

## Rewilding Earth Podcast Episode 106: On Humanity's Evolution To An Ecocentric View of Nature's Value - Carter Dillard 3/24/2023



Jack Humphrey: Give us a synopsis of this piece in Newsweek.

Carter Dillard: So there are really at least two ways to approach environmentalism and protecting our environment. There's the anthropocentric approach, which treats nature as a human resource and resources to be conserved. And there's an ecocentric approach which treats nature or the non-human world as a living system that deserves its own rights and obligations.

To it because there are creatures that live there that have their own autonomous worlds, their own desires and their own lives, and. Inevitably anthropocentrism or using the non-human world or nature as a human resource is what created the climate crisis. It we thought we could control that system of use.

We were unable to control it. At this point, we have no chance of complying with the Paris agreements goals for preventing the worst of the climate crisis. And we [00:01:00] are in fact likely to trigger. Ecological feedback loops like methane releases in the Arctic through which we'll lose control of the entire process.

And I think it's important at this point to say that failure to pivot towards ecocentric approaches to environmentalism, things like climate restoration through massive sequestration of the emissions, that is homicide when it comes to what the harm that will inflict on future generations.

You have natural rights in the title, and that brings up ideas, especially when you're talking about the legal system rights of things that are not human, like rivers and and ecosystems. Is, does that have something to do with this as well? Is this all IWiN?

Carter: It does. The reason I wrote the op-ed in the news in Newsweek was the, there is an ecocentric approach to environmentalism that's consistent with [00:02:00] our constitutional right to be let alone or a right not to exploit nature, but a right to experience nature.

Carter: And that right comes not like all rights, it comes with obligations or duties not to interfere with other people's right to experience nature. For the non-human world, there's a correlative duty that would protect nature. So the natural rights in this case are a little different than the what A lot of oftentimes we'll hear about rights of nature when it comes to particular forests or rivers or mountains might, we might.

Carter: Consider them to be rights holders. But there's also an argument that to really protect those systems, we have a right to be left alone by others and other people have a right to be left alone by us. That idea of autonomy, personal freedom, is anchored to nature in the Declaration of Independence and really in all of the political theory that underlies the Constitution.

Carter: So there's litigation that would [00:03:00] protect. The right to be free, the right to be let alone by others. That's absolutely consistent with the idea of climate restoration, this massive sequestration I'm talking about, and the restoration of wilderness so that people in the future can experience the non-human world or nature.

Much the way many generations ago did. We don't have the right to take that away from them. So I wrote the op-ed because there is constitutional litigation to protect that, right. And that litigation was dismissed for reasons that I think

were wrong. And I think we ought to file, we do plan on filing the litigation again.

And I'm, I wrote the op-ed really in, in some ways as a whistleblower because there are a lot of interests that want to interfere with our right to be free. But environmentalism is based on the freedom of nature. We should fight for that, right? And in the face of the climate crisis, I think we're obligated to do it not just for ourselves, but for future generations.

It's amazing to me reading this how such a good [00:04:00] and important case at the center of most of what people are talking about these days which you've summarized here. It could be dismissed at all . There had to be politics involved. There had to be a reason, that someone doesn't want this to happen, which also makes me feel a little hopeful.

Is it that dangerous to them?

I think there, there are no two ways about it. Mainstream environmentalists have used an anthropocentric approach to protecting the environment for decades. It was an approach that I think was used because the idea was we get progress by negotiating some middle ground with what?

Some environmentalists who see themselves as naturally on the left we get progress by negotiating some middle ground with people on the right, or conservatives that don't necessarily value the environment. And so if you have an anthrop approach that treats the non-human world as a resource that is.

A trajectory that a lot of people plan to make a lot of money using. [00:05:00] And of course if you then, if there's a right to nature that. Creates an obligation to leave the non-human world in its wild state. Essentially non-humans living in liberated habitat. Something that we consider to be the wilderness that threatens a lot of the planning around the use of the non-human world.

A lot of interests who don't want to see that sort of freedom but I think the argument is we don't have to, there doesn't necessarily have to be a. Need for environmentalists see themselves as being on the left to settle with folks on the right, at a standard like anthropocentrism. People on the right should understand that their freedom, if that's what they really value, their autonomy, their right to be let alone, that is based on nature.

It's based on climate restoration. It's based on bringing back the wilds, not just through things like mitigating emissions, but also through family reforms that ensure responsible parenting and other things. [00:06:00] One approach is to say, look, it was obviously wrong. To settle for anthropocentric standard, we have to convince people on the right that part and parcel of being free or let alone by others are being truly autonomous and independent.

Liberated involves restoring the buffer between people, the non-human world, right? Because. If it's an anthropocentric world dominated by humans, you're not free from others, you're always subjected to them. When you're out climbing in the ice in the Arctic, Exxon is reaching in to ruin your experience.

And these days, given the threat of the climate crisis, as I said, it's not just a matter of freedom. It's a matter really of. Of the rights of future generations to be safeguarded against the harm we would cause them. So yes, the cases will be, the case will be refiled. Other cases like it will be refiled.

And I think the bottom line is there's really not a form of environmentalism today. That would be legitimate. If it's not recentering around eco centrism, which [00:07:00] means climate restoration and quite frankly, family reforms that would bring children into the world and conditions that would protect them from the climate crisis that's happening.

There's no environmentalism that doesn't involve family reforms. Failure to do this sort of thing in the past is what created the nightmare we're facing today.

That focusing on the anthropocentric view on everything. It doesn't actually even work. It's a failed experiment that the environmental movement at large has tried for decades, and yet here we still are at the precipice of.

Global disaster and really needing to do something radically different and then people throwing out cases that should be heard and tried.

Exactly. And I think given that we've tried anthropocentrism, we've tried to treat nature as a human resource and this is where we have arrived I think it's easy to see that there should be alternatives and eism doesn't have to be some mysticism or magic that [00:08:00] invests the non-human world with some sort of God-like status.

It simply has to be recognizing that human freedom involves this non-human world that sort of exists between us. So instead of having 400 parts per million, which is a total failure sequestering and Peter Kowski is a great writer about the possibilities and the obligations to engage in climate restoration.

Sequestering in a way that brings us back in, at least in the direct. Of 280 parts per million or less climate emissions, while at the same time recognizing something that's pretty obvious, right? Environmentalists have not wanted for decades. To talk about family reforms, population reforms, but evidently we failed in that regard because bringing children into conditions where we know they're going to suffer and die when all we'd have to do, all we have to do is redistribute resources in a way that enables equitable planning.

Good planning, so they're not. Billionaire kids getting [00:09:00] trust funds and other children dying from starvation, you're redistributing to allow planning. We can not only engage in things like sequestration under kowski models, but we can also make sure that even as things do get bad, we're not bringing children in the conditions that harm them.

And at the same time as we do that planning, we're also gonna be engaging in sign. Mitigation, emissions mitigation because for example, having a smaller family has 20 times the emissions reduction long run than things like changing your energy usage pattern or your diet. Big surprise non-existent people tend to do less harm to the environment.

And, the question isn't now, should. How exactly would we continue the enth anthropocentric approaches of the past hoping that recycling's gonna do it? The question now is how does the left, which believes in equality, they believe in redistribution of resources for equitable opportunities in life.

How do they team up with the right to understand that the great concentrations of wealth and power at the top both. [00:10:00] In terms of extreme private wealth and public in terms of governments that quite frankly, there, there's so many citizens in any given representative's district, it's hard to say those representatives represent them anymore.

In fact, they probably are more likely to represent companies. How does the left reach out to the right and convince them we need to redistribute the wealth and power at the top to ensure equitable planning and climate restoration? That's the question. And if we do. Can you answer that question? We can bridge that divide.

We'll move towards the ecocentric solution. So the cases will be refiled.

At some point you. Keenly aware of who's in charge and who wants to remain in charge. And the way that they did it by pulling away, or not even accounting for nature, having any other use than, for humans. That was a very hard one battle for them. And now that they have it all, it would be an even harder one battle to infiltrate that already created system and turn it around.[00:11:00]

And you're talking about the legal side of things. How promising is this to you? What's the future? You said it'll be this and more cases. Do you see a ground swell at all in the near or long term?

It's a great question, Jack, and I think. You, they're probably, you'd have to look at legal work as a, as serving at least two purposes.

One is obviously to get the legal result. So you're gonna petition for action by Congress, you're gonna file a lawsuit, hope for courts to do the right thing. You. We'll hope for that legal result, but part of it is telling a story using the bill that you're getting sponsored in Congress or the lawsuit that you're filing to tell a story about the need for change and

the fact that there's some basis in our current system, whether it's language in the constitution.

Or things that Congress has said it wants to do, and they're not doing it the right [00:12:00] way. There's some basis to pursue that. And I think by using legal action to build your base, to tell that story you also get a different result. You don't have to necessarily wait for the legal result.

You're building a campaign for change around some of the legal work you're doing. So even if you're not hopeful that the powers that be in Congress and the courts will do the right thing. By engaging in the act of legal advocacy, you're also engaging in that public storytelling that helps people understand what needs to happen.

And it took long time to develop the culture of consumerism and having 3.2 kids and all of the things that people believe and tell their kids immediately after they're born, begin. Indoctrinating them into this system that we're all born into. It took a while and I wonder why there aren't more storytellers out there.

Telling the story of a different kind of future. There's very little futurism in [00:13:00] environmentalism. It's always a reaction to a problem that's occurred, but sometimes the other side will enlist our own people in fighting against an environmental message or a conservation message against their own interests.

And I believe that's because a story hasn't been told

yeah, I see a story here. I do see a pretty clear story here. And I don't wanna get too academic, but the name of the story that will be told in the International Encyclopedia of Ethics this summer in a publication we have forthcoming from the Fair Start Movement, we call it the constitutive Fallacy.

And that is the idea that you're obligated to follow the law because, Is written into a constitution, some written document, some thing that you can see, and that is the basis for law instead. What makes that a fallacy? Is that really the thing that, that [00:14:00] we should be looking to? Is whatever actually would empower us as citizens to make laws, to make things like constitutions, to create these social contracts and agreements that are the symbols of the real power that people would have.

And so one story we can tell is look, we made a mistake. We thought that we were obligated to follow the law because. This symbol called the Constitution, but the Constitution only symbolizes the power of the people. And so what you're really looking for is a norm or a rule or some sort of obligation that actually empowers people and at Fair Start Movement.

What we've found is that what empowers people. Is good family planning. It's good family ethics that give children minimal levels of welfare, redistribute wealth to give them equality of opportunity that ensure. The restoration of nature. And in fact, [00:15:00] consistent with that, the restoration of voices in democracy through things like parental readiness delay in parenting smaller families.

And if you have that sort of good planning, you actually empower people in a way that gives them into a voice and then just say this not only gives them a voice, but it gives them the. To engage in, in rule making and social contracts, the kind of thing from which the authority.

Of something like the constitution derives, constitution begins with the word we. It derives all of its authority from the premise that people are engaged in some sort of social contract rulemaking. And the way we plan families can actually empower people to do that, not just as a symbol, but as a real.

And I'll end by saying, I think, the question is it a hopeful story or is it hor or is it a horrible story if we've said, look, Made a mistake in our country's history by focusing on this symbol. What we really want to do is empower people in terms of how [00:16:00] we raise children consistent with say, the Children's Rights Convention to empower them.

Is it a hopeful or a or horrible story? We're looking at? The reality is, Jack, there is a sea change. Infertility rates in women's decision to liberate themselves from having to be mothers and in the trajectory, the future trajectory of fertility

and population. If you look at almost all of the media out there, media's freaking out that countries around the world are experiencing significant fertility declines.

That is a sea change in our species behavior, and I think that makes the story hopeful. The possibility that we can move. The symbol of the Constitution as this is what obligates us, and instead see ourselves as obligated only by just family planning. A fair and liberated form of family planning that doesn't enslave women, lets people truly plan and invests.

Quite frankly, a lot in children. [00:17:00] So we're focusing on child equity and not just parental autonomy. That norm of better family planning can actually empower people. And I think quite frankly, whatever the powers it be planned, people primarily led by women's liberation are moving in their own direction.

If you look at fertility rates and population decline, they're moving towards that better norm with or without governments. So I think it's a hopeful. And it's a story about truly empowering people.

That's the people side, and I agree with everything there. I'm also hopeful that in that empowerment, in that process, in the sea change, we will also see change in the way people relate to nature and in a way that's not.

How we're doing it now, but more on the ecocentric side. Do you see that's where that connection is made? Because that has to happen as well as everything that you just said?

Carter: Absolutely, and I [00:18:00] think it goes hand in hand with the idea, quite frankly, the rising and idea that the most important form of FU of education is humane education, right?

You want to teach people to be empathetic and to deal with others. On a fair basis that. Respects and empowers the other person, not in a dominant way that is consistent with eco centrism. Empathetic people tend to be more empathetic towards not just humans, but also non-humans. And so yes, I think consistent with declines in fertility, eventually a decline in population.

You, you're looking at greater investment in these child, greater love and attention for each child, the greater development of greater. In those children, and those children are gonna be able to see the non-human world as a form of personhood, a form of persons to whom they should be empathetic, not as things that they should own and dominate.

I see our species evolving in that direction. And a good [00:19:00] test for who's on the right side of this fight is how they perceive declines, infertility and population. If they see that as a threat, because they had hoped to make all of this money on growth by sitting on their butts and getting in, their returns on investments, those people are a problem.

But if you look at, if you're talking to people who see the decline, infertility as women's liberation and the eventual decline in population as the rewilding of the earth, we're looking at people that not only believe. In investing more in children and maybe developing their empathy. You have people that believe in freedom because we'll have freedom.

The buffer of nature between us, freedom to be let alone, and also the freedom that comes from children in whom more was invested

Jack: up to and including the things that Dave Foreman talked about nature for its own. And self-willed lands, could you see that being part of popular culture, like that's what people believe starting churches of biocentrism even perhaps.

How far do you think we could go and do we [00:20:00] have enough time, do you think? For, because culture to get to where it is today took a long time to get.

Yeah, I think it, it really is a matter of the those aspects of the left that would believe in. Ensuring that humans are capable of self-rule enough so that you don't necessarily need governments mandating control of all the wilds you people have are empathetic enough, trust each other enough are quite frankly, have been given equitable opportunities in life so that there's sufficient trust so you can.

Free zones. Now that equitable investment in children, and I'm talking about redistributing wealth from rich kids to poor

kids, that's a left idea. But if you're doing it for the purpose of ensuring those children the capacity for self-rule, because know, we didn't screw each other over at birth by robbing each other, equality of opportunity, if you're moving in that [00:21:00] direction which the left wants, you're going to be capturing parts of the.

That, that are principled, that believe in this idea of self-governance. And I do think you move towards the possibility of self-rule systems, and that's a really, that's a libertarian, largely right-wing right-leaning ideal. And I think it's possible if the left. If their equality gets extended to children, we truly believe in that equality for children.

We'll end up with autonomy for adults, which is something the right tends to get to, to value more. So I think there is a link. It's just going to mean the left has to take equality seriously by redistributing. Wealth among children, and then the right has to stick to its principles. That autonomy means what it sounds like, which is the right to be let alone, not just in nature and through nature, but in our social relations because we trust people.

What about two different quantifications I've heard in the past. One is everything that current [00:22:00] and former generations have taken from future unborn humans. In that when they're born, one that's born today is not gonna have nearly the planet resources, opportunities, or anything that it they did when you and I were born and we didn't have a heck of a lot left after all of our ancestors were done with it.

That redistribution, a lot of that money was taken from the future.

Absolutely. I mean that, I would characterize that as a baseline, what we call it a baseline problem, which is how do you determine, for example, what the baseline for costs and benefits are when looking at things like climate emissions At the Paris Agreement, they really the.

The entities that negotiated came up with an arbitrary baseline. They said let's look at gross domestic product. Projected gross domestic product, and how climate emissions and regulations of climate emissions play into that. But the baseline, the actual baseline for determining what's a cost and what's a [00:23:00] benefit.

Is whether or not you are a people, a group of people that are capable of doing that in an inclusive and a democratic way. And that means, quite frankly your. Your family planning. Your family policies are pointing in a future that looks more like creating people for town halls than it would be creating people for shopping malls.

So you're talking about equality, lots of investment and probably smaller groups of people. Capable of engaging in collective rulemaking. That's very different than let's produce as many people as possible without investing much of anything in them, including certainly not equality among children because we just need to stuff as many people in the shopping malls as we can.

You don't. Get an accurate baseline in terms of inclusive decision making if you don't go with the town hall. And so if you're looking at measuring the harms or the costs that were imposed on future generations, it's the difference [00:24:00] between what a town hall would look like and what a shopping mall would look like, and the wealth at the top that made their money based on that difference by taking us from a town hall model to a shopping mall model.

That amount of money is what is owed and it is owed to future generations, and it's best spent in the form of family planning entitlements that will let future generations get back towards the town hall. It's actually not that complex. It's just it is what legal theorists would call a baseline problem and.

This was ignored because of a simple thing. The, for lots of reasons, a lot of us know that we believe that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Now, decades later, we've learned it's a total lie. It was simply marketing that was developed to sell. Breakfast products. The same lie was told.

The idea that having children is a personal or private act to the parents. There's nothing less personal or private than creating another person. That act is interpersonal in [00:25:00] nature. In fact, children have more at stake in the active creation than their parents, and so you would gear it towards their needs under the Children's Rights Convention.

Break that lie and you treat the act of creating people as interpersonal and you solve this baseline problem. I think we can redistribute the wealth that was taken in the form of family planning entitlements. And this isn't pie in the sky. Baby bonds are the subject of state and federal legislation, at least proposed legislation now that'll grow in more important so that you link those bonds to things like loss and damage, reparations, climate, repar.

We start to see the system. I'm talking about it. It's definitely not imaginary. This is going to happen. It's just a matter of how to expedite that process.

What's inspired you to work on these things, write on these things. I'm interested in your reading list or your listening lists of, I said earlier that doesn't appear to be very many conservation or environmental futurists out there.

It's all [00:26:00] technology. It's all what mankind can do to improve the future through chemicals and technology, but, I think there's a lot of really good stories that should be or are being told out there that maybe people as clued in as you go and you get your inspiration there. Or is all of this just still just more of a thought exercise that we all individually play with in our own heads?

It's a great question, Jack, and let me, I do have inspiration, but let me say with regard to the future, to the storyteller of an environmentalism that has to do with liberating humans, an environmentalism based on freedom. I honestly believe that voice will come from the global south.

It will not come. From Eurocentric cultures, quite frankly, that have had hegemony over the process to date and have failed, I think, yeah, I think there will be a voice. I don't know who the voice is, but I think it will come from the global south, and it will inevitably be it will probably not be the voice of a man, but what I will in terms of [00:27:00] inspiration for what I'm seeing, inspiration for some of the work that I'm able to do.

A lot of the great people I'm able to work with. . It's quite frankly, just seeing young people, primarily Gen Z, disbelieve all of the lies. Yes. And react to those lies by taking to the streets. The Paris Agreement, which was an anthropocentric agreement to continue gross domestic product in an unsustainable way, it failed.

And when it failed, people began to take to the streets and to engage in direct action cuz they knew it was. Young persons who are told to have kids so that they can go work in Ellen Musk's factories. They don't believe that anymore. In fact, he's going to be, he is a target for a lot of them because of the money that the family planning systems that created him and his wealth, what that did to the world, their reactions to the lies and seeing through the lies much better than I did when I was in my twenties.

That's true. Inspiration. and I think it's only going to get [00:28:00] better as the matrix of unsustainable growth falls apart. Then the question is how do we, it's not how we continue it. The question is how we take the money that was stolen through those systems. And I think young people are inclined to engage in means of redistributing that wealth, that show bravery and not just not feely to a system that doesn't.

And to that storyteller, then it would be incumbent upon all of us to do everything we can to platform that person or those people as well, and as quickly as we possibly can

exactly. I do think the story's gonna probably be framed as anti decolonization, and I think what a better, more beautiful story to tell than that as an alternative. To, someone like Musk, a white South African, born into wealth, denied that wealth.

He tells a story about carrying emeralds in his pockets and then claims that he came from, relatively modest means leaving South Africa in the middle of apartheid to come unfortunately to [00:29:00] country like the United States that misunderstood freedom as free marketeer instead of freedom as equal opportunity.

And freedom from others of nature. And so I think the story of decolonization, it is going to have to be the way that the story of people like Musk fall, but I think fall they will. Very well said. Carter, I love having you back. I'm really

excited to see what you produce in the future. And thank you so much for visiting us here at the Real Reality and Earth Podcast.

Jack, I really appreciate you having me. You take care.

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