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Article:

Büscher, B., Fletcher, R., Brockington, D. orcid.org/0000-0001-5692-0154 et al. (12 more authors) (2017) *Doing Whole Earth justice: a reply to Cafaro et al.* *Oryx*, 51 (3). p. 401. ISSN 0030-6053

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605317000278>

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Reply to Cafaro et al, 2017

We are grateful to receive Cafaro et al.'s (2017) reply to our recent article 'Half Earth or Whole Earth? Radical Ideas for Conservation and their implications' (Büscher, et al, 2016). In their reply, Cafaro et al clarify some of the principal tenets of the 'Nature-needs Half' (NHH) movement and clearly there are important issues we agree on. As we mentioned in our original article, the outlook for biodiversity is bleak and we share a deep worry about this reality. Nonhumans should be able to exist and thrive, and this is something that we fully affirm as well. Equally important is Cafaro et al.'s acknowledgement that the neoliberal growth economy needs to be challenged if we are ever to make headway in addressing the current extinction crisis. This position is especially significant given that it differs from that of the main champion of the Half Earth concept, E.O. Wilson (2016), who appears to have blind faith in the ability of free market capitalism to eventually correct its social and environmental problems. It also opens up the potential for conservation to support efforts to resist the ravages of neoliberal capitalism – something that has become even more urgent during a Trump presidency (Büscher and Fletcher 2017).

Having said this, overall we remain unconvinced by the proposal to set aside half of the planet in protected areas. Cafaro et al. may be correct in saying that this would save many species (though arguably only if climate change's effects on biodiversity prove less severe than currently predicted). However, it will not address the destruction of nature that is fundamental to the global economy. Cafaro et al. do acknowledge that setting aside half of the planet needs to be accompanied by an end to 'human misbehaviour' in the rest of the earth, but they offer no strategy for how to achieve this. We worry that focusing only on protected area expansion will make such changes less likely. It could distract from any search for mechanisms to actually redress an inherently unsustainable political economy, or worse, act as an excuse for doing nothing. This is why we argue for a 'whole earth' vision that addresses both issues together. There are parallels here with the question of human population growth, raised by Cafaro et al. This is an important issue, but one that cannot be treated separately from the question of unequal levels of environmental impact. To do so provides a convenient rationale for focussing attention on the reproductive habits of the world's poor rather than the vastly more environmentally damaging consumption (-encouraging) habits of the world's rich.

Most significantly, and the core of our original article, is the human cost of the half earth proposal. Moving from roughly 17% to 50% of the globe in protected areas across all biomes will have a tremendous social impact through processes of physical, economic and symbolic displacement. This might have desirable implications in some wealthier parts of the world (for example through rewilding), but many of the new protected areas would be in places whose inhabitants have contributed least to the problem of global environmental change. It is all well to suggest that 'local communities should be actively involved in conservation efforts', but what power will their interests, voices and rights have in the face of the claims of supporters of the NHH movement? The lack of a clear and operationalised commitment to global justice is a profound flaw in the NHH vision.

Setting aside half of the planet does not help us learn how to 'live with' nature (Turnhout et al. 2014) in an unjust world. On the contrary, it exacerbates already problematic nature/culture dichotomies that are at the heart of the problem of extinction of species and of the neoliberal growth economy Cafaro et al. oppose. Without a concrete plan for how to address either the human costs of the Nature Needs Half proposal or continued threats from the global economy to the nonhuman species in whose name it is promoted, we remain deeply concerned by the

implications of such a proposal. We believe we need a Whole Earth approach that explores new ways for humans and nonhumans to coexist within an economy that promotes prosperity without the need for narrow economic growth.

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