I add a third. First, there is the pre-modern attribution of intentionality to nature and non-human living beings. Secondly, there is the move of 'deep ecology' to attribute an equal functionality of both humans and non-humans in the ecosystem. Thirdly, I point to the project, in evolutionary biology, of finding a foundation for the ethical attitude in biological nature.

I then develop a positive account of the isomorphism of the intentionality of humans and all conscious living animals, through an Aristotelian account of sensation as a power of transcendence. This approach puts human transcendence along a spectrum of transcendence characteristic of all animals. The specific difference of human transcendence has been reformulated by contemporary Aristotelians influenced by Wittgenstein through the notion of language as providing an open-ended world of meaning available to human persons. This furnishes a foundation, going beyond Ferry, for the defence of the new humanist approach to nature.

Foreground

In his book, *Les Sept Ecologies* ("The Seven Ecologies", subtitled, "Toward an alternative to antimodern catastrophe theory"), Ferry argues for an ecology that is "not anti-growth, nor anti-liberal, nor hostile to consumption and technological innovation" (2021, 39, my own translation, here and below). He sketches the twofold background to the contemporary politics of ecology, namely the indisputable evidence of planetary degradation, the unsustainable energy consumption, the erosion of biomass and biodiversity, the pollution of air and water and the gas emissions causing climate change; and, secondly, the vacuum caused by the failure of religious and political ideologies, with ecology stepping in as the new grand narrative, whether reformist or radical, feminist or decolonial and anti-capitalist. Ferry notes the loss of faith in the ability of democratic governments to master or exercise control over capitalist development. There is a sense of "democratic dispossession".

Ferry (2021: 9–32) outlines a series of ecological visions he sees as having traction in contemporary European (and possibly global) culture. (i) The doomsayer collapsists focus simply on the post-catastrophe world. (ii) The revolutionary alarmists (heirs of deep ecology movement of the 1980s, discussed below) suggest attitudes that run counter to those implicated in the coming catastrophe – de-growth, de-globalisation, de-consumption and de-population, as well as suspending democracy as having too short-term a vision. (iii) The decolonials, again, link the climate crisis with a crisis of justice, as capitalism is centred on the extractive economy and intensive mono-cultivation disregarding biodiversity; Extinction Rebellion is a well-known example of this movement. (iv) Similarly, ecofeminism sees the oppression of nature as linked to the oppression of women. (v) The vegan movement, on the other hand, focuses on attitudes to animals and animal suffering, while pointing to the health benefits of vegetarianism and veganism, in the extreme version disallowing the use of all products of animal husbandry, no wool, no shampoo, no zoos, no pets and so on. (vi) Less extreme are the reformist alarmists, advocating sustainable development, favouring nuclear energy and so on. (vii) Finally, the ecomodernism approach favoured by Ferry sees sustainable development and green growth as unworkable: taxing fossil fuels simply provokes social unrest on the part of those whose jobs are threatened. Ecology, Ferry wants to suggest, is not a matter of moralising, of “sad passions and guilt” but of human intelligence and interests properly understood. He wants to decouple growth from environmental degradation through the circular economy.

In what follows I am not concerned with the details of his programme but rather with the philosophical background to the idea of a humanism that is eco-friendly. I draw chiefly on Ferry’s earlier outline of ecological concerns, *The New Ecological Order* (1995), in which he argues that a non-anthropocentric ethic is self-stultifying and suggests rather a “non-metaphysical humanism”, one linked to a move away, in postmodernity, from thinking in terms of categories of nation, religion or political ideology in favour of the value of being faithful to friendships, an idea developed at length in his *La Révolution de l’Amour* (2010), the revolution of love. It is the latter frame of thinking that justifies his new humanist approach to nature and in the following section I sketch some of its key points.

Ferry’s second humanism

Ferry’s starting point is the critique of humanism found in Critical Theory. The ideal associated with the Enlightenment and with the emergence of secular republicanism concerned building “a new social and political order where men and women will at last be masters of themselves, free to make their own laws instead of being bound to follow those which seemed to emanate from the cosmos

or from the divinity” (Ferry 2010: 297). This ideal replaced both that of a cosmic order in which humanity must find its rightful place, and the idea of following the promises and commands of a divinity promising salvation – an eternity of love compensating for the pain in this world.

But the humanist ideal of the 18th and 19th century was too abstract. Its oversights were highlighted in Horkheimer and Adorno’s classic, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972). It is the idea of the disengaged rational subject over against the natural and social order that is the problem, they argue, concealing all the ways in which human agency is constrained by factors extraneous to the rational mind. The denial of nature in humanity creates a “mythic irrationality”. “As soon as man discards his awareness that he himself is nature, ... social progress, the intensification of all his material and spiritual powers, even consciousness itself... are nullified, and the enthronement of the means as an end... is already perceptible...” (1972: 54-5) What is lost is agency itself. “The individual is reduced to the nodal point of the conventional responses and modes of operation expected of him...” (1972: 28)

Ferry makes the point that the humanism of the Enlightenment was a legal-rational ideal, abstracted from the real life-world experience of persons in terms of what they, in the end, find of value, what makes their life worth living. In that sense, it is to be expected that there is going to be widespread scepticism about the power of human values to effect real change. There is a disconnect between the humanism and the ordinary lives of people. Ferry (2010: 298-9) sees the problem in two very different ways of understanding ‘fraternity’, one of the three slogans of French republicanism, along with liberty and equality. Fraternity can mean something like the state’s provision to citizens of redistribution, education, health-care, unemployment insurance and so on. What taxes European states is how this is going to be extended to the millions of people outside the First World. Fraternity here refers to a system that is abstract and impersonal.

On the other hand, fraternity may refer to the interpersonal links that really matter in cases of serious illness, loss of a loved one, divorce, loss of dignity when one loses one’s job, and so on. In other words, one is referring here to the close group of family and friends. “Here we have to do with the heart of our affective humanity in the flesh, not with the juridico-rational humanity.” (Ferry 2010: 299)

Ferry wants to say there are personal values, i.e. what we really value, other than moral values. The former come into play when one has to get to grips with our vulnerability, our mortality, our dependence, and all these latter are *ours* – not supervenient on our real life, as it were. This is putting us back into nature, the oversight of which, as suggested by Horkheimer and Adorno, was characteristic of Enlightenment humanism.

For ecomodernism to be effective, what needs developing is the quality of our response to value, whether moral or existential/spiritual. We need a transcendence that does not bifurcate us, taking the person out of nature.

Ferry brings home the point that we need to move away from “classical transcendence” to the very different kind of “transcendence in immanence” (2010: 279–288). “We can conduct ourselves as saints,” he writes (2010: 306), “live through generosity, respect and goodness, apply the most sublime moral principles in the most perfect way, but this changes nothing in this area. It is not just that loving is not a matter of reason or of ethics; it is that no matter what, we are subject to aging, we love those we love, we don’t escape suffering and illness, nor banality and ennui, and eventual disappointment in one’s affective life.” There are values here, but they are not moral values.

This dimension of value identified as a second humanism will affect how one sees philosophy, and, importantly, politics as well. Contemporary philosophy has, mistakenly, handed over the field of spirituality to religion, and restricted itself largely to ethics and politics; Rawls and Habermas are mentioned (Ferry 2010: 309). But the cultural shift that has accompanied the changed practice in marriage – from arranged to freely chosen – has opened up a new field for philosophical reflection, to do with “love-passion”. The traditional topics of moral philosophy, promoting honesty and goodness, condemning lying and criminality, do not touch on this area of personal life. And yet this area, Ferry argues (2010: 326–8), has become, with some exceptions, a more-or-less universal cultural phenomenon. Secondly, it is the democratic experience par excellence, giving meaning to our lives which was not the case for moral values except for an elite. And thirdly, it serves to re-organise the old values. Ferry cites two examples: the value of liberty is relativised by the value of love-passion; and the motivation for aid to developing countries shifts from a colonial mentality to the obligations of love. Finally, this value speaks to the heart of one’s existential anxieties: “One never despairs of the life of affection,” says Ferry (2010: 302) “because it is that which enchants or re-enchants lives which outside of this, seem truly not worthwhile.”

A thought experiment can clarify this. Suppose everyone behaved in accordance with moral ideals, respected human rights, practiced benevolence and so on. In such a society there would be no rapes, or murders, no injustice, nor wars nor genocide. There would be no need for armies, police prisons, repressive judicial systems. Ferry’s point is this, that this “would still not prevent aging, nor dying, nor losing a close friend, nor grieving at the death of a loved one, nor being unhappy in love, being in love with someone who does not love in return, nor being bored with everyday life in its banality.” (2010: 306)

So, there is a new humanism, a new horizon of values. Basically, Ferry argues that as the old humanism associated with nationalism, rights, colonial attitudes is dying in large parts of the developed world, so the new humanism is having a political effect. To value love-passion implies valuing family and children; it is valuing the state of the world to be inherited by one's children and grandchildren. There is an important significance for ecological thinking of the attitudes associated with the new humanism. In the light of this ecomodernism would seem to have some real plausibility.

We turn now to the negative task of outlining problems with anti-humanist approaches to nature. I am drawing here, as indicated earlier, on Ferry's earlier text, *The New Ecological Order* (1995).

Anti-humanist ways of thinking of the value of nature

Natural living beings in premodern thinking

Could one simply adopt a premodern attitude to nature as itself living and purposeful? Ferry illustrates this approach with some examples. The 1497 treatise *Des exorcisms* written by Swiss theologian Hemmerlein gives several examples of unethical or illegal behaviour of non-human creatures, thought of as having intentions. One such is that of the irruption of larva with black heads, *Laubkaefer*, that "entered the earth at the beginning of winter, plunging their murderous teeth into roots, so that when good weather returned, rather than blooming, the plants dried up." The locals brought these insects to trial before their tribunal, provided them with counsel and a procurator; the judge ruled that "since the said larva were creatures of God, ... and had the right to live, and that it would be unjust to deprive them of subsistence" and he banished them to a forested, untamed area nearby (in Ferry 1995, xii). In another document of the time the case is recounted of the rats in the Autun district; in the case brought against them they failed to obey the magistrate's summons to appear in court. Their counsel argued that the reason they had not obeyed the summons was due to the difficulty of the journey and the fact that the cats were on the alert. The judge agreed, adding the factor of the "diminutiveness of their bodies" (in Ferry 1995, xv).

Cut to the contemporary liberal democratic state and the case argued for in the *Southern California Law Review* in an article entitled "Should trees have standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects" (1972). Here Professor Stone cites the case of Walt Disney – wishing to "develop" a wild valley Mineral King in the Sierra Nevada – vs the ecological association Sierra Club. The latter's argument was rejected by the court on the basis that their interests were not

directly encroached on by the development. Stone argues that this could have been different if legal rights were accorded to “forests, oceans, rivers and other so-called natural objects in the environment” (in Ferry 1995, xvii).

The point here is not in this case to suggest the likelihood of the trees – given legal standing – failing to appear in court. Rather, the point is that the concern of Professor Stone does not reflect the reality of the contemporary social determinants. It is not the law, rights, and (competing) interests that mobilise today. In his later publication, *La Revolution de l'Amour*, Ferry argues convincingly that it is not “interests” that are the primary motivating attitudes today but rather the passions by which we live our lives, either those of racism, prejudice, nationalism or those to do with our commitment to family and friends (Ferry 2010: 462). To argue that if it is to be protected the environment needs to be accorded “rights”, is to be blind to the real motivations operative today, not rational-legal but those to do with love-passion.

Ferry wants to preserve the insight of the modern period into human freedom.

His *humanitas* resides in his freedom, in the fact that he is undefined, that his nature is to have not nature but to possess the capacity to distance himself from any code within which one may seek to imprison him. In other words, his essence is that he has no essence (Ferry 1995: 5).

To put forward a set of rules of behaviour that bypasses the operation of this freedom is to go up against a hard-won humanist culture. Ferry points out the right to difference that is put forward as a counter to colonial impositions but that has less than happy corollaries, namely the idea that someone's cultural particularities stick to them in a way that detracts from the capacity for universality definitive of our humanity. But was colonialism a consequence of humanist universalism or an aberration of it?

Anti-humanist ecological thinking

Ferry sees much of the logic of the ‘deep ecology’ environmentalist philosophers failing in a similar way. In the background are thinkers such as Nietzsche, for whom life is the only value and our judgments are only of interest as symptoms (Ferry 1995: 80).

Callicott's argument is worth quoting in full:

1. The biological sciences including ecology have disclosed a) that organic nature is systematically integrated; b) that mankind is a non-privileged member of the organic continuum, and; c) that

therefore environmental abuse threatens human life, health, and happiness. 2. We human beings share a common interest in human life, health, and happiness. 3. Therefore, we ought not violate the integrity and stability of the natural environment (in Ferry 1995: 88).

But this argument, this concluding ‘ought’, doesn’t go through. It is a hypothetical imperative only, i.e. it goes through only if the aim is ‘health’; but ‘health’ is not an absolute but a relative value.

The final resort of the deep ecology movement is to speak of a “heuristics of fear” (Jonas): since we don’t have the knowledge to understand complexity of our actions, fear of doing irreparable harm to the environment should motivate us. This approach bypasses reasonable debate and democratic consensus.

In his Chapter Four entitled “Thinking like a mountain”, Ferry summarises Aldo Leopold’s revolutionary environmentalism. Leopold argues that just as at the time of slavery some humans used to be thought of as property, as the ancient Greek figure Odysseus assumed in pronouncing with impunity on the fate of his property, so too today we are blind to seeing the immorality of seeing the ‘other’ as property, but this time we are talking not about slaves but about nature itself. In his *A Land Ethic*, Leopold argues that there “is as yet no ethics dealing with man’s relation to land, to animals and plants which grow upon it. Land, like Odysseus’ slave-girls, is still property” (in Ferry 1995: 59).

But our analysis has the relation of human agent to the world not at all in terms of ‘neutral’ property but as responding appropriately to objective value: its intelligibility and its call on one’s feeling-response. ‘Deep ecology’ would seek to overturn the hard-won understanding of human being as an ‘anti-natural’ being, one who lives not by laws of nature but by their *conception* of such laws, as Kant puts it (in Ferry 1995: 54).

A further argument is based on the ‘right to difference’ (Chapter Six), in other words on the idea that the modern human view of things – whatever it is – must concede its merely relative perspective and give way to the equal worth of the perspective of other cultures, other species, other beings. But the humanist perspective, that goes beyond the facts of particularities of culture, and so on, established itself against regionalism of various kinds, and opposition to this would have been thought of as ‘right-wing’. Now, however, in reaction to colonialism, that ‘right to difference’ – say, for Zulu maidens to be shown topless on Facebook – is asserted. It is also contradictory both to assert the ‘right’ of particular cultures, or habitats, and at the same time to support the flow of immigrants into such cultures (see Ferry 1995: 111). The humanist project puts the

individual citizen as not tied in without remainder to their particular culture but encouraged to participate in the universal. The right to identity, if there is such a thing, is the right to a particular group, and the assumption is of the “cultural traits that cling to their being” (Ferry 1995: 114). But such traits can only be a relative not an absolute consideration: the term ‘right’ is then incorrectly used here.

Reductionism in evolutionary biology

To these two examples of Ferry of anti-modern ecological thinking one can add a third kind of reductionism, namely the attempt to found ethics on evolutionary biology.¹ Undoubtedly, much of value has been learnt from ethological studies and evolutionary biology about how human agency lies on a spectrum of voluntariness with living nature, in particular with certain non-human animal species. But the attempt to reduce our ethical approach to nature to the functioning of the human species in an evolutionary framework is going to flounder, as I will now suggest.

Radcliffe Richards has argued that biological categories are sufficient to explain human behaviour without remainder, by means of a mechanism, as she puts it, “by which mindless processes might produce the kind of complexity that had previously seemed explicable only in terms of [human] intentions...” (2000: 17). How things appear to us (anthropocentrism) must be distinguished from how things really are. She concludes that one cannot trust one’s deepest feelings as guide to moral action – her example is the feeling of retribution. Ethics must come from something else, and the suggestion is that it is evolutionary mechanisms, to do with kin selection and reciprocal altruism, to combat selfishness and promote behaviour that is conducive to social order. Michael Ruse (1986) called these mechanisms “epigenetic rules.” But, he contended, the notion that altruism is of genuine or objective value, is “a collective illusion foisted on us by our genes.” He put little store by the idea of any autonomous moral reasoning. After all, he remarked, “why should I care whether you are upset at my stealing your food and clothing?” (1986: 253) We can call this the problem of Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky’s character in *Crime and Punishment*, unmoved by the harm he causes to his landlady whom he murders. So anthropocentrism would seem to be justifiably displaced.

Seemingly in contrast to this (but staying strictly within the scientific perspective displacing anthropocentric humanism), Collier and Stengl (2012) argue that it would be mistaken to think that moral values are discredited by evolutionary biology. They argue for “evolutionary moral realism”: we should care about fairness and the like, they argue; we “ignore them at our peril.” (2012:

1 I am repeating here some of my discussion in Giddy 2018.

219). Moral values are adaptive, they have a to-be-pursued character. Moral values are nevertheless restricted, in their understanding, to “factors figuring in the biological story” (2012: 221, footnote).

What is missed here is that *presupposed* to biology (or any scientific inquiry) is the capacity to judge some conception of how things are as probably, or possibly, true – and similarly some supposedly desirable course of action (say, doing science) as truly of value or possibly not. The biological story necessarily prescind from accounting for these human capacities, and hence biological ethics fails to see how the psyche can negotiate between conflicting instincts, or integrate them. One might argue that just as “fairness” or something like it may, be verified behaviourally in capuchin monkeys (as shown by Collier and Stingl), so too “retribution.” Nothing *conclusive* in the matter of ethics is to be found in the biological sciences.

To conclude this section, we can note that the capacity to come to terms with our complex and multi-levelled feeling response to the world is central to moral growth and thus to the plausibility of an effective and autonomous role for ethics in society. And this is key to the moral project put forward by Ferry in his non-metaphysical humanism.

Foundations for a new humanist approach to nature: the isomorphism of human and non-human animal transcendence

I now turn to the task of giving Ferry’s new humanist approach to nature, ecomodernism, a philosophical – rather than simply sociological or cultural – grounding. That is to say, to outlining reasons why the cultural intuitions – to do, to use Ferry’s phrase, with the value of love-passion – have normative plausibility. As mentioned already, there is a scepticism, today, about human agency, in particular about the actual ability of governments to successfully moderate the exploitative tendency of the extractive economy. In response, the anti-humanist approaches to ecology tend to downplay human transcendence. The new humanist approach, in contrast, highlights the real transcendence of non-human animals. This gives support for the eco-friendly intuitions of the new humanism. How is this so?

Ferry points to the central factor of our vulnerability, human transcendence being always rooted in immanence, signalled by the experience of loss, failure and death. This vulnerability links the human animal to the condition of dependence of all living creatures. How does this idea impact on the humanist approach to the environment, that puts the emphasis on persons’ interpretation

and appropriate self-conscious decision-making – in other words, ethics? In his reworked Aristotelian ethics, *Dependent Rational Animals* (2013), Alasdair MacIntyre repositions this approach so as to link such ethics with the human being's dependence as a natural being. There are, as MacIntyre puts it, "animal preconditions for human rationality" (2013: 57). MacIntyre's ethics is not per se relevant to our discussion but rather it indicates a general direction that can supply the kind of philosophical grounding we are looking for. This approach does not entail a metaphysics – this is Ferry's worry – that abstracts human agency from the natural world. The independence that characterises human persons (and gives plausibility to the humanist approach to environmental concerns) is seen as dialectically linked to dependence and the learned habits of discernment and decision-making that Aristotle sees as the core of ethics, must be complemented by "the virtues of acknowledged dependence", discussed by MacIntyre in his Chapter 10. This is in accordance with the general frame of thinking of Aristotle, as a – necessarily brief – discussion of another commentator on Aristotle will show.²

The contrast here is with the dominant metaphysics in the modern period, associated with Descartes. Whereas for Descartes the great divide among things is that between self-conscious beings ("thinking substance") and the rest ("extended substance"), for Aristotle the divide falls between living and non-living. For Aristotle each living thing has its own way of being or enacting itself. The act definitive of cat-ness, the be-ing of the cat, is how it moves from potentiality to actuality, as it grows to what it is. How does it do this? How, in particular, does agency in the non-human animal actually function?

We can begin with the capacity for sensation. Sensation in an animal is sometimes mistakenly thought of simply as stimulation – as my approaching body stimulates the sensors of the automatic doors ahead of me, causing them to open. In the Aristotelian approach, on the contrary, sensation is more than a physiological occurrence in a physiological thing, explained in terms of 'inputs' and 'outputs', as it were. A contemporary commentator on Aristotle explains it well. McCabe (2005) takes sensation in a cow as an example. The impact of the green grass on the eye of a cow, he argues, is not to turn the eye green – along the model of how the application by the artist of green paint would alter the canvas. In fact, the phenomenon of the cow seeing cannot be explained fully as a physiological occurrence in a physiological thing. Intentionality is involved. The perception of greenness functions "as a factor in the cow's interpretation of and behaviour towards its world." (McCabe 2005: 65). The grass is there, as the

2 This is in spite of Aristotle's idea of the pinnacle of human flourishing being the model of the *megalo psychos*, the great-souled man, the man who has no need to acknowledge dependence (MacIntyre 2013: 127).

cow correctly perceives, to be ripped up and chewed, a source of nourishment. So seeing is not predicated in the final analysis of the eye, nor the brain, but of the cow itself and only properly understood if one understands 'the world of the cow'. (2005: 105). The faculty of sensation, shared by the non-human and human animal alike, transcends the world of interacting material objects. The foot, to take another example, insofar as it is simply a physical or material thing (as it is as the foot of a corpse), will have limited value as the organ of a sense power: having a temperature of its own it would not be sensitive to the temperature in the objects, say, bath water, that it encounters. The change in the animal that is termed 'sensation' is not, therefore, simply physiological. The eye, again, if merely a physical, coloured object, could not be an organ that could give information about actual colours in objects in the world. Because it is sensitive to all colours, it is itself (understood as a sense power) without colour.

The upshot is that if we think of 'materiality' as being determined from the outside (principle of inertia), then the animal has an immaterial dimension (although incorrectly thought of as 'alongside' the materiality of the organism). The change when the animal sees is a change from within, leading to a change in the behaviour of the animal.

The various anti-humanist approaches to ecology, as we have seen, in each case put forward a reductionist understanding of human agency, that is to say, there is no 'within' dimension, the dimension emphasised so emphatically by Ferry. First, the suggestion that all nature is itself living and purposeful bypasses the core modern insight into human freedom. Similarly, deep ecology overlooks the way human agents can respond to the world not as 'property' but in terms of its intelligibility and objective value. Finally, evolutionary biology fails to account for the way all scientific inquiry presupposes the scientist's capacity – going beyond the scientist's positionality – to judge any theory as true or probably not. A foundation for Ferry's new humanism would have to show, in contrast, the plausibility of a non-reductionist understanding of agency, in Ferry's phrase, of "transcendence in immanence". The animal, then, has, in addition to its determination from outer factors, to say it again, something of a 'within' – or, to use a technical term, an immaterial dimension.

So far so good. Humans share this capacity for intentional movement. In addition, however, human beings have not a limited repertoire of reactions but an unlimited one. Through language, McCabe explains, human animals are able not just to have intentions but to formulate these for themselves. They can respond freely to alternate posited intentions. This capacity is transformed into an effective ability in varying degrees, however. Which of the posited intentions is the most worthwhile, say, that of supporting an authoritarian dictator promising

prosperity for all, or that of a democrat seeking to empower ordinary people? The promotion of good habits of intellectual discernment and of integrity in one's choices are core to any humanist programme.

Here we have a way forward to address what I have referred to above as the Raskolnikov problem, the problem of the undeveloped *quality* of any person's response to value: why should I care if someone is upset by my stealing their laptop? The caring, we can now see, is a matter of developed habits of response to value. That they *can* develop is a corollary of the human capacity for transcendence.

However, if we push the question as to how this act of freedom without predetermined limits can be explained, we run into difficulties. McCabe's 'linguistic animal' picture, influenced by the later Wittgenstein, has the person as growing as a person through his or her insertion into the narrative and tradition of the community, lifting him or her to a universal plane. But what if the narratives no longer have traction, their meanings no longer with immediate appeal but operating in a kind of routinised, almost mechanical, causality that can be fully unpacked in sociological terms? This would also seem to be a problem for Ferry's non-metaphysical humanism. McCabe does have an answer to this. He references the view of Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*, that is to say, that there is no difference between "his arm went up" (behavioural observation) and "he raised his arm" (intentional meaning) (1972, para.621). McCabe's response (2005: 63) is to point to the difference between "she waved her arms about" and "she greeted her friend across the street", the latter being the *meaning* of the first, bringing in the full context of the intentions of the agent.

However, the explanatory cause of this aspect of "intending" cannot be a *further* act behind the physical act – that is to invite a regress: he intended to intend.... And an explanation is needed if one is to assert this aspect as real not simply epiphenomenal, tagged on to the behaviour, so that one can therefore be justified in addressing an 'ought' to the will (something not possible, in Wittgenstein's contention). Moving away from reductionist behaviourism is, as argued above, key to our humanist environmental project.

In order to answer this, we need to appeal to our ordinary experience of being the origin of our own actions – of knowing or of choosing. This experience is primordial—denying agency (for example the agency involved in that denial) seems to be a performative self-contradiction. In his contribution to the debate, Augustine Shutte points to the fact of this act being "uncaused" as the explanation

of the realm of the ethical: "In the act of understanding or of choice, I know that the self of *whom I am aware* or whom I choose to be is identically the same... the self *that is aware* or that chooses" (Shutte 1984: 58, emphases added). I come to judge some idea or interpretation as, in fact, (certainly or probably) true to how things actually are. In this act it is myself holding the idea that is judged by myself. It is not one part of me acting on another part. The same is the case when I make a deliberate choice of action. I am self-enacting. This means I am self-moving in a way that goes beyond the limited repertoire of possible actions of non-human animals.

Thus, the specific difference of the *human* animal, in our organs of understanding and choice, can be identified as residing in the fact that the act of meaning is not caused by another event. We can address an 'ought' to the human animal, and so reasonably expect an adjustment of habits of choice that we have envisaged in our humanist environmental ethics. Given this understanding of the human powers, it is important to respect, and not to bypass, people's reasons-for-actions – a humanist perspective. What is new here is how this perspective has been given a philosophical foundation, an understanding of human agency that is – as seen in the analysis of the capacity for sensation in animals – isomorphic with the agency properly predicated of non-human animals.

Conclusion

Ferry's concern, in arguing for a non-metaphysical humanism, is that any metaphysics of the human person would slip into a reductionism – taking the categories of the sciences as the only possible knowledge – or else a supernaturalism, a conceptual scheme that bypasses our self-confirming experience of our agency. He suggests that, to affirm transcendence, no extraneous metaphysics is needed, simply interior proof, a phenomenology of getting to the truth of things, of living by values, or of appreciating beauty. The metaphysics that I have drawn upon above, I want to argue, is not at all extraneous but on the contrary refers precisely to this experience of oneself as an agent. The Aristotelian approach, furthermore, is crucial for our understanding of the exigencies of growth in character, in self-knowledge and self-determination that justifies our non-anthropocentric environmental ethics, a new humanist approach to nature.

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