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**“EARTH AS A LIFE-RAFT AND ETHICS AS THE RAFT’S AXE”\***

**ABSTRACT:** If earth is a life-raft, there might be some sharks around. In the case of our tiny and fragile planet, however, there seem to be no sharks out there; instead the enemy is already aboard. In this essay I will discuss Kaarlo Pentti Linkola’s claim that our species represents a major threat for the ecosphere, as well as his suggestions on how could this threat be best dealt with. In particular I intend to focus on the two pillars of Linkola’s moral outlook, namely that [a] the best interests and the wellbeing of the whole are morally superior to the ones of any individual being or a single species, and that [b] only the preservation of life on earth *in general* may be considered as of absolute moral value. I will try to prove my view that neither can be considered a morally justified principle, hence both could be accepted only as metaphysical hypotheses. Then I will critically discuss the arguments Linkola uses to support his claim that humans are a major threat to the ecosphere. I will argue that his claim is unsound, and I will conclude that his outlook is no less alien to morality than any other version of ethical holism.

**KEYWORDS:** ethical holism, ecocentrism, biocentrism, environmental crisis, overpopulation, democracy, progress.

A common metaphor on our planet portrays it as a rescue boat for life that travels in an endless sea of cosmic darkness. If this metaphor is to be considered a precise one, this would mean that the earth is the only chance for life to survive the journey – at least as far as animal life is concerned. Apart from this, however, the metaphor implies that our planet is also very fragile, and that its carrying capacity is limited. Now, imagine that this boat is invulnerable to external threats; imagine, also, that it is self-sufficient and self-regulated. It is only a tiny fraction of its numerous passengers that has the power to put in danger the boat’s safety: they can do this either by multiplying uncontrollably and thus adding excessive weight to the boat, or by undertaking certain actions that could completely destroy the boat, and this despite the palpable fact that the boat’s failure will unavoidably lead all passengers to their doom, the saboteurs included. What should be done with such a bunch of foolish saboteurs, then? Why shouldn’t they just be forced out into the sea? Well, here comes an impossible inconvenience: the only ones who are entitled to judge this – and the only ones who can execute the sentence – are these very same saboteurs. The metaphor now seems trickier, and tricky metaphors usually are an ideal starting point for moral debates. In what follows I will provide an outline of this raft-in-danger debate. In particular I will discuss the unexpected view that the species *Homo sapiens*, the saboteurs of the metaphor, ought to either decide against their own interests, or even against their very existence. I will suggest that this view rests on the fundamental moral principles that [a] the well-being of the whole is morally superior to that of the part, and that [b] only life on earth in general is of absolute moral value, therefore it should be secured by any means and at any cost, even if this would call for the

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annihilation of the species *Homo sapiens*. I will try to prove my view that neither can be considered a morally justified principle, hence both could be accepted only as metaphysical hypotheses. Then I will critically examine Linkola's view that humans are indeed a threat to the very existence of the ecosphere, as well as his claim that our species ought to either drastically diminish in numbers, or, even better, totally disappear from the face of the planet. I will argue that Linkola's analysis is either undocumented or based on irrelevant evidence, therefore it is misleading. I will conclude with my view that Linkola's outlook is no less alien to morality than any other version of ethical holism.

## 1. A prelude.

Environmental ethics came into the foreground during the last half of the twentieth century. Only a few years ago *Little Boy* had nearly vaporized the entire city of Hiroshima and most of its population leaving behind – apart from grief – an enormous environmental disaster that was going to last for decades; at the same time the extensive use of pesticides and other chemicals in the fields was threatening to make all future Springs silent (Carson 2002); *agent orange* hadn't won the war for the US, but still kept killing thousands of innocent people in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia long after the end of the war; at the time many claimed that the human population has been increasing beyond any control, and that the so-called *population bomb* was about to explode (Ehrlich 1968). The major traditions in ethics had obviously failed: if they were not the source of the environmental disaster, they were at least obviously unable to prevent it. This failure was probably the reason why Richard Routley claimed in 1973 that there was a need for a new, an environmental ethics (Routley 1973, 205), whose task would be no other than to establish moral imperatives and duties towards the planet and force mankind to commit to the preservation and the flourishing of the natural world.

To this purpose philosophers engaged themselves in reexamining the moral status attributed to nature by the major moral traditions. The dominant for centuries view that nature may have only instrumental value was severely questioned and rejected as responsible for the environmental degradation, together with its offspring, anthropocentrism. The fact that humans were considered to be the only bearers of *absolute* or *intrinsic* value apparently left the rest of the creation with only *instrumental* one; this view, however, seemed outwardly arbitrary. In Peter Singer's words: "Contemporary philosophers [...] freely invoke the dignity of mankind without needing to justify the idea at all. Why should we not attribute 'intrinsic dignity' or 'intrinsic worth' to ourselves? Fellow-humans are unlikely to reject the accolades we so generously bestow on them, and those to whom we deny the honor are unable to object" (Singer 2012, 173). Maybe, then, it is not man, but the ecosphere that should come into focus: the whole of the planet could be a proper *locus* of absolute moral value, and this irrespective of whether the ecosphere is useful to humans or not (Elliot 1997, 68). A forest, for example, has its own moral value just because *it is the forest it is*, and not due to the fact that it supplies humans with timber, fresh air, fruits and the such; its moral value is only due to the fact that it exists as a part of the whole (Katz 1997, 99). A forest that has never been used as a source of timber is *not less of* a forest. Nature has no *entelecheia*; natural entities are intrinsically functionless (Brennan 1984; Katz 1993, 224), they have no final purpose; they are not intended to serve humans. Nature's moral value is independent from its usefulness to humans (Routley 1973, 207ff); this value would remain the same even if

the human race vanished from the face of the earth, since the moral value of all natural beings and entities is owed only to the fact that they participate to the whole of the ecosphere. If this is so, however, species and individuals may be attributed only *relative* moral value, and this as far as they participate to the whole (Protopapadakis 2006, 47).

## 2. The backbone.

What is the connection of all these to ethical holism? The fundamental principle of ecocentrism described above, namely that the ecosphere is the only *locus* of absolute or intrinsic moral value, implies that all species, the *Homo sapiens* included, can be attributed only *relative* moral value, a kind that is totally dependent on the fact that the species is a part of the whole, as well as on the way the species affects the whole (Callicott 1989, 15-38). This shifts the focus from the wellbeing and the interests of the individual to the wellbeing and the interests of the ecosphere (Leopold 1968, 224-225). Under the lenses of ecocentrism the best interests of the whole seem to be morally superior – or, prior – to the best interests of any single species. This, however, might also mean that if any species is harmful to the ecosphere or dangerous for its existence, it is morally justifiable to use any means available and/or necessary to reestablish a proper, viable equilibrium – and, guess what, the only species that persistently acts in such a way as to jeopardize the stability and viability of the ecosphere is the species *Homo sapiens*. Therefore, the argument could go as follows:

- A. Only the ecosphere is of absolute moral value, and its parts may only have relative value, one that is only due to the fact that they participate to the whole, and one they maintain for as long as they promote the wellbeing of the whole or, at least, they do not endanger or harm it.
- B. If any part of the whole endangers or harms the whole, it ought to be neutralized by any means necessary.
- C. The species *Homo sapiens* endangers or harms the whole.
- D. Therefore, the species *Homo sapiens* ought to be neutralized by any means necessary.

The first premise is the main pillar of ecocentrism; the second follows directly from the first. As for the third one, there seem to be some good reasons to accept it as true. Among others [a] humans seem to be propagating beyond any control, and this has become a major threat for the natural equilibrium, [b] mankind throughout its history has proven extremely efficient in spoiling the beauty, compromising the integrity and destroying the purity of nature, and [c] our species comes hand in hand with technology, progress and urbanization, which, however, are source-demanding and a constant threat to the environment. Anyone who accepts the premises of this argument as true, and since the argument is formally valid, is morally bound to the conclusion, and this irrespective of the fact that this *anyone* can only be a member of the species *Homo sapiens*.

An outlook quite analogous to ecocentrism is *biocentrism*, according to which either inherent value (Derr & McNamara 2003, 21) or the status of the moral object should be extended from humans to all living beings in nature (Yu & Lei 2009, 235). The view, in particular, that humans are the exclusive bearers of inherent value and

that, therefore, they are somehow superior to other living beings in a moral sense, to biocentrism strikes as totally unjustifiable (Taylor 1986, 100). Taylor maintains that all living organisms are *biologically goal-directed teleological centers of life with a good of their own*: “We grasp the particularity of the organism as a teleological center of life, striving to preserve itself and to realize its own good in its own unique way [...] in the sense that each is a unified system of goal-oriented activities directed toward their preservation and well-being” (Taylor 1981, 210). The fact that certain capacities – such as consciousness – seem to be unique in humans provides no justification for considering ourselves morally superior to other living organisms, since, after all, “various nonhuman species have capacities that humans lack. There is the speed of a cheetah, the vision of an eagle, the agility of a monkey. Why should not these be taken as signs of *their* superiority over humans?” (Taylor 1981, 211). The biocentric outlook demands that those who accept it should also adopt “the doctrine of species impartiality. One who accepts that doctrine regards all living things as possessing inherent worth – the *same* inherent worth, since no one species has been shown to be either ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ than any other” (Taylor 1981, 217).

Taylor’s claim that all living things possess the same inherent worth *just because they are living things*, seems to bestow moral superiority *only on the property of life itself*. From the assumption that if a *thing* is *living* it is inherently worthy, it may follow that if a thing is not a living one it is not inherently worthy. What makes, then, a thing inherently worthy seems to be the property of life. If this is so, life *per se* is the ultimate source of moral value and at the same time – as well as because of this – the only possible absolute moral value. If this – not so unexpected – step is taken, then the argument I previously outlined could be restated as follows:

A<sup>1</sup>. Only life on earth as such is of absolute moral value; therefore all living things may have relative value, one that is only due to the fact that they are living things, and one they maintain for as long as they do not endanger the existence of life on earth.

B<sup>1</sup>. If any living thing endangers the existence of life on earth, it ought to be neutralized by any means necessary.

C<sup>1</sup>. The species *Homo sapiens* endangers the existence of life on earth.

D<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the species *Homo sapiens* ought to be neutralized by any means necessary.

This short discussion on biocentrism and ecocentrism is not intended to imply that those who abide by the principles of both outlooks *necessarily* follow the above arguments to reach the conclusion that the species *Homo sapiens* ought to be neutralized. To this some further steps would be necessary, steps that one may or may not take; as a matter of fact, most do not. I only claim that both outlooks can provide the springboard for ethical holism in the field of environmental ethics. As for the *sui generis* Finnish thinker Kaarlo Pentti Linkola, it seems that they actually did.

### **3. The ethical holism of Kaarlo Pentti Linkola.**

Linkola combines in an idiosyncratic manner the fundamental principles of both ecocentrism and biocentrism in order to articulate a holistic ethical outlook that rests on two pillars: [a] life *per se* in any form is of absolute moral value, therefore the preservation of life on earth should be accepted as the supreme moral imperative for moral agents and [b] the best interests and the wellbeing of the ecosphere as a whole

are morally superior to the ones of individuals or species. In his view, the ultimate purpose of ethics is – or, should be – the preservation of life on earth until a distant future (Linkola 2009, 19); that is, not the preservation of the life of the species *Homo sapiens* or of any other species in particular, but of *life in general*. He claims that the major traditions in ethics as well as the moral norms and values that humans for centuries have been accepting under the influence of these traditions have been tested and proven incompatible with the purpose of establishing a proper equilibrium that would guarantee the preservation of life on earth and the wellbeing of the ecosphere; therefore traditional moral theories should be altogether rejected. After all, it is utterly nonsensical for a society not to question moral norms that obviously are intended to cause its doom (Linkola 2009, 138). The view that foremost seems to be in need of thorough reexamination and revision is the one that assumes the alleged moral supremacy of the species *Homo sapiens*. To Linkola this view is undocumented and arbitrary, since our species is *just one more* among millions of species that inhabit the planet. Humans are neither the owners nor the stewards of the earth; to assume otherwise would be contrary to reason and completely outrageous (Linkola 2009, 61). Linkola's views resulted in the articulation of a holistic moral theory that regards the disruption of technological progress and growth, the drastic reduction of human population, and the rejection of democracy as a moral imperative for humans.

#### **a. Technology, progress and prosperity.**

“The most central and irrational faith among people”, claims Linkola, “is the faith in technology and economical growth. Its priests believe until their death that material prosperity bring enjoyment and happiness – even though all the proofs in history have shown that only lack and attempt cause a life worth living, that the material prosperity doesn't bring anything else than despair. These priests believe in technology still when they choke in their gas masks” (penttilinkola.com 2006). But which progress are we talking about? Most of us humans, according to Linkola, have to work more than our forefathers did, occupying ourselves with trivial and senseless duties, such as plugging and unplugging jacks, keeping income and expense accounts, or trying to convince a complete stranger to buy a brand new washing machine. If we had the chance to choose, we would prefer to do something totally different to what we have invested a major part of our life in, something with inherent value. Do all these indicate some kind of progress? Technology and industrialization are not only useless, but also detrimental to our species, since they make humans perceive things in a rather distorted way. For example, the most common argument in favor of technology is that it has already vastly improved the quality of life for the majority of the human population, and that it seems capable of improving it even more in the future. According to Linkola, however, this is not the case; on the contrary, he believes, technology is the main cause why human beings have lost any meaning or purpose in their lives. If it weren't for the countless misfortunes, calamities and hardships it had to face and managed to overcome throughout all its existence, in Linkola's view our species would be lacking even the few good qualities it now has. It is only due to hardships that the species *Homo sapiens* has developed its best features. Due to technology, however, today humans need not care for hardships: when it rains they can stay dry; it is highly unlikely they will starve to death; predators can not harm them, since humans have become the dominant predators on the planet. Still, in Linkola's view, there is nothing wrong in hunger, in freezing, in uncertainty, in the possibility of unexpected death. On the contrary, the fact that humans have more or

less managed to escape all these has become a major cause for the sense of homelessness, for confusion and despair. The extremely high rates of suicide in developed countries bear good witness for this.

In my view Linkola's arguments, regardless of whether one accepts them as sound or not, fail to establish Linkola's claim that technology should be altogether rejected as detrimental for our species as well as for the environment. I believe that a reason for this failure might lay in the fact that Linkola seems to be discussing *technology* in a rather oversimplified manner, focusing almost exclusively on the advanced technological achievements of the few last centuries. But this is obviously an idiosyncratic as well as an incomplete way of understanding technology, since it disregards everything that has been done before the second industrial revolution. Technology, however, begins with the conversion of natural resources into tools (Bain 1937, 860), and this is not something that concerns only the species *Homo sapiens*; apart from humans other animals (Sagan and Druyan 391, 1993) – and not only primates – also have the ability to make use of basic technology. The term *technology* may stand for every means an animal uses instead of her limbs – the primitive wooden spear and rocks to make a fire no less than the thermal core of a high-end nuclear plant. Linkola himself takes pride in being an apt fisherman, and I guess that he prefers the fishing rod to his bare hands in fishing. Even if he doesn't make it clear, it seems that Linkola's arrows are aimed at *advanced* technology only. But where exactly is the line that separates basic from advanced technology to be drawn? Linkola's aphorism seems to imply that what makes the fishing rod different to the nuclear plant is the fact that the plant has the potential to massively destroy life on earth, while the rod doesn't. But this again doesn't make advanced technology per se *necessarily* destructive to the ecosphere: electronic correspondence is much friendlier towards the environment than traditional one, since neither paper nor any means of transportation are required. Nuclear power, on the other hand, is far cleaner for the environment than the steam, and in the near future it is expected to become quite as safe, especially in the case nuclear fusion replaces nuclear fission, a development that is supposed to solve the issues related with the production and disposal of nuclear waste. Moreover, even if we accepts the view that the environmental destruction is mostly due to technological progress, this does not necessarily entail that technology should be either *abandoned* or *rejected*; it might also involve doing everything necessary to render it harmless. Technology may all the same be environmental-friendly, as the use of solar panels, of the wind, or of tides and ebb-tides as energy sources indicates.

Concerning Linkola's claim that technological progress is the main reason why we humans have lost any purpose in life and its true meaning, I remain unconvinced not only for the very fact, but also for the explanation that Linkola provides: I seriously doubt in the first place that there is *any single* purpose or a *true* meaning in life to be lost; but even if there are, I couldn't tell whether my fellow humans have lost them indeed or not; and finally, even if I were willing to accept that they have, I couldn't be sure that this should be blamed on technology only or primarily, if at all. Since I do not feel either qualified or entitled to discuss in depth psychological issues such as the above, I do not intend to say much more; I shall only notice that back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century William Shakespeare in his magnificent Sonnet 66 seems to be sharing the same deeply felt agony concerning the loss of the so-called true meaning in life, a feeling so strong that even made him cry for "restful death"; his desperation, however, had nothing to do with technology:

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,  
As to behold desert a beggar born,  
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,  
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,  
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,  
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,  
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,  
And strength by limping sway disabled  
And art made tongue-tied by authority,  
And folly, doctor-like, controlling skill,  
And simple truth miscalled simplicity,  
And captive good attending captain ill:  
Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone. (Shakespeare 2004, 137)

## **b. Overpopulation**

Technology and progress are not the only targets for Linkola to aim his arrows. To him overpopulation is equally disastrous to the ecosphere. All species, he explains, are naturally endowed with self-regulating systems of reproduction, so as to avoid excessive increase in numbers, due to which not only the existence of the very species would be in danger, but also local and global equilibria: each time a maximum population quota is reached, some safety valve gets triggered and the ideal quota is being finally restored; famine and disease are the most common as well as efficient safety valves for this. Humans, however, have managed to override all natural safety valves; this has allowed our species to reproduce beyond any control and has resulted in making it a terrible burden for the ecosphere. The situation is so urgent, according to Linkola, that no means that hold the promise to bring about the drastic reduction of human population should be rejected, even if these would involve war, genocide and disease. Linkola only wishes these calamities and others as such will be targeted in such a way, as to bring about the most destructive effects possible for the species *Homo sapiens*! Such a wish might strike as outrageous to some, but it is only expected from a thinker who holds that the existence of individuals is of no value at all when compared to the survival of the species, and that the existence any particular species, in turn, is of no value when compared to the survival of life on earth. Since only the members of our species can intellectually grasp this, it is a moral duty for us humans to force our numbers under a certain quota: “What to do, when a ship carrying a hundred passengers suddenly capsizes and only one lifeboat, with room for only ten people, has been launched? When the lifeboat is full, those who hate life will try to load it with more people and sink the lot. Those who love and respect life, will take the ship’s axe and sever the extra hands that cling to the sides of the boat.” (Linkola 2000, 447)

War, disease and genocide may be extremely serviceable to this purpose in exactly the same way as the raft’s axe can be: “Who misses all those who died in the Second World War? Who misses the twenty million executed by Stalin? Who misses Hitler’s six million Jews? Israel creaks with overcrowdedness; in Asia Minor, overpopulation creates struggles for mere square meters of dirt. The cities throughout the world were rebuilt and filled to the brim with people long ago, their churches and monuments restored so that acid rain would have something to eat through. Who misses the unused procreation potential of those killed in the Second World War? Is

the world lacking another hundred million people at the moment? Is there a shortage of books, songs, movies, porcelain dogs, vases? Are one billion embodiments of motherly love and one billion sweet silver-haired grandmothers not enough?" (Linkola 2000, 447). Malthus would probably have been proud to have written these words.

To Linkola war, far from being a disaster, is actually a blessing to the ecosphere – if only it were a bit more effective: "It would spark hope only if the nature of wars would morph so that deductions of persons would noticeably target the actual breeding potential: young females as well as children, of which a half are girls. If this doesn't happen, waging war is mostly waste of time or even harmful" (Linkola 2009, 173). Since our species in Linkola's view is only a malignant tumor for the ecosphere (Veith and Olasky 1994, 74), "if there were a button I could press, I would sacrifice myself without hesitating if it meant millions of people would die" (Milbank 1994, A4). Sadly for Linkola there is no such button yet, so he has to settle for certain substitutes – or, better, for some soothing memories: "We even have to be able to re-evaluate the fascism and confess the service that that philosophy made thirty years ago when it freed the earth from the weight of tens of millions of over-nourished Europeans, six million of them by ideally painless means, without any damage to the environment" (Linkola 1979).

Allow me to maintain some skeptical doubts concerning the services fascism paid to philosophy, as well as concerning these "ideally painless means" due to which the earth was relieved from six million Europeans – who, by the way, show far from over-nourished in numerous shocking pictures... I will also remain unconvinced that wars and genocides are a blessing to the ecosphere even the way Linkola sees it – actually such events are usually followed by a tremendous increase in birth rates. I will even pass Linkola's admittedly admirable readiness to sacrifice himself in order to secure the ecosphere; instead I will focus on his claim that the earth is overpopulated by our species. This view, exactly as all similar ones that have been supported in the past, to me seem entirely arbitrary: overpopulation is for sure a term almost impossible to define, as Paul Ehrlich – among others – would reluctantly admit now. In the late 70s Ehrlich claimed that the human population had increased so much, as to have become a major threat for the ecosphere; according to him this threat resembled a bomb ready to explode – this was his famous *population bomb* argument (Ehrlich 1968, 3ff). At his time the human population was no more than three and a half million individuals. Today it counts well above six and a half million; still Ehrlich's bomb has not yet exploded. It is certain that our planet is not vast, and that the natural resources are not limitless. It is also certain that there is a maximum quota for human population. What is uncertain is that – at least for the time being – one may know which exactly the upper limit for human population is.

In addition to these, there is strong scientific evidence that overpopulation is neither the only nor the main cause for the ongoing environmental degradation. It seems that, instead, most of the times the main causes for this are certain policies: soil erosion and the desertification of the land is often due to inappropriate land use and farming techniques, over-farming and over-grazing, as it is with the Sahel zone; the melting of the ice in the poles should mostly be blamed on the industrial activity of certain countries that remain reluctant to adopt the necessary measures to reduce the green house effect. The rapid and extremely dangerous deforestation of the Amazon is not due to overpopulation, but to the constantly increasing need for wood in the developed countries whose population, nevertheless, instead of growing, either remains steady or declines.



### c. Democracy

Linkola's most hated enemy seems to be democracy and this with a good reason: to him democracy is on the one hand responsible for facilitating progress and overpopulation to produce their negative effects for the ecosphere, and on the other it is by its nature unable to bring about the necessary changes in this situation. Olli Tammilehto summarizes Linkola's views: [1] The survival of mankind is seriously being threatened. [2] This is primarily due to the pollution of the environment, the destruction of ecosystems and the acceleration of these processes. [3] The uncontrollable growth of human population and technological progress are the main causes for the devastation of nature. [4] Apart from any natural conditions, population growth and technological progress are being determined by man's biological characters. [5] The extinction of man is an extremely bad thing. A bad thing is by definition something that anybody should try to avoid. But why humans seem not to be trying to prevent their own extinction? Linkola believes that man's psychological structure is such that most people repress these facts (the premises no. 1 and 2), and that without any doubt irrational faith is a key part of man's biological characters – and a solid part of man's mechanism of self destruction: humans either do not realize the fact that the population growth and technological progress threatens their own existence or, even if they do, they do nothing to change the situation. But still there is hope: there are a few persons, a number of clear-sighted individuals who happen to lack this irrational faith – they are some kind of mutations, freaks of nature, the random product of biological process. These mutants surprisingly are not bound by the same biological laws that average humans are being determined by. [6] In the item (4) “man” equals “normal man,” the majority of humans. Next to these there are a small number of “visionary mutants,” who are aware of the actual situation and are ready to undertake certain actions to change it. [7] Any minority may have the power to change things only if it is fully supported by the majority of people. [8] A minority of such *visionary mutants* could never gain full support by the majority of people; therefore, its only chance is through a *coup d'état*. [9] Then, the power of the state could be used in such a way as to neutralize any threat for the existence of mankind. [10] In the case a *coup d'état* would seem a reprehensible means to some, Linkola claims that man's duty is to strive for the prevention of extremely bad things, even if this would mean resorting to ethically reprehensible conduct (Tammilehto 1985, 8ff). Linkola supports his view with the following claims:

a. Projects such as depopulation and the disruption of progress couldn't ever be included in the agenda of any politician; but even if they were, it is highly unlikely that people would vote for such an agenda. Unpopular purposes cannot be sought nor achieved in a democratic state. “If the voice of the people is being hearkened to, there is no hope. Democracy is the religion of death. Only in an austere, aware and responsible government there is some spark of hope: Democracy is the most miserable of all known societal systems, the heavy building block of doom. Therein the unmanageable freedom of production and consumption and the passions of the people is not only allowed, but also elevated as the highest of values. The most incomparably grave environmental disasters prevail in democracies. Any kind of dictatorship is always superior to democracy, leading to utter destruction more tardily, because there the individual is always chained, one way or other. When individual freedom reigns, human is both the killer and the victim” (Linkola 2009, 174).

b. If these are true, democracy is a flawed form of government intended only for the fools: “Democracy and public right to vote guarantee that no others than sycophants of the people can rise to the government – of a people who never clamour for anything else than bread and circuses, regardless of the costs and consequences. Even the only possibility comparable to a lottery jackpot, that some intelligent exception would rise to the positions of power, is lost with democracy” (Linkola 2009, 159-160)

c. Democracy calls for personal decision making, and individual will is rarely compatible with the best interests of the whole (Linkola 2009, 204-205). Respective procreation, for example, all democratic governments leave it up to their citizens to acquire as many offspring as they wish. In Linkola’s view, however, such a crucial issue should be determined only by central authority in such a way as to force human population below the limit of ten percent of the current (Linkola 2009, 139). This would undoubtedly mean that procreation should be banned for many – and strictly regulated for everybody, something that people would never accept. Only a global totalitarian government consisting of a few “mutant visionaries” could enforce such a regulation (Linkola 2009, 205). Such mutants, of course, will never come to power through democratic elections. Hence, a *coup d’ état* is the only chance for this.

In my opinion Linkola’s hostility towards democracy is equally arbitrary as are his views on progress and overpopulation I previously discussed. Non-democratic governments seem to have been equally – or more – responsible for the degradation of the natural environment. Totalitarian regimes are by definition accountable to nobody, and usually tend to care more for growth disregarding what this would mean to the environment. On the contrary, in democratic states public opinion is usually much more aware and sensitive towards the environment, and surely it can force the government to abandon certain projects that are dangerous for the environment. Contrary to what Linkola believes, democracy allows minorities enough power to change anything; the situation doesn’t necessarily call for a green *coup*.

In addition to these, Linkola’s imperative that “man’s duty is to strive for the prevention of extremely bad things, even if this would mean resorting to ethically reprehensible conduct,” sounds somewhat controversial; to me it is a typical case of the *contradictio in terminis* fallacy. Any reprehensible conduct can either be imposed onto somebody, or it can be in accordance with the free will of a moral agent. In the case it is imposed, however, it makes no sense to consider it either reprehensible or praiseworthy, since the moral agent had no alternative; such a conduct is simply unsuitable for moral evaluation. Linkola surprisingly claims, however, that the “ethically reprehensible conduct” he suggests is at the same time the only way out, which clearly means that for any reasonable individual there is no alternative. But since this conduct is – according to Linkola – still reprehensible, it cannot be the only way out; and if again it is indeed the only way out, it cannot be ethically reprehensible. Either way, Linkola’s moral imperative doesn’t seem to be a neither a typical nor a sound one.

#### **4. A postlude**

So far I have tried to provide an outline of Linkola’s moral theory and discuss his major views. I argued that the main principles on which his theory rests, as well as his key arguments are neither sound nor convincing. At this point allow me to add some further thoughts on ethical holism in general, and on Linkola’s version in particular. Even though I do not consider myself – and the species I belong to – the

center of the universe, and although I believe that the ecosphere would be just fine even if the species *Homo sapiens* became totally extinct, I still find it impossible to discuss ethics from a point of view other than the one my nature allows me to have; I cannot think like a lion nor like a mountain. I agree, humans are nothing but a tiny cluster of the entire creation; this cluster, however, is the only one that has developed ethics, and this ethics is the only one I know and I can discuss. This means that any ethics that gives moral priority to naturalistic or metaphysical entities and leaves humans entirely out of its focus to me doesn't look like an ethics at all. You may call me narrow minded, if you like; you may also blame me for missing the whole picture, whichever it might be; you may also believe that I have failed to escape the grasp of anthropocentrism, and you will probably be right about it. I know that anthropocentrism is responsible for many practices that are morally reprehensible, especially towards animals. I also know that it is biased, partial and superficial. If, however, ethics is the conquest not of the *ideally best*, but of the *less bad*, any anthropocentric outlook is always the safest we can have.

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