

Stranger Than Fiction

*Brendan O'Neill
Monday, October 27, 2008
Planet Gore, National Review Online*

Earlier this year, I wrote an eco-satirical column under the pseudonym Ethan Greenhart, in which I (or rather, Ethan) called upon Greens everywhere to pray for an economic downturn. The column argued that nothing would benefit our human-ravaged planet more than a “big, beautiful, stock-crashing, Wall Street–burning, consumer-baiting, home-evicting, bank-busting recession.”

We need something to stop humans “raping the planet,” I said, tongue pressed ferociously against my cheek, and “the recession might just be the chemical castration for the job.” A recession could be the “antibody Gaia so desperately needs to deal with her human itch,” since it would force people to buy less and live more humbly.

The column said recession would be a just punishment for the “lunatics” of humankind, before the arrival of the “final big disease” — that glorious moment when a rampant sickness will “reduce the human population to sustainable levels” and “end industrialism . . . just as the Plague contributed to the demise of feudalism.”

I was going too far, right? Yes, there are super-alooof Gaia worshippers who, caring little for the living standards of their fellow men, argue that a recession would be a good thing – and, sure, they deserve a few satirical darts tossed their way. But surely no right-minded Green (assuming such a thing exists) would celebrate the depletion of mankind by a “preferably painless but speedily contagious disease”?

You’d be amazed.

Not 24 hours after the column was published, “Ethan” received an e-mail (my alter ego came with his own inbox) from Valerie Stevens, chairperson of the U.K.-based Optimum Population Trust. The OPT is an influential green-leaning outfit that campaigns for strict controls on population growth. Ms. Stevens, believing — remarkably — that Ethan Greenhart is a real person, wrote: “What a marvellous piece of writing. I feel exactly the same as you!”

Consider what this means. The head of one of Britain’s most vocal Green lobby groups feels “exactly” that people who work in shops are comparable to “concentration camp guards”; that humankind is a “poisonous bacteria in Gaia’s bloodstream”; that “consumerism makes us mentally ill”; that the consumer society has “turned us into savages . . . well, not us, obviously, but certainly them”; and that a disease should come and decimate “the plague that is mankind.” All of these statements were contained in the pretend eco-rant that

OPT chair Valerie Stevens described as a “marvellous piece of writing” with which she agrees “exactly.”

The OPT has numerous Green bigwigs on its advisory board, including Jonathon Porritt, who was director of Friends of the Earth from 1984 to 1990 and is currently an adviser to Prince Charles, the insufferably eco-minded heir to the British throne. Ms Stevens’ enthusiastic agreement with Ethan Greenhart unwittingly revealed the backward, misanthropic thinking that rattles in the attics of Britain’s posh Green elite.

It also revealed something else: the environmental movement is now so pompous, hysterical, bloated, and disconnected that it is almost beyond satire. My weekly Ethan Greenhart columns, published in my online magazine, spiked, have now been turned into a book: *Can I Recycle My Granny? And 39 Other Eco-Dilemmas*. In the course of writing it, I discovered that satirizing Greens is forever an uphill struggle, as one’s campaign to mock environmentalism continually threatens to be derailed by the latest ridiculous utterance from the Greens themselves.

Ethan Greenhart has argued that climate-change denial should be recognized by the American Psychiatric Association as a “mental disorder” and that there should be “eco-lobotomies” for persistent deniers. Well, this is only a more extreme version of a leading British Green’s demand for “international criminal tribunals” to try those who “preach the gospel of denial.” Yet it turns out that many Greens are already discussing the “psychological processes” that contribute to climate change denial, with *The Ecologist*, an influential British magazine, arguing that “angrily denying the problem [of climate change] outright” is a form of “psychotic denial.” Perhaps eco-lobotomies aren’t so far off now.

Ethan Greenhart has claimed to have set up something called Bottlefeeders Anonymous, for those moms who have strayed from The Ethical Path by bottlefeeding rather than breastfeeding their offspring. “Bottlefeeding is a form of child abuse,” he declares, since it involves “stuffing your child’s gut with powder produced in a factory by a really big and probably quite evil conglomerate.” Lo and behold, it turns out that eco-minded “militant lactivists” really do look upon bottlefeeding as abusive. Green columnist George Monbiot believes that feeding your child formula is “tantamount to child abuse.”

Ethan has even celebrated suicide as a sensible solution to human overcrowding on Gaia’s “pretty face.” Here he was inspired by cranky Green groups like the Church of Euthanasia. Yet this outlook ain’t so cranky anymore. Shortly before *Can I Recycle My Granny?* was to hit the shelves — in which Ethan maintains that “non-existence is the most perfectly ethical way of being” — a book by David Benatar (a professor of philosophy at the University of Cape Town, no less) appeared under the title *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming Into Existence*.

Horace said the purpose of satire is to “laugh men out of their follies.” Yet such is the depth of contemporary Green folly that even mockery can be mistaken for another sensible idea or contribution to the “Green cause.” Of course (and I would say this, wouldn’t I?) my book is still full of cutting-edge satire — “richly comic,” hails *The Independent*. But you had better buy it quick before its maddest, zaniest send-ups of the environmentalist movement become the latest Green orthodoxy.

Brendan O’Neill (a.k.a. Ethan Greenhart) is the editor of spiked and the author of Can I Recycle My Granny? And 39 Other Eco-Dilemmas.