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## Article

# ‘A fruit of every clime’? Rousseau’s environmental politics

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**Abstract** An important branch of environmental theory frames the climate crisis as a moral problem in need of a moral solution: human hubris is responsible for environmental degradation and must be atoned for through humility. Politically indeterminate, however, such argumentation is vulnerable to de-politicizing and mal-politicizing capture. In an effort to fend off the threat of either, this paper turns to the history of political thought and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who theorized the environment as both a moral and a political domain. I examine how Rousseau understood the availability of republican self-rule to be contingent both on the natural environment and on the relationship we construct with it such that freedom, in his words, is not automatically ‘a fruit of every Clime.’ This is the case, he suggests, because of the environment’s intersection with political economy and political culture. At the same time, Rousseau contends, republican self-rule is also a moral practice; republican polities afford citizens a public means of achieving and exercising moral agency. Triangulating the relationship between polity, morality, and environment, Rousseau’s thought offers an integrative logic through which to imbue the environment with both moral and political salience, thereby circumventing the dangers of mere moralization alone.

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## Introduction

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in 2019, Greta Thunberg stressed the moral dimension of the environmental emergency we face. ‘The bigger your carbon footprint is,’ she argued ‘the bigger your moral duty. The bigger your platform, the bigger your responsibility’ (Thunberg, 2019). Likening the earth to a house on fire, Thunberg emphasized the moral obligation we have to douse its flames.



Some have argued that it is this moral framing of the problem that has made Thunberg such a powerful figure within the environmental movement (Gessen, 2019) and many working to address the current crisis endorse presenting it as a fundamentally moral concern. Demanding that environmental repair goes ‘beyond politics,’ activist networks like Extinction Rebellion frame their mission in terms of ‘morality and care’ (Extinction Rebellion, n.d., sect. 2, 1). Scientists looking for ways to increase public interest in anthropogenic climate change highlight the efficacy of tapping into people’s moral intuitions about right and wrong (Koenig, 2019). Unsurprisingly, ethicists have also welcomed moral narratives, arguing that environmental catastrophe is in effect a ‘perfect moral storm’ (Gardiner, 2016).

Environmental theory is no exception to this trend. Consonant with a broader ethical turn in affiliated disciplines like political theory, a multithreaded strand of green thought takes up the idea that the environmental crisis is a moral problem in need of a moral solution.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on diverse schools of thought—including new materialism, object-oriented ontology, and posthumanism—this particular approach to environmental theory attributes the planet’s material degradation to anthropocentric hubris (Bennett, 2010, 2015; Cooke, 2020; Liftin, 2010; Morton, 2013b; Schlosberg, 2016; Wapner, 2010). On this model, a prideful belief in human exceptionalism and autonomy is understood to have licensed our abuse of the natural world (e.g., Dryzek & Pickering, 2019, p. 11). From this prevalent diagnosis follows a prevalent prescription: humility is seen as the key to counteracting such hubris and putting out the literal and figurative fires of environmental emergency (Bennett, 2010, 2015; Cooke, 2020; Liftin, 2010; Morton, 2013b; Schlosberg, 2016; Wapner, 2010). If, in other words, the environmental crisis has been perpetrated by the moral wrong of egotistical pride, it can be atoned for and corrected through the moral right of humility.

Such argumentation is important, yet it does not automatically counsel a politics—or for that matter any particular politics—and this leaves it vulnerable to co-optation and misuse. Where moral approaches to environmental theory privilege questions of duty (‘Who is responsible for environmental harm and who owes what to whom as a result?’), a political approach would instead prioritize questions of power (‘Who exercises control over environmental decision-making and who do those decisions benefit?’).<sup>2</sup>

Of course these considerations can, and I will argue should, be conceptually interwoven.<sup>3</sup> However, this is not always the case. Focusing on the debt hubristic humans owe non-human nature, this humility-minded offshoot of environmental thought is politically indeterminate and susceptible to de-politicization and mal-politicization alike. Not only is stoking green guilt and humility a tactic currently deployed by economic actors keen to neutralize political change, ecological humility has been previously embraced by reactionary, anti-democratic ideologies.

In an effort to inoculate this approach against both, I turn to the history of political thought and the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Writing at the beginning



of the carbon era, Rousseau's ideas about nature—including the supposition that what is natural is good—are understood to have close ties to environmentalism and, historically, led various environmentalists to embrace Rousseau as one of their own (Lane, 2014; LaFrenière, 1990). Against the backdrop of this pedigree, I illustrate how, for Rousseau, the viability of free and equal republican self-rule—and with it a key form of moral self-realization—was linked to the material environment. Triangulating the relationship between polity, morality, and environment, Rousseau's thought provides an integrative logic through which to imbue the environment with both moral and political salience, thereby avoiding the dangers of mere moralization alone.

Scholars have already begun to make inroads in troubling both an ethics-first approach to environmental theory in general, as well as the specific, humility-oriented strand that I confine myself to here. For example, in developing a 'political theory of our planetary future,' Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann seek to 'make climate *more* political' (Wainwright & Mann, 2018, pp. x, xii). They contend that the environmental crisis should be seen, not as 'peripheral to struggles for democracy, liberty, equality, and justice,' but rather as bound up with them (Wainwright & Mann, 2018, p. xi). Others, like Bonnie Washick and Elizabeth Wingrove, draw attention to the de-politicizing features of particular schools of green thought. Singling out new materialism, they argue that this framework is effectively a 'dictum to nurture personal goodness' which, leaving us with 'little but the self to work on,' risks inhibiting collective exercises of power (Washick & Wingrove, 2014, p. 66).

My intervention extends such efforts. I demonstrate that de-politicization as well as mal-politicization is risked not only by individual philosophical perspectives, but also by a branch of green thought oriented around humility. Drawing on Rousseau, I endeavor to make environmental theory '*more* political' by illustrating how politics, morality, and environment have been analytically interwoven before. As scholars like Zev Trachtenberg show, Rousseau conceives of a recursive dynamic between humans and their environs wherein each shapes the other (Trachtenberg, 2019, pp. 488–489).

Impacted by human beings and impacting them in turn, the environment is a fundamentally political issue for Rousseau. This is the case, first, in that environments can affect the odds that freedom and equality prevail in a given region. The exercise of power through republican self-rule is necessary for freedom and equality, but the material world influences its practicability. Specifically, Rousseau suggests, environments shape their inhabitants' horizons of political possibility through their effects on food production, which influences political economy and, through economy, political culture. He reasons that self-rule is best supported by temperate climes likely to generate only moderate surpluses that disincentivize the kind of intense economic activity anathema to robust political engagement.



At the same time, however, and second, Rousseau argues that the way we structure our relationship to the environment also affects our prospects for republican self-rule. Populations living within the productive limits of their environs, and those who avoid pursuing surplus production purely for economic gain, are better equipped to rule themselves. While republican freedom is thus not automatically a ‘fruit of every Clime,’ its exercise has moral as well as political significance (SC, p. 100).<sup>4</sup> Originating in a self-imposed duty to abide by the general will, republican polities are also ethical constructs that offer their citizens a means of actualizing moral agency. As such, Rousseau’s thought interpenetrates polity, morality, and environment, presenting the latter as a simultaneously moral and political concern.

It is at this broad, conceptual level that Rousseau offers a helpful amendment to humility-based environmental thought: moralized accounts of environmental duty such as these must also address politics and power if they are to avoid inadvertently endangering republicanism.<sup>5</sup> How, in the face of environmental pressures, Rousseau urges us to ask, can we relate to the environment in a way that safeguards not only moral but political freedom and equality?

By using Rousseau this way, I anticipate an objection that is best addressed upfront. Some readers may worry that Rousseau’s analysis brushes up too closely against environmental determinism. Deployed to suggest that by virtue of geography some populations were not ‘naturally’ suited to autonomy, environmental determinism has historically been invoked as a pretext for European domination. To what extent, then, can we divorce Rousseau’s thinking from determinism’s ugly, Eurocentric legacy?

Here it is important to note that Rousseau’s thought is appreciably distinct from that of other, deterministic Enlightenment philosophers, such as Montesquieu’s, with which it is engaged (Scott, 1997, pp. 825–826).<sup>6</sup> Climates cannot have a uniform or static effect on their human inhabitants for Rousseau—as they can for Montesquieu—because human nature is itself malleable and subject to change (Scott, 2004). Rousseau thus adheres to a ‘non-deterministic version of naturalism,’ in which humans are both ‘moulded by their natural and social environment’ and yet remain ‘intrinsically free’ (O’Hagan, 2004, p. 73). Particularly insofar as this ‘molding’ goes both ways, the recursive relationship Rousseau theorizes between humans and the material world makes it difficult to discern any unidirectional dynamic whereby nature could dictate politics (Trachtenberg, 2019).

Regardless of how we adjudicate Rousseau on this matter, highlighting the possibility that environmental factors now stretching across the globe may imperil republicanism is an altogether different point from the indefensible, historical contention that only in the west do climatic features support liberty. Earlier determinists were undoubtedly wrong in the identifications they made between certain climates and the possibility of freedom, but that Eurocentric fallacy does not undermine the separate suggestion that different environmental conditions may be



more or less auspicious for political self-rule. Worsening ecological constraints are already providing fodder for anti-democratic actors in the United States and Europe (Gilman, 2020; Rueda, 2020). The element of Rousseau's thought that I focus on calls into question the environmental viability of political freedom and equality everywhere, global north included.

## Environment as moral domain

Environmental theory is a remarkably diverse field. Incorporating topics ranging from climate justice to metabolic rift theory, to name but a couple, the breadth of environmental thought precludes broad generalization. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify distinct trends within the field.

One such trend, advanced by a key strand of environmental theory, holds that pride and human hubris have propelled the environmental crisis. Two main tenets guide this view. First, while human exceptionalism has paved the way for environmental degradation, human beings are in fact not unique and deserve no special privilege. Second, while such exceptionalism tends to be affixed to a corollary belief in human autonomy, humanity is, on the contrary, deeply reliant on and indebted to non-human nature for its survival and flourishing. Rejecting prideful pretensions to human exceptionalism and autonomy, this strand of environmental thought clarifies the ways in which we are neither special nor self-reliant and thus have ethical duties to non-human nature. Having positioned the environment as a moral domain, it then advocates humility as the appropriate response to environmental degradation.

Drawing on a wide range of conceptual resources, scholars advancing this position are keen to illustrate the ways in which humanity is not a special or privileged category. Many point to alternative ontologies as a way to do so. Taking up actor network theory, Jane Bennett develops a new materialist ontology in which agency is not the conceit of humanity, but is rather distributed across and exercised by all forms of matter (Bennett, 2010, p. 13). 'Challeng[ing] the uniqueness of humanity' in this way is an environmental necessity, she suggests, because 'the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter' otherwise 'feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption' (Bennett, 2010, pp. 104, ix).<sup>7</sup>

Where Bennett levels the ontological playing field by discerning a form of subjectivity—or actancy—in non-human material, Timothy Morton achieves a similar effect by instead suggesting that '[e]verything is an object, including the seemingly special one we call *subject*' (Morton, 2013a, p. 63). Using object-oriented ontology, Morton aims to in this way 'humiliate the human' and 'decenter[ ] us from a place of pampered privilege' (Morton, 2013b, p. 47). In this



respect, new materialist and object-oriented ontologies share the same ecologically motivated ‘target’: ‘human hubris’ (Bennett, 2015, p. 232).<sup>8</sup>

Precisely because humans are not special, many argue, it is environmentally imperative to disband with anthropocentric modes of thought and valuation. Maeve Cooke argues that our ‘situation within the Anthropocene calls on humans...to rethink our ethics and...politics’ and makes a case for the necessity of a new ‘ethically non-anthropocentric ethics’ (Cooke, 2020, p. 1168).<sup>9</sup> Drawing on the Frankfurt School, Cooke frames this new ethics as a means to overcome pride. To date, ‘ethically anthropocentric’ ethical frameworks have made ‘humans the centre of ethical value in the universe,’ positioning us as creatures who ‘command[ ] more respect’ than others and enjoy a ‘privileged ethical status’ (Cooke, 2020, p. 1171). Such self-conceit, coupled with a primal fear of nature, has authorized our environmentally destructive efforts to dominate the material world through instrumental reason. As such, moving away from anthropocentrism by ethically de-centering humanity is essential to environmental repair.

Similarly affirming the notion that humans are not special, others conclude from this that we have an obligation to sacrifice our particular interests for the sake of the larger planet’s environmental health. Characterizing the Anthropocene as an ‘illustration of human hubris, self-centeredness, and interference,’ David Schlosberg offers an allegorical reading of the film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* to argue for the moral importance of subordinating human interests to those of non-human others (Schlosberg, 2016, p. 4). Rather than ‘remain the source’ of the earth shattering ‘storm’ that is environmental degradation, humans must grow into the role of the parent who, as the film’s apocalyptic flood approaches, selflessly ‘puts the animals on the boat’ first (Schlosberg, 2016, p. 4).

Paul Wapner advances a similar argument, framing the adoption of a humbler, self-sacrificing ethics in which care for non-human others takes priority as a matter of moral maturation. Opposing ‘Promethean environmentalis[ts]’ who strive to engineer a way out of climate catastrophe, Wapner frames Prometheus as a juvenile figure whose ultimate punishment ‘warns against humanity’s hubristic tendencies’ and calls attention to the ‘limits’ of ‘what humans can achieve’ (Wapner, 2010, pp. 37, 40). Better to develop instead, he argues, an ethics of ‘care for Others’ in which, recognizing we are not the ‘center of the universe,’ we ‘limit[ ]’ ourselves so that other ‘people, creatures, and entities’ are afforded the ‘ecological space to live out their lives’ (Wapner, 2010, pp. 51, 35).

In fact, some speculate, perhaps we might even take pleasure in such ethical self-constraint. Karen Liftin, for instance, makes an environmental case for embracing ‘ontological holism,’ a worldview she distills from the teachings of philosopher, guru, and Indian nationalist Sri Aurobindo, in which self-sacrifice or ‘self-giving’ is experienced as joy (Liftin, 2010, p. 124). Seen from within a ‘cosmology of interdependence and wholeness,’ self-sacrifice is not a loss, but a cheerful giving back to those ‘forces beyond the individual to which one is indebted for one’s very



existence' (Liftin, 2010, p. 124). This conceptualization, as Liftin quotes Aurobindo, amounts to a 'practical recognition by the ego that it is neither alone...nor chief in the world' and as such, she suggests, might be deployed to encourage environmental repair through humble self-limitation (Liftin, 2010, pp. 121–122).

That humans are not special—and so, morally speaking, have a duty to subordinate their particular desires to what is best for the larger environment—is often linked to the idea that we are also not autonomous or self-reliant. It is for this reason that Cooke reframes instrumental reason as a faculty that is fundamentally dependent on the material environment in which we exercise it. Rather than a capacity masterfully exercised by humans over nature, instrumental reason is 'constitutively connect[ed]' to the objects it manipulates (Cooke, 2020, p. 1174). Because '[t]hought becomes dominating' of the material world only when it forgets or denies its 'constitutive connection' with it, 'taking thought back into nature' and reminding ourselves of the inextricable bond between subject and object can have an environmentally salutary effect (Cooke, 2020, pp. 1174, 1175). As such, Cooke contends, responding to environmental degradation requires us to develop not only a humbler, non-anthropocentric ethics in which humans are no longer the 'centre of...the universe' but also a far less independent understanding of human rationality (Cooke, 2020, p. 1176).

The eco-ethical principle of non-autonomy is often upheld by ontological efforts to quiet humanity's environmentally destructive ego as well. In these formulations, what is at issue is the degree to which not human cognition, but human being itself is reliant on, and even constituted by, the non-human. Bennett develops a notion of human beings as 'human-nonhuman assemblages' (Bennett, 2010, p. xvii). Pointing, for instance, to the central role that gut flora plays in our survival, she emphasizes the ways in which we are fundamentally reliant on the actancy of non-human matter and in so doing, challenges the 'narcissism' of any portrait of humanity as singular, coherent, or 'in charge of the world' (Bennett, 2010, p. xvi).

Working to similar effect, Morton describes any one 'lifeform' as made up of 'other lifeforms,' which are in turn 'made of non-living entities' (Morton, 2013b, p. 42; Morton, 2013a, p. 29). Such radical interconnection is especially profound when it comes to hyperobjects—'things...massively distributed in time and space relative to humans'—like global warming (Morton, 2013b, p. 1). Highlighting humanity's dependence on non-human matter, hyperobjects 'force us to realize the truth of the word humiliation itself, which means being brought...back down to earth' (Morton, 2013b, p. 17). Thus laid low, this extreme lack of autonomy demands an environmental change of course, one premised on a humble awareness of human limitation and motivated to act on the obligations this entails.

It is sometimes implied that such humility encapsulates a parallel politics, yet what this might involve and how it might be connected to power is either un- or under-specified. 'Politics...follow[s],' Liftin writes, 'from our sense of who we are





in relation to others' and the forms of obligation these relations generate (Liftin, 2010, p. 127). As such, moralized attitudinal shifts in how we understand our relationship and duty to the material world are themselves taken to be political. It is in this sense that humbly recognizing human non-particularity, for example, constitutes a 'politics of sight' for Schlosberg (Schlosberg, 2016, p. 15) and a 'politics of sacrifice' for Wapner (Wapner, 2010, p. 33). Others see in environmental humility an implicitly democratic politics. Morton suggests that the postulate of non-particularity affirms equality (Morton, 2010, p. 7), while Bennett argues that the idea of non-autonomy might allow non-human others to be included in conceptions of the public (Bennett, 2010, pp. 94, 95).

However, the assertion that politics 'follow[s]' from ethics is much contested. Many theorists have challenged the notion that politics and political thought can be viewed as forms of applied ethics (Geuss, 2008; Newey, 2001; Rossi & Sleat, 2014). Without becoming embroiled in this larger debate, it is unclear that a politics results from adopting such an environmental ethics. Claims about duty in this context do not necessarily issue claims about power. On the contrary, it appears the maxims of non-particularity and non-autonomy could be operationalized, and their requirements satisfied, through apolitical measures alone. Moreover, claims about what humans owe non-human matter do not necessarily issue singular, uniform claims about power. As detailed in a further section below, environmentally minded commitments to human non-particularity and non-autonomy have readily serviced authoritarian political projects in the past. If, that is, eco-humility can be tacitly democratic it can also be tacitly anti-democratic.

In sum, this branch of environmental thought frames the environmental crisis as a moral problem originating in the defect of hubris; anthropocentric pride has enabled humanity's material exploitation of the planet, resulting in its wholesale degradation. Formulated in this way, such crisis demands a moral solution, grounded in the upstanding, countervailing quality of humility. Only if humanity learns to appreciate the ways in which it is not distinct from or more important than the rest of the material world—but instead a part of and indebted to it—might our devastation of the earth cease.

## **Environment as moral-political domain: Rousseau**

In contrast to this strand of green thought, Rousseau conceptualizes the environment as a simultaneously moral and political domain. I begin here with the political.

As Trachtenberg argues, the environment's political significance for Rousseau stems from his understanding of 'human society and its environment' as 'mutually constitutive' (Trachtenberg, 2019, p. 487). The *Second Discourse* establishes a 'recursive' relationship between human beings and their environs in which, as our



earliest forebears began to 'use their capacities to transform their surroundings,' these changed environs in turn transformed them, helping to activate otherwise latent capacities requisite to society and eventually polity (Trachtenberg, 2019, p. 489).<sup>10</sup> Positing that humans construct their environments and that their environments also construct them, Rousseau's thought holds out the 'prospect of a more explicitly political environmentalism' in which, Trachtenberg argues, one of the chief evaluative criteria is the political effect of our interactions with the natural world (Trachtenberg, 2019, pp. 487, 490).

I build on this analysis by teasing out the ways in which Rousseau theorizes the environment's political salience across his oeuvre. It is at this broad, conceptual level, rather than in the particular, at times anachronistic details of his work, that Rousseau is useful for today.

On one hand, the environment is a fundamentally political issue for Rousseau insofar as it influences whether and what kind of politics is likely to develop in a given region. Rousseau argues that environments exert this influence through their impact on food production, which in turn has implications for political economy and political culture. The particular ratios at which a climate supports food production can affect whether political order is viable at all and, if so, whether it is suited to republicanism. Polities in which the people are sovereign and exercise power themselves—realizing freedom and equality through the act of self-rule—are by definition republics for Rousseau and constitute the only legitimate kind of political order. By affecting surplus production, environments can also impact the degree to which economic activity is likely to detract from active political engagement, with larger surpluses potentially distracting people from the active culture of civic participation necessary to self-rule.

On the other hand, the environment is a fundamentally political issue for Rousseau in that how people relate to their environs also affects their politics. Those who choose to live within the productive limits of their environment, he argues, or to forgo material surplus production for the sake of outsized economic gain, fare best in their prospects for self-rule. Organizing economic interactions with the environment in these ways curbs, Rousseau contends, the sort of political apathy inimical to republicanism.

Importantly, the construction and maintenance of republican self-rule also has a moral valence for Rousseau. Premised on a purely elective form of self-imposed duty, republican polities afford citizens 'moral freedom' (SC, p. 54) and are themselves 'moral person[s]' (SC, p. 61). Rousseau thus interpenetrates politics and morality vis-à-vis the environment, positioning the environment as both a moral and political concern. In this way, he offers a crucial corrective to humility-based environmental thought. Moral theories about what duties we have to the environment—including as a consequence of hubris—must also address the thematic of politics and power lest they jeopardize republicanism. As such, Rousseau's thought directs us to a central question for green theory: given material



constraints, how can we relate to our environs in a way that sustains not only moral but political freedom and equality?

### **Environment and political economy**

Rousseau argues that the environment influences whether political life is possible, and if so what kind, cautioning that because freedom is not a ‘fruit of every Clime’ it may not be easily ‘within the reach of every people’ (SC, p. 100). Historically, political order of any sort developed in areas with arable land and access to iron ore. Underwriting the idea of property and the division of labor, geographies that support ‘[p]lowing and agriculture’ alongside the ‘art of working metals’ encourage the formation of pre-political modes of society that eventually give way to political order (DI, p. 169). Allowing humanity to propagate its ‘subsistence’ through ‘iron and wheat,’ climates furnishing these natural resources contribute to political development (DI, p. 168). Those lacking access to metal deposits and arable land, such as those who inhabit environs where the ‘sea wash[es] up against nothing but nearly inaccessible rocks,’ may well ‘[r]emain’ non-political or, as the case may be, happy if ‘barbarous...fish-eaters’ (SC, p. 79). Environments, and the kinds of natural resources they make available, contribute to our potential for political life.

Moreover, within arable and metal rich geographies, other features of the environment and its ability to nourish a population are of consequence for specifically republican politics. A legitimate political society, Rousseau argues, is one in which the people hold sovereign power, realizing freedom and equality through its exercise, and is always, when it meets this criteria, a republic (SC, p. 67).

Assessing the feasibility of republican self-rule for a given population is the task of the Rousseauian Lawgiver, who must carefully weigh a number of environmental factors in making such a determination. Because ‘men make up the State and the land feeds...men,’ Rousseau writes ‘the ratio requires that there be enough land to support its inhabitants, and as many inhabitants as the land can feed’ (SC, p. 76). Too high a ratio of production to consumption will instigate attacks from without, whereas too low a ratio will compel ‘offensive’ conflicts for adequate provision (SC, p. 76). Dependence in either direction is inimical to good polity, proving ‘extremely hard’ for those with too little and ‘extremely dangerous’ for those with too much (SC, p. 77, fn.).

Given this balancing act, the Lawgiver must pay special attention, in discerning whether a free and equal republic can be sustained in a given region, to many environmental considerations, including the ‘differences in properties of soil, its degrees of fertility, the nature of its products’ and ‘the influence of climates’ (SC, p. 76).<sup>11</sup> For Rousseau, the successful construction of republican politics is in part contingent on the environment and its ability to support independent, self-sustainable food production prone neither to waste nor inadequacy.



However, Rousseau reasons, environmental conditions in no way cement political destiny. How a population relates to its environment, whether as a consequence of force or volition, also shapes its republican prospects and experience of political freedom. This is exemplified by the downfall of the Ichthyophagi. Enjoying political independence so long as they could sustain their coastal lifestyle as a 'fishing' people, Alexander the Great brought the Ichthyophagi to heel by banning the practice and 'compell[ing] them...to eat the foods common to other Peoples' (DS, p. 7, fn.). Altering the Ichthyophagi's relationship with their material environment, Alexander altered their politics.

A related lesson, Rousseau stipulates, can be learned from the example of the Republic of Tlaxcala, 'an enclave in the Empire of Mexico' (SC, p. 77, fn). Inhabiting a region that did not produce its own salt, the Tlaxcalans chose to forgo the additive altogether rather than become reliant on Mexico's supplies. Refusing to buy salt from their neighbor, or even accept any as a gift, the Tlaxcalans 'preserved their freedom,' Rousseau argues, by preserving their natural resource independence (SC, p. 77, fn). By relating to their environment in a way that embraced its unique features, including its productive limits, the Tlaxcalans cultivated political freedom.

Rousseau contends that both the environment and how we relate to it shape not only the kind of political order we are likely to live in, but also the form that government takes. Understood as an intermediary, executive body linking the people in their active role as sovereign and passive role as subjects, governments can take different configurations, even across republics. According to Rousseau, this too may be influenced by the climate and its effects on food production. Food surplus is necessary to any and all types of government, Rousseau reasons, because the 'public person consumes but produces nothing' (SC, p. 100). Yet the precise form government takes is impacted by the rate of consumption to production. This ratio is itself shaped by environmental factors such as the 'fertility of the climate, the kind of labor the soil requires, and the nature of its products' (SC, p. 100). Whereas in some regions one hardly needs to 'scratch the soil' to grow anything and generate an appreciable surplus, in other areas 'more hands are needed to get the same product' meaning the surplus 'must necessarily be less' (SC, p. 102). Likewise impacting surpluses is the amount of produce required to feed and sustain a population, with those in warmer regions tending to consume far less (SC, pp. 102–103).

Taken together, what this means for Rousseau is that there are 'natural causes in every clime' that can influence the 'form of Government' (SC, p. 101). On one end of the spectrum, in regions unable to deliver much surplus at all, nearly 'any polity' may be extremely difficult (SC, p. 101). On the other end, in regions producing large surpluses, generated for instance by 'an abundant and fertile soil,' monarchies and even despotic forms of government drawn to 'luxur[ious]' excess may



proliferate (SC, p. 101). If too harsh a climate poses a governmental challenge, so does too rich a natural environment as well (SC, p. 102).

Consequently, Rousseau specifies that ‘good polity’ is best supported by ‘intermediate regions’ productive of ‘moderate’ surpluses neither so minute as to threaten survival nor so extravagant as to tempt indulgence (SC, pp. 102, 101). More temperate environments invite government to take more tempered forms. This includes the form of elective aristocracy—wherein members of the executive body are voted in and out of office—a mode of government viewed by Rousseau as generally the ‘best and most natural’ and associated by him with both ‘moderation’ and ‘contentment’ (SC, pp. 93, 94). In this way, Rousseau argues, moderate climates tend to encourage the kind of Goldilocks ratio of food production to consumption most supportive of moderate government and ‘free peoples’ (SC, p. 101).

Yet here too environmental factors hardly seal political fate. People choose, within their particular material context, how to pursue production and consumption, thereby exercising a degree of control over the form their government takes. This is evident in Rousseau’s own Lawgiver-like assessment of Poland’s political promise. In *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, Rousseau encourages the Poles to ‘constantly multiply [their] wheat and...men without worrying about the rest’ (GP, p. 229). Stressing that the country enjoys adequate arable land, he notes that the ‘surplus produce’ of its ‘soil’ could easily be sold abroad for ‘more money,’ but counsels against this course of action (GP, p. 229). Rather than prioritizing ‘commerce,’ Rousseau urges Poland to focus its efforts on increasing ‘as much as possible...the food supply’ and its ‘consumers’ (GP, p. 229). Because the ‘infallible and natural effect of a free and just Government is population,’ he writes, ‘the more you perfect your Government, the more you increase your people’ (GP, p. 229). Rousseau argues that growing both the food surplus and population that consumes it in lockstep will help to support Poland’s construction of a more ‘free’ and ‘just’ government. Yet pursuing this program must be an active choice, one that Rousseau tries to persuade the country to make. How we decide to structure our relationship with the environment can impact whether sovereignty and government take the freest forms possible.

## **Environment and political culture**

The environment is economically as well as culturally significant for politics. Environments have an appreciable impact on culture generally, according to Rousseau, as evidenced by the way they shape language. Linguistic differences can be partly attributed to the ‘consequence of the climates’ in which this or that language originates (OL, p. 266). Amid the relative comfort of ‘warm climates,’ Rousseau hypothesizes, speech would have developed in an effort to communicate love, taking the shape of cheerful, melodious sounds (OL, pp. 277–280). By



contrast in 'cold countries' where the 'soil is barren' and survival is threatened, speech would have issued from cries for help, resulting instead in 'harsh and noisy' vocalizations (OL, pp. 279–280). Whether these details are accurate or not, Rousseau is attuned to how our environments shape our experiences, influencing whether, what, and how we communicate (Starobinski, 1988, pp. 312–313).

If the environment contributes to the construction of culture generally, its effect on the mores salient to politics is particularly noteworthy. By shaping food surpluses, environments may impact the degree to which a preoccupation with economic activity and material gain takes hold in various regions. Distracting from active political engagement, and making people uninterested in civic life, such fixations have a negative effect on the exercise of republican power. By enabling the accumulation and potential sale of large surpluses, especially fertile environs can create sizeable gaps in wealth that lead to a cultural preoccupation with material goods. Cultivating an obsession with sumptuous excess among the haves, and an all-consuming focus on survival among the have-nots, climates that enable large surpluses threaten to divert attention away from civic participation.

Here too, though, Rousseau notes the importance of choice and relationality. On the heels of encouraging Poland to increase its food surplus and population, he concludes that doing so will allow the region to root out '[I]xury and indigence' together, thereby encouraging citizens to focus first and foremost on the business of politics (GP, p. 229). No longer engrossed in either the 'frivolous tastes opulence fosters' or the 'vices associated with poverty,' the Polish people would instead be incentivized to concentrate 'their cares and their glory in serving the fatherland well' (GP, p. 229). In determining how to relate to its environment as a source for material production, Poland is also deciding, Rousseau stresses, whether or not to foster the kind of patriotic interest in civic life essential to self-rule.

*The Social Contract* likewise registers the environment's ability to influence cultures of political participation and, at the same time, the role that human discretion plays in constructing such norms as well. Once more associating exceptionally fertile climes with apathy-inducing wealth disparity and an obsession with material gain, Rousseau underscores the advantages of temperate environments for political engagement. He argues that the 'mild climate' of the Mediterranean supported a culture of active political involvement among the ancient Greeks first, by allowing for regular meetings in the public square, and second, by disincentivizing 'greedy' surplus accumulation and the fixation with profitmaking over freedom (SC, p. 115). Unencumbered by the allure of economic gain, albeit also aided by slave labor, the sovereign assembly's 'chief business was its freedom' (SC, p. 115).

Precisely because 'mild' and even 'cold' climates in this way support the sort of active civic life necessary to self-rule, nations that inhabit such environs but nevertheless pursue 'luxury and softness' in effect seek out and 'choose to assume their chains' (SC, p. 115; emphasis added). Through their influence on surplus



production and the preoccupations this gives rise to, environmental factors contribute to the development or non-development of civic norms tied to patriotism and political participation. Nevertheless, according to Rousseau, the ways in which people relate to these environmental conditions also shapes their capacity for self-rule.

Rousseau presents this bidirectionality through a related series of images. In asserting that Lawgivers aiming to reorganize a people must have a comprehensive grasp of its prevailing character, Rousseau warns that this is because where ‘tastes, morals, prejudices and vices’ are already ‘deeply rooted’ it is difficult for them to be ‘stifled by new seeds’ (GP, p. 177). A nation’s mores are themselves like forms of vegetation that feed, sustain, and constitute it. Native plant species accustomed to a given terrain cannot be easily weeded out or replaced by non-native flora just as ingrained norms and habits are not amenable to simple alteration. Thus while freedom is a ‘fruit’ that grows and can be readily consumed in some ‘Climes,’ it is foreign to others, proving in some instances difficult if not impossible to introduce (SC, p. 100). Although some environments immediately encourage the habits and preferences that facilitate republican politics, others offer no such organic support.

However, Rousseau suggests, nurture is just as important as nature. A taste for the ‘fruit’ that is freedom can also be developed through routine training and acculturation. ‘Freedom,’ he writes is in this way ‘like the solid and hearty foods or the full-bodied wines fit to feed...robust temperaments used to them, but which overwhelm...weak and delicate ones that are not up to them’ (DI, p. 115). As such, although freedom is a ‘hearty fare’ that is ‘hard to digest’ and so requires ‘healthy stomachs to tolerate it,’ such tolerance can be built up through habituation (GP, p. 196).

Closely entwined with freedom, patriotism can likewise be cultivated. ‘Every true republican,’ as Rousseau, puts it ‘drank love of fatherland, that is to say love of the laws and of freedom, with his mother’s milk’ (GP, p. 189). Patriotic devotion, ‘seeing only...fatherland’ and ‘liv[ing] only for it,’ can be actively encouraged through sustained acclimation. Whether or not people develop the aptitude for republican self-rule, while partially dependent on the cultural tastes their environs encourage is also, according to Rousseau, a function of their own voluntary efforts.

In Rousseau’s assessment, then, the environment is a fundamentally political domain. This is because both environmental factors and the way we construct our relationship to them shape politics. Through political economy, the environment influences the probability that political society will take root and, if so, whether it is likely to take a republican form and support the freest modes of government. Moreover, by influencing the potential scale of surplus production and appeal of market activity, the environment also impacts political culture and the extent to which people develop a taste for republican values.

Yet the way we go about structuring our relationship with the environment is also up to us to decide. As the examples of the Tlaxcalans and Poles exhibit, how



the inhabitants of an environment choose to relate to its political economic capacities colors their hopes for self-rule. Because political economy feeds into political culture, this means that the civic norms essential to republicanism are also, in part, products of the way people orient themselves to their material surroundings. As such, Rousseau contends, environmental concerns cannot be divorced from questions about who exercises power and how.

### **Environment and the interpenetration of politics and morality**

Insofar as the environment is in these ways a political arena for Rousseau, so is it also a moral one. This is because moral development can be achieved through participation in republican self-rule. To be clear, such participation is not the only path toward moral awakening; scholars have long debated various typologies of the 'good life' at work in Rousseau's writing (Cooper, 1999; Lane & Clark, 2006; Todorov, 2001). But it is, nevertheless, an important one.

Republican polities are both founded on, and give their citizens regular occasion to exercise, moral duty. The Rousseauian republic is formed when each of its originators agrees to put '[their] person and [their] full power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and in a body...receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole' (SC, p. 50). Creating a self-imposed duty to abide by the general will for the sake of the common good, this associative act 'at once...produces,' Rousseau explains 'a moral and collective body' (SC, p. 50). Catalyzing and making manifest members' capacity to act as moral agents, republican political societies confer 'moral' as well as 'civil freedom' on their participants (SC, p. 54). As such, the 'transition' to republican order 'produces a most remarkable change in man...endowing his actions with the morality they previously lacked' (SC, p. 53). Serving as a vehicle for moral actualization, in the form of adherence to self-imposed obligation, the Rousseauian republic is not only a political entity, but also a 'moral person' (SC, p. 61).

By the same token, non-republican polities threaten to corrupt their subjects' moral agency. Despotic forms of political society in which power is exercised by one over many risk suppressing moral and civil freedom alike. Stripping people of the ability to behave as self-determining moral actors in their role as citizens, this mode of political order 'debase[s]' human nature and reduces individuals to the 'level of Beasts that are the slaves of instinct' (SC, p. 178). Societies that actively repress free, elective forms of political self-obligation also foreclose this path toward moral self-realization. Thus, a given society's political structure and configuration has far-reaching implications for the moral lives and opportunities of its members.

Rousseau in this way interpenetrates politics and morality. Either opening up or foreclosing public avenues for the exercise of duty-bound free agency, political institutions cannot help but have a moral dimension. Broached this way, to theorize





the political is to theorize the moral. This has implications for how the environment is conceptualized: because the environment is a political issue for Rousseau, it is by necessity a moral one as well. In contributing to the texture of political life, environmental factors, and what we make of them, also contribute to the expression of moral agency. Climate, soil make up, fertility, geography, and the like play a hand in the construction of republican self-rule and so also play a hand in the construction of self-imposed duty. By interweaving the political and the moral, Rousseau constructs a triangulated dynamic between polity, morality, and environment in which the latter is at once moral and political.

### **Environment as moral-political domain: today**

It is this unique positioning of the environment that makes Rousseau's thought valuable for the present. Again, in suggesting as much, my aim is neither to resuscitate Rousseau's theory nor to take on board the specific content of his claims. Our world is very different from Rousseau's and his concrete suggestions do not translate into today. What Rousseau does offer, however, is a more general logic for thinking about the interaction between polity, morality, and environment. Triangulating all three, he links eco-moral and eco-political thought.

This conceptual interpenetration is imperative. The core tenets of the humility-minded branch of green theory characterized above—humans are neither exceptional nor autonomous—are politically undetermined and vulnerable to co-optation by both de-politicizing and politically malignant forces. Rousseau's logic offers a corrective; it positions the environment such that it can be theorized as in part a moral domain without risking either pernicious political co-optation or the refusal of politics together. In this way, it presses us to ask, not simply, what kind of moral change is necessary to respond to environmental pressures, but rather, given these pressures, how can we relate to the environment in a way that sustains moral as well as political freedom and equality?

Focusing on environmental humility can have the de-politicizing effect of either limiting, deflecting, or obfuscating exercises of power. To begin with, some communication scholars argue that 'moralization' in general—humility-inducing or otherwise—is a de-politicizing discursive practice. By formulating some positions and their proponents as ethically good, and others as ethically bad, moralized environmental discourse curbs contestation and debate because, where there is already a 'correct' view, there is little discussion to be had (Carvalho et al., 2016, p. 128). Coding would be alternative green perspectives as immoral delegitimizes competing views and restricts substantive deliberation, presenting climate change, instead, 'in terms of a social consensus about how it should be understood and what should be done about it' (Carvalho et al., 2016, p. 128). Constraining and curtailing contestation, such moralization is politically disempowering.



Moralizing the environment specifically by encouraging guilt and humility can be further de-politicizing when it diverts attention away from politics. As Tim Jensen shows, many economic actors in effect do just that, activating these sentiments in order to motivate market activity, drive sales, and increase profit. Through 'advertising and institutional branding,' various firms use eco-friendly rhetorical techniques to mobilize 'low-lying levels of collective guilt for one's complicity in an economic system that is ecologically destructive' (Jensen, 2019, p. 71). Triggered to experience humility and remorse, targets are then 'invite[d]...to atone' through 'market-based solutions and consumption management techniques' (Jensen, 2019, p. 71). Environmental humility is thus ginned up in such a way as to find expression and relief not through the power-wielding action of citizens but through the money-wielding action of consumers. Morally activated, agency is directed toward the market and away from politics.

Fostering guilt and humility can also have a de-politicizing effect when used to conceal the exercise of power by, for instance, those with an interest in avoiding largescale environmental reform. The concept of a 'climate footprint' is a striking illustration of this. A seemingly neutral way to monitor and reduce environmental impact, the idea was in fact popularized by BP (formerly The British Petroleum Company) in an effort to guilt-trip the public into believing that the fault for climate change lay not with oil giants like itself, but individuals (Kaufman, n.d.). Without significantly reducing its own 'footprint,' BP urged the general public to sacrifice and make do with less by putting themselves on 'low-carbon diet[s]' for the greater health of the planet (Kaufman, n.d.). As others have suggested, this discourse advances an apolitical account of environmental harm in which 'systemic actors like fossil fuel companies' are let off the hook by way of 'placing moral responsibility' on consumers themselves (Crist, 2020). Here, promoting guilt and humility papers over the deployment of power, expended to maintain an environmentally harmful status quo.

Rousseauian triangulation conceives of the environment in a way that precludes de-politicization, directing us instead to the fundamental intersection of politics and environment. Approached from a perspective that interpenetrates polity, morality, and environment, considerations about ecological duty cannot be detached from the intricacies of power. Who owes what to whom, environmentally, cannot be divorced from who exercises control and to what end. From this vantage, moralized reactions to environmental disrepair, like guilt and humility, must also be understood in relation to power. What is at issue is not simply the obligations these sentiments entail, but who they empower and to what end. How, we might then ask, can ecological guilt and humility equip people to relate to the environment, and environmental constraints, in a way that supports their own self-rule instead of inhibiting it?

Moralized approaches to understanding the environmental crisis that stress humility are susceptible not only to de-politicization but also to mal-politicization.



While perhaps now largely associated with the left, environmental humility has historically been embraced by the extreme right. Historian Jason Staudenmaier argues that humility-inflected ecologism was integral to Nazism. Drawing on the work of early ecologist Ernst Haeckel, National Socialist thought emphasized ‘holism and organicism’ (Staudenmaier, 2011, p. 27). It identified the path toward ‘social-ecological harmony’ as a matter of discerning the ‘eternal laws of nature’s processes’...and organizing society to correspond to them’ (Staudenmaier, 2011, p. 27).

The assertion that structures of human sociality must follow the dictates of biology led Nazism to a ‘denigration of humanity’ (Staudenmaier, 2011, p. 26). To be clear, humans had an active role to play in organizing collective life such that it mirrored the natural world. Along with various environmental legal protections, the ‘green wing’ of the Nazi party promoted technology as a means to achieve such mirroring (Staudenmaier, 2011, pp. 34–39). Yet ecological humility was a key doctrinal theme articulated by National Socialism. In the view of its proponents, the ‘essence of National Socialist’ ideology lay in the realization that ‘[h]umankind alone is no longer the focus of thought,’ and must recognize its ‘connectedness with the totality of life’ (quoted in Staudenmaier, p. 13). As such, others have suggested, ‘one can discern a fundamental deprecation of humans vis-à-vis nature, and, as a...corollary...an attack upon human efforts to master nature’ across Nazi thought (Pois, 1986, p. 40). Anthropocentrism, National Socialists asserted, ‘assume[s] that nature has been created only for man. We decisively reject this... According to our conception of nature, man is a link in the living chain of nature just as any other organism’ (quoted in Staudenmaier, 2011, pp. 26–27). Thus, in the words of party member Ernst Krieck, the ‘hubris and guilt’ that lay behind quests to subjugate the environment had to be rejected (quoted in Pois, 1986, p. 40). Human domination might be natural, but humans had no business dominating nature, of which they were but one interlocking part.

The notion that humans are neither special nor autonomous can be pressed into the service of anti-democratic agendas.<sup>12</sup> But Rousseauian triangulation intercedes here as well. Insisting that we interrogate eco-humility’s political entailments, it offers a suggestion about how to theorize morality, polity, and environment in a way that forecloses its authoritarian capture. On this model, the moral and the political are joined to one another in a way that affirms freedom and equality and conceptually refuses top-down, hierarchical coercion. Grounding political legitimacy in the moral exercise of free agency, Rousseau’s thought invalidates any exercise of power that does not originate in self-imposed duty.<sup>13</sup> Compulsion is justifiable only where it reflects ‘obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself’ (SC, p. 54). Moreover, such freedom ‘cannot subsist’ absent equality (SC, p. 78). For self-rule to be practicable, all must be equal before the law. In fact, Rousseau specifies, this formal provision of equality includes a material counterpart: ‘no citizen’ ought to be so ‘rich that he can buy another’ nor ‘none so poor that he is



compelled to sell himself" (SC, p. 78). Making legitimacy conditional on freedom and equality, Rousseau's triangulated view of politics, morality, and the environment refuses authoritarian appropriation.

Beyond highlighting ways to avoid de-politicizing and anti-democratic co-optation, Rousseau's interpenetrated logic confers two additional advantages. First, it deepens and expands our rationale for attending to the environment. Where all three are intertwined, not only do individuals have a moral reason to care about the environment, but also a political one as well. In fact, these incentives complement and reinforce one another. Insofar as we are invested in the exercise of either duty-bound moral agency or self-ruling political power, it is also incumbent upon us to invest attention in the environment. This is because, on Rousseau's telling, the success of free and equal politics and the success of their citizens' public moral development hinges on a society's ability to manage the natural resources of its environs and carefully calibrate their aggregate use. Living a morally and politically free life is possible only when we produce and consume in ways that are sustaining and sustainable.

Second, this interwoven approach enriches diagnostic understanding of environmental harm, which in turn deepens and expands the range of prescriptive responses appropriate to it. Seen as part of a moral-political nexus, environmental degradation must be identified and counteracted as both an ethical and political bad. On the basis of Rousseau's logic, environmental devastation must be indicative of a political failure as well as a moral one. If there is something problematic about the way we interact with the environment, then there is something problematic about our structures of political economy and political culture, too. A wider battery of prescriptive measures follows from this. From a triangulated viewpoint, improving our relationship with the material world must entail modifying not only some aspects of duty and morality, but also some aspects of power and politics including, most notably, political economy. While this may render environmental repair more daunting, it is also more comprehensive and holistic.

The interpenetrated quality of Rousseau's theory allows the environment, and environmental crisis, to be conceived as both moral and political concerns. Approaches to green thought that emphasize humility would be well served by engaging with this triangulated perspective. To be fair, Rousseau's work does not align seamlessly with the humility-driven principles of non-exceptionalism and non-autonomy. While affirming humanity's indebtedness to and dependence on the environment, Rousseau hardly suggests that we are indistinct from the rest of nature. Nevertheless, his reasoning has something to offer. Drawing attention to the intersection of polity, morality, and environment, it allows for the environment's humility-based moralization without hazarding either de- or mal-politicizing seizure. At the same time, it strengthens incentives to care about the environment and enriches understanding of what such care will likely require.



## Conclusion

In relation to political theory, the rise of humility-minded environmental thought can be linked to a larger, disciplinary turn toward ethics. Others have waged wholesale attacks on this turn (for example, Geuss, 2005), emphasizing—among other concerns—its inattentiveness to collective action, deference to status quo structures of power, and rejection of emancipatory projects (for example, Vázquez-Arroyo, 2016). But the argument I have advanced here is more modest.

Theorizing the environmental crisis as a primarily moral concern born, for example, of human hubris, is politically dangerous. This does not mean that morality need be sidelined altogether. Duty-based approaches to understanding environmental degradation, like the humility-minded branch of green thought I focus on above, must, however, be bound to an explicit politics. This must be a politics attentive to how our relationship with the material world is bound up with economy and culture and intersects with the realization of freedom and equality.

Interweaving considerations of power and obligation, Rousseau's thought provides a springboard from which we might begin to theorize the environment as a simultaneously moral and political domain. May we have the vision and foresight to do so.

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## Data availability

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were used.

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## Notes

1. Mirroring the interchangeable usages of 'moral' and 'ethical' found in this literature, I use the two synonymously.
2. On moral thought's broad preoccupation with duty, see: Scanlon (2000). On political thought's broad preoccupation with power, see: Geuss (2008)
3. On the general 'intertwin[ing]' of political and ethical thought regarding climate change and the environment, see: Lane (2016, p. 109).
4. All references to Rousseau's work are taken from Gourevitch's translations and use the following abbreviations: DI (Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men); DS (Discourse on the Sciences and Arts); GP (Considerations on the Government of Poland); OL (Essay on the Origin of Languages); PE (Discourse on Political Economy); SC (The Social Contract).
5. Rousseau has been put to use in reframing other aspects of the intersection of politics and environment as well. See: Lane (2014), Lane and Clark (2006), Lane (2006). Others emphasize the ethical dimensions of Rousseau's environmentalism. See: Canivez (2016), Masaki (2021) Roosevelt (2011), Vanderheiden (2002).
6. The extent to which Montesquieu himself can be categorized as a straightforward determinist is contested. See: Krause (2003). Anti-determinist positions also took repugnant shapes in the context of 18th century philosophical debate. David Hume, for one, argued that essential, hierarchical differences between nations—and ultimately races—demonstrated the fallacy of Montesquieu's environmental determinism (Sebastiani, 2013, pp. 28, 29, 42).
7. Bennett elsewhere critiques the 'politics of moralizing,' however, what she challenges with this expression are not ethics-first ways of theorizing politics, but overly self-assured approaches to political theory (Bennett and Shapiro, 2002, pp. 2, 4), counseling humility here too (Bennett and Shapiro, 2002, p. 19).
8. On the centrality of 'modesty' to new materialism, see: Connolly (2013, p. 399). On the affinities between new materialism and object-oriented ontology, see: Malm (2018, pp. 110–112).
9. Cooke frames her intervention as attentive to politics and ethics, yet positions 'transformative politics' as a subsidiary of 'ethical enterprises' (Cooke, 2020, p. 1168).
10. On this dynamic, see also: Biro (2005), Horowitz (1987).
11. Factors like 'the location, the climate, [and] the soil' are so integral to the Lawgiver's calculus that Rousseau also stresses their consideration in the earlier *Discourse on Political Economy* (PE, p. 12).
12. This is not a purely historical concern; fascistic, authoritarian, and far-right actors today position the climate crisis as a justification for various anti-democratic measures (Gilman, 2020; Malm and The Zetkin Collective, 2021; Mann, 2022; Rueda, 2020).
13. Cf. Arendt (1961, pp. 164, 165).

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