

## **Neoliberal ethics messing with sustainability?**

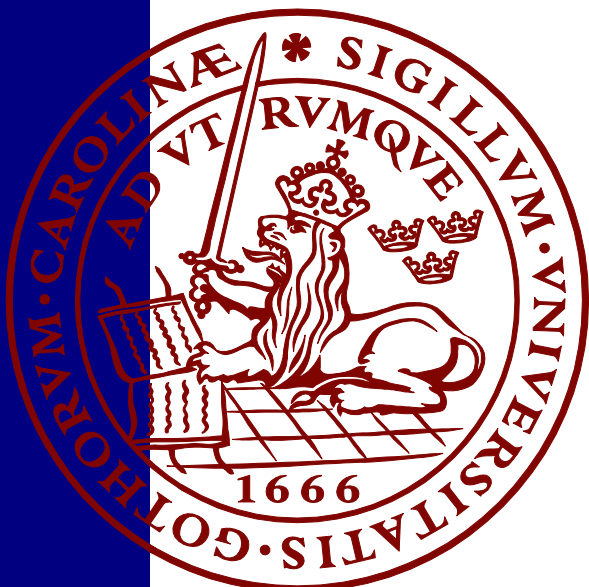
An analysis of the fundamental conflict between neoliberal ethics and sustainability measures and its consequences

*Lucia Betzler*

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Lund University  
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(30hp/credits)



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## **Abstract**

Despite all of the detrimental effects predicted in the event of non-action regarding climate change, a large number of people in the Global North are in a state of social inertia and openly criticise climate change mitigation (CCM) and climate change adaptation (CCA) measures. Most explanatory approaches of this phenomenon do not question the basic beliefs that our system is based on in their analysis. In an attempt to do so, I hypothesise that one reason for social inertia related to sustainability is that sustainability is in conflict with neoliberal ethics.

To test this hypothesis, in a first step, I identify neoliberalism as hegemonic ideology, analyse its ethical foundation following Hayek, and derive its inherent understanding of sustainability from this analysis. My findings are that conflicts between neoliberalism and sustainability only arise when externally criticising neoliberalism as not being radical enough. From within the theoretical framework, sustainability can be incorporated in the neoliberal system of thought.

Informed by this, I perform a critical discourse analysis on people's comments in response to three U.S.-American newspaper articles on CCM and CCA measures. The aim is to understand in which way neoliberal arguments are used to oppose them. I find that the analysed comments broadly perceive such measures as coercive, interfering with individual liberty, and leading down a regressive path towards totalitarianism.

Against this background, I argue that the strategies to overcome social inertia amongst people who base their worldview on neoliberal ethics, ideological change is needed. To promote such ideological change, the neoliberal system of thoughts can be challenged immanently, and can be tackled through counter-hegemonic movements, with a focus on interiority supporting this fight.

**Key words:** neoliberal ethics, hegemonic ideology, social inertia, climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, critical discourse analysis, Friedrich A. Hayek

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**List of abbreviations**

<b>CCA</b>	Climate Change Adaptation
<b>CCM</b>	Climate Change Mitigation
<b>CDA</b>	Critical Discourse Analysis
<b>CtGND</b>	Comments with regards to the article on the Green New Deal
<b>CtM</b>	Comments with regards to the article on meat consumption
<b>CtP</b>	Comments with regards to the article on plastic bans
<b>GND</b>	Green New Deal
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>PPP</b>	Polluter Pays Principle
<b>RQ</b>	Research Question
<b>U.S.</b>	United States
<b>WSJ</b>	The Wall Street Journal

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research problem

The scientific evidence is overwhelmingly clear: Humanity is facing an unprecedented, self-caused crisis of global environmental change, encompassing problems like climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental contamination. This crisis threatens our planet, the integrity of ecosystems, and as a consequence the continuity of different forms of life on earth (Beck, 2009; Burch & Harris, 2014; IPCC, 2018). The effects of this crisis can already be felt around the world and are likely to increase in frequency, duration and severity. They are threatening health, food security and livelihoods, especially if no drastic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are performed quickly (IPCC, 2018).

In light of all these detrimental consequences imminent in the case of non-action, alarmingly little is changing around the globe. Even though political groups fight for climate justice and social movements increasingly mobilise global and local strikes and actions around the world (e.g. 350.org, 2019; Fridays for future, 2019), greenhouse gas emissions keep increasing globally (Climate Action Tracker, 2019). Besides, large fractions of people in the Global North seem to be ignoring any hazard and continue to live their affluent, consumerist lifestyles (Adams, 2014). This trend is reflected e.g. in the United States (U.S.), where awareness and concern about climate change as an important threat is indeed increasing (currently, 57% of U.S. Americans believe so), but mainly amongst Democrats. Republicans in contrast still ascribe little meaning to it (Kennedy & Hefferon, 2019).

As such, social inertia, a concept framed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is still a widespread problem when it comes to climate change mitigation (CCM) and climate change adaptation (CCA) measures<sup>1</sup>. Bourdieu (1985) claimed that social classes tend to perceive their social space and the systemic structure as objective and set and hence are inclined "to accept the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than to rebel against it, [or] to counterpose to it different, even antagonistic, possibilities" (p. 728). Hence, social inertia inhibits people from taking action and opposes them to change (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). Resistance towards change does not only arise when discussing the necessity of big systemic changes, but even against the slightest advances in direction of CCM or CCA. Examples for this phenomenon can be the criticism against a 'veggie day', e.g. in Swedish schools, to promote less meat consumption (Huhtaniska, 2019), or the heated discussion around the introduction of a general speed limit on German highways (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2019).

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<sup>1</sup> Climate change mitigation refers to those human actions that either aim at decreasing the sources of greenhouse gas emissions or at enhancing the reabsorption of the gases through sinks (UNFCCC, 2009b). Climate change adaptation are adjustment to already existing or expected effects of climate change (UNFCCC, 2009a).



Substantial research has been devoted to the roots of such social inertia. Brulle and Norgaard (2019) categorise explanatory approaches on the basis of their level of focus as individual or societal<sup>2</sup>. The most commonly given explanation is situated at the individual level and is titled the ‘information deficit model’ by Buckeley (2000). It seeks the lack of action in the deficiency of comprehensible knowledge about the problem: It is often too complex, too abstract, or too blurred by the constant doubts sown by climate deniers. The second individual-level explanation states that “encountering climate change can destabilise the self” (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019, p. 889) and create anxiety and insecurity, which are feelings that paralyse the affected person and thus numb her\*his ability to act.

On the societal level, Brulle and Norgaard (2019) place political and ideological conflicts, or more precisely, the conflict between ‘reformist’ and ‘radical’ approaches at the core of social inertia and resistance towards CCM and CCA measures. They see ‘reformists’ as pushing for technological development and market-based solutions to solve climate issues. ‘Radicals’ on the other hand argue from a Climate Justice perspective and criticise the global political and economic system for upholding unequal power relations that largely benefit the Global North at the expense of the (economically) poor people on this planet. From this radical perspective, the reformist approach limits the possibilities of social action to a cosmetic minimum that does not challenge the status quo and can hence be considered a driver of social inertia in itself (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). Another society-level argument is put forward by a master’s thesis for the programme *Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science* at Lund University which argues that the “neoliberal welfare system and labour market deprive individuals of their agency, rendering them unable to become agents of change” (Glock, 2017).

However, Glock’s argument constitutes an external critique to neoliberalism<sup>3</sup>; thus, when applying the inherent logic of neoliberal theory itself, his argument is not valid<sup>4</sup>: From this perspective, the labour market is a constituent of individual freedom and gives humans agency in the first place. Hence, neoliberalism does not prevent people from doing anything. To the contrary, it enables them to act according to their neoliberal ideals and values, regardless of the outcome for sustainability (Harvey, 2005).

I thus hypothesise that ***one reason for social inertia related to sustainability is that sustainability is in conflict with neoliberal ethics***. These ethical principles are at stake when discussing solutions to climate change: every change we make threatens the values of people believing in a neoliberal ethic

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<sup>2</sup> A third common level of focus for explaining inertia is organisational (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). This is outside the scope of this thesis, though, and thus will not be discussed here further.

<sup>3</sup> Neoliberalism constitutes the major doctrine for macroeconomic policies and thinking of our time (Harvey, 2005). In the following chapters, I will refine its definition, establishing it as the hegemonic ideology of our time.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to discredit Glock (2017)’s argument. The argument is sound and makes sense from his point of analysis.

as well as their beliefs of what is good and right, which leads them to oppose climate action. Using Brulle and Norgaard (2019)'s categorisation, this hypothesis provides a societal-level explanation to social inertia, since it puts attention to ideological conflict. Yet, its focus of observation differs from that described above, since it centres around the ethical foundation of the underlying system (neoliberalism) rather than the outcomes that this system produces.

I use the term sustainability following the definition put forward by the Brundtland report. It states that sustainability is a form of "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 41). Thereby, I deliberately stay in very general terms when operationalising actions that are promoting sustainability, namely all measures that mitigate climate change or adapt to it. This is because my hypothesis claims that any such measure conflicts with neoliberal ethics. Therefore, the extent of the measure and the 'amelioration' (from a sustainability point of view) does not matter, rather the existence of the suggestion.

## **1.2 Research questions**

The aim of my research is to test this hypothesis. To do so, I ask the following research questions to guide the research process:

- *RQ1: To what extent are neoliberal ethics compatible with sustainability?*
- *RQ2: To what extent are neoliberal arguments used to oppose CCM and CCA measures?*
- *RQ3: Resulting from this analysis, what are potential pathways forward in the fight against social inertia related to sustainability?*

The first question is a merely theoretical analysis placed within the bigger debate around the relation between neoliberal arguments and sustainability. To understand the impact of the discrepancy between the two on people's thoughts and behaviour, RQ2 takes the form of a case study based on reader's comments in response to articles in a U.S.-American newspaper. RQ3 takes the results of the analysis of both RQ1 and RQ2 and gives an overview of potential ideas to move forward in the fight against climate change and social inertia related to it.

## **1.3 Relevance to sustainability science**

This thesis is embedded in the research field of sustainability science. This field is problem-driven in a sense that it seeks to understand "problems in coupled human-environment systems" (Wiek, Ness, Schweizer-Ries, Brand, & Farioli, 2012, p. 5), and solution-oriented as it aims at providing "practical solutions to those problems" (Wiek et al., 2012, p. 5). The problem at stake in this thesis is that the human-made environmental and climate crisis is often described as ending in an apocalypse (Adams,

2014) or the collapse of civilisation (Leahy, Bowden, & Threadgold, 2010). Despite that fact, many people not only fail to understand the risk and act accordingly, but also actively contest CCM and CCA measures as exemplified in the different examples above. The way this thesis aims at having real-world implications is by contributing to the understanding of the reasons behind such resistance in order to be able to, in a next step, tackle them in a more targeted way and thus have a bigger impact. This type of solution-oriented research is by definition normative, with the declared aim of a transformation towards sustainability (Clark & Dickson, 2003).

An important characteristic of sustainability science is to make sense of the world by thinking in systems. This approach to problems allows for questioning the Western rational way of knowledge production and learning from it to create more meaningful research (Meadows, 2009). Traditionally, we have learned to search for explanations to problems in the outside world and that problems can be solved by analysing cause-effect correlations and addressing the causes. In systems thinking however, each problem is embedded in larger structures, or systems, that are complex and wicked. In that sense, some solutions to certain problems might in turn cause other issues in other parts of the system. Additionally, problems might be inherent to the set-up of a system and hence might only be solvable by restructuring the basic components of it (Meadows, 2009).

A helpful tool to understand such different levels of complexity is the so-called iceberg model (see Figure 1). Following the analogy of an iceberg, the *events* that we are experiencing in the real world, represent the visible 10% of the iceberg and are informed by certain underlying, invisible *patterns of behaviour*. Those patterns derive from the *structure of the system* which is itself based on our *mental models*. The deeper inside the iceberg we go, the bigger is the leverage for influencing the system as a whole (which could be a human being or society as a whole) and creating profound change (Academy for Systems Change, n.d.).



**Figure 1.** The Iceberg Model. This systems-thinking tool breaks down the complexity of systems into different levels of analysis and their interrelations. Accordingly, *events*, or real-world occurrences, are always the outcome of the underlying *patterns of behaviour* of an individual or group. These are influenced by the way the system is *structured*, and its components are interrelated, which is again a result of the underlying *mental models*, i.e. the basic values and beliefs the system is based on. The ‘deeper inside the iceberg’, the bigger the leverage for potential change. (Academy for Systems Change, n.d.).

As for this thesis, the iceberg model inspired me to formulate my hypothesis and research questions. Much research on tackling climate change issues focusses on third-person analyses rather than on mental models and the values and beliefs that shape the way we see the world and ultimately how we act (O’Brien & Hochachka, 2011). As an example, let us look at the explanations for social inertia outlined in the previous section. The ‘information deficit model’ describes a *pattern of behaviour*: If people receive more comprehensible information over time, they also will act more. Both reformism and the lack of agency as drivers of inertia constitute *systems structures*. They describe how the composition of the system itself influences behaviour over time, but do not ask questions as of why the system is structured the way it is structured, hence the underlying *mental models*. That is why I focus my research on the level of *mental models*, because although interiority is increasingly being recognised as an important aspect of the problem, more research is needed to effectively tackle the arising issues (Wamsler, 2018).

## **1.4 Thesis structure**

Guided by the research questions, this thesis is structured into seven chapters, the first of which being this introduction. In the background (Chapter 2), I set the scene by explaining the importance of hegemonic ideologies on our identity and on how we see the world and act in it. This is followed by a methods section describing my research design and methodology (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 defines neoliberalism as the hegemonic ideology of our time and analyses its ethical foundation from a Hayekian point of view. Based on this analysis, its relation to, and potential contradictions with, sustainability are investigated, answering RQ1. Informed by this, I perform a critical discourse analysis on people's comments responding to three different newspaper articles that propose CCM and/or CCA measures (Chapter 5). The aim is to understand to what extent neoliberal arguments are used to oppose sustainability measures, or in other words, to what extent ethical considerations are the source of the criticism, answering RQ2. In the discussion (Chapter 6), I critically reflect on my findings and discuss their implications as for how to approach people who base their worldview on neoliberal arguments when trying to convince them to be more sustainable, responding to RQ3. Chapter 7 finishes the thesis with concluding remarks and an outlook.

## **2 Background: On ideologies and hegemony**

In this thesis, I build my arguments on the claim that neoliberalism is the dominant ideology with hegemonic status and as such has a strong influence on how people see the world. While this claim is scientifically supported in the next chapter (3), the present chapter explains the socio-political importance of ideologies and, more precisely, hegemonic ideologies.

### **2.1 The impact of ideologies on our lives**

What persuades men and women to mistake each other from time to time for gods or vermin is ideology. One can understand well enough how human beings may struggle and murder for good material reasons – reasons connected, for instance, with their physical survival. It is much harder to grasp how they may come to do so in the name of something as apparently abstract as ideas. Yet ideas are what men and women live by, and will occasionally die for. (Eagleton, 1991, p. 12)

Like with many other sociological concepts, e.g. democracy or freedom, there is no single definition of ideology that is commonly agreed upon. One strand of research understands ideology as a form of distorted cognition, while another one focusses rather on the role that ideas play in society (Eagleton, 1991). The latter is more important for the purpose of this thesis, since it does not want to discuss whether ideologies are right or wrong, but what influence they unfold in society, regardless of whether they are right or wrong. Following Van Dijk (2000), then, ideologies are broadly defined as “the fundamental beliefs of a group and its members” (p. 7). These beliefs can be of social, political, cultural,

or religious origin and provide guidance to their members in understanding the character of the world, answering normative questions of what is good or bad and acting appropriately (Van Dijk, 1998). This understanding of ideologies makes them fit in the category of *mental models*<sup>5</sup> in the iceberg model and thus of utmost importance in shaping our worldview and our actions.

An vital base on which ideologies are constructed are values, “the pillars of the moral order of societies” (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 74). According to Van Dijk (1998), each culture has its set of core values that the vast majority believe in and refer to. Those individuals who leave this common ground of values are usually met with rejection. However, the understanding of these common core values is not the same for everybody. The author argues that every ideology ‘appropriates’ the values and uses them in ways beneficial to their own interests. Accordingly, groups with conflicting ideologies may still base their claims on the same value, “but invest it with very different ideological content” (Van Dijk, extent to which other people want to rule their lives (GND3) 1998, p. 76). For example, freedom can mean to limit state interventions to a bare minimum, or on the contrary, that the state has to intervene as a prerequisite for freedom (see Chapter 4.2). These different interpretations of the same value reveal the self-serving character of ideologies, since their aim is to legitimise and secure the own interests.

Since those interests are based on diverse normative claims and ‘value-appropriations’ and thus differ greatly between groups, ideologies are a source of social conflict (Van Dijk, 1998). This conflict mainly evolves around power issues. While dominant groups seek to maintain and legitimise their power, groups with different or opposed worldviews struggle to resist this power and to free themselves from the domination. An important element of this struggle is the control over discourse, since ideology is transported through discourse. Thus, those who control the discourse are also likely to have at least some influence on what people think and how they act (Van Dijk, 2003). All in all, ideologies have a polarising effect that separates ‘us’ from ‘them’. Thereby, the ‘us’ has a strong identity-building character, since it guides people in what to do, “their goals, their values, their relations to other groups, and their resources for survival or social existence” (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 71f.).

## **2.2 Hegemonic ideologies**

The concept of cultural hegemony that goes back to Antonio Gramsci is closely related to that of ideologies, yet not limited to it (Jaques, Islar, & Lord, 2019). The Marxist thinker argues that within capitalist societies the dominant class upholds their position of power not only through coercion, but

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<sup>5</sup> Note that Van Dijk has a very different understanding of the term ‘mental models’ (see e.g. Van Dijk, 2000). In this thesis, I strictly follow the iceberg model when using this term.

also, and more importantly, through the establishment and continuous perpetuation of consent around their understanding of a good social order amongst subordinate classes or groups. This includes their value system, worldview, and understanding of a just distribution of goods and services within society (Lears, 1985), hence their ideology as defined in this thesis.

For Gramsci, hegemony is constructed and perpetuated through public discourse, e.g. by public institutions like schools or public figures which have an influence on the opinions and values of others, like doctors or religious figures (Jaques et al., 2019). Through such discourse, the values and worldviews of the dominant class are naturalised and legitimised as common knowledge, while the broader public believes to follow their own interests. The public is thus factually manipulated into consenting to being dominated and exploited, since the social order largely benefits the elites (Beilharz, 2005).

To summarise from a theoretical point of view of ideologies: Once a dominant ideology has achieved hegemonic status, its basic assumptions become common sense and are thus naturalised and depoliticised through discourse (Fairclough, 2003). People then act perpetuating the ideology, thinking that they act to their own benefit, while actually mainly benefiting the elites. According to Eagleton (1991), this is the most efficient form of oppression and especially difficult to break, since the oppressed positively identify with the cause of their oppression.

It is, however, important to keep in mind that even a naturalised ideology is never undisputed and needs to be constantly reiterated to be upheld (Eagleton, 1991).

### **3 Methods**

#### **3.1 Epistemological and ontological stance: Critical Realism**

This research is based on the philosophy of science of Critical Realism. This framework ontologically recognises that there is an objective world out there but epistemologically acknowledges that this external reality is not immediately accessible and hence researchable (Bryman, 2012). Critical Realism proposes a stratified reality composed of three levels. (1) The *empirical* constitutes the level of events as they are experienced by humans. That means that these events are measurable, yet already mediated through human interpretation. (2) On the level of the *actual*, progressions of events occur regardless of whether they are experienced and analysed by humans or not. (3) Finally, the level of the *real* describes the causal mechanisms and underlying forces that shape the objective reality and create the events experienced in the *empirical* (Fletcher, 2017). The role of Critical Realist research, then, is to understand those structural forces and their effects on the other two levels to asymptotically get closer to knowing reality (Bryman, 2012).

### 3.2 Research design

My research design is derived from such Critical Realist specifications and follows the logic of a stratified reality. To gain more knowledge of the functioning of our world, I hypothesise that neoliberal ideology is a structural force in the *real* that influences events (in my case: the occurrence of social inertia related to sustainability) happening in the *actual*. To research this potential connection, I look at texts in the *empirical* level using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Figure 2 depicts the research design graphically.

More in detail, RQ1 is a theoretical question which supports the hypothesis by analysing the relation between neoliberal ethics and sustainability. Since neoliberalism is not a uniform field of studies, it is not based on a common set of ethical principles<sup>6</sup>. Hence, I chose to focus on Friedrich Hayek's notion of this theory for two reasons. Firstly, because he is one of its main advocates (Callinicos, 2007; Harvey, 2005) and secondly, because it was Hayek's declared aim to develop a coherent philosophical theory based on a system of ideas that goes beyond the mere discipline of economics (Gray, 1998).

RQ1 only allows for a theoretical analysis of my hypothesis and thus leaves open the question whether the theoretical discrepancies between neoliberalism and sustainability actually have an influence on people's thoughts and behaviour (RQ2). Therefore, it is necessary to look at the arguments which people use when criticising proposed sustainability measures and to analyse what they base these arguments on. I do so by performing a CDA on readers' comments in response to newspaper articles which report actual or planned CCM or CCA measures. I chose these comments as my case study because they contain valuable information indicating people's reaction and hence their opinion on such measures. Furthermore, I chose newspapers as my news medium since newspapers have the function to not only inform the public (e.g. about potential sustainability measures) but also to help people form an opinion (Schultz, 1998).

RQ3 is meant as an outlook for potential pathways of change. With the insides I got from my first two research questions, I raise several topics that I consider important to take into consideration when tackling inertia. I do not go into depth with these, but rather try to inspire future research.

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<sup>6</sup> Whereas Hayek e.g. condemns social justice in form of redistribution as a violation of personal liberties and as conflicting with his understanding of society, utilitarianism promotes at least some form of redistribution (Askari & Mirakhor, 2019).



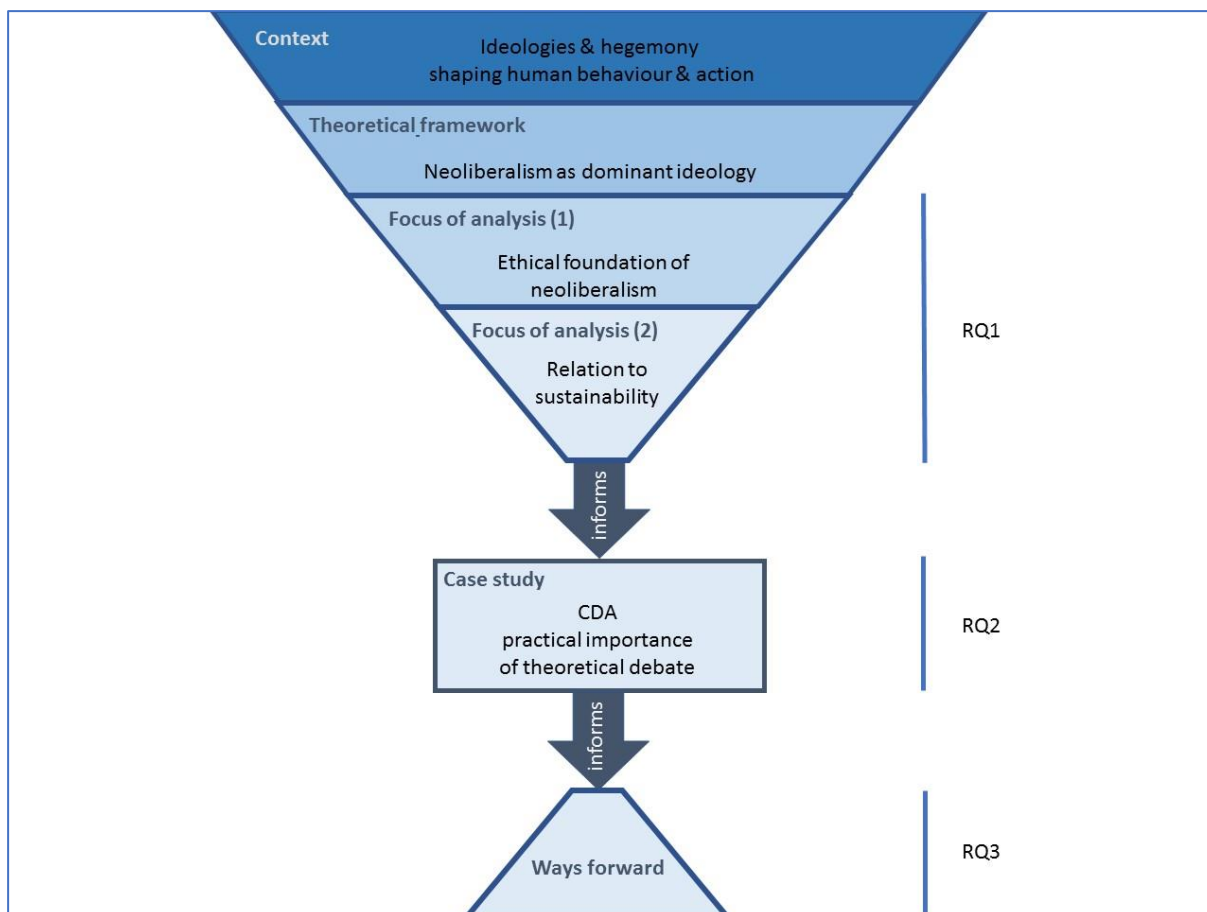


Figure 2. Overview of the research design guiding my thesis and its relation to my research questions (RQ). Own illustration.

### 3.3 Methodology

The methodology used clearly follows my research design. To understand both Hayek’s notion of neoliberalism and its relation to sustainability, I conducted a literature review (Bryman, 2012, p. 14). To analyse the arguments put forward on newspaper articles, I performed a CDA following Fairclough (1989, 2003). Below, I explain the process of both my data collection and analysis.

#### 3.3.1 Data collection

When retracing my data collection process, it is important to note that my study is qualitative. This means that I am interested in understanding the different arguments put forward and the ways of reasoning of people rather than how many people have which opinion. This has important implications for the type of data which I selected.

I chose three articles of the U.S.-American newspaper *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) from the year 2019. To limit my scope, I decided to focus on the United States (U.S.), mainly for two reasons. First, because as explained in the introduction, social inertia continues being an important issue in slowing the U.S.’s climate action. Second, because the U.S. is considered one of the countries where neoliberal

ideas are most widely accepted (Bay-Cheng, Fitz, Alizaga, & Zucker, 2015; Campbell, 2005). Furthermore, the WSJ was picked since it is one of the two newspapers with the highest circulation (Statista, 2019) with a neutral to conservative leaning (Langlois, 2018). This slightly conservative bias is not problematic, since I am not trying to quantify how many people are opposed to sustainability measures in the U.S. but, as stated before, what their arguments are for having this opinion. Instead, I considered the slight conservative bias to increase the likelihood of being confronted with neoliberal content, which is the focus of the analysis. Concerning the articles, I chose three sustainability topics that are currently being discussed in the U.S. These topics are (1) plastic bans, (2) meat consumption, and (3) the *Green New Deal* (GND).

- (1) Plastic waste is globally discussed as an important environmental problem that needs to be addressed (Derraik, 2002). All around the world, awareness is rising, and countries are creating new legislation to tackle the problem and reduce the amount of waste (Deutsche Welle, 2019). The U.S. has not adopted a national law on the regulation of plastic. Instead, it finds itself in a scattered landscape of state-wide or local bans to reduce plastic production and laws prohibiting these types of bans in other places of the country (Gibbens, 2019). The chosen article on that topic titles *Plastic Bans: What You Need to Know* and was published on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019. It summarises the topic of plastic bans in the U.S., including its importance, the drawbacks, and the landscape of laws in the country. It is attached in Appendix 1.
- (2) Wynes and Nicholas (2017) identify the adoption of a vegetarian diet as a high-impact measure for individuals to undertake in the combat against climate change. According to the OECD (2019), the U.S. is the country with the second-highest meat consumption worldwide. Furthermore, the organisation states that U.S.-American meat consumption has only decreased slightly since the 2000s and increased again in the last five years. Therefore, tackling meat consumption in the U.S. can be considered an important pro-environmental measure aiming at individual behaviour change. The selected article of the WSJ on that matter is titled *Climate Experts Advise Eating More Vegetables, Less Meat* and was published on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2019 (Appendix 2). It summarises the latest research on that regard, including the impact of (especially red) meat on the climate, current measures in the meat industry to adapt to these findings, and the benefits of a (more) plant-based diet.
- (3) The GND is a program and resolution put forward by left-wing Democrats which calls for the U.S. to take climate change seriously and tackle it together with social justice and racial inequality issues (Weise & King, 2019). The name *Green New Deal* has been used various times before for similar suggestions but gained public attention after the midterm elections in 2018. The broad aim of the GND is to decarbonise the U.S. economy and make it more equal, e.g.

through high investments in CO2-neutral energy sources or more energy-efficient buildings (Friedman, 2019). The WSJ article chosen on this topic is called '*Green New Deal*' Democrats Position Climate Change as Central Issue in 2020 and was published on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2019 (Appendix 3). It briefly explains the program and marks it as an important debate for the 2020 presidential elections.

Each of the outlined debates constitutes a measure to increase sustainability within the U.S., though with an increasingly big impact on citizen's lives. While banned plastic can be largely replaced by other materials and thus only marginally affects people's lifestyles, a call for less meat consumption requires people to change their dietary habits. The GND, finally, would have a more overarching influence. As the New York Time states, it "would eventually change the way we design buildings, travel and eat" (Friedman, 2019). This allows me to analyse whether the 'severity' of the suggestion has an effect on people's arguments.

The comments which build the final sample for the CDA were selected using an in-out-coding (Saldana, 2010). *In* were all the comments which voice a criticism towards the proposed sustainability measure. *Out* were both those comments which are in favour of the suggestion, and those which do not voice any arguments. Examples of such comments could be mere insults against e.g. scientists or politicians, or comments like "human gas emissions will increase while animal gas emissions decrease. Is this the intended goal?" (Comment on Lee Hotz & Bunge, 2019, no argument raised). Furthermore, a maximum of two sub-comments answering with voicing a negative opinion to other people were coded *in*, since I considered three arguments on one specific aspect enough and was more interested in the variety of arguments. Finally, only the first 32 negative comments of each article based on arguments were considered. Thus, my final sample consists of a total of 96 comments voicing their criticism towards the pro-sustainable arguments put forward in each of the three articles.

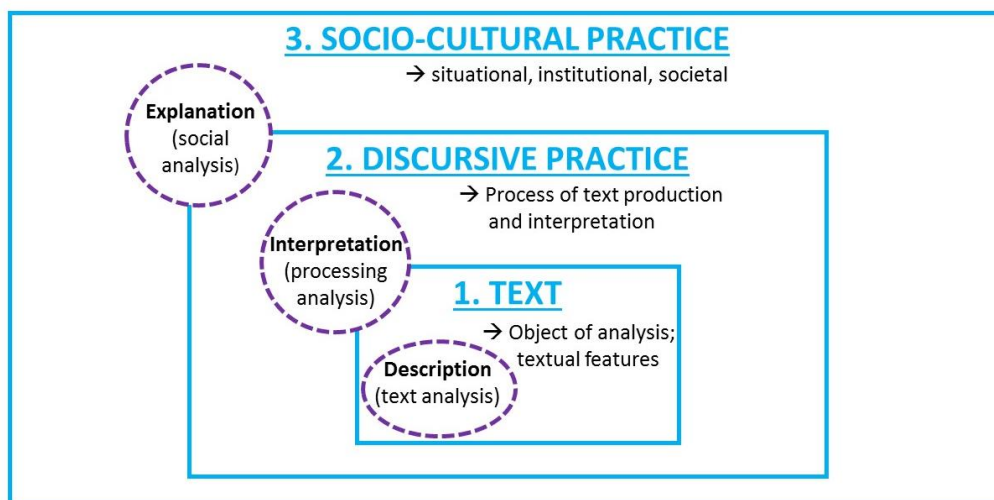
### **3.3.2 Data analysis**

To analyse the data, I conducted a CDA following Fairclough (1989, 2003) through the lens of neoliberalism according to Hayek (2011).

Critical discourse analysis is concerned with the often non-transparent relations between written or spoken text on the one side and the wider social and political context in which this text or language is produced, i.e. how they influence and shape each other. Discourse here refers to this exact way of understanding language as part of a bigger social system and as producing meaning in it. As such, it has a strong influence on our knowledge, our beliefs, and our identity (Fairclough, 2003). What makes a CDA critical is that it aims at uncovering those socio-political relations which are unquestioned by people and thus invisible. One example of this is how language is related to power and ideology and

can contribute to uphold patterns of domination (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough explains: “Given my focus on ideology, this means helping people to see the extent to which their language does rest upon common-sense assumptions, and the ways in which these common-sense assumptions can be ideologically shaped by relations of power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 4). As such, his understanding of CDA is the perfect tool for the purpose of this research.

Fairclough (2010) proposes a three-dimensional approach to CDA (see figure 3). He states that every discursive element always contains and conveys elements of all three levels. The first dimension is the written or spoken *text* itself. Thus, in accordance with Critical Realism, this is the level accessible to human experiencing and as such the object of analysis. The second dimension constitutes the *discursive practice*, meaning production and perception/interpretation of the discursive object by humans. This includes speaking or writing for the sender of a message and listening or reading on the side of the receiver of the text (Kashkuli, Ghanbari, & Abbasi, 2016). Finally, the third dimension reveals the wider *socio-cultural practices* that the discursive element is embedded in. This contextualisation is on the one hand as specific as the concrete situational context, and on the other hand also entails both the broader institutional and the societal context (Fairclough, 2010).



**Figure 3.** Dimensions of discourse. The three blue boxes represent the three dimensions of discourse, while the purple circles constitute the different types of analysis associated with the respective dimensions. Own figure, adapted from Fairclough (2010, p. 133).

To critically analyse discourse, then, all three dimensions must be taken into consideration. To analyse the text itself, a mere *description* is necessary. The relation between the processes of text production and interpretation on the one hand, and the text on the other hand is to be *interpreted*. Lastly, the linkage between the discursive and the socio-cultural practices constitutes a social analysis and requires *explanation*. It is noteworthy that the relationship between the wider socio-cultural context

and the text cannot be studied directly but is mediated through the discursive practice. The ways in which texts are produced and interpreted on the discursive level (Dimension 2) is contingent on its underlying socio-cultural circumstances (Dimension 3). The final text (Dimension 1) in turn is shaped by the predominant discursive practices (Dimension 2) of text production and interpretation (Fairclough, 2010)

To analyse this thesis's data, I carried out this outlined three-fold process of text analysis. Throughout the process, I used the software *Nvivo* as a program to analyse the qualitative data. I co-created codes throughout the process of analysis, having Hayek's theory in the back of my mind but not being blinded by it so that the data could still speak for itself and produce its own codes (Saldana, 2010). The codes later were clustered into broader themes. The result section is structured according to these themes.

### **3.4 Limitations of this study**

With regards to my choice of theory, my main limitation is that I want to study neoliberalism as hegemonic ideology but only analyse Hayek's interpretation of it. As explained before, I consider this focus necessary and deliberately chose Hayek's approach over that of others. Yet, Hayek has a very specific worldview that sometimes deviates from widespread beliefs amongst neoliberals. Whereas neoliberals e.g. often believe in rationalism (Bay-Cheng et al., 2015; Sugarman, 2015), this notion contradicts Hayek's theory of knowledge (Infantino, 2010). Consequently, some neoliberal lines of thought existent in society might be missed due to that narrow scope.

Using a case study usually comes along with the difficulty to generalise the results (Bryman, 2012). In my research, this is a two-fold issue. I consciously chose the small scope of (1) one newspaper in (2) one country in order to be able to understand the topic in depth. However, with this narrow focus I can neither make quantitative comments on the overall amount of neoliberal thought within the U.S., nor do my case study results allow me to talk about any other country than the U.S. This is only true for my case study, though. My theory chapter and RQ1 make a quite general statement on the (in-)compatibility of neoliberal ethics and sustainability. To test the real-world implications of such claims necessarily needs have a limited focus in the first place.

The data I selected for my case study has several strengths and weaknesses. I consider it a strength that I analysed the comments of three different articles as this allows me to compare the results and find differences and similarities between them. Further, I considered both direct comments to the article and some sub-comments to those comments. Like that, I was able to cover both the variety of different arguments and more in-depth discussions on very specific issues within the debate. Having said that, I had to limit the number of the comments I analysed. Accordingly, I neither included more than 32 (negative) comments per article, nor did I take into consideration any comments which voiced

a positive opinion on the measures. With regards to the 32 comments, more topics might have come up amongst other negative comments. As for the positive comments, people arguing in favour of a CCM or CCA measure might still follow a neoliberal worldview. This would contradict my hypothesis that states that neoliberal ethics lead to social inertia. This is another limitation of the generalisability of my data: With my sample, I cannot conclude that everybody who is a defender of neoliberalism necessarily rejects any sustainability measure.

Lastly, I am analysing data whose content clearly is contradictory to my personal worldview. In such case, it is easy for the researcher to adopt a critical view on the material; yet an unbiased analysis must be ensured nonetheless (Bryman, 2012). To overcome my own personal bias as much as possible, I set up a research design that is inspired by theory and informed by methodology. Thus, when collecting data, I included all comments that fit my in-out code in my sample, regardless of their content. Finally, when analysing the data, I strictly let my research be guided by my theory.

## **4 Theoretical framework: neoliberalism**

With the understanding of ideologies and hegemony as well as their importance for the creation of identity and social order in mind, this chapter establishes neoliberalism as the hegemonic ideology of our time. In that light, the importance of the hypothesis of this thesis becomes more apparent, because as hegemonic ideology, neoliberalism has an important influence on people's perception of the world and thus might inflict damage to the sustainability agenda.

To be able to define neoliberalism as one coherent philosophy of thought based on one set of values, its ethical foundation is explored from a point of view of Friedrich Hayek. Thereafter, sustainability is analysed from this point of view.

### **4.1 Background on neoliberalism**

As political and economic system, neoliberalism emerged in the late 1970s and gained global prominence throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Harvey, 2005). In order to counter the global economic recession in their countries, politicians like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan built their economic policies on what used to be minority arguments at that time. Under their leadership, neoliberalism grew globally to be the major doctrine for macroeconomic policies and thinking (Harvey, 2005). This globalising process was not always voluntary, though. Together international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the U.S. used the global development agenda to impose neoliberal ideas on countries of the Global South (Astroulakis, 2014; Boda & Faran, 2018).

A widely used definition of neoliberalism goes back to Harvey (2005). He writes:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (p. 2)

As an economic system, neoliberalism is often described as the current manifestation of capitalism (Benatar, Upshur, & Gill, 2018; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005) and as such is called neoliberal capitalism by some (Astroulakis, 2014).

Saad-Filho and Johnston (2005) state that nowadays “[w]e live in the age of neoliberalism” (p. 1). This is because its influence reaches far beyond the economic sphere. In a neoliberal society, the patterns of the economic system are applied to the non-economic sphere, infiltrating all facets of our social lives. Harvey calls this the “commodification of everything” (Harvey, 2005, p. 165). Since neoliberalism views the market as the most adequate means to direct human activities, it only makes sense to create markets for every issue of human life. Examples for such commodification can be entry fees for natural parks to enjoy them as a retreat, as a natural spectacle, or as cultural heritage (Harvey, 2005), or the view of humans as enterprises who manage and constantly improve their skills in order to acquire a perfect Curriculum Vitae and thus have better opportunities on the job market (Sugarman, 2015). This is why Duménil and Lévy (2005) call neoliberalism “a *new social order*” (p. 9, emphasis in original) rather than merely an economic system.

In view of this understanding of neoliberalism, it fulfils the characteristics of an ideology put forward by Van Dijk and described in Chapter 2. It takes a great part in shaping how humans see the world; it is “reformulating personhood, psychological life, moral and ethical responsibility, and what it means to have selfhood and identity” (Sugarman, 2015, p. 104). In the U.S., even some of the core values of the country coincide with neoliberalism, such as the strong focus on individualism and the concept of the American Dream, where everybody can make it to the top if he\*she only works hard enough for it (Bay-Cheng et al., 2015). Thus, neoliberalism can be understood as an ideology, as is also widely accepted amongst social scientists (e.g. Beattie, Bettache, & Ching Yee Chong, 2019; Benatar et al., 2018; Duménil & Lévy, 2005).

Furthermore, it can also be considered the hegemonic ideology for three reasons. First, it largely benefits the global financial elite who accumulate both power and wealth at the expense of not only the majority of humanity but also the environment (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). In the name of free markets and free trade, neoliberalism undermines some rights to access to e.g. food, education and health care for many people and thus drives poverty and conflicts in less secure regions of the world (Benatar et al., 2018). Second, those people profiting from a global neoliberal system hold important

positions in education, media, and national and international institutions, which allows them to establish neoliberalism as the hegemonic discourse (Harvey, 2005). As such, thirdly, its basic assumptions became naturalised, part of the common sense and as a consequence invisible (Sugarman, 2015). The a-politicised focus on growth and progress is perceived as a necessity without alternative and the arising problems inevitable side-effects (Benatar et al., 2018).

With this general understanding of neoliberalism in mind, the next section explains in detail Hayek's interpretation of it, with a special focus on the ethics he bases his theory on.

#### **4.2 The ethical foundations of neoliberalism according to Hayek**

In his almost 60 years of scientific work, Hayek created a system of ideas which reaches far beyond economics (Gray, 1998). Throughout all that time, his red thread was to continuously improve his understanding of the conditions that enable individual liberty (Infantino, 2010). As a result, liberty or freedom, two terms he uses interchangeably, constitute both the philosophical basis as well as the justification of his theory of the neoliberal order of society (Miller, 2010).

To understand Hayek's concept of freedom, it is important to first draw the attention to the distinction between two different, even opposed conceptualisations of this value, namely positive and negative freedom put forward by Isaiah Berlin (2002). He describes negative liberty (or freedom) as the absence of interferences in a person's activity. The bigger the deliberate intrusion in those activities, the less free a person is, or put differently, the more coerced. To the contrary, positive liberty describes the freedom of being self-determined in one's actions and decisions, of having control over one's own life and its direction rather than being steered or instrumentalised by external forces. Although the two concepts might seem quite similar, the political implications of adopting one over the other can be contrary. For most liberals e.g., the claim to maximise the (negative) freedom from coercion goes along with the necessity to minimise state actions and social life. To the contrary, supporters of a notion of positive freedom are often willing to compromise in that regard. A certain level of social justice might be perceived as a pre-requisite of a free, self-determined life. Therefore, some redistribution might be constitutive to freedom rather than coercive (Berlin, 2002). Hence, the way in which liberty is interpreted, or ideologically 'appropriated' as Van Dijk (1998) would argue, is of utmost importance. It shapes the view of how a good society should be ordered and as such can serve different purposes and create contrary outcomes.

Following this differentiation, Hayek is a defender of negative individual liberty. He defines his understanding of freedom very carefully and narrowly to differentiate it from other people's perceptions of it. Those perceptions, he argues, are desirable states, too, but do not capture the "original meaning of the word" (Hayek, 2011, p. 59) which he claims to have found himself. For him,



then, liberty means the condition in which an individual is not exposed to coercion by other humans, or in other words, the state of “independence of the arbitrary will of another” (Hayek, 2011, p. 59). Hereby, the availability of many alternatives to choose from is not constitutive of liberty: one can be free even within very limited possibilities, as long as one is not forced to choose one option over another.

Hayek’s concept of freedom is closely linked to personal responsibility. Freedom allows individuals to create their own life plan and to live accordingly, including taking mortal risks and making devastating mistakes. This liberty however comes along with the responsibility to live with the (un-)intended consequences of such actions. Thus, freedom is not necessarily a direct cause of well-being, nor is it a means to happiness or wealth. Hayek’s focus, as Miller (2010) explains, rather lies on freedom as prerequisite for progress, of individuals, societies, but also of human civilisation as a whole. Bad experiences are seen as an unpleasant, yet important experience for learning and for personal growth and as such drive human progress. This explains Hayek’s focus on the asymptotical approximation to the nihilation of coercion: Being controlled and thus limited by external forces is problematic, because it eliminates agency to thrive and grow for individuals and humanity.

Together with this understanding of liberty, Hayek’s theory of human knowledge constitutes the basis for his political philosophy. Miller (2010) describes:

His key concepts are defined substantially by reference to knowing. Liberty is having access to the information needed to design and follow one’s plan of life. Tradition is knowledge in the form of accumulated experience. Progress is the advance of knowledge. (p.54)

Hayek acknowledges that our world and society are highly complex, and human knowledge about it is scattered and dispersed amongst millions of individuals. As a result, no single individual or group of people could ever know enough to properly steer our society or redesign our environment (Bevir, 2010). Instead of being designed or steered, then, the social order we encounter nowadays is a product of what Hayek calls the spontaneous order of society. This order emerged through selective social and cultural evolution of trial and error processes and as such emerged unintentionally (Gray, 1998). From these basic assumptions about the limits of knowledge and the spontaneous social order, Hayek develops (1) his defence of the free market, (2) the rejection of what he called socialism, and (3) the role of the state, all in relation to the urge to maximise freedom. In the following, these three elements of his theory are presented.

(1) **The market.** Hayek is one of the biggest defenders of a free market system. For him, the market originally emerged as an unintended consequence of the spontaneous order but persists because it is superior to other forms of social organisation. (Callinicos, 2007). The market system enables people to

cooperate despite their imperfect knowledge. It is a means of organising that scattered information through the mechanism of supply and demand, to allocate resources efficiently, and as a consequence to create collective choice (which for him is the sum of individual choices) (Bevir, 2010). The market therefore does not need any coercive forces to create a social order and as such is a constituent of liberty.

(2) **Socialism.** In his early works, Hayek (2006)<sup>7</sup> postulated that the state interfering with the market will inevitably lead down *The Road to Serfdom*. The logic behind this argument goes as follows: Socialism reflects the rationalist effort to order society following principles like social justice. From this point of view, values constitute irrefutable moral ends that are to be followed. Yet, Hayek argues that there is no such thing as naturally given values; they are, like everything else, a product of the spontaneous order. Therefore, he perceives socialism as a threat to the evolutionary progress of civilisation (Miller, 2010). It undermines important moral rules like freedom, self-reliance, responsibility, and the urge for competition and progress. Moreover, since the knowledge of any redistributive institution is necessarily incomplete, resources cannot be allocated optimally, and some groups will inevitably benefit from this, while others will be restricted in their freedom. Therefore, any form of socialist intervention in market processes will ultimately lead to totalitarianism (Gray, 1998).

(3) **The state.** The superiority of the market requires a minimal state whose main task is to create a frame in which the social order can freely unfold. This largely means the assurance of the freedom of individuals from coercion through other individuals. To do so, the state is required to create a legal system that protects the private sphere and property rights of individuals. This legal system is bound by the rule of law which must be predictable, general, and applicable to everybody, including the lawmakers. Hence, the state has a monopoly on coercion to enforce people's freedom. In that sense, the state is restraining, yet not coercing (Gray, 1998; Miller, 2010).

#### **4.3 Sustainability from Hayek's point of view**

To my knowledge, Hayek never published anything on climate change or sustainability. He did however positively comment on the *Polluter Pays Principle* (PPP) in a very short YouTube clip from the 1970s (Triathlonlarsson, 2010). According to Cordato (2001), the PPP states that whoever causes environmental damage should also pay the resulting costs. According to this principle, pollution is defined as "any by-product of a production or consumption process that harms or otherwise violates the property rights of others" (p. 3). The height of the payment should mirror the severity of the

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<sup>7</sup> *The Road to Serfdom* (Hayek, 2006) is one of Hayek's most influential books, originally published in 1944. It propagates market liberalism and calls to attention the dangers of socialism and fascism for individual's freedom.

created harm. It is important to notice that the damage is measured with regards to the person suffering from it, not the environment itself.

To better understand Hayek's view on the PPP, it is noteworthy that in his book *The Road to Serfdom* (2006), he acknowledges that the market can fail to create perfect conditions for competition and as such admits the existence of negative externalities, e.g. with regards to deforestation or pollution. Such cases should be resolved by "the substitution of direct regulation by authority" (p. 40). Hayek does thus allow for state interventions to re-establish the proper functioning of the market. This is the basis for justifying the PPP: In case of pollution, market failures can cause harm to the property rights of an uninvolved person. If so, the pollution constitutes a limitation to that person's freedom, a condition that the state is supposed to avoid through regulations. In the YouTube clip, Hayek explains that such legal framework gives polluters the choice to either pay or avoid the damage in the first place, hence being restrictive but not coercive (Triathlonlarsson, 2010). Consequently, from Hayek's point of view, the PPP can be considered a very useful principle for addressing environmental problems, since it increases the efficiency of the market without coercing anybody's freedom.

Beyond that, a justification for sustainability turns out to be difficult for mainly two reasons. The first one has to do with the nature of knowledge. As explained before, Hayek rejects the idea that any central planning unit can steer society or control our environment, because they are too complex and knowledge about them is too dispersed. He does not deny that chosen experts can gather scientific knowledge about the world (although he might question who can be chosen as such expert) (Hayek, 1945). Further, he believes that it is important to carefully and critically assess new scientific findings and, if appropriate, include them in one's own worldview (Hayek, 2011). Hence, I would assume that Hayek would not deny humans' influence on our climate system. Whether he would perceive this as a major problem or trust the market (that incorporated the PPP) to find efficient solutions to the problem is up to speculation. However, for him, taking a value like sustainability and trying to steer society according to its assumptions would constitute a threat to the social and cultural evolution of society and the progress of our whole civilisation. It would ultimately lead to a totalitarian and unfree society and as such could not be approved of.

#### **4.4 Interim conclusion and answer to RQ1**

After explaining the global spread and importance of neoliberal thought, this chapter analysed the ethical assumptions that it is based on according to Hayek. Using this theoretical lens, I investigated how Hayek's theory would deal with the issues of climate change and sustainability. This allows me now to answer RQ1 which asks to what extent neoliberal ethics are compatible with sustainability.

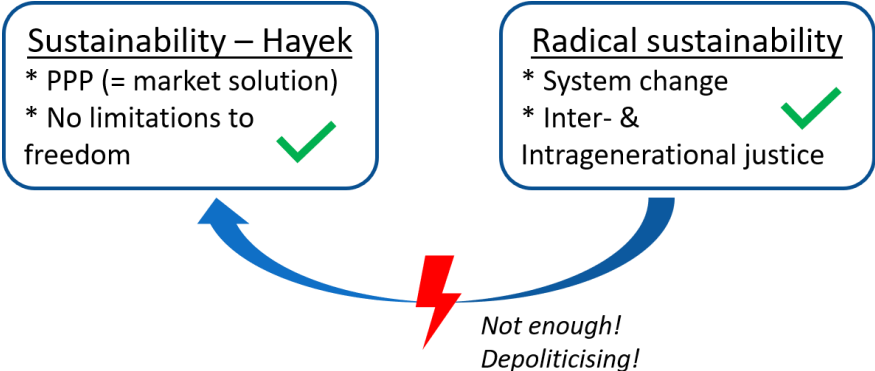
Neoliberal ethics according to Hayek acknowledge human-induced climatic changes and allow for its mitigation through the *Polluter Pays Principle*. Like that, an unsustainable market failure can be eliminated while at the same time keeping up the efficient allocation of resources through the market and the individual freedom of everybody involved. As such, neoliberalism allows for some CCM measures and as such is compatible with some kind of sustainability.

However, much research has been published on market solutions being insufficient in creating conditions that ensure future generations that their needs will not be compromised (e.g. Daly, 2005; Jackson, 2017; Latouche, 2010; Boda & Faran, 2018). According to those scientists, beyond a certain threshold, economic growth is neither possible nor desirable. Ever since the influential report *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972), much research questioned the compatibility of continuous economic growth on a finite planet (Tulloch & Neilson, 2014) and has uncovered an inherent contradiction of capitalism: Capitalist companies are dependent on environmental goods and services to generate profit. Due to the necessity to grow in order to be able to compete in a market system, those companies are, however, constantly pressured into destroying this very source of their profit (Peet, Robbins, & Watts, 2011). The way out of decoupling the economy from its ecological basis that many economists put forward as a response to this research has been shown to not be possible by Jackson (2017). Additionally, he explains that beyond a certain threshold, economic growth does not even increase human well-being any further, making it obsolete from there. Market-based solutions do not tackle any of these problems, because they are inherent to the system and thus necessitate a systematic change (Tulloch & Neilson, 2014). This, however, would be condemned by Hayek as totalitarian and an immense interference with people's liberty and as such rejected (Hayek, 2011).

Tulloch and Neilson (2014) identify another problem regarding a neoliberal conception of sustainability. They claim that the *Neoliberalisation of Sustainability*, as they call it, not only does too little to actually achieve sustainability, but also depoliticises the term by using it for their own purpose. Van Dijk (1998) calls this the appropriation of values for one's own interest. Yet, this accusation works both ways: While neoliberals use sustainability to further legitimise to uphold a system of maximum negative freedom (Tulloch & Neilson, 2014), their opponents use sustainability as a justification for the need of establishing a system of inter- and intragenerational justice (Rogall, 2013).

Consequently, my research suggests that it depends on the perspective whether neoliberalism is at conflict with sustainability insofar as the concept can be interpreted, or appropriated as Van Dijk (1998) would argue, in very different ways. Figure 4 depicts this tension.

To find a way forward from this tension but not neglecting it, I argue that Hayek’s view of neoliberalism is incompatible with any notion of sustainability that aims at a systemic change, as described above. In the following, I refer to this notion of sustainability as *radical* sustainability, since it aims at tackling the root causes of the sustainability problem. Furthermore, the appropriation of the term sustainability by neoliberals poses an additional obstacle towards the realisation of radical sustainability since it depoliticises the term.



**Figure 4.** The (in-)compatibility of neoliberalism with sustainability. The checkmarks represent the inherent compatibility of each of the two systems with their understanding of sustainability. The lightning-crossed arrow in contrast illustrates the insufficiency of Hayek’s understanding of sustainability from a radical sustainability point of view.

Continuing from this first interim conclusion, the following chapter further examines how this manifests in social inertia related to sustainability.

## 5 Results and data analysis

This chapter summarises the arguments that people expressed as a criticism towards the three newspaper articles (Dimension 1 in the CDA). The arguments are clustered into broader themes that were created in reference to neoliberalism. For each theme, an analysis of its neoliberal context is given (Dimension 3). Where appropriate, the ways in which language is used is addressed, too (Dimension 2).

### 5.1 Identified themes

#### 5.1.1 Coercion

Both the words *freedom* (GND10)<sup>8</sup> and *coercion* (M29) are only mentioned once in the whole data set. Yet, the notion of coercion is implied in many comments across the three articles. This happens in different ways: For comments in response to the plastic ban article (CtP)<sup>9</sup>, the focus lies on the “control” (P7, 12) of “smaller and smaller things in ordinary life” (P6). Additionally, several people disapprove of a sense of moralisation (P31) or virtue-signalling (P6, 12, 14), the imposition of someone’s morals on them. CtM complain about e.g. indoctrinations (M12), prescriptions (M20) and their thoughts and expressions being managed (M13). Finally, CtGND disagree with proposed prohibitions (GND7, 22) and lament the extent to which other people want to rule their lives (GND3). These examples show that there is a qualitative difference in the criticism of the comments to the three articles, from what rather seems like an annoyance to some serious invasions to complete control.

Hence, arguing along the same line as Hayek, not only do readers problematise how the measures put forward in the articles interfere with individual (negative) freedom, but they also react increasingly concerned with an increasing severity of such coercion.

#### 5.1.2 Totalitarianism

To each article, one or two people replied that the state should not try to find solutions to the outlines problems, because it is inefficient (P16), or because it cannot foresee the unintended consequences of its actions (GND27). The comments in response to all three articles agree that if the state intervenes in form of the proposed measures, this constitutes totalitarian acts or will ultimately lead to

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<sup>8</sup> All comments are listed in Appendix 1.2, 2.2, and 3.2, respectively. To refer to them throughout the thesis, each comment received a unique code made up of the abbreviated article name (P, M, and GND) and a number.

<sup>9</sup> For reasons of readability, the comments to each article are referred to in form of the following acronyms: 1) *Comments to the Article on Plastic Bans*: CtP, 2) *Comments to the Article on Meat Consumption*: CtM, and 3) *Comments to the Article on the Green New Deal*: CtGND.

totalitarianism. In all three articles, the U.S. is seen as going down a road towards socialism (P4, 31, M30, 31, GND7, 9, 21) or ultra-leftism (P30). CtM and CtGND go further than that in calling the measures “fascist” (M7, GND15) and viewing the U.S. being “doomed to follow the path of Venezuela” (M9, also GND6, 9). M30 argues that

the idea of CO2 and man made [sic!] climate change is an *excuse* for obtaining and maintaining global socialism. This is an agenda and people are *being duped into* thinking there is a political solution to climate change [...] Socialism, the goal, does not work, never has worked and is *immoral in its application*. (emphasis added)

M21 agrees to the notion that socialism is a form of upholding power. CtGND add Marx’ (M31, GND1, 31), Lenin’s (GND27) and Mao’s (GND19) communism to the list of what they see the U.S. developing into. GND11 writes:

The Green New Deal is the moral equivalent of the Ming Dynasty's 15th century decision to dismantle China's oceangoing fleet of ships [...] Result? Europe dominated the world for the next 500 years.

This notion of the destruction of the country and its economic power is found several times amongst CtGND (GND2, 10, 11, 14, 17, 27, 28, 32). Overall, while the issue of totalitarianism is only mentioned by a few with regards to the plastic article, it is a central focus for many commenters on the GND article. As a general trend, as the depicted comments show, the bigger the proposed changes are, the stronger is the wording and the opposition against them.

These findings can be explained very well from Hayek’s point of view. Using sustainability as an excuse to steer society in a certain direction is a threat to both freedom and evolutionary progress. This is because it inhibits the spontaneous order of society for the sake of some rational considerations that can never capture the complexity of reality, and as such is immoral. Furthermore, it necessarily leads down *The Road to Serfdom*, here called in the various above-mentioned ways. Lastly, that the ‘socialist’ measures are seen to uphold certain power structures goes along well with Hayek’s view of socialism benefitting some people over others.

### **5.1.3 Regression**

All three articles received comments stating that the proposed measures inhibit progress. Plastic bans and meat reductions are perceived as hostile towards technology or luddite (P14, M6, 9). M17 states that enforcing a plant-based diet would push “mankind back down the evolutionary ladder”. CtGND agree with such notion, believing that under the GND people in the U.S. would live like in a “bucolic past” (GND11) or “like the peasants in the Medieval period” (GND23).

Additionally, a few CtP and CtM stress that the market would be the better approach to handle the mentioned problems and CtM and CtGND problematise the consequences of the measures for the market. They argue that the GND would put the U.S. at an “economic disadvantage” (M5) in comparison to e.g. China, “bankrupt” (GND32) the U.S. economy, or mean “economic suicide” (GND17).

The interferences with both the market and progress halt the evolution of civilisation and are therefore not only undesired but extremely problematic from a Hayekian point of view.

#### **5.1.4 Distrust in expert knowledge**

Another important theme identified across all three sets of data is the distrust in scientists, journalists, and environmentalists and their knowledge. This notion is most prominent in CtM mentioned by almost two thirds of the comments. As such, the articles are perceived as “biased” (P26, M14) or “propagandistic [with] no relationship to reality” (P23) or the existence of research to support claims is questioned. M26 e.g. states:

There is absolutely no repeatable experiments that I can find that backs up the the [sic!] statement that changing anyone's diet will reduce global temperatures.

Further, M24 asks: “Please stop peddling this human caused climate change nonsense. There is no science to support it.” As in this example, several more people (although not all) question the existence of human-made climate change altogether (P27, M12, 23, 24, 30, GND3). Some use quotation marks when talking about e.g. ““experts”” (M20, 23, 29, 32) or ““climate change”” (P27, GND6), probably to indicate their scepticism. GND13 talks about “climate theology”.

As explained in Chapter 4.4, Hayek himself most likely would not deny anthropogenic climate change, since he believes that, under specific circumstances, scientific knowledge can be acquired. However, his theory of knowledge could be interpreted as a ground for distrust in expert knowledge, since he argues that there are limits to what we can know as humans. What is for sure problematic from his position is if such knowledge is used to legitimise interventions in the market.

#### **5.1.5 Blaming others**

Lastly, two notions of responsibility can be found in the data: individual and national responsibility. Individual responsibility is mainly a topic in CtP. Few comments mention that people are individually responsible for their own plastic waste consumption (P17, 27, 28). Further, P13 argues that “it is the people, not the bags which are the problem”, stating that the blame is to put on those individuals that are not acting responsibly (see also P5, 27).



National responsibility is also mainly an issue in CtP and only mentioned sporadically with CtM and CtGND. The main two arguments put forward are that (1) the U.S. is not the biggest or only source of the problem and that (2) other, often Asian, countries are worse than the U.S. Most of the time, both arguments go hand in hand. To give some examples, many comments (e.g. P1, 19, 30), talk about countries of the Global South polluting the ocean, not the U.S.:

The problem is worldwide with the developing countries being the worst offenders using the ocean as a garbage dump. (P12)

P12 expresses a sense of the U.S. being powerless with regards to climate change:

We are 5% of the world's population producing 12% of world's CO2. We are powerless over 88% of CO2 emissions. We could all die tomorrow and the issue would not be diminished. (P12)

Many of the comments that talk about responsibility indirectly ask the question 'if they do not change, why should I/we?':

When the "sacred pet cows" of India are all sacrificed in the search for a solution to the impending climate change catastrophe, I will consider giving up my meat. (M8)

Since in Hayek's understanding of neoliberalism the individual is responsible for all his\*her actions, it makes sense to also approach climate change or the global plastic problem in that way. Furthermore, some comments express a notion of 'the polluters should pay', aggregated on a national level. However, aggregating responsibility can be quite coercive: If everybody in my country was the source of the waste problem but me, then my liberty would be limited through regulations. This argument of aggregated responsibility hence is not strictly Hayekian. Consequently, neoliberalism can only partially explain comments blaming others for the problems in our world.

## 5.2 Language use

In terms of the language used, the most striking issue is the tone in which comments are written and how this varies between the three articles. This manifests mainly in the amount of insulting language utilised. CtP use close to no direct insults. P12 blames (so-called) developing countries as the "worst offenders" of plastic waste, while P31 describes the plastic bans as "not only mindless but silly". Besides that, the general tone ranges from descriptive (P1, 13, 25) over ironic (P4, 7, 9) to annoyed (P10, 12, 14, 16). The amount of insulting words is much higher in CtM, with almost every third comment criticising the suggestions to be e.g. an "insanity" (M1), "folly, stupid and unworkable" (M30), or "a load of ....." (M8). Furthermore, to a significantly higher extent than in the other two cases, CtM articulate discontent with the author of the article and the editors of the WSJ: Not only are they blamed for being biased or only expressing an opinion (M11, 14, 26), but they are also called

dishonest (M12) and “indoctrinated ninnies” (M13). Finally, almost every second CtGND uses insulting language in one way or another. Ideas are, amongst others, called “nit-wit” (GND12) and idiotic (GND19), people believing in the GND are named stupid (GND5, 6, 8) and the WSJ is criticised for being “on strike for using their brains” (GND12) because of how they portray the issue. These comments display a sense of urgency and despair: GND2 e.g. feels the “need to start shooting” in case the GND becomes legislation. GND3 seems to almost be begging when he\*she writes:

Can somebody, anybody please explain to the liberals that CO2 is necessary for life on this planet, does NOT DRIVE CLIMATE, and that mankind cannot control climate” (GND3, emphasis in original).

Why people use such language cannot be asserted with absolute certainty. In general, people can disagree with something but still argue in an objective manner or agree but still use violent language. Yet, the underlying tone of the comments seems to express a level of anxiety and anger, and increasingly so between the three cases, which is reinforced through the insulting choice of words.

Finally, portraying ‘the other’ as stupid or flawed is a manifestation of social conflict and perpetuates the sense of us vs. them. From an ideological point of view, this has the effect of normalising one’s own behaviour as being ‘good’ and discrediting the other one’s as misguided and ‘bad’. This is a form of perpetuating the hegemonic discourse. In the comments, this is done in two ways, the first of which is blaming other countries for being the source of the problem, hence neglecting one’s own contribution to the problem (see 5.1.5). The second way is the above-mentioned violent language against those people, journalists, and experts that are in favour of the CCM and CCA measures.

### **5.3 Interim conclusion and answer to RQ2**

The research question guiding this analysis was to what extent neoliberal arguments are used to oppose CCM and CCA measures. The answer to this question can be given in a summary of the results laid out in the following.

The analysed comments broadly view the suggested CCM and CCA measures as coercive and interfering with individual liberty. For all three topics there are people who believe that these interferences are either totalitarian or lead to totalitarianism. This is problematised as being regressive and inhibiting civilizational progress. These findings are strongly reflected in the data and represent neoliberal ethics and values. Most of the views are not expressed using such Hayekian vocabulary, yet implicitly convey the same message. The criticism towards expert knowledge up until the denial of climate change can only partially be explained by the notion of limits to human knowledge. In the same

way, the often-stated blame of other countries for the problems at stake as well as their responsibility to fix them can only partially be explained through neoliberal ethics.

Concerning the topics of coercion and totalitarianism, the degree of rejection and the sense of urgency gradually increase from the plastic ban article to the meat article to the GND article. This is also reflected in the use of language that gets increasingly violent from the comments to the plastic article to the ones related to the GND.

On a final note, very few arguments are market-based. Under each article, there are one or two comments arguing in that way, but the large body of rejection is based on the arguments outlined above, not the notion that the market can and will fix environmental problems. In dismissing state measures and totalitarianism, a market-solution is of course implicitly favoured. Yet, the focus of people lies on the threat of totalitarianism that radical sustainability poses, not the supremacy of market solutions over state solutions to fight climate change.

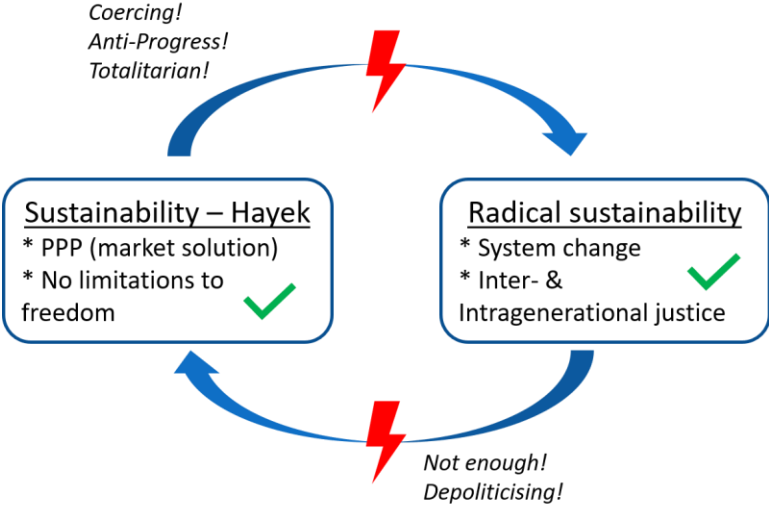
## **6 Discussion: Ways forward**

This chapter discusses my findings with regards to RQ1 and RQ2. Informed by this, it then discusses potential pathways forward in the fight against social inertia related to sustainability, thereby answering to RQ3.

The answers to RQ1 and RQ2 portray the following picture, mapped in Figure 5: Neoliberalism according to Hayek is opposed to any notion of radical sustainability, because the two concepts are based on two incompatible sets of basic assumptions with very different outcomes as for the societal order. Consequently, any suggestion of radical sustainability measures poses a threat to neoliberalism, and their implementation can be seen as a regression from Hayek's position. This is because they aim at restructuring society in ways that neoliberals consider as detrimentally limiting individual's freedom and enslaving people. Such opposition is reflected in people's comments on the proposition of CCM and CCA measures in the WSJ articles: Comment-writers fear to be coerced by the measures and regress into a totalitarian system if they are implemented.

Consequently, people who base their worldview on neoliberal ethics might seem in a state of social inertia where they 'fail to act' from a perspective of radical sustainability. Yet, from their own point of view, actions beyond market-based CCM and CCA measures are unnecessary to achieve their notion of sustainability. Hence, although it might seem like those people are in a state of social inertia, it makes sense from their moral point of view to not act (or only act within the market system). This offers an explanation to not only social inertia, but also to the explicit criticism and opposition against

CCM and CCA measures that are based on state intervention, since they are opposed to neoliberal morality.



**Figure 5.** The tension between two understandings of sustainability arising from opposing basic assumptions. The checkmarks represent the inherent compatibility of each of the two systems with their own understanding of sustainability. The lightning-crossed arrows in contrast illustrate the rejection of the respective other system. Own illustration.

Against this background, I argue that the strategies to address social inertia and to communicate climate action to people who base their worldview on neoliberal ethics have to be reconsidered.

As explained in Chapter 2, Meadows (2009) argues that some problems inherent to a system might only be solved by restructuring this system. Since I identify neoliberal ethics as one possible foundation of social inertia and criticism in response to sustainability measures, ideological change is an important prerequisite for people to change their views and behaviours with regards to climate change. This view is further supported by the assumption of the iceberg model that tackling mental models has a high leverage for change. To promote ideological change, four strategies could be pursued that will be mapped out in the following, without going into detail.

- (1) First of all, the focus of analysis should shift away from communicating climate change in ever improved ways<sup>10</sup>. I argue that stressing the severity of climate change and the importance of sustainability does not help to convince neoliberally-minded people to change their course of actions towards it: Even if they fully agreed with the problematic of climate change, their solutions would still be considered as too little from a radical sustainability point of view. Yet, much research (Armstrong, Krasny, & Schuldt, 2018; Moser, 2010), media (McGinnis, 2015) and civil society

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<sup>10</sup> I do not mean to question the existing strategies as such but rather their applicability to neoliberally-minded people.

institutions (Dupar, McNamara, & Pacha, 2019) keep focussing on improving the tangibility of climate change and trying to make it graspable for people<sup>11</sup>. The *Information Deficit Model* (Buckeley, 2000) is one example of such research which aims at increasing climate action through access to approachable knowledge.

- (2) One important way to challenge neoliberal ideology is by identifying its inherent inconsistencies, e.g. through the method of immanent critique (Boda & Faran, 2018). This can be done in two different ways: On the one hand, the inconsistencies with regards to (neoliberal) capitalism and market economy can be uncovered (e.g. Callinicos, 2007; Boda & Faran, 2018), as sketched out in Chapter 4.4. On the other hand, the neoliberal interpretations of values such as negative freedom (Berlin, 2002) or 'neoliberal sustainability' (Daly, 2005) can be philosophically discussed and challenged. Although external critique to neoliberal ethics (e.g. Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005; Sugarman, 2015) is important, too, immanent critique has the bigger leverage when trying to address people who believe in that system of thought.
- (3) Another pathway to challenge neoliberal ideology is by defying its hegemonic status. As long as neoliberal ideas are hegemonic and as such normalised and depoliticised, it is difficult to convince people of its inconsistencies and the (socio-ecological) problems it brings along, because they identify with its basic assumptions (see Chapter 2.2). Yet, hegemony is dependent on the constant perpetuation of these assumptions and as such can be contested with counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses (Gramsci, 2000). Thus, this social conflict of upholding and challenging hegemonic discourse has the potential to drive political and socio-cultural change, including a change at the level of norms and values, since they are the basis of such hegemonic ideologies at stake (Jaques et al., 2019)
- (4) Finally, a very different approach to reaching and affecting people at the level of their values and morals is through insights from the emerging field of studies of inner transformation (or inner transition). Inner transformation "describes change within individuals that relate to their (expanded) consciousness and is associated with changes in values and behaviour. It is supported by indigenous, religious, or spiritual practices, such as mindfulness" (Wamsler, 2018, p. 1121). Whereas immanent critique focusses on rationally contesting the internal logic of a theory and hegemony counters problems on a systemic level, inner transformation draws attention to the often-neglected domain of interiority. This "refers to the intangible, unseen domain of life that cannot be objectively measured by the senses. It includes beliefs, understanding, morality,

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<sup>11</sup> I am not trying to deny the existence of research that already focusses and worldviews, how they influence our behaviour, and how we can influence them. Moser (2010) e.g. identifies that morality can be an obstacle to taking climate change seriously.

motivations, values, and worldviews” (O’Brien & Hochachka, 2011, p. 94). O’Brien and Hochachka explain further that integrating interiority could foster a “radical transformation of the way that we think about change, from something that humans simply respond to and objectively manage, to something that humans consciously create” (O’Brien & Hochachka, 2011, p. 89). As such, inner transformation offers a novel perspective that has the potential to complement the other approaches in challenging neoliberal beliefs in our society.

It is important to note that my discussion must be read in the light of the limited generalisability of my results. Although my theory makes general claims, its real-world application is limited to people who commented on three articles in one newspaper in one country. Yet, it is important to understand the scope of the identified problem of the incompatibility of neoliberal ethics and radical sustainability with regards to the resultant consequences. Further research is needed to do so. This can be done e.g. by making a quantitative rather than a qualitative analysis. Another possibility is to analyse a more diverse sample of people, e.g. by looking at several newspapers or through more in-depth interviews with people across the political spectrum. Additionally, an analysis of both positive and negative arguments towards CCM and CCA measures can test whether neoliberal ethics inevitably lead to social inertia, or whether there are people who base their worldview on neoliberal thoughts but fight for radical sustainability anyhow, and if so why. All these suggestions go for both the U.S. and other countries. Some assumptions regarding the generalisability of my data can be by made falling back on existing research. In my thesis, I claim that the neoliberalist ideology has hegemonic status, meaning that its impact on the society is profound (see Chapter 2). This indicates that the implications of the identified problem might be profound, too. Moreover, McCright, Marquart-Pyatt, Shwom, Brechin, and Allen (2016) recognise that the identification with a political party in the U.S. is closely related to peoples’ ideology and their climate change views. As such, they state, climate change scepticism is significantly higher amongst Republicans than Democrats. This might be an indicator that there are more right-leaning people than those reading the *WSJ* that support similar views than the ones analysed for this thesis.

My research focussed on neoliberalism being a source of social inertia for individuals. Since hegemonic neoliberal ideas are not only the basis of individual belief systems but permeate every part of our lives and societies, it could be interesting to investigate to what extent neoliberal ethics are the cause of institutional and governmental inertia as well.

Finally, large portions of my results were well explicable by Hayek’s notion of neoliberalism. Yet, as stated in my limitations section (Chapter 3.4), his notion of neoliberalism is not the only one that exists. Since I argued that neoliberalism is hegemonic, not neoliberalism according to Hayek, other ethical

defences of neoliberal thought could be tested as for their compatibility with sustainability to yet again develop a better understanding of the relationship between neoliberal ethics and sustainability to be able to create even stronger claims on how to fight the problems our world encounters, arising from this incompatibility.

## 7 Conclusion

In the fight against climate change, the pressing issue of people being in a state of social inertia related to sustainability has been subject to many analyses. In my research, I focussed on ideas and beliefs as a basis for such unfavourable behaviour, or more precisely: those values and beliefs that underlie a neoliberal worldview as proposed by Friedrich A. Hayek. This focus was chosen since neoliberalism is regarded in this thesis as the current hegemonic ideology and as such has a wide-ranging impact on peoples' lives, worldviews and identities.

Through my analysis, I was able to show that neoliberalism is only at conflict with sustainability when considering a notion of it that deems systemic change necessary for its realisation. From a Hayekian perspective of neoliberalism, such a notion of sustainability is perceived as a threat to its central value of (negative) freedom, leading to the coercion of individuals and regressing towards totalitarianism. In contrast, from within the system of thought of neoliberalism, a perspective of sustainability can be pursued that largely follows the *Polluter Pays Principle* and as such is concordant with the market generating collective choice and with the neoliberal view of freedom. This understanding of sustainability in turn is rejected by radical views of sustainability as not ambitious enough and as such incapable to establish a true sustainable societal order.

This leads to a paradox: What is seen as social inertia from system critics is perceived as the right way forward from Hayekian neoliberals, and what is viewed as the proper way to re-order society for advocates of radical sustainability constitutes a threat to the fundamental beliefs of neoliberals. This tension occurs largely to due to the different ideological appropriations of the same values for the respective self-interests.

From the normative point of view that we need radical sustainability to maintain the possibility for future generations to fulfil their needs, the following problem arises: As long as people stick to their neoliberal ethical system, each step towards sustainability will be a fight that either leaves them unfree (or even enslaved), or will ultimately destroy the environment and as such the continuity of different forms of life on earth.

This leaves me with the conclusion that ideological change is needed to overcome the 'social inertia', or rather the point of view of neoliberals that only market-based solutions are enough to achieve

sustainability. To promote such ideological change, the neoliberal system of thoughts can be challenged immanently, and can be tackled through counter-hegemonic movements, with a focus on interiority supporting this fight.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: WSJ article – Plastic bans

BREAKING NEWS

DOJ officials say department was asked to consider whether Trump's Ukraine

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/plastic-bans-what-you-need-to-know-11561195802>

U.S.

## Plastic Bans: What You Need to Know

Single-use plastics have become a focal point for lawmakers seeking to reduce waste, but the industry is pushing back



Four states, including California and New York, have passed statewide bans on single-use plastic bags, and Hawaii has a de facto ban. PHOTO: MARK KAUZLARICH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

*By Jennifer Calfas*

June 22, 2019 5:30 am ET

Cities and states across the U.S. have been enacting a flurry of restrictions on single-use plastics.

Maine and Vermont just passed statewide bans on plastic bags, while Orlando, Fla., and Palo Alto, Calif., have both pushed through local restrictions on plastics this month.

Since the start of 2019, 200 bills related to single-use plastics have been introduced in state legislatures, according to the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators. Single-use plastic includes products like plastic bags or carryout utensils from restaurants, made to be employed once and then thrown out or recycled.

Here's what you need to know about the measures:

### What are these bans?

These bans aren't uniform laws—they vary in size and scope. The more basic bills ban thin plastic bags from grocery stores and other relevant retailers. Some legislation mandates fees ranging from about 5 cents to 10 cents on carryout bags. Others ban thin plastic bags but charge fees for alternatives, including paper, reusable and compostable bags.

Plastic bags have become the main target of wider sustainability efforts because of their accessibility, said Jennie Romer, a lawyer and sustainability consultant who advocates for these laws on the state and city level. They aren't the only target. This year, state legislatures in Maine and Maryland passed bills banning plastic-foam containers. And in 2018, a series of plastic-straw bans hit cities including New York and San Francisco, as well as companies like Starbucks.

“Plastic bags are an issue that is approachable,” Ms. Romer said. “That’s a big reason why we’ve seen such an explosion of plastic laws.”



Consumers are discouraged from recycling plastic bags, which can get tangled in equipment and disrupt processing.  
PHOTO: CHARLES KRUPA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

### Why now?

Increased attention on litter and ocean conservation—piqued by images of dead whales with stomachs full of plastic bags and garbage patches filled with bags and other plastics floating in the ocean—is helping make the issue a hot topic in homes and statehouses.

“This is connecting to people’s lives in a real and dramatic way,” said Jeff Mauk, executive director of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators, an environmental issue-based network of lawmakers.

The push for these bans is also due, in part, to 2018 restrictions China imposed on

earlier version of this article incorrectly gave his first name as Mark. Also, North Carolina in 2017 repealed a plastic-bag ban that had been in effect in the Outer Banks. The graphic in an earlier version of this story didn't mention the repeal in footnotes. (June 24, 2019)

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## Appendix 1.1: Comments

**Table 1:** Comments in response to the article on plastic bans (see Appendix 1). Only those comments to the article are displayed that were part of the final sample I analysed. This means 32 comments out of the first 81 comments in this case. Text in italics constitutes a quote that the comment refers to, either from the article itself or from another comment.

Name	Comment
P1	Coming from someone I know in the plastics industry, he claims that the plastic found in whales comes from third world countries who simply dump their trash in the ocean
P2	This is true. If people truly want to help the environment, money would be spent to develop waste processing in the countries that dump their trash. Instead, we have moral grandstanding over straws, which has very little impact since trash in the U.S. isn't dumped into the environment anyway.
P3	Banning single use plastic straws and bags is a purely symbolic act having minimal effect on the environment. For a significant ecological effect, ban single use disposable baby diapers. Every year an estimated 20 billion disposable diapers end up in landfills creating 3.5 million tons of waste that can take up to 500 years to degrade. As an added benefit, the average family could save about \$900 per year using cloth baby diapers.
P4	Maine and Vermont just passed statewide bans on plastic bags, Great, two states now run by socialists who love to pretend to be ever so politically correct. I live in Maine and see nothing but problems ahead. The paper bags we will now have to buy at the grocery store are made of PC recycled paper and usually split before they are even out to the car. Wood fiber becomes shorter each time it is made into paper, and has less strength.
P5	Sledgehammer and flea comes to mind. The real issue is human behavior not plastic bags.
P6	recycle them. It takes but a little thought and effort. Why do we have government incursions into smaller and smaller things in ordinary life? For the individual, be responsible, for the bureaucracy it is simply another opportunity to expand itself with the double bonus of virtue signaling at the same time.
P7	So-called progressives seek to banish and/or control every single human technological advancement that makes our lives better. Let that sink in.
P8	I don't like my groceries like milk, meat and vegetables to leak and stain whatever they come in contact. I also wonder if the leakage creates germs and disease? Plastic bags prevent these concerns. Remember when these same people created the plastic bag industry by saying that paper bags were killing all the forests in the world?
P9	"...appear to be..." Yeah, let's just ban anything that appears to be a problem. Here's another hint. What you saw at Macchu Picchu were not bags that came from the U.S.
P10	The U.S. is not Peru. Why punish us for the littering of other countries? Makes no sense.
P11	Just a little history refresher .... first, progressives always create a problem then want credit for solving the problem they created. Example 1: Progressive Democrats wanted to stop the use of paper bags and straws to save the trees that were never at risk which led to the flood of plastic bags and straws. Now they champion ending the use of their plastic bags and straws. Example 2: Progressive Democrats demanded we stop using clean nuclear energy and use fossil fuels instead. Now, five decades later, they claim that the use of fossil fuels is a crisis and they need \$5 Trillion to fix the problem they created. I see a pattern....
P12	It's a littering problem, not a plastic bag problem. Spare me the virtue signaling with your bans. It's just lazy thinking. The problem is worldwide with the developing countries being the worst offenders using the ocean as a garbage dump. The climate change argument is run the same way. We are 5% of the world's population producing

	12% of worlds CO2. We are powerless over 88% of CO2 emissions. We could all die tomorrow and the issue would not be diminished. It's called the tragedy of the commons. Typical Allinskyite thinking. Awful-ize the problem, command and control solution. No thanks.
<b>P13</b>	Well stated. It is the people, not the bags which are the problem. Where we live the grocery stores have collection bins for used bags which are then sent to mills to become plastic lumber (which is great for decks). And many people like us, use reusable bags (They really are stronger and easier to handle). You won't see trash on the sides of the roads or in the streams because we don't litter. On the other hand, drive into the cities... It is the PEOPLE not the bags.
<b>P14</b>	Banning plastic bags, straws, etc. is another fad, like banning disposable diapers 10- 20 years ago. The real issue is littering. People who actually change babies' diapers know how superior they are for the babies' health and comfort -- which is the whole purpose of diapers in the first place. However, mothers, hospital nurses, and other diaper-changers don't throw them in the street the way housemaids dumped chamber pots out of windows 200 years ago. Lightweight plastic bags are less energy-intensive and more sanitary than their paper & cloth predecessors. That's why they caught on. Luddites raging at one innovation after another are not furthering rational improvements. They're indulging in counterproductive virtue-signaling. Unfortunately, you can't command headlines and build careers on the motto: "Don't be a slob."
<b>P15</b>	The next movement will be to ban consumption of meat. After all, chickens and pigs create all kinds of, er, effluent.
<b>P16</b>	Governments, federal, state and local are too big, too expensive and inefficient. Leave us alone already. The private sector can handle this.
<b>P17</b>	.When you see the pictures of the protest over the Keystone pipeline, you realize that those who are condemning the usage of plastic, be they straws or bags, are just lazy, messy, ill-considered humans who don't take the time to put the trash in a container so that it can be put in landfill. Save the whales. Clean up your own trash.
<b>P18</b>	Visit Tokyo (and Japan in general). Waste is "culturally" put in its place and disposed of in typically garbage to energy facilities close to the collection point. Whenever you have a "culture" that is willing to make waste of anything they have; you have litter and a mess e.g. refrigerators, cars, plastic bags, etc. all lining streets (visit Egypt or India or China). Plastic typically comes from the waste products generated in the oil refining process. Using this "waste" to create sanitary and convenient solutions to consumer needs is wise. Addressing cultural "throw away" attitudes worldwide is a better solution than bans.
<b>P19</b>	Just to keep things in perspective, 90% of all plastic in the ocean comes from 10 rivers, 8 in Asia and 2 in Africa, so our effort to control the waste in the oceans by limiting the use of plastic in the US is bound to have a near nil effect. But who can deny the feel good effect!
<b>P20</b>	What is the "problem" that single use plastics caused in the USA? The novel idea that the USA exported regarding single use plastics was to properly dispose of them. Environmentalists originally LOVED plastic bags as paper bags caused trees to get cut down. Now plastic bags are the boogiemán and environmentalists expect people to re-use plastic bags (which does cause food borne illnesses) or have consumer bring their own fabric type bags with them. This "solution" does not universally work.
<b>P21</b>	Some of the worst occurrences of trashing Paradise I've ever encountered were on small remote islands in the South Pacific. At first I thought the trash on the beaches were from passing ships, but I witnessed many locals just leaving trash on the beaches.
<b>P22</b>	Tell me the logic of "banning" plastic bags while selling them in boxes at retail. What is "single use" with a plastic bag? They have various alternative uses.

<b>P23</b>	Single use is a propagandistic term that has no relationship to reality. Most of us would greatly miss the very useful plastic bags, and we reuse just about every one that comes home from a store: toting shoes to gym or on a trip; lining wastebaskets; picking up messes in the yard; protecting hands when pulling noxious weeds; tucked into a purse to protect purse or hair from unexpected rain; collecting and storing related items, such as yarn. Environmentalists rave about seeing "so many" plastic bags caught in trees. I have never seen even one, but I have seen kites and balloons in trees, and I have read about and seen videos of birds so entangled in kite strings that they will die if not rescued -- but I have never heard a plastic bag banner mention kite or balloon strings.
<b>P24</b>	In our home plastic bags are multi-use. e.g.: cleaning up after our dog. These bags are unlikely to end up in some whale's stomach. What happened to common sense?
<b>P25</b>	I have read the comments most of which are tied into the concept of residential recycling rather than disposal. The Economist ran a survey many years ago dealing with the issue of residential waste. One of the more memorable concepts concerning the United States was there is no shortage of acreage for landfills. There also was an estimate of how much land it would take for 100 years of waste disposal which I recall was not horrific. If we look at this issue from a process rather than a product problem it would seem doable to strictly control the collection of plastic containers of all kinds and dump them in the ground until we are able to find better solutions. I believe there is research being conducted for biodegradable plastic shopping bags. As such, they would need to be in a place to degrade like a land fill anyway. This concept could be applied to other recycled residential waste materials for which there is currently no market. Control first, design next.
<b>P26</b>	This article (like ALL of the Wall Street Journal article I have read in the last few years) is biased against biodegradability (in fact, this is the first one in the last half dozen I have read that even mentions biodegradability -- but little more than a mention). Please get a reporter who understands the science here and the issues and is able to produce a fair and balanced article (stop assigning these reporters who don't seem to know much about the subject and who only seem to care about the superficial political aspects).
<b>P27</b>	As with the "Coming Ice Age", "Global Warming" and then "Climate Change", you can never with the uneducated environmentalists - who always swear that THEIR latest hypothesis is the correct one. And they always seem to be young, who of course, "know better" than the older folk. First, what is plastic? Formerly a waste byproduct burned off into the air in the manufacture of energy products. Which is not going anywhere soon - so, should we just burn it off again? Driving up cost and pollution. Second, why is so much plastic used? Because paper did NOT work - do you know how much food waste was reduced going to plastic? What are you going to do to prevent that? Third, single use plastic bags significantly cut down on food born disease - I don't used them, but I clean my multiple use bags. The problem is, most people don't, too lazy. Fourth, paper degrades, causing methane, the number 1 greenhouse gas. Well, this week. Properly disposed of plastic is fine - but we blame the plastic.
<b>P28</b>	Where is your responsibility controlling your own use of plastic? I carry my own bags, my husband always has a plastic bag in his back pocket, reused for years. The heavier type that can be constantly reused works best for him. We refuse any additional bags, we don't buy products that are over packaged and we don't need legislation to regulate our lives.
<b>P29</b>	Keeping plastic bags from festooning the environment is legit, but what you really need to know is the bans are mostly virtue-signaling from woke liberals.
<b>P30</b>	Encouraging the use of alternatives to plastic is good, but an outright ban is for the ultra leftist to feel good about themselves. I'll believe the legitimacy of this when Asia stops the rivers of plastic, literally rivers filled with plastic, from emptying into the ocean. Anyone

	who has traveled anywhere in this world knows North America's plastic issue is minuscule in comparison.
<b>P31</b>	Banning single use bags mostly because it is an "approachable" thing to do and when biodegradable plastic is easily available and at an additional cost that is small (reported as maybe 10% more) is not only mindless but silly. It's the progressive/socialist equivalent of denying climate change and not only seeks to deny science and common sense but also impose a silly morality on others.
<b>P32</b>	So while I don't like seeing images of these things, banning plastics in the U.S. probably isn't the solution. Sure, I could use reusable glass containers instead of ziplock (in many cases I already do) , I could use fabric bags for groceries, and I could eliminate the use of garbage bags altogether - I'd just have to wash the container every so often. While we can pursue alternatives, they too have issues, cost perhaps the biggest. I doubt our nation is willing to accept those increased costs especially when you consider the following: 1) alternatives have their own perils - for one, water shortages could be exacerbated with increased cleaning of materials 2) I don't think the U.S. is the leader here of the materials that end up in the ocean. While I have absolutely no proof ready to share I can tell you that the poorer places I've visited in the past have little to no enforcement on littering. I would though love to see strictly enforced litter laws on our beaches here.

## Appendix 2: WSJ article – Meat consumption

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/climate-experts-recommend-eating-more-vegetables-less-meat-11565251202>

ENVIRONMENT

## Climate Experts Advise Eating More Vegetables, Less Meat

After issuing a new report detailing farming's contribution to warming, researchers suggested diet changes to reduce the impact



A farmer's market in Nebraska. The Farm Belt is edging north in response to higher temperatures that largely stem from greenhouse-gas emissions. PHOTO: RYAN SODERLIN/THE WORLD-HERALD/ASSOCIATED PRESS

*By Robert Lee Hotz and Jacob Bunge*

Updated Aug. 8, 2019 2:20 pm ET

Climate experts meeting in Geneva recommended changes to the foods people eat and farm in an effort to stave off the disruptive effects of rising global temperatures, while growers and major food producers attempt to adapt.

People should consider eating more vegetables and less meat, the researchers said Thursday. The switch may help slow greenhouse-gas emissions, they said, because farming vegetables releases less greenhouse gases than livestock production.

“Diets that are rich in plant-based foods have lower greenhouse-gas emissions than diets heavy in red-meat consumption,” said climatologist Cynthia Rosenzweig, who studies climate change and agriculture at NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York.

Farming and other land uses account for nearly a quarter of greenhouse-gas emissions,

while half of the methane emissions in the atmosphere are released from cattle and rice fields, the researchers said. Other studies have found less of an impact on greenhouse-gas emissions but still sizable effects.

Some food manufacturers and agricultural companies are already taking steps to change practices. Cargill Inc. said last month it was launching a 10-year initiative to reduce the intensity of greenhouse emissions from its beef supply chain by 30%. Smithfield Foods Inc. has set a goal of reducing greenhouse emissions 25% by 2025 through moves like working with farmers to improve the efficiency of fertilizer use and crop yields, while reducing nitrous oxide emissions.

Mondelez International Inc., maker of Cadbury candy bars and other chocolate products, said farms in Ghana that participate in its cocoa sustainability program reported 15% higher yields for the commodity than nonparticipants.

More changes to farming are in the works. Big seed suppliers like Bayer AG, Corteva Inc. and Syngenta AG are developing varieties of corn that can grow in dry conditions and rice that can withstand saltier water. The companies say those plants can help farmers produce food as temperatures and sea levels rise.

Agribusinesses are also touting genetically engineered crops and synthetic pesticides as the best way to maximize crop production and minimize deforestation and tilling, which can release carbon into the atmosphere. In 2015, scientists developed a genetically modified rice that gives off virtually no greenhouse gas emissions while growing; there isn't an estimate on when it might be ready for market. At least one agriculture tech startup is testing soy, camelina and corn crops whose DNA was edited to lower their emissions and adapt the plants to climate change.

"Farmers that use the best technologies and agronomic approaches significantly reduce their greenhouse gas emissions," Erik Fyrwald, Syngenta's chief executive, said in a recent interview.

Plant-based meat replacement products could spur an increase in vegetable consumption and a drop in eating beef, companies like Beyond Meat Inc. and Impossible Foods Inc. say. Making imitation ground beef using proteins from yellow peas or soy requires less grain production and water, and could help curb emissions from livestock themselves, the companies say.

Big restaurant companies including Burger King, Dunkin' Brands Group Inc. and Carl's Jr. have added Beyond and Impossible meat substitutes at thousands of U.S. restaurants in the past year.

The latest round of attention followed the release of a report on climate change and land use by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, a United Nations body that evaluates climate-change science for government policy makers.

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greenhouse gases as a calorie-equivalent amount of pork, and five times as much as an equivalent amount of poultry, according to a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in 2014.

Food production could be affected by the warming it contributes to, the IPCC researchers said. Crops in many regions have been affected by heat waves, dust storms, wildfires and prolonged drought. The annual area of land in drought grew by about 1% a year between 1961 and 2013, the IPCC researchers said.

Rising levels of carbon dioxide, long thought to boost plant growth by increasing photosynthesis, may also affect the nutritional value of some crops, recent growth experiments suggest. “Wheat grown at higher CO<sub>2</sub> has 6% to 13% percent less protein, 4 to 7% percent less zinc and 5 to 8% less iron,” said Dr. Rosenzweig, who helped prepare the report.

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—*Micah Maidenberg contributed to this article.*

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## Appendix 2.2: Comments

**Table 2.** Comments in response to the article on meat consumption (see Appendix 2). Only those comments to the article are displayed that were part of the final sample I analysed. This means 32 comments out of the first 69 comments in this case. Text in italics constitutes a quote that the comment refers to, either from the article itself or from another comment.

Name	Comment
<b>M1</b>	Changing my diet based on what climate researchers say?!?! This would be like altering my exercise routine based on advice from my hair stylist. Insanity.
<b>M2</b>	Then climate scientists should eat more vegetables.
<b>M3</b>	Vegetarians in general have smaller skeletons, smaller brains than meat eating neighbors, and far less available energy for thinking during their lifetimes..... A low protein diet DOES have its "side" effects . historically, Vegetarians made more docile slaves and serfs.....
<b>M4</b>	The climate science "industry" is similar to the diet "industry", the vitamins and supplements "industry" and the bottled water "industry". Cases can be made for either side of the debate but in each case only one side produces \$\$\$\$ with Zero (proven) long term results.
<b>M5</b>	In the Climate Accord , the US put itself at an economic disadvantage vs China, since we pledged to lower our emissions while China pledged to lower her rate in growth of emissions, but only later, not now--and there is no enforcement provision . We have seen how China operates when she negotiated with the Trump administration, and then backed away from agreements that had been arrived at in the negotiations. Is there a good reason why the US should put itself in an even worse economic competitive position with China by increasing our costs of production, if it cannot be shown that our contribution to lowering emissions will have a measurable effect on planetary warming? Can we do it alone?
<b>M6</b>	Not an accurate analogy, Climate Science that supports Neo-Luddite-ism, is a terminal illness to Western Culture, the other con games just run of the mill parasites that can't kill a healthy host....
<b>M7</b>	Thirty-plus governments maintain climate models that don't track the observed temperature anomalies (except one - the one that doesn't predict any significant warming as the carbon dioxide concentration continues to rise and accelerate). They are flawed from the onset as they are calibrated such that natural factors don't induce any warming. It's begging the question writ large - and is the foundation of the IPCC reports. Published findings (based on NASA and NOAA data) show that plant growth, due to increased photo-synthesis, has grown significantly over the last 35 years. As for food production, the UN stopped tracking it's global food production index in 2014 - from 1960 to 2014 the index shows us that food production has nearly doubled. The new push for fascist controls on agriculture will see poor people unable to afford meat, and, since most grazing land won't support farming, it will lead to more clearing of forested land. Going after the rice would be pro-starvation.
<b>M8</b>	When the "sacred pet cows" of India are all sacrificed in the search for a solution to the impending climate change catastrophe, I will consider giving up my meat. Until then, this is all a load of .....
<b>M9</b>	Meat haters have officially joined the 'Band Wagon" of Carbon Hating, following the Goose steps of Big Government, Nanny Staters, Watermelon Communists, ZPGers, and Other Human hating factions with a seasoning of neo-Luddites cultural saboteurs.
<b>M10</b>	One hopes that these jet setting climate geniuses have taken into account the net effect of the potential increase in homo sapiens flatulence from more plant-based foods and



	the desired decrease in bovine contributions. Of course, as victims of widespread skepticism, these experts must be believed.
<b>M11</b>	I think the evidence seems to indicate that more plant based meals and less red meat is healthier. I have shifted my diet in that direction and subjectively feel better. As for the rest I find all politicized science suspect of bias based results. This especially true in inexact science like climate science where any result seems to fit the model.
<b>M12</b>	I hope I'm not the only subscriber to the WSJ who notices the dishonesty of their reporters and editors---excepting only those who write for the Editorial and Opinion pages. Look at the way in which they are now "regulating" the Comments: Their questions, such as the one above, resemble those bad teachers ask their middle-school students. The Journal must think its readers are a pack of idiots! Read the caption below the lead photograph at the top of this page. It smoothly integrates the universally accepted idea that the earth is experiencing "rising temperatures" with "that largely stem from greenhouse-gas emissions." The latter is hardly settled knowledge. The writers at the WSJ evidently think indoctrinating readers is the same as reporting the news. I have conversations with folks daily that tell me each of them holds a different set of, not opinions, but facts in his mind. This means "what you know depends on what news source you read." That's a recipe for chaos.
<b>M13</b>	Sadly, the truth of your comment falls on deaf ears. Management hires these indoctrinated ninnyes and permits the banal sort of questions they manage to serve up to readers. It's all tedious and depressing and reflects the leftist trends we see everywhere of managing thought and expression.
<b>M14</b>	You have a lot of company. Most people just ignore the usually irrelevant question. I find it more annoying that many of the articles do not permit comments, particularly those that are factually inaccurate or biased. Even the headline for this article of questionable science is misleading. The finding was not that plant based was "better" for the environment, but that red meat, i.e., beef and rice were the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Last time I looked, rice was a plant based food.
<b>M15</b>	Even better have 3 billion less people eating anything. If humans are indeed the causal factor and the US is only 6 percent of the world's population, lots of luck. The only way to prove the point is massive CO2 removal programs. >30 percent of the energy diverted from all the world's power plants for CO2 removal to restore our present 415 ppm to pre-1900 300 ppm is required. Obviously at that point we will find out what percentage of the problem was CO2 related.
<b>M16</b>	Every plant converts atmospheric CO2 into more complex carbon compounds. They all decay back into CO2 (if they aren't buried in the right swampy low oxygen environment that time and pressure turn into coal). This is the CO2 cycle. So growing wheat, corn, and vegetables etc. just takes a different path to the end product of CO2 than if you fed them to animals. Growing trees does sequester CO2 but only for the life of the tree. Using trees as building materials and other products can actually prolong their ability to sequester carbon. Still the basic CO2 cycle will ultimately apply. This isn't a pithy post that will get a lot of likes but rather a request of one of these climate experts to explain how the CO2 cycle somehow exempts vegetables. I can only explain their findings by ignoring the fate of all plants and focusing only on selective parts of the CO2 cycle.
<b>M17</b>	<i>"Maintaining one human"</i> - makes the anti-human point of all environmentalism quite clear, don't you think? Also, the history of human evolution shows that the human body and brain GREW with the addition of animal proteins to the diet. Environmentalists would put us back on a plant based diet, pushing mankind back down the evolutionary ladder....
<b>M18</b>	And spoken like a true city-dweller. Just had a discussion with the manager of a high school radio station at his transmitter site. A tower built in a field. I used to see cattle up

	at that site--but not today...field overgrown with weeds which we had to fight to get to the building. If you don't raise grazing animals for meat, the grass still grows, dies, decays, releases greenhouse gases. If you do use grazing animals for human food, you provide an important source of protein and other nutrients to our omnivorous diet.
M19	This is all getting kind of silly. And to its detriment the WSJ has also been drinking the Kool-Aid. Very disappointing.
M20	Now these "experts" are prescribing our diets, as well? I was particularly struck by the notion that rice growing could have the same effect as 1, 200 coal fired power plants. China has 48% of the world's coal fired capacity while the US has just 13%. Moreover, the US is replacing coal with natural gas and renewables while China keeps building them. And yet the Left thinks China is swell.
M21	It's all about control, liberals want to control what you eat, your medical care, your education, who you worship, how you work, where you live, because to them that's the way they maintain their power.
M22	Once you give others the power over what you may and may not ingest into your own body, there are no limits to what those same others can do to you...
M23	<i>"Climate experts meeting in Geneva on Thursday recommended changes to the foods people eat and farm in an effort to stave off the disruptive effects of rising global temperatures".</i> They are no "climate experts." They are charlatans who peddle pseudo-science for political gain. There is nothing to "stave off" because global temperatures have not risen beyond natural variability, neither are they going to. This is well documented in peer reviewed papers published daily in professional journals and in published satellite data that are available to all. <i>"What changes should governments make, if any, in light of this report?"</i> None.
M24	Please stop peddling this human caused climate change nonsense. There is no science to support it. I read the WSJ because of its balance and attention to facts. This article undermines that trust.
M25	Oh, and be sure to also report that one of the eco-elites' basic staples of liquid consumption - bottled water - takes at least ten times as much energy to produce as tap water. But that won't go over very well with the alarmists. There are limits.
M26	There is absolutely no repeatable experiments that I can find that backs up the the statement that changing anyone's diet will reduce global temperatures. If the author or the WSJ knows of one please publish it. Otherwise move articles like this from the science section to the opinion section because it is not science just speculation. Thank you in advance.
M27	None. It's completely partisan. Leftism, environmentalism, and vegetarianism all ride on the same gene. These are the same people telling us science says 3-year-olds can choose their sex.
M28	<i>"The switch <b>may</b> help slow greenhouse-gas emissions, they said, because farming vegetables releases less greenhouse gases than livestock production."</i> * emphasis added. When they are definitive and have a solid study to report back on which we can review (versus doing a junket together where they speculate) then report back to us. Until then, this is the kind of stuff that belongs with the magazines in the checkout isle shelf next to the National Enquirer.
M29	As long as "climate experts" keep their suggestions to merely that - suggestions - I have no problem with them. It's when they seek to use the coercive power of the state to change suggestions into COMMANDS that all good citizens should strenuously object...
M30	Once again the idea of CO2 and man made climate change is an excuse for obtaining and maintaining global socialism. This is an agenda and people are being duped into thinking there is a political solution to climate change. This idea is folly, stupid and unworkable. Socialism, the goal, does not work, never has worked and is immoral in its application

<b>M31</b>	Socialism does work for those few party member at the top of the pyramid scheme. Maduro in Venezuela is doing very well. The rest of the population is eating out of garbage cans with intermittent electrical power while the standard of living in Venezuela has crashed. THAT is why the Marxocrats in the US are pushing for it, because they want to be the Politburo of the new system. They could care less about everyone else.
<b>M32</b>	Sure, like I'm going to listen to a bunch of "climate experts" tell me what to eat? Pass the salt.

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POLITICS

## ‘Green New Deal’ Democrats Position Climate Change as Central Issue in 2020

Leading candidates embrace clean-energy push, setting up contrast with pro-fossil-fuel Trump



Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Ed Markey, both at podium, on Thursday promoted a plan to ‘achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions’ in the next 10 years. PHOTO: AL DRAGO/BLOOMBERG NEWS

By *Andrew Duehren*

Feb. 8, 2019 8:00 am ET

WASHINGTON—Democratic officials and activists are pushing the party to unify behind a plan to quickly wean the U.S. economy off fossil fuels and cement climate change as a central issue in the 2020 election.

The plan, released on Thursday and dubbed the “Green New Deal,” aims to dramatically overhaul the country’s energy and transportation infrastructure to “achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions” in the next 10 years.

In lieu of a specific piece of legislation, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D., N.Y.) and Sen. Ed Markey (D., Mass.) are introducing a resolution outlining goals for the effort, which also calls for guaranteeing every American a job and health care.

Democratic presidential contenders Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D., Mass.), Kamala Harris (D., Calif.), Cory Booker (D., N.J.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D., N.Y.) are co-sponsoring the legislation in the Senate, as is 2016 candidate and possible 2020 hopeful Bernie

Sanders (I., Vt.).

The Green New Deal offers Democratic candidates for president a contrast with President Trump, who has cast doubt on the human role in climate change and on predictions by U.S. government scientists that climate change could cost the U.S. economy hundreds of billions of dollars a year by the end of the century. The Trump administration has also moved to ease regulations on the fossil fuel industry and has moved to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris agreement limiting carbon emissions.

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“This is going to enter the 2020 election cycle as one of the top two or three issues for every candidate,” said Mr. Markey.

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With Republicans in control of the Senate, the resolution is unlikely to pass in the current Congress, and Republicans quickly attacked the proposal as overreaching and unnecessary.

“This Green New Deal...would be a raw deal for American families as the cost of energy skyrockets under their leftist plan,” said Sen. John Barrasso (R. Wyo.), the chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Mr. Trump on Thursday didn't comment on the proposal, but a spokesman for the Republican National Committee sent a note to reporters stating, “It's more likely than not Democrats will choose a nominee in 2020 who supports it.”

With the presidential field taking shape, the Democrats hope to take advantage of shifting attitudes toward climate change.

A December Wall Street Journal/NBC News national poll showed that 66% of Americans believe that action is needed to address climate change, with 45% calling for immediate action.

In the House, Democrats will try to coalesce around specific climate-change proposals and set a direction for the party ahead of 2020. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi stopped short of endorsing the idea of a Green New Deal on Thursday, while applauding the enthusiasm of its supporters.

“I'm very excited about it all, and I welcome the Green New Deal and any other proposals that people have out there,” she said.

Rep. Rob Bishop (R., Utah), the ranking Republican member of the House Natural Resources Committee, dismissed the Green New Deal as “cute.”

“When they get serious and have something that’s practical, then let’s talk about it,” he said.

Also Thursday, Mrs. Pelosi announced the membership of a Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, one of several Democratic bodies in the House that will prioritize climate change and environmental issues in the current Congress.

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Rep. Sean Casten (D., Ill.), a member of the new committee, said that Democrats should work to produce more specific proposals than the Green New Deal.

“In terms of aspirational goals, it’s lovely. I’d love to live in a world that’s totally clean and has green jobs for everyone and all sorts of other benefits. I don’t know how you get there,” he said.

“There’s a real danger in leading people off cliffs before the bridge is built.”

Rep. Jim McGovern (D., Mass.), a supporter of the Green New Deal

resolution and the chairman of the Rules Committee, said that Democrats will eventually unify behind a plan to combat climate change.

“We’re all one big happy family,” he quipped. “We’ll work it all out. It will all work out.”

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### Appendix 3.1: Comments

**Table 3.** Comments in response to the article on the Green New Deal (Appendix 3). Only those comments to the article are displayed that were part of the final sample I analysed. This means 32 comments out of the first 90 comments in this case. Text in italics constitutes a quote that the comment refers to, either from the article itself or from another comment.

Name	Comment
GND1	The green new deal manifesto was originally called Das Kapital.
GND2	<i>"1 Green New Deal" will NOT pass in the next 2 years</i> " One should hope--otherwise we need to start shooting. <i>"2 can raise awareness about Climate Change politics"</i> Yes, raise awareness that these people want to destroy our country; <i>"3 this kind of development will benefit our long-term national interests"</i> Yes, by getting rid of more Dems.
GND3	Can somebody, anybody please explain to the liberals that CO2 is necessary for life on this planet, does NOT DRIVE CLIMATE, and that mankind cannot control climate. For the rest of us, some people can and do desire to rule your lives, and these people are nuts. For God's sake Brooklyn, take this bartender back home. The nation cannot possibly drink enough for her to make sense. I hope
GND4	Let's get it done in 5 years. Sounds like a plan. Comrade. (for those of you with impaired sarcasm detectors, please have them re-calibrated.)
GND5	Ed Markey aligns himself with the bartender because he is afraid he is going to get beat in the next senate election. The US is not the only country that is impacting climate change, the bartender's plan does not explain how she will get China, India, and the rest of the world on board. You can't fix stupid.
GND6	The quickest way to turn the US into Venezuela is to pursue "green" energy initiatives. These fools don't realize that Wind Turbines and Solar panels are not possible without fossil fuels, from cradle to grave. And, if you want a greener planet, you want more CO2, not less. The level of stupidity around "climate change" is breathtaking.
GND7	The WSJ conveniently leaves out that the plan will eliminate air travel and provide income health and retirement benefits to people "unwilling" to work. This plan basically guarantees President Trump's re-election. Thank you socialists.
GND8	Because banning airplanes is realistic. These people are stupid.
GND9	Hopefully, this will alert the people to the socialistic turn by the democrats. If not our country is doomed to follow the path of Venezuela.
GND10	This proposal is far too bold and overreaching. It naturally forces the question of whether we as a country wish to maintain a (relatively) free market economy, or embrace a command model. To move towards the latter as a society, there must be a credible specter looming in the tangible future that demands a solution. Not only has man-made climate change failed to play out as a real threat and detriment over the past three decades, but forcing ideological policy on a market that's not ready will only damage the economy and the U.S.'s ability to compete in the global environment.
GND11	The Green New Deal is the moral equivalent of the Ming Dynasty's 15th century decision to dismantle China's oceangoing fleet of ships -- right on the cusp of Europe's Age of Discovery, enabled by Portugal and Spain's adoption of the Chinese-invented magnetic compass. Result? Europe dominated the world for the next 500 years. The architect of the real New Deal, President Franklin Roosevelt, aimed to revive American industry, extend electric systems into underserved areas, and to reforest barren, eroded lands. Greenies nowadays are encouraging retrograde practices like clear-cutting American forests, pelletizing the wood, and selling it to European electric plants. Greenies want to make domestic electricity more expensive and less reliable,

	and dismantle entire industries in pursuit of an imagined, bucolic past. FDR would be turning over in his grave to hear the Orwellian inversion of his terminology.
<b>GND12</b>	Are the writers of WSJ on strike for using their brains. How can you write an article and not highlight the most problematic ideas. It aims to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in 10 years, , but how is she going to get rid of farting cows and airplanes fast enough. Get rid of every building in the US to be upgraded or replaced to make them more energy efficient. This is just the tip of the nit wit ideas. Did she not watch the Paris yellow jackets, she is an embarrassment , but hey keep moving your lips AOC, Trump in 2020
<b>GND13</b>	<i>(“Only it is far less than 100 years from now and many estimates support that being pro-active is a much more economic solution than reactive”)</i> Exactly how much sooner than 100 years are you claiming? Be specific with the economic cost/benefit rational. People going all the way to Malthus 300 yrs ago to today with Commoner and Ehrlich have projected disaster that never occurred, not because the past trends were wrong, but because their forecasts assumed no changes. That is what is happening today with climate theology. People over estimate the impact of changes and way under estimate the vibrancy of human innovation and problem solving. In that way it is reactive in that the solutions are made ONLY when the economic case supports it. And government is never the source of the solution.
<b>GND14</b>	The cost estimates appear to include only those costs for all the new shiny windmills, solar panels, and retrofitting buildings. Not the loss to the treasury for taxes not paid as businesses shut down or move overseas. Nor the loss to the economy as these jobs vanish. My electric costs me 9 cents a KWH, for equipment that runs 24/7. In Germany—perfect example that these plans won’t work—35 cents a KWH. At that rate, my business is gone. As will be many other businesses, and the wages and taxes they now pay.
<b>GND15</b>	\$.09 a Kwh is a dream here in California. We’re in the \$.13-\$.15 Kwh range and going up. The California legislature is actively making a statement that the average citizen will have to add solar to their existing homes or simply not be able to afford to run A/C in the summer. This fascist mindset is what the “Green New Deal” is all about.
<b>GND16</b>	<i>“It’s more likely than not Democrats will choose a nominee in 2020 who supports it.”</i> Well, there’s your Four More Years right there ” <i>A December Wall Street Journal/NBC News national poll showed that 66% of Americans believe that action is needed to address climate change, with 45% calling for immediate action.”</i> Ask them if they accept that in order to implement the “action”, the government will have to confiscate 70% of their wages, and see if the poll results change! ..... This just in... People like Free Stuff ... shocking!, until it’s not free
<b>GND17</b>	Hypothetical poll questions: 1. Do you avour “immediate action” to prevent polar bears from starving? 2. If “immediate action,” triples your electric bill (as in Germany) but has no effect on polar bears one way or the other, do you still avour it? 3. Since China now emits more CO2 than the U.S. and E.U. combined, “immediate action” by the U.S. won’t be visible on a pie chart, but will likely cripple American aviation, auto and housing industries, and vast sectors of reviving manufacturing. Do you still want “immediate action” if those are the likeliest results? 4. Do you feel the West is morally obligated to commit economic suicide so that Asia (2/3rds of global population) can remain exempt from all treaties, and continue to gain on everyone else? 5. Do you avour “immediate action,” if it speeds up China’s dominance, reduces the U.S. and Brazil to agricultural colonies, Australia and Canada to resource colonies, and Europe to a few museum pieces?
<b>GND18</b>	I’m with Kimberly Strassel. I almost fell off my chair laughing when I saw AOC tout her “Green New Dream” or whatever they call it.



<b>GND19</b>	The article should have included the idiotic ideas put forward by this group. They are available before they were taken down. I don't think even Chairman Mao would have endorsed them.
<b>GND20</b>	(Answer): No. Wrong. Not insane. It's good. The Democrats support for this flying-carpet wish-list will sink them.
<b>GND21</b>	Why does Ms Occasionally-Cogniscent care... I recall her stating that the world was going to end in "like twelve years?" She'll be a useful idiot for the Socialists for the next two years. Even they will find her embarrassing, and will support a primary challenger for her seat. On the other hand, she makes Ms Pelosi look less intellectually challenged, so they might want to keep her around.
<b>GND22</b>	What a dolt, eliminate air travel. When am I going to take a train to Europe?
<b>GND23</b>	Or, rather, no travel anywhere at all. Just stay put — no need to visit any relatives, take a vacation, see a museum, etc. Just like the peasants in the Medieval period. And AOC is our sovereign lord, savior and nursemaid. God help us.
<b>GND24</b>	This is proposed as a non-binding plan with radical changes. We saw how effective the last non-binding deal (Paris Accord) was in accomplishing anything. All this coming from a naïve, inexperienced freshman legislator with no credentials to back up her firebrand rhetoric. Just another snake oil salesman, peddling feel good tonics to people who are being told the sky is falling. No hard plan, no cost/benefit analysis for people to see. Just another push to get government into an activity to protect people from themselves. We know how those things go.
<b>GND25</b>	Oddly no mention this "New Deal" would include providing government welfare support (i.e., money) to those "unwilling to work." Democrats would have a much easier path to the White House during the next election by moving to the political center. For some reason they're going to the extreme left.
<b>GND26</b>	If it passes, count me in as "unwilling to work" and send me my Government check. Who needs to be a productive member of society?
<b>GND27</b>	This is good to use to get rid of the Far Left once and for all. It shows they want 100% control of the economy, business, government and the courts in order to totally transform our economy and way of life. They want to do this in 10 years, something Lenin and Stalin took 50 years to do and proved a failure. It also shows they are ignorant and impractical with no idea of unintended consequences, unless they want to weaken us so China and Russia can take over.
<b>GND28</b>	It is foolish for Americans to spend hundreds of Billions of dollars over the next decade to potentially reduce CO2 levels which increases our cost of electricity while making us less competitive., as Asia is building 1,900 coal fired power plants which will dwarf any American reductions in CO2. Regardless, warmer climate will bring more benefits than harm.
<b>GND29</b>	Jobs for everybody is better than welfare, but I don't that mean that. Even if the US is green it won't matter if the rest of the world doesn't do it.
<b>GND30</b>	The 'Green New Deal' is complete insanity and stupidity. Though what's truly frightening is that a many people are buying it as realistic and completely doable. A true reflection of the collapse of America's educational system. "Idiocracy" here we come...
<b>GND31</b>	The Bolsheviks really have assumed control of the Democrat Party. The NGD is the Communist Manifesto on steroids!
<b>GND32</b>	This "Green New Deal" dovetails nicely with the latest global warming report that said the earth is the hottest it has ever been since someone figured out what temperature means. All this heating they blame on human use of fossil fuels. Yet we also have contributions from volcanic activity and fires not to mention the clear cutting of CO2 absorbing forests all over the world. Do we really want to bankrupt the nation for this?

