Each of us has an effect on the environment every day the key is to make this impact a positive one. We must all take responsibility for our own actions, whether as individuals, or as members of a community or an organization. Let’s work together and become good Environmental Citizens! If you don’t, who will? (Environment Canada 2004).

‘Environmental citizenship’ is, like other forms of ‘adjectival citizenship’, a recent invention. The environmental citizen’s life may be rather different from that of the ‘average’ citizen. For example, she will ‘turn off the tap when brushing [her] teeth or washing her face’; ‘walk, ride [her] bike, carpool or use public transport when possible’; ‘shop at second-hand stores and garage sales … instead of purchasing brand new items’; ‘help protect and conserve that part of the local ecosystem where … she belongs … and participate actively in local environmental affairs in cooperation with government and others’. Indeed, a list of things that the environmental citizen might (or should) do is likely to be very long. As it is commonly used, the idea of environmental citizenship makes demands on people to act differently for the sake of the environment. It is ‘an attempt to make environmental conservation and sustainability an important duty of citizenship that citizens all over the world should be aware of’ (UNEP 2002).

The readiness of environmental advocates and policy-makers to use the language of environmental citizenship belies the complexity of the idea. In this paper, I attempt to set out and defend a particular conception of environmental citizenship in the hope that it may help to provide a theoretical framework for understanding some of those complexities. The proposed conception is developed from an immanent critique of contemporary liberalism, specifically political liberalism, and its conception of the environment and our place in it. I argue that conceiving of liberal citizens as ‘environmental citizens’ – or, more accurately, ‘citizens of an environment’ – enables us to overcome two serious inconsistencies in contemporary liberal theories. Moreover, a liberal approach to environmental citizenship may be most likely to make sense of ‘conventional’ accounts of environmental citizenship, which have been developed in contemporary liberal democratic societies. In other words, there are benefits for both our understanding of liberal citizenship and our understanding of environmental citizenship of bringing the two ideas together in a constructive way.
The paper is divided into six sections. In section 1, I introduce the idea of environmental citizenship and its complexities through discussion of a short Environment Canada ‘definition’. I suggest that the most interesting way of interpreting environmental citizenship is to use the idea of being a ‘citizen of an environment’. In section 2, I outline two ways of understanding the idea that each of us is a ‘citizen of an environment’. I reject the ‘Leopoldian’ interpretation and begin to set out a liberal interpretation that emerges from a very brief account of the ‘history’ of liberal citizenship. In section 3, I argue that the internal consistency of contemporary political liberalism depends on liberal citizens being conceived as ‘citizens of an environment’. More specifically, liberals must abandon their conception of the environment as ‘property’ and adopt conceptions of the environment as ‘provider of basic (human) needs’ and as ‘a subject about which there is reasonable disagreement’. In sections 4 and 5, I further develop the idea of liberal environmental citizenship by setting out an account of the rights (section 4) and the duties (section 5) of the liberal environmental citizen. I argue that liberal environmental citizens have substantive, procedural and ‘personal’ environmental rights. They have duties to obey environmental laws and promote just arrangements, and may (despite common assumptions about liberalism) have duties to do private pro-environmental actions, such as recycling and limiting car use. Section 6 is a short conclusion.

1. The idea of environmental citizenship

The resurgence of ‘citizenship’ as a fashionable idea in the last decade of the twentieth century has been well documented. One side effect of this renewed interest has been the emergence of a long list of ‘adjectival citizenships’. For example, MacGregor and Szerszynski identify ‘cyber citizenship, scientific citizenship, corporate citizenship, consumer citizenship, and global citizenship’ as ‘just a few of the pairings that have made an appearance in the literature’ (2003, p.1). In the environmental literature, we have seen (at least) ‘environmental citizenship’, ‘ecological citizenship’, ‘sustainability citizenship’ and ‘green citizenship’. One problem with all of these adjectival citizenships is that it is not clear what the adjective does to the idea of citizenship. We know what ‘British citizenship’ means – a British citizen is a member of a particular political community with a particular set of institutions and defined territorial borders. ‘British’ is a qualifier that we can understand because it clearly relates to the core idea of citizenship as membership of a political community. But what does ‘scientific citizenship’ or ‘environmental citizenship’ mean?

The interpretation of adjectival citizenships is not straightforward. We may sometimes be able to identify a general interpretation. For example, ‘scientific citizenship’ is generally used as shorthand for ‘scientifically literate citizenship’. Advocates of scientific citizenship aim to promote a political community in which citizens are

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5 Environmental citizenship has been very widely used. Ecological citizenship is less common but see, especially, van Steenbergen (1994), Smith (1998) and Dobson (2003). The idea of ‘sustainability citizenship’ can be found in Barry (2003) and ‘green citizenship’ in Dean (2001) and Bell (2004a).
6 MacGregor and Szerszynski make a similar point (2003, pp.1-2).
7 See, for example, Irwin (2001).
sufficiently scientifically literate to contribute positively to the making of informed
decisions on science-related issues. Similarly, ‘corporate citizenship’ is generally used as
a synonym for ‘corporate social responsibility’. Advocates of corporate citizenship want
to see businesses adopt commitments that go beyond ‘profit maximisation’. The
corporate citizen is concerned about the common good of the political community – the
corporation is (at least, metaphorically) a good citizen of the political community.
However, like most adjectival citizenships, scientific citizenship and corporate
citizenship are ideas that have been contested and criticised. Moreover, the differences
between their interpretations suggest that there is no consistent pattern through which
adjectival citizenships can be interpreted – each one is a unique concept.

Environmental citizenship is particularly interesting because despite the common usage
of the idea – which emphasises caring for the environment – it is theoretically very
complex. Consider, to begin with, a definition offered by Environment Canada:
Environmental citizenship is a personal commitment to learning more about the
environment and to taking responsible environmental action. Environmental
citizenship encourages individuals, communities and organizations to think about
the environmental rights and responsibilities we all have as residents of planet
Earth. Environmental Citizenship means caring for the Earth and caring for
Canada (quoted in MacGregor and Szerszynski 2003, p.8).

At first sight, there appears to be an emphasis on a ‘personal commitment’ to ‘taking
responsible environmental action’ and ‘caring for the Earth’, which is supported by a
‘commitment to learning more about’ and ‘think[ing] about’ the environment. The use of
the phrase ‘personal commitment’ suggests an individual voluntary choice – a choice that
we might or might not make. However, closer inspection reveals that underlying the
‘personal commitment’ to the environment are ‘environmental rights and responsibilities
we all have as residents of planet Earth’. The language of rights and responsibilities
suggests something less voluntary than ‘personal commitment’. The idea that we have
those rights and responsibilities ‘as residents of planet Earth’ suggests an expanded
political community. On this account, the core of environmental citizenship appears to
the idea that we are ‘citizens of the environment’ where the environment is understood as
‘planet Earth’. Yet, there is a final twist when we learn that environmental citizenship
means caring not only for ‘the Earth’ but also, more specifically, ‘caring for Canada’. It
seems we are not only citizens of one global environment, ‘planet Earth’, but also citizens
of more local environments, such as the Canadian environment (for Canadians).

The underlying complexities in the Environment Canada definition highlight some of the
more interesting features of environmental citizenship. On its surface, environmental
citizenship appears to be the idea that we should voluntarily choose to care for the
environment. Environmental citizens are simply citizens who are concerned about the
environment just as scientific citizens are simply citizens who are scientifically literate.
On this account, the link between ‘environmental’ and ‘citizenship’ is not particularly
interesting. It isn’t even the case, as MacGregor and Szersysnki suggest, that
‘citizenship’ is ‘put at the service of “the environment”’ (2003, p.2). Instead, it is human
behaviour more generally that is ‘put at the service of the environment’. ‘Citizenship’ is
just convenient shorthand for certain kinds of actions, notably public participation in
(environmental) decision-making, and certain kinds of attitudes or concerns, notably a set of concerns that go beyond self-interest.

The underlying conception of environmental citizenship as ‘citizenship of the environment’ or ‘citizenships of multiple environments’ is theoretically much more interesting. What does it mean to be a citizen of an environment – a citizen of Planet Earth or a citizen of an environment defined by particular political (or other) boundaries? What are the rights and duties of a citizen of an environment?

2. Two interpretations of being a ‘citizen of an environment’?

One interpretation of the idea of ‘citizen of an environment’ might be something like Aldo Leopold’s ‘land community’ (1949). On Leopold’s account, the political community extends beyond humans to include all members of the land community. Humans are not the only citizens of an environment. Therefore, it is not only humans that have citizenship rights nor is it only to humans that we owe duties of citizenship. As Mark Smith puts it:

In ecological thought, human beings have obligations to animals, trees, mountains, oceans and other members of the biotic community (1998, p.99).

For Smith, ‘Ecological citizenship will lead the human species into a fundamental reassessment of its capacities for acting upon the environment’ because ‘the relations of entitlement and obligation [rights and duties] break through the species barrier and beyond’ (1998, p.99). So, environmental citizenship – or as Smith prefers ‘ecological citizenship’ – is a genuinely innovative idea because it re-defines the political community to include the non-human and, therefore, gives us duties as citizens of an environment to non-human members – fellow citizens – of that environment.

My own view is that this conception of ‘citizenship of an environment’ is unsatisfactory because it breaks the fundamental link between the idea of citizenship and the idea of the political community. A political community is fundamentally a community of agents capable of participating in the decision-making process. Of course, there will be some members of any modern political community (e.g., those with learning difficulties, children, the insane, etc.) who are not competent agents but they are special cases that reflect our commitment to certain principles of justice or beneficence. However, to think in terms of a land community is not merely to introduce more special cases but rather to abandon the idea of a community of competent political agents. If the idea of citizenship is tied to the idea of political community, it really can’t be plausible to talk about citizenship of the land community.

I want to suggest a second interpretation of the idea of ‘citizenship of an environment’, which I believe is more coherent. It is a common criticism of ‘mainstream’ liberal conceptions of citizenship that they ignore the fact that members of the political

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8 It is, of course, a modern innovation to conceive of non-competent agents, such as children, as citizens.
9 I discuss the relationship between agency and membership of the political community in more detail in Bell (2003a).
community are embodied individuals living in a physical environment. However, the problem with most contemporary liberal conceptions of citizenship is not that they ignore either our embodiment or the environment but rather that they conceptualise them in an unsatisfactory way. We can see this quite clearly by looking at T. H. Marshall’s account of the three ‘phases’ of liberal citizenship (Marshall 1950). For Marshall each phase is associated with the introduction of a new type of rights. The first phase, ‘civil citizenship’, introduces civil rights, especially property ownership rights. The physical environment is not ignored by this conception of citizenship; it is conceptualised as property to be owned. However, the embodiment of citizens is ignored. It is only the wealthy who are citizens and as their bodily needs are met privately, their embodiment is not a political issue. The second phase, ‘political citizenship’, introduces political rights, including universal suffrage. In this phase the conception of the environment as property remains in place and the embodiment of citizens is still not on the political agenda. However, the extension of the franchise makes it inevitable that our embodiment will become a political issue. The third phase, ‘social citizenship’, introduces social or welfare rights, including rights to support to meet our basic needs for food, clothing, shelter and health care. In this phase, our embodiment is not ignored but it is not related to our environment, which is still conceived as property. The body – and its survival – becomes a political issue but the body and its environment remain separate. The ‘social citizen’ is conceived as a ‘locationless’ or ‘free-floating’ embodied creature inhabiting a world made of ‘property’. He or she has no attachment or connection to the physical environment or any particular part of it.

This separation of the embodied individual from the environment remains in the theories of contemporary egalitarian political liberals, such as John Rawls, Brian Barry and Charles Beitz. In these theories, ‘egalitarian citizenship’ or ‘opportunity citizenship’ introduces a more extensive set of social rights grounded in egalitarian theories of distributive justice and a commitment to ‘fair equality of opportunity’. However, there is little change in the conceptions of the environment or the individual. The physical environment remains marginalised; the world is still made of ‘property’. Contemporary liberals still recognise the importance of basic needs but in theories developed for contemporary liberal democracies, such as the theories of Rawls and Barry, concern for bodily survival becomes less central. The state must do far more than provide for basic needs. It must ensure that citizens have a fair opportunity (including a fair share of resources) to pursue their own conceptions of the good life or their own ‘comprehensive doctrines’. Our embodiment is taken for granted and the emphasis shifts to the (mental) freedom to choose how to live. Interestingly, the emphasis on the freedom to choose and pursue our particular conceptions of the good life permits individuals to choose to live a life in which they are connected to their physical environment. The liberal citizen can choose to be an organic gardener, to ‘get back to nature’, to work to conserve his local environment or even to campaign on global environmental issues. However, the citizen’s

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10 This may be an accurate criticism of classical ‘republican’ conceptions of citizenship.
11 See Bell (2004b) for further discussion of the liberal conception of the environment and our place in it.
12 I defend this claim in Bell (2004b) with particular reference to Beitz (1999) but I believe the same argument could be made (although, to varying degrees) with respect to Rawls (2001) and Barry (1995). However, Thomas Pogge may be (in some, if not all, respects) a significant exception (Pogge 2001, p.15).
conception of his connection to the environment, like his conception of the environment itself, is just that – his conception. Politically – or more accurately, from the standpoint of political justice – we remain ‘locationless’ (but embodied) individuals living in a world ‘made of property’.

The idea that we are ‘citizens of an environment’ can be understood as a corrective to the prevailing liberal conception of citizenship with its understandings of the individual and the environment. This correction might take either of two forms. On the one hand, we might argue that liberalism misconceives the nature of humans, the environment and the relations between them. On this view, liberalism is fundamentally flawed and the idea that we are ‘citizens of an environment’ is incompatible with an idea of liberal citizenship. On the other hand, we might argue that the prevailing conceptions of the individual, the environment and the relations between them in liberal theories (and practice) must be revised to make liberalism coherent. On this view, we can be liberal ‘citizens of an environment’. I propose to offer the second kind of argument.

3. Environmental citizenship and the coherence of liberalism

The central problem for liberalism is that it conceives of the environment (or the world) as ‘made of property’. I want to argue that this conception of the environment is not only distorting and dangerous but also internally inconsistent with two key elements of contemporary liberal theories. A coherent liberalism will recognise that liberal citizens are ‘citizens of an environment’.

First, the liberal conception of the environment as ‘made of property’ and individuals as ‘locationless’ is inconsistent with the liberal’s commitment to ensuring that citizens’ basic needs are met. Basic needs can only be met through the exploitation of the physical environment. There is a necessary connection between our nature as embodied humans and the environment – our survival depends on the physical environment. Liberals may have been able to ignore this connection – and conceive of the environment as ‘property’ – in the past but surely not now. In the twenty-first century, we know that human actions have significant effects on the environment, that the complexity of the environment means that the limits of those effects in space and time cannot be easily predicted, and that the environment can in turn have profound effects on human health and well-being. We also know that we live in a limited world with an increasing population, which makes more and more demands on environmental resources. A coherent liberalism cannot fail to conceive of the environment as more than ‘property’ – it is our ‘means of survival’; the ‘provider of our basic needs’. From the standpoint of political justice, the environment must (at least, partly) be conceived as the ‘provider of basic needs’ and our relationship to the environment conceived as one of dependence. If liberals are committed to the maintenance of liberal societies into the future (as they are), they must also be committed to the continued provision of basic needs for future generations. Unless we think that in the future humans will not be dependent on the environment to meet their basic needs, liberals must be committed to sustaining the environment as ‘provider of the basic needs of future generations’. In short, liberals cannot coherently avoid recognising that liberal
citizens (whose basic needs must be met) are ‘citizens of an environment’, which provides for their needs and on which they and future generations of citizens are dependent.

So far, I have said nothing that would force the liberal to reject the idea that we should conceive of the environment as ‘property’. Instead, I have argued that the liberal cannot conceive of the environment only as property. The environment must also be conceived as ‘provider of basic needs’ and insofar as meeting basic needs is a priority for liberals, it is this conception of the environment that must take priority. In other words, the principle of environmental sustainability for the sake of meeting the basic needs of present and future generations of citizens should take priority over any principle of ownership of the environment as property. But I have not argued that from the standpoint of political justice it is illegitimate to conceive of the environment as ‘property’. Once we have met the requirements of the environmental sustainability principle, why shouldn’t it be appropriate from the standpoint of political justice to think of the environment as ‘property’? Why shouldn’t the appropriate political ‘relationship’ between individuals and the environment be the legal relationship of ownership rather than some kind of physical, emotional or moral relationship?

One possible answer is that conceiving of the environment as property to be owned is morally wrong because it distorts our relationship with the environment. The immorality may lie either in the promotion of actions that wrong the environment or in our compromising the capacity of citizens to live the good life. However, political liberals cannot offer this kind of argument because it depends on the claim that there is a known truth about how we should relate to the environment. For political liberals, the ‘fact of reasonable pluralism’ – the fact that there are a multiplicity of reasonable moral doctrines held by reasonable people in democratic societies – means that it is unreasonable to defend principles of political justice that will govern the basic institutions of society by appealing to controversial moral claims (Rawls 2001, p.3). Therefore, metaphysical and moral claims about the environment and our proper place in it cannot be used to justify principles of political justice. Similarly, they cannot be the basis of the conception of the environment that is used in ‘public reason’ arguments about political justice (Rawls 2001, p.27).

Interestingly, the very reason why we can’t appeal to a moral truth about the environment to reject the conception of the environment as property is also the reason why liberals cannot consistently conceive of the environment as property. Let me explain. The conception of the environment as property is just one of many reasonable conceptions of the environment and our place in it that might be held by reasonable persons in a democratic society. It will be accepted in the comprehensive moral doctrines of some reasonable people and rejected in the comprehensive moral doctrines of other reasonable people. If political liberals cannot ground ‘public reason’ arguments about political justice in (controversial) comprehensive moral doctrines, they can no more conceive of the environment as property to be owned than they can conceive of it as something independently worthy of our care and concern.
So, how should liberals conceive of the environment and our place in it? We have already seen that the fundamental liberal commitment to social rights – the right to have our basic needs met – requires us to conceive of the environment as ‘provider of basic needs’. However, unless we think that there is only one ‘environmental pathway’ consistent with our conception of environment as provider of basic needs, there will be environmental choices that are underdetermined by that conception of the environment. How should the basic political structure be organised to make those choices? If we were to conceive of the environment as property for political purposes, we would think those decisions should be made in the market. Unless people do things that undermine the capacity of the environment to be provider of basic needs, they should be able (as individuals, associations, businesses) to do whatever they like with the environmental property that they own. If we were to conceive of the environment as something independently worthy of our care and concern for political purposes, we would think those decisions should be determined by correct ecological principles. However, we have seen that contemporary liberal theorists cannot conceive of the environment in either of these ways for political purposes. How then can we make decisions about the environment?

The solution is democracy – specifically, deliberative democracy with an aggregative decision-making procedure when (as will usually be the case) deliberation does not produce consensus. Democratic environmental decision-making, unlike free market decision-making, does not make any assumptions about the nature of the environment that are not supported by fundamental commitments of contemporary liberal theory. A democratic decision-making procedure conceives of the environment and our place in it as ‘a subject about which there is reasonable disagreement’. In this respect, a democratic approach to environmental decision-making is grounded in the ‘fact of reasonable pluralism’, which we have already seen is a fundamental commitment of contemporary liberals. For the purposes of political justice, we do not need to go beyond this fundamental commitment. Of course, the principle of political justice that we arrive at – namely, democracy – is a procedural rather than a substantive principle of justice. So, where our conception of the environment as ‘provider of basic needs’ is tied to substantive principles of intragenerational and intergenerational distributive justice, our conception of the environment as ‘a subject about which there is reasonable disagreement’ is tied to procedural principles for making decisions about the environment.

Interestingly, democratic procedures will allow the state (as instructed by the demos) to pursue comprehensive environmental ideals that some people may reject. Any real liberal state will not remain ‘neutral’ between competing conceptions of the environment and our place in it. Instead, its policies will reflect the conceptions that ‘win’ in the (politically just) democratic procedures. So, political debates about the environment (beyond what is required of the environment as ‘provider of basic needs’) will be debates among comprehensive metaphysical and moral doctrines. The only time that citizens cannot appeal to their comprehensive moral doctrines is in the prior debate about how environmental decisions should be made. In that debate – the justice debate – citizens must conceive of the environment as ‘a subject about which there is reasonable
disagreement’. Therefore, the justice debate can only be a debate about alternative democratic procedures. This is not the place to pursue that particular debate any further except to highlight the importance of deliberation as a key element of democratic procedures. A space for free and public discussion of citizens’ metaphysical and ethical beliefs about the environment is essential if we are to take seriously the idea that (some) people conceive of their beliefs as ‘truths’, which can be communicated, justified, and explained to others. Citizens must formally have the opportunity to try to persuade others to adopt their conceptions of the environment and our place in it.

So far, I have argued that the idea of liberal environmental citizenship is not just a matter of ‘adding together’ the ideas of ‘liberal citizenship’ and ‘environmental citizenship’. The adjective ‘environmental’ doesn’t just ‘extend the [liberal] discourse and practice of rights-claiming into the environmental context’ (Dobson 2003, p. 68). It doesn’t just add another set of rights to the existing list of liberal rights. Instead, we can interpret ‘environmental citizenship’ in a way that makes it an integral part of a coherent liberal theory. The problem with contemporary liberalism is not just that it hasn’t got a long enough list of rights but rather that it has an untenable conception of the environment and our place in it. I have argued that this conception of the environment as property not only ignores the role of the environment in satisfying our (liberal) rights to have our basic needs met (‘environment as provider of basic needs’) but is also inconsistent with the liberal commitment to the ‘fact of reasonable pluralism’ (‘environment as subject about which there is reasonable disagreement’). For the sake of the coherence of liberal theory, we must recognise that liberal citizens are ‘citizens of an environment’, which is both ‘provider of basic needs’ and ‘subject about which there is reasonable disagreement’. In the next two sections this conception of liberal environmental citizenship is developed in more detail.

4. Liberal environmental citizenship rights

Liberal theories of citizenship are usually constructed around accounts of citizens’ rights and duties. We should not expect an account of liberal environmental citizenship – or liberal citizens as citizens of an environment – to be structurally any different. So, what are the rights and duties of a liberal environmental citizen? In this section I set out the liberal environmental citizen’s rights and in the next section I consider his or her duties.

Liberal approaches to environmental rights have often focussed on rights to particular environmental goods, such as clean air and water.\(^{13}\) These arguments depend on the (often implicit) recognition that the environment is ‘provider of basic needs’. On the proposed account of liberal environmental citizenship, our substantive environmental rights would be derived from an account of basic human needs. However, the detail of these environmental rights is likely to be subject to considerable dispute. For example, a right to ‘clean air’ would not seem to be sufficiently clear or specific but any more

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\(^{13}\) For discussion of some of the problems with substantive environmental rights see Hayward (2001) and Bell (2004c).
detailed specification (either in terms of the chemical content of the air or the effects on human health of breathing it) is likely to be subject to reasonable disagreement. We might agree on the importance of the environment as provider of basic needs but still disagree on the detailed specification of the substantive environmental rights of citizens. This disagreement – within the bounds of ‘public reason’ to use the language of political liberalism – cannot be ‘rationally’ resolved but decisions must be made through agreed decision-making procedures (which might include judicial or legislative interpretation of the environmental rights necessary to satisfy citizens’ basic needs).

In addition to these ‘directly’ derived environmental rights, the conception of the environment as ‘provider of basic needs’ may also be the source of procedural environmental rights. It is a characteristic of liberal democracy that if citizens have a substantive right, they should also have a related procedural right, namely, the right to defend that substantive right. This may take two forms. First, we have the right to defend an already existing legal right. For example, if we have a legal right to welfare benefits, we have the right to claim those benefits, complain if we don’t get them and even take legal action to secure them. Similarly, if we are legally entitled to breathe air that meets particular air quality standards, we should also have the right to complain if the air in our area does not meet those standards and where necessary to take legal action to secure improvements (and, perhaps, compensation). The requirement that our substantive environmental rights are justiciable also implies that citizens must be entitled to information on environmental quality that is neither difficult to obtain nor difficult to comprehend.\(^\text{14}\) Second, if the legal right does not exist, we should have the right to campaign for it. In other words, we should have right to participate (through an accessible political process) in the making of environmental laws that define our substantive environmental rights.

Liberal environmental citizens also have two types of rights derived from the conception of the environment as a ‘subject about which there is disagreement’. First, they have procedural rights that entitle them to participate in policy-making and decision-making about the environment. If a liberal society has environmental decisions to make that are not fully determined by the requirement that it satisfy basic human needs, liberal environmental citizens must have the (procedural) right to participate in the (democratic) decision-making process. Liberal environmental citizens have the right to try to promote their own conception of the ‘good environment’ through the democratic process. Of course, the liberal environmental citizen might not want to preserve landscapes or maintain ‘green’ spaces. He might like concrete and tarmac or he might just believe that individuals should have the freedom to own and use the environment as they see fit (as long as its overall capacity to meet citizens’ basic needs is not compromised). In this sense, the liberal environmental citizen might not be a ‘green’ citizen (although, as we have seen he must be committed to a conception of environmental justice).

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\(^\text{14}\) Information rights of this type are emphasised (along with participation and access to justice) in the Aarhus Convention, which provides a useful starting point for thinking about how procedural environmental rights might be instantiated in law. I have discussed the Aarhus Convention in more detail in Bell (2004d).
Second, the liberal environmental citizen will have ‘personal rights’ that allow him to make choices in his everyday life about how he affects the environment. In those ‘spaces’ where the state does not prescribe action, the individual citizen has the right and the freedom to choose to take the environmental effects of his actions into account. He might choose to recycle his waste or not to own a car because he believes that it is morally wrong to pollute the planet. He might choose to do voluntary conservation work in his own community or in some other part of the world. He might choose to join an environmental non-governmental organisation, such as Friends of the Earth, and make a financial contribution to their campaigning work. However, he might choose to do none of these things. The liberal environmental citizen might choose not to be a ‘green’ citizen. Again, the idea of liberal environmental citizenship might diverge from some of the conventional conceptions of environmental citizenship. Indeed, unless we believe that the liberal environmental citizen has moral duties that go beyond his legally prescribed duties, he may completely disregard the environmental effects of his actions. The next section explores the duties of liberal environmental citizens.

5. Liberal Environmental Citizenship Duties

It is tempting to think that the duties of the liberal environmental citizen can simply be ‘read off’ or derived in a straightforward way from the account of the liberal environmental citizen’s rights. After all, it is often thought that all rights have correlative duties and that all (significant) duties are correlative to rights. So, if you have a right not to be killed, everyone else has the duty not to kill you. However, things become more complicated with more positive entitlements. For example, if you have a right to particular air quality standards, someone must have the correlative duty to ensure that those standards are met. However, it is unhelpful (and, perhaps, misleading) to say that everyone has the duty to ensure that those air quality standards are met. Instead, we need to look more closely at the duty and consider how it might be divided up among different duty-bearers. For liberals the ‘state’ plays a key role in dividing up duties and mediating between citizens qua duty-bearers and citizens qua rights-holders. In many cases the state takes on the role of primary duty-bearer. For example, it is the state that employs people to monitor air quality and to regulate potential polluters. Similarly, it is the state that employs people to develop and (in some cases) implement plans to improve air quality. However, the state also assigns some duties to non-state actors. For example, the state may introduce legislation that requires commercial enterprises to monitor and report on their emissions or prohibits them from using particular polluting technologies. Similarly, it may require the polluter to pay some or all of the costs of cleaning up pollution. A detailed account of all of the (environmental) duties that the state should assign to liberal environmental citizens is obviously beyond the scope of this (or any other) paper. Instead, we need to think about the generic duties of the liberal environmental citizen (just as we thought about the generic rights of the liberal environmental citizen).

The most obvious duty of the liberal environmental citizen (as of all liberal citizens) is the duty ‘to comply with just institutions that exist and apply to [them]’ (Rawls 1999, p.
The duty to obey just laws obviously includes a duty to obey just environmental laws. For example, if there is a just law that imposes limits on vehicle emissions, the liberal environmental citizen has a duty to comply with that law. Similarly, if there is a just law that imposes an eco-tax on petrol, the liberal environmental citizen has a duty to pay that tax. The liberal duty to obey the law depends on the law being a just law. How do we know when an environmental law is a just law? Drawing on our discussion of environmental rights, we might identify two legitimate or just sources of environmental law. First, laws that relate to our substantive environmental rights are just laws if they meet two criteria: they are based on public reason arguments derived from the idea of the environment as provider of basic needs; and they are made through a democratically endorsed decision-making procedure. Second, laws that relate to our ideals of the good environment (but not to our substantive environmental rights) are just laws if they have been either directly or indirectly made by voters in a deliberative democracy with just law making procedures. Of course, there may be disagreement about whether an environmental law (or environment-related law) meets these criteria but that does not undermine the basic obligation to obey just environmental laws.

Liberal citizens also have a duty ‘to further just arrangements not yet established, at least when that can be done without too much cost to ourselves’ (Rawls 1999, p.99). The liberal environmental citizen has a duty to promote just environmental laws that will secure the substantive and procedural environmental rights of all citizens. It is important to understand the potential scale of this duty. Insofar as we conceive of the liberal environmental citizen as a ‘citizen of planet Earth’, he will have a (prima facie) duty to promote environmental justice across the world. The liberal environmental citizen is a citizen of an environment in two respects: the environment provides for his basic needs; and he has a comprehensive moral doctrine, which (at least implicitly) includes a conception of the good environment. In the context of modern environmental problems, such as climate change and ozone depletion, and modern patterns of international trade, it is difficult to avoid understanding ‘citizen of an environment’ as ‘citizen of planet Earth’. Our basic needs (and the basic needs of future generations) would seem to depend on the integrity of the global ecosystem as much or more than they depend on more local ecosystems and the resources that can be drawn from our local environment. Indeed, if we did (or do) find that we cannot meet our basic needs from our own local environment, we would (or do) seek to extract resources from other places on ‘planet Earth’. Moreover, international communications and travel have made us all aware of the many different local environments throughout the world. For many of us (at least the richer among us) an important part of our conception of the good life is visiting, seeing (e.g., through television, books, pictures) or simply knowing of the existence of other local environments. Many citizens’ conceptions of the good environment are not limited to their own local environment; they have a conception of other good local environments and, in some respects, a conception of the good global environment. So, while we may be ‘citizens of particular local environments’ we are also ‘citizens of planet Earth’. Therefore, our (prima facie) duty is to promote environmentally just institutions across the globe.
The liberal duty to promote just institutions would clearly be very demanding (especially for cosmopolitan liberals) but for the ‘cost proviso’ that we should only seek to ‘further just arrangements … when that can be done without too much cost to ourselves’ (Rawls 1999, p.99). The ‘cost proviso’ is essential in a world where there are serious injustices. A liberal environmental citizen in any contemporary democratic society could devote every minute of his life to promoting global environmental justice and still leave plenty for others to do. In other words, the duty to promote just arrangements could be utterly all consuming leaving no space for decent liberal environmental citizens to do other things or have ‘more rounded’ lives. The cost proviso may be an essential feature of a plausible liberal theory but it is also problematic in two respects. First, there is the rather obvious problem of deciding what limits it places on the duty to promote just institutions. We may always have a prima facie duty to promote just arrangements but when do we have an all things considered duty to promote just institutions? Is a liberal environmental citizen always duty bound to vote for laws or a government that he believes will promote global (environmental) justice? Do all liberal environmental citizens have a duty to involve themselves in political campaigns for global (environmental) justice at some time in the lives? Second, the cost proviso raises a more fundamental problem about the relationship between rights and duties and the possibility of achieving just arrangements. If just institutions are designed to secure citizens’ rights, the absence of just institutions means that some citizens’ rights are not being secured. However, if all rights have correlative duties, the failure to secure some citizens’ rights must involve a failure by someone to do their duty. We might plausibly construe the duty to promote just arrangements as the residual (or ‘catch-all’) duty correlative to all of those citizens’ rights that are not currently being secured. But, if that duty comes with a cost proviso, it would seem that there may be cases where no one has the all things considered duty to devote more time or effort to securing some citizens’ rights. In other words, there might be cases where rights remain unsecured but no one is failing to do their duty. How should we deal with this possibility? Should the cost proviso be ‘set’ to ensure that if everyone (or everyone ‘appropriately placed’) were to do their all things considered duty, just arrangements would be secured? Should rights claims be modified to take account of what could be achieved if everyone were to do their all things considered duty to promote just arrangements?

So far, I have argued that liberal environmental citizens have two kinds of duty: a duty to obey just laws; and a duty to promote just arrangements (which is limited by a cost proviso). It is likely that a liberal environmental citizen who does his duty will do many of the things suggested by ‘conventional’ accounts of environmental citizenship. For example, he will not use a car with illegal emissions, leave litter in the countryside, or illegally buy products whose import has been banned. In addition, he is likely to play a role in campaigning for global environmental justice. For example, he may join Greenpeace and pay his annual subscription, write letters to his MP on environmental issues or even take part in public protests aimed at securing and protecting citizens’ substantive or procedural environmental rights. In fulfilling his duty to promote just arrangements

15 John Barry makes a similar point about the ‘burdensome’ nature of a ‘heavily duty-based conception of green citizenship’ (2003, pp.5-6).
arrangements, he exercises his procedural environmental rights to be involved in environmental law making (although, he may go beyond those rights if he takes illegal direct action). He also exercises his ‘personal right’ or freedom to choose how his actions affect the environment. In choosing to spend time or money campaigning or supporting campaigns for environmental justice, he freely (but dutifully) chooses to try to promote just arrangements.

This conception of liberal environmental citizenship does leave out two important categories of action that are often included in accounts of environmental citizenship. First, the liberal environmental citizen does not have a duty to protect ‘green spaces’ or natural landscapes. He is not required to campaign for their protection, to engage in conservation work or to contribute money to help support conservation work. As we saw earlier, the liberal environmental citizen need not be a ‘green’. The ‘green’ has a particular conception of the good environment that goes beyond the liberal conception of the environment as ‘provider of basic needs’ and ‘a subject about which there is disagreement’. The ‘green’ might be still be a ‘decent’ or ‘good’ liberal environmental citizen if he fulfils the duties of a liberal environmental citizen and then exercises his personal right to spend some of his time or money on promoting ‘green’ causes. However, if he prioritises ‘green’ causes over his duties as a liberal environmental citizen, we might think that he is a good ‘green’ but we cannot see him as a good liberal (environmental) citizen.

Second, it would seem that the liberal environmental citizen does not have a duty to make personal choices that will contribute to the promotion of global environmental justice. His duty to promote just arrangements is a duty to act politically to promote just arrangements. It is not a duty to act privately within existing unjust arrangements to secure other people’s environmental rights. For example, the liberal environmental citizen does not have a duty to give up his car unless there is a law that requires him to give up his car. He may believe that by giving up his car he would contribute positively to preventing local air pollution or global climate change and, thereby, help to secure someone’s substantive environmental rights. Even if he is correct, he does not have a duty to give up his car. It is this apparent rejection of private environmental duties that seems to put liberal environmental citizenship most clearly at odds with conventional accounts of environmental citizenship. However, I want to suggest that liberalism need not be committed to the rejection of private environmental duties.

The liberal can endorse private environmental duties, such as recycling and limiting car use, for two kinds of reason. First, private pro-environmental actions might be the best way of promoting just arrangements. For example, the best way of promoting government actions (laws and policies) that facilitate recycling might be for members of the public to voluntarily recycle their own waste. High levels of voluntary recycling (despite the difficulty) might be the clearest sign to a government that there would be popular support for public spending on improved recycling facilities. Recycling his waste might be the most effective contribution that a liberal environmental citizen can make to promoting just environmental laws and policies. Insofar as private pro-environmental actions are necessary or effective means of promoting changes in law or
policies, liberal environmental citizens (acting on their duty to promote just arrangements) may have a duty to perform them.

Second, there may be some private pro-environmental actions (again, recycling may be an example) that a liberal state cannot require us to do by law but can declare to be ‘a citizen’s duty’. My point is not the familiar (but false) claim that the liberal state cannot make laws that limit citizens’ freedom of choice. Liberal states should make laws that limit citizens’ freedom, including laws that limit our freedom for the sake of protecting the integrity of the environment (as provider of basic needs). The liberal state might limit our freedom in any number of ways, from prohibiting the dropping of litter to prohibiting the use of cars. If the laws are properly justified on ‘public reason’ grounds, their impact on our basic rights and freedoms will already have been taken into consideration. For example, the impact on some citizens’ freedom of movement caused by prohibiting cars will have been weighed against the impact on the ability of the environment to provide for the basic needs of current and future generations of citizens caused by allowing car use. If environmental laws are properly justified and made through a legitimate democratic procedure, the fact that they remove freedoms we might previously have had does not justify their rejection. However, there may be some private pro-environmental actions that a liberal state should support and encourage but should not require by law. In such cases, the balance of ‘public reasons’ may be against law making but in favour of ‘duty making’. For example, if the enforcement of a law is likely to be impossible without serious invasion of citizens’ privacy, as it might be in the case of compulsory recycling, the balance of ‘public reasons’ is unlikely to support law making. However, it might support declaring that citizens have a duty to recycle their waste to protect the environment. The declaration of a ‘citizens’ duty’ does not threaten the privacy of anyone. It may also seem like a ‘cheap’ option because it does not involve any enforcement costs. However, this may not be the case because ensuring compliance with a ‘citizens’ duty’ is likely to involve substantial facilitation, promotion and education costs. The ‘decent’ or ‘good’ liberal environmental citizen should not need much prompting to do those ‘citizens’ duties’ that are justified by ‘public reason’ arguments grounded in the conception of the environment as provider of basic needs and affirmed through legitimate democratic decision-making procedures. He respects ‘citizens’ duties’ in the same way that he respects laws. The ‘not-so-good’ citizen is likely to need more persuasion to do ‘citizens’ duties’ just as it will take more effective enforcement measures to get the ‘even-less-good’ citizen to comply with laws.

I have suggested that liberal theories identify two kinds of duty for liberal citizens – the duty to obey the law and the duty to promote just arrangements. Liberal environmental citizens will have these two duties. I have also argued that, notwithstanding common assumptions about liberalism, liberal environmental citizens may also have duties to do private pro-environmental actions. Such actions might be an effective way of promoting just arrangements or they might be deemed by a liberal state to be ‘citizens’ duties’. So, the liberal environmental citizen may have many of the same duties as the conventional environmental citizen except that he has no specifically ‘green’ duties to protect natural landscapes or ‘green’ spaces.
6. Conclusion

‘Environmental citizenship’ entered the environmental policy discourse before it entered the academic discourse of environmental politics or environmental political theory. The challenge for academics is to explore the idea and place it in relevant theoretical frameworks and contexts. The ultimate aim of that exploration should be not only to develop better theories but also to use those theories to inform practice. In this paper, I have argued that one interesting and plausible way of understanding the idea of environmental citizenship locates it in liberal political theory, specifically contemporary cosmopolitan political liberalism. If we conceive of liberal citizens as ‘citizens of an environment’, we are not only able to develop a liberal conception of environmental citizenship but also to correct two serious inconsistencies in liberal theory caused by problems in the liberal conception of the environment and our place in it. In developing the idea of liberal environmental citizenship, we have identified the generic rights and duties of the liberal environmental citizen. The next step – and one too many for this paper – would be to use this account of the generic rights and duties of the liberal environmental citizen as a starting point for a more substantive and practical account of the liberal citizens’ environmental rights and duties.

References


