Check for updates

*Perspectives and controversies*

THE ANTHROPOCENE REVIEW

# Ecomodernism: A clarifying perspective

The Anthropocene Review
2024, Vol. 11(3) 684–685
© The Author(s) 2023

Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/20530196231221495
journals.sagepub.com/home/anr

**Erle C Ellis,[1,2] Mark Lynas[3,4] and Ted Nordhaus[5]**

**Abstract**

Since 2015, the Ecomodernist Manifesto has inspired efforts to shape a better future for people and the rest of life in the Anthropocene. At the same time, misconceptions and misunderstandings have arisen about what ecomodernism stands for. As three authors of the Manifesto, we offer this clarifying perspective.

**Keywords**

environmentalism, environmental limits, environmental politics, human development, innovation, technology, trade-offs, values, economic growth

Since 2015, the Ecomodernist Manifesto has inspired efforts to shape a better future for people and the rest of life in the Anthropocene. At the same time, misconceptions and misunderstandings have arisen about what ecomodernism stands for. As three authors of the Manifesto, we offer this clarifying perspective.

## Environmental challenges demand action

Earth continues to warm because of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels. Biodiversity losses are increasing, and environmental pollution is harming ecosystems and human societies alike. Concerted public policy efforts and long-term investments are needed to end fossil fuel emissions, to conserve and restore habitats and end rapid extinctions, and to reduce harmful pollution.

## Human development has enormous benefits

Human development has enabled broad and unprecedented improvements in the human condition, with famine virtually abolished, rapid reductions in maternal and infant mortality, and general

[1]University of Maryland, Baltimore County, USA
[2]University of Oxford, UK
[3]Alliance for Science, USA
[4]RePlanet, Belgium
[5]Breakthrough Institute, USA

All authors contributed equally.

**Corresponding author:**
Erle C Ellis, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Baltimore, MD 21250-0001, USA.
Email: ece@umbc.edu

improvements in basic living conditions. Science, medicine, and technological developments have been critical to these improvements and should be celebrated, promoted, and defended.

## Technologies are tools

All realistic options to shape a better future for people and planet, including the clean energy transition, making space for nature, and reducing and ending pollution, depend on embracing technological advances. Nevertheless, even technological innovations that open up new opportunities for environmental and social benefits can create new problems—trade-offs—which then need to be addressed in turn.

## Economic growth is not a panacea

Economic growth has been associated with many desirable outcomes for people and many negative environmental impacts. But economic growth and environmental protection need not be incompatible, and continuing economic growth is essential in low-income countries. A mix of public and private sector actions are critical to shaping a better future for people and planet, including a strong role for governments and the state, both in regulating pollution and fostering technological innovation.

## Power to the people

We believe fundamentally that all human life is of equal value, that human rights are universal, and that a better world demands equal opportunity for all. We reject any form of dictatorship and support free and fair elections, press freedoms, and all forms of participatory politics and governance as fundamental human rights that extend beyond formal elections.

## In Summary

Ecomodernism is a work in progress and a broad church. We remain convinced that its core vision points the way forward. Environmental limits do not define the possibilities for a better future for life on Earth. Human aspirations and the fate of the planet need not conflict. A better future for both is achievable when societies work together to develop, invest in, and build new capabilities, from clean energy and green cities to more productive and environmentally sound food systems. We welcome debate and further discussion on these suggestions and on the original manifesto.

### Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### ORCID iDs

Erle C Ellis https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2006-3362

Mark Lynas https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9059-4653