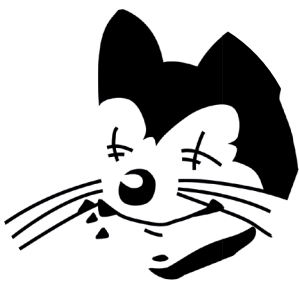


COMMENT

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A Response to “How dare I?”, on Ecological Misconception

Julio Garcia-Perez (mathematics) argues that Alberto Begue's piece (Sustainability, Felix 1745) paints a strawman fairy-tale of Greta Thunberg's ideology

COMMENT

Julio Garcia Perez

Comment Writer

Last week, Alberto Begue wrote an article on the ecological movement represented by Greta Thunberg. The goal of the article seemed to be to “destroy” what the author believes to be the ideas most ecologists support with facts and logic. After reading it I was somewhat confused, as what he was writing against does not really represent the movement and barely any reasoned arguments against ecologism were provided. In this article I will show how Alberto's idea of climate activists is mistaken, what some of our (my) real ideas are, superficially dispute the eco-neoliberal fairy-tale (for the nth time) and talk about the reactionary figure of the “politically incorrect knight” in our times.

At the beginning of the article, the author states in some way that he is concerned with the environment. To do this he highlights his love for numerous animals, flowers and all those sorts of things that do just one thing: infantilise and trivialise the ecological cause. By associating climate activists like Greta with people who, for some reason, really like nature you are equating it to a hobby. Would someone dare compare our sacred economy with coin collecting? No. So I would suggest that if the author wants to be taken (not

saying that he is not) as someone concerned by the climate crisis (yes, crisis, not change), he could at avoid this unnecessary trivialising remark. Again, being ecologically concious is not about having a passion for the wonders of mother earth, but to see that if we keep going like we are, we are all fucked; and I cannot think of something more critical to his own concerns.

After this self-recognition as a nature lover (which is more than I can assert), Alberto proceeds to present to us what he believes the “Greta cult” (what many reactionaries would probably call ecologists these days) mean by ecologism. Central to this insulting caricature is the idea of overpopulation and what he calls “mass suicide” (plausible if Seneca was a top selling author). Alberto's incorrect claim that this is something most ecologists advocate is precisely a bastard idea of the neoliberalism he so much loves and social Malthusian ideas (that the Nazis so happily inherited). Capitalism has for decades imposed an individualist conception of ecological conscience based on blaming each of us for our lack of “green” behaviour in our day to day life. Yes, that is right, you, who uses plastic straws, are as responsible as Shell for the climate crisis. Once accepted this personal responsibility, it is (not so) reasonable to jump, as Alberto does, to population control and genocide, which, as I mentioned are usually

present in reactionary far right sectors, as the ideal way of ending with each of us eco-sinners. Individual eco-shame is yet another effort by the

“He highlights his love for numerous animals, flowers ... that infantilise and trivialise the ecological cause”

establishment to avoid the masses from realising that a hundred companies are responsible for 70% of the contamination of the planet, and genocide is just an alternative measure that punishes (kills!) the powerless instead of the powerful.

After the above considerations, you can probably understand why I was confused when I read that I am “obviously the heir of those who wanted to sterilise populations”. A movement that challenges a threat to the survival of humans cannot argue for their extermination! Maybe the author has yet to realise that the climate crisis does not only kill cute animals like the dolphins and elephants he cites, but also humans, especially the destitute. It is, indeed, the “third” world (it exists!) that is suffering the most the consequences of the wrongdoing of the usual suspects. This is the



The environmental movement is more profound than a hobby for those who “really like nature” //Wikimedia

reason why movements like Extinction Rebellion put emphasis in showing the ecological issues that these countries experience and the West cannot be bothered with (unless it is to despoil them or enslave them). We, or at least I, argue is that it is a few companies in the (un) developed Western world, supported by the political class and the privileges of the (un)free market that are responsible for our current crisis. Note that this is a shift from the individualist eco-shaming invented by neoliberalism to a structural critique of the system, one that most of us can adhere to. Once this different critique has been established, we

could jump, like Alberto did, to the different conclusion that we should destroy these few companies or even destroy the system, instead of destroying every human. This is again a caricature that so many economy lovers love to criticise. But the truth is we are not even asking for a system destruction (the wettest of my anti capitalist dreams), but for a system change.

The other main idea Alberto seems to assign to the “Greta cult” is “degrowth”. The term itself is curious enough, as like anything that challenges the sacred cow that is the economy, it had to be coined in a negative fashion as the antagonism

of “growth”, and we all know that “growth” is good, or do we? According to Alberto, the closest synonym of economic growth would be technological progress. I am slightly sceptical of this, the neoliberal world is not known for putting technological progress first, but profit maximization (or so my Mathematics of Economics module suggests). This is a point that is sometimes difficult to come to terms with: technological progress is only a by-product of companies' goal to make cash, and therefore, subjected and obstructed by it. The development of technology would be better focused and more

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efficient if it was not a slave to marketable trends (selfie stick, iPhone 10, iPhone 10 S, iPhone 10 SS, iPhone 10 SSHH...) and elitism that only a few can afford but directed towards the real necessities of the people. What growth really refers to is growth of contamination rates, growth of inequality, growth of precarious jobs, growth of the market against the environment and against the people. This is the point where Alberto and I differ, he believes growth and ecologism are compatible, what is more, he seems to declare them best friends, so he would probably not agree with my previous rant about “growth”. But let us talk about degrowth.

Degrowth does not mean a decrease in the quality of life or that you will have to live in dark green forests; that is just the picture painted by, again, the usual suspects. Degrowth is a set of policies and measures directed towards the achievement of a society where contamination degrows, inequality degrows and the importance of the omnipresent market degrows. Degrowth is (not paradoxically) also about growth: growth of green jobs, growth of public services and property, growth of civil participation and decision making, growth of small business, growth of biodiversity... This is precisely the system change I was talking about, one that puts people first and, like parents with their kids, tells big business when they are crossing the line. So, I think Alberto should have at least mentioned how degrowth “takes away: teachers, hospitals, doctors and even freedom”, as it seems to me to be quite the opposite case. I recommend Naomi Klein’s “This Changes Everything” for a well-researched (better written) introduction to many



Clearly satan in disguise, with an EU halo // Wikimedia

topics regarding capitalism, ecologism and green

“Degrowth is [...] directed towards the achievement of a society where contamination degrows, inequality degrows and importance of the market degrows”

alternative approaches to neoliberalism in our time.

After telling us about his affinity for rats, misidentifying the arguments of the “Greta cult” and stating that degrowth is the devil in disguise, Alberto claims that the only alternative to ecologists’ miserable and apocalyptic solution to our miserable and apocalyptic future is the same capitalism (i.e. our miserable and soon to be apocalyptic present) that precisely led us to this situation. To back this bold claim, he presents the example of the river Thames, which he argues is at its most biodiverse for centuries! This is true, it was even declared biologically dead in 1957 and biodiversity has improved since the industrial revolution, but saying that it is thanks to our friend capitalism is a bit of a stretch. The end on the British Empire

meant a huge decrease of usage of the river and the displacement of heavy industry from London to the periphery helped a lot. About companies cleaning the river because it is in their interest, as far as research has led me this was because of stricter changes in the legislation, not the company’s “generous” nature. Regardless, we should not be thanking a company for cleaning, even voluntarily, what they dirty (at least I do not thank my dirty flatmate for cleaning his shit). He also mentions how this is a solution found within the capitalist framework, it is true as well, and it matches very well with degrowth’s legislation over companies. Maybe, Alberto, you agree with the “Greta cult” more than you think! Being more

rigorous now, one cannot present a Thames example as a “proof” that capitalism eco-rocks, when capitalism is, as I have already said, the cause of the climate crisis (maybe you would like to argue against that too). Regarding democracy, I believe no Greta is threatening democracy, but rather trying to make our current liberal democracies more participative and closer to the people, so I cannot see how democracy is antagonistic to ecologism and degrowth. What I can see is how ecologism challenges political systems that do not represent their people, in who sovereignty lies, and how that can be an issue for the usual suspects; but that is not surprising.

Lastly, I wanted to talk about a figure that I have noticed has emerged

parallel to the far right globally, that of the “politically incorrect knight”. Reading Alberto’s article made me think more about this idea, so I will use it to exemplify the concept. Opposite to the well-known online “white knight” who fights for progressive causes such as (especially) feminism, LGBT+ movement, ecologism... in a saviour-like manner, the “politically incorrect knights” are those individuals who fight against these progressive ideas in a rather insulting, direct or merciless way, hence the politically incorrect. This role comes from the threat perceived by some sectors of society in progressive ideas becoming hegemonic in our culture. In order to attack them without looking reactionary or archaic, they raise in their discourse these progressive ideas to hegemonic (when they are far from it), widely accepted or politically correct so that they can then charge against them as a revolutionary act against the establishment. In the case of this article, Alberto identified ecologism as hegemonic, even saying that most parties have made it its number one priority. This is far from true and not even left parties pay nearly enough importance to ecologism, the priority for parties remains numbers that say something about the sacred economy (or Brexit in the case of the UK). The title of his article also illuminates the revolutionary aspect of the act (yes I know it is also a pun), as he presents his text as one daring to stand up against Greta the eco-dictator, stealing the girl her dreams in his last paragraph. Well, Alberto, I will not be the one to steal your dreams, but I can assure you that not even you, or a few fat companies will be able to steal our dream for a better society.