John Clark
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quate synthesis of theoretical reflection and empirical inquiry, attains an increasingly comprehensive theoretical scope, and strives for a truly dialectical relation to creative social practice — offering the guidance of reflection and remaining open to guidance by the truth of experience.

The project of a social ecology will certainly gain impetus through the growing awareness of global ecological crisis and deterioration of the ties of human community. Yet it will be moved and inspired most by its affirmative ecological faith — by its love of humanity in all its magnificent expressions, its wonder at the diverse manifestations of life on earth, and its awe at the mystery of being. It will also learn to accept human limitations and the tragic dimension of history, and put aside the illusions of shallow progressivism, revolutionary fantasy, and Promethean heroism. It will find hope rather in a vision of the human community — freed from its quest for domination of self, of others, of objects, of nature — realizing its own good through participating in and contributing to the good of the larger community of life. In pursuing this vision, social ecology realizes its deepest meaning as a reflection on the earth household, a reflection that reveals our place as companions in our common journey.

> "Humanity is Nature achieving self-consciousness."
> — Elisée Reclus[1]

In its deepest and most authentic sense, a social ecology is the awakening earth community reflecting on itself, uncovering its history, exploring its present predicament, and contemplating its future.[2] One aspect of this awakening is a process of philosophical reflection. As a philosophical approach, a social ecology investigates the ontological, epistemological, ethical and political dimensions of the relationship between the social and the ecological, and seeks the practical wisdom that results from such reflection. It seeks to give us, as beings situated in the course of real human and natural history, guidance in facing specific challenges and opportunities. In doing so, it develops an analysis that is both holistic and dialectical, and a social practice that might best be described as an eco-communitarianism.

The Social and the Ecological

A social ecology is first of all, an ecology. There are strong communitarian implications in the very term ecology. Literally, it means the *logos*, the reflection on or study of, the *oikos*, or household. Ecology thus calls upon us to begin to think of the entire planet as a kind of community of which we are members. It tells us that all of our policies and problems are in a

[1] Elisée Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, 6 vol. (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905–08), Vol. I, p. i.

[2] "Social ecology" is also an interdisciplinary field of academic study that investigates the interrelationship between human social institutions and ecological or environmental issues. It is closely related to human ecology, the area of the biological sciences that deals with the role of human beings in ecosystems. However, studies in social ecology are much broader in scope, incorporating many areas of social and natural science in their analysis. This interdisciplinary social ecology offers much of the empirical data which philosophical social ecology utilizes in its theoretical reflection.

sense "domestic" ones. While a social ecology sometimes loses its bearings as it focuses on specific social concerns, when it is consistent it always situates those concerns within the context of the earth household, whatever else it may study within that community. The dialectical approach of a social ecology requires social ecologists to consider the ecological dimensions of all "social" phenomena. There are no "non-ecological" social phenomena to consider apart from the ecological ones.

In some ways, the term "social" in "social ecology" is the more problematical one. There is a seeming paradox in the use of the term "social" for what is actually a strongly communitarian tradition. Traditionally, the "social" realm has been counterposed to the "communal" one, as in Tönnies' famous distinction between society and community, Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft. Yet this apparent self-contradiction may be a path to a deeper truth. A social ecology is a project of reclaiming the communitarian dimensions of the social, and it is therefore appropriate that it seek to recover the communal linguistic heritage of the very term itself. "Social" is derived from "socius," or "companion." A "society" is thus a relationship between companions — in a sense, it is itself a household within the earth household.

An Evolving Theory

Over the past quarter-century, a broad social and ecological philosophy has emerged under the name "social ecology." While this philosophy has recently been most closely associated with the thought of social theorist Murray Bookchin, it continues a long tradition of ecological communitarian thought going back well into the nineteenth century. The lineage of social ecology is often thought to originate in the mutualistic, communitarian ideas of the anarchist geographer Kropotkin (1842–1921). One can certainly not deny that de-

technological system, and the growing and intimately interrelated social and ecological crises. There is no better example of the power of broad social ecological analysis.

The Future of Social Ecology

Future research in social ecology will consist of much more detailed study of these issues and many other questions related to the development of the global economic, political and technological systems and the resulting social and ecological consequences. The critical theoretical framework of social ecology will become richer and more highly articulated as it incorporates these empirically-based studies. At the same time, its theoretical vision of a communitarian regionalism will be enriched and rendered more determinate by the proliferation of empirical, experiential projects in the tradition of Geddes' regional survey, and its political and economic theory will be transformed as evidence is assimilated from continuing experiments in ecological and communitarian organization and social practice.

Social ecology is at the present moment in a stage of rapid transformation, self-reflection, and expansion of its theoretical horizons. It is in the process of escaping from the dogmatic tendencies that have threatened its theoretical vitality and practical relevance, and the sectarian narrowness that has reactively defined it in opposition to other ecophilosophies. It is ready to withdraw from the "contest of ecologies" and move forward in its theoretical development, in creative dialogue with other philosophies.[59] It is now in a position to realize its potential as a holistic and dialectical philosophy that seeks greater openness and opportunity for growth, works toward a more ade-

[59] I have suggested some of the ways in which dialogue between social ecology and deep ecology might be usefully explored in "How Wide Is Deep Ecology?" in *Inquiry* 39 (June 1996): 189–201.

in individual behavior, regulatory legislation, structural political and economic reform, citizens' direct action, voluntary association, and large-scale resistance movements do not each have roles to play in social ecological transformation under various historical conditions.

To date, the best general assessment of economic globalization and corporate power from a social ecological perspective is Athanasiou's *Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor*.[57] Athanasiou points out how the link between systemic social issues and ecological crisis is increasingly becoming evident. He notes, for example, that while until recently "only a few isolated radicals saw the Third World's crushing international debt as a green issue, it is well known as a key link in the fiscal chains strangling the world's ecosystems."[58] Athanasiou presents a model of social ecological analysis that goes far beyond generalizations about a human "quest for domination" or a "grow or die" economy. For example, he explains how in return for loans, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank impose on poor countries "Structural Adjustment Programs" (SAPs) that are socially and ecologically disastrous, as rational they may seem from a narrow economistic perspective. SAPs demand drastic reductions in public spending for education, health, housing and other social goods, eliminate subsidies for agriculture, food and social services, encourage production for export, eliminate trade barriers, raise interest rates and lower wages. The result is a more rationalized and superficially stable economy in which poverty increases, the quality of life declines for most people, and environmental destruction accelerates to fuel export-based production.

The phenomenon of globalization shows with increasing clarity the link between transnational capital, the state, the

[57] Tom Athanasiou, *Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1996).

[58] Ibid., p. 9.

spite Kropotkin's positivistic tendencies and his problematical conception of nature, he has an important relationship to social ecology. His ideas concerning mutual aid, political and economic decentralization, human-scaled production, communitarian values, and the history of democracy have all made important contributions to the tradition.[3] However, it is rooted much more deeply in the thought of another great anarchist thinker, the French geographer Elisée Reclus (1830–1905). During the latter half of the last century, and into the beginning of the present one, Reclus developed a far-ranging "social geography" that laid the foundations of a social ecology, as it explored the history of the interaction between human society and the natural world, starting with the emergence of *homo sapiens* and extending to Reclus' own era of urbanization, technological development, political and economic globalization, and embryonic international cooperation.

Reclus envisioned humanity achieving a free, communitarian society in harmony with the natural world. His extensive historical studies trace the long record of experiments in cooperation, direct democracy and human freedom, from the ancient Greek polis, through Icelandic democracy, medieval free cities and independent Swiss cantons, to modern movements for social transformation and human emancipation. At the same time, he depicts the rise and development of the modern centralized state, concentrated capital and authoritarian ideologies. His sweeping historical account includes an extensive critique of both capitalism and authoritarian socialism from an egalitarian and anti-authoritarian perspective, and an analysis of the destructive ecological effects of modern

[3] See especially *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968) and *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (Boston: Extending Horizons, 1955) for important discussions of many of these topics, and his pamphlet, *The State: Its Historic Role* (London: Freedom Press, 1970) on communitarian and democratic traditions.

technology and industry allied with the power of capital and the state. It is notable that a century ago Reclus' social theory attempted to reconcile a concern for justice in human society with compassionate treatment of other species and respect for the whole of life on earth — a philosophical problematic that has only recently reemerged in ecophilosophy and environmental ethics.[4]

Many of the themes in Reclus' work were developed further by the Scottish botanist and social thinker Patrick Geddes (1854–1932), who described his work as "biosophy," the philosophical study of the biosphere. Geddes focuses on the need to create decentralized communities in harmony with surrounding cultural and ecological regions and proposes the development of new technologies (neotechnics) that would foster humane, ecologically-balanced communities. He envisions an organicically developing cooperative society, based on the practice of mutual aid at the most basic social levels and spreading throughout society as these small communities voluntarily federate into larger associations. Geddes orients his work around the concepts of "Place, Work, and Folk," envisioning a process of incorporating the particularities of the natural region, humane, skillful and creative modes of production, and organically developing local culture into his "Eutopia" or good community. Geddes calls his approach a "sociography," or synthesis of sociological and geographical studies. He applies this approach in his idea of the detailed regional survey as a means of achieving community planning that is rooted in natural and cultural realities and grows out of them organically. He thus

[4] For the first English translation of some of Reclus' most important texts, and an extensive commentary on his thought, see John Clark and Camille Martin, *Liberty, Equality, Geography: The Social Thought of Elisée Reclus* (Littleton, CO: Aigis Publications, 1996). For a concise discussion of Reclus' relevance to contemporary ecological thought, see John Clark, "The Dialectical Social Geography of Elisée Reclus" in *Philosophy and Geography* 1 (forthcoming).

The New Leviathan

If a social ecology cannot be dogmatic in its economic prescriptions for the future, it must be entirely forthright in its judgment concerning the dominant role of global corporate capital in today's intensifying social and ecological crisis. While some social ecologists have repeated vague cliches about the market and capitalism (sometimes confusedly conflating the two), social ecological analysis consistently results in the inescapable conclusion that the growing global dominance of corporate power is the major institutional factor in the crisis. Whatever good intentions individual employees, managers, executives and stockholders may have, large corporations operate according to the constraints built into their organizational structures and according to the requirements of global economic competition. To the degree that the prevailing conception of global "free trade" is realized in practice, a corporation that operates according to ecologically optimal decision-making processes will be devoured by its more ruthlessly rational competitors. While there are in some cases strong incentives for transnational corporations to appear socially and ecologically responsible, there are stronger pragmatic requirements of rational self-interest that they act in socially and ecologically irresponsible ways. A social ecology must therefore concern itself with the various means by which more responsible decision-making might be achieved. This might include regulation by local, regional and national governmental bodies, organization of consumers, organization of workers, transformation of organizational structures of existing enterprises, creation of new and more responsible forms of economic organization, and various forms of citizens' direct action. The effectiveness of any of these approaches can only be determined through experience and experimentation. There has been no convincing demonstration that change in personal and cultural values, changes

imagine a broad spectrum of self-managed enterprises, individual producers and small partnerships that would enter into a growing cooperative economic sector that would incorporate social ecological values. The extent to which the strong communitarian principle of distribution according to need could be achieved would be proportional to the degree to which cooperative and communitarian values had evolved — a condition that would depend on complex historical factors that cannot be predicted beforehand.

Bookchin suggests that in a transitional phase the "rights" of the small businesses will not be infringed upon,[56] though his goal is a fully-developed municipalist system in which these businesses will not be allowed to exist. It is far from obvious, however, why these enterprises should not continue to exist in the long term, alongside more cooperative forms of production, as long as the members of the community choose to support them. There is no conclusive evidence that such small enterprises are necessarily exploitative or that they cannot be operated in an ecologically sound manner. Particularly if the larger enterprises in a regional economy are democratically operated, the persistence of such small individual enterprises does not seem incompatible with social ecological values. This possibility is even more plausible to the degree that the community democratically establishes just and effective parameters of social and ecological responsibility. The dogmatic assertion that in an ecological society only one form of economic organization can exist (whether municipalized enterprises or any other form) is incompatible with the affirmation of historical openness and social creativity and imagination that is basic to a social ecology.

[56] Ibid., p. 275.

makes an important contribution to developing the empirical and bioregional side of the social ecological tradition.[5]

Many of Geddes' insights were later integrated into the expansive vision of society, nature, and technology of his student, the American historian and social theorist Lewis Mumford (1895–1992), who is one of the most pivotal figures in the development of the social ecological tradition. Ramachandra Guha is certainly right when he states that "[t]he range and richness of Mumford's thought mark him as the pioneer American social ecologist …"[6] Most of the fundamental concepts to which Bookchin later attached to the term "social ecology" were borrowed from Mumford's much earlier ecological regionalism.[7] The philosophical basis for Mumford's social analysis is what he calls an "organic" view of reality, a holistic and developmental approach he explicitly identifies as an "ecological" one.[8] In accord with this outlook, he sees the evolution of human society as a continuation of a cosmic process of organic growth, emergence, and development. Yet he also sees human history as the scene of a counter-movement within society and nature, a growing process of mechanization.

Much like Reclus before him, Mumford depicts history as a great struggle between freedom and oppression. In Mumford's

[5] For discussions of Geddes' guiding values of "Sympathy, Synthesis and Synergy," and his regional concepts of "Place, Work, and Folk," see Murdo Macdonald, "Patrick Geddes in Context" in *The Irish Review* (Autumn/Winter 1994) and "Art and the Context in Patrick Geddes' Work" in *Spazio e Società/ Space and Society* (Oct.-Dec. 1994): 28–39.

[6] Ramachandra Guha, "Lewis Mumford, the Forgotten American Environmentalist: An Essay in Rehabilitation," in David Macauley, ed. *Minding Nature: The Philosophers of Ecology* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), p. 210.

[7] Mumford did not choose to coin any convenient term to epitomize his social theory. I take the term "ecological regionalism" from Mark Luccarelli's very helpful study, *Lewis Mumford and the Ecological Region* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).

[8] *The Pentagon of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), p. 386.

interpretation of this drama, we find on one side the forces of mechanization, power, domination, and division, and on the other, the impulse toward organism, creativity, love, and unification. The tragedy of history is the increasing ascendancy of mechanism, and the progressive destruction of our organic ties to nature and to one another. The dominant moment of history, he says, has been "one long retreat from the vitalities and creativities of a self-sustaining environment and a stimulating and balanced communal life."[9]

Mumford describes the first decisive step in this process as the creation in the ancient world of the Megamachine, in the form of regimented, mechanized massing of human labor-power under hierarchical control to build the pyramids as an expression of despotic power. While the Megamachine in this primal barbaric form has persisted and evolved over history, it reemerges in the modern world in a much more complex, technological manifestation, with vastly increased power, diverse political, economic and cultural expressions, and apparent imperviousness to human control or even comprehension. Mumford sees the results of this historical movement as the emergence of a new totalitarian order founded on technological domination, economic rationality and profit, and fueled by a culture of obsessive consumption. The results are a loss of authentic selfhood, a dissolution of organic community, and a disordered, destructive relationship to the natural world.

Mumford's vision of the process of reversing these historical tendencies is a social ecological one. He foresees a process of social decentralization in which democratic institutions are recreated at local and regional levels as part of organic but diverse communities. "Real human communities," he contends, are those that combine unity with diversity and "preserve so-

[9] "The Human Prospect" in *Interpretations and Forecasts*: 1922–1972 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), p. 465.

municipal funds and placed under growing public control."[52] Taken together, such suggestions describe the beginnings of a "Green economics" that could have a major transformative effect on society.[53]

One of the most compelling aspects of Bookchin's political thought is the centrality of his ethical critique of the dominant economistic society, and his call for the creation of a "moral economy" as a precondition for a just ecological society. He asserts that such a "moral economy" implies the emergence of "a productive community" to replace the amoral "mere marketplace," that currently prevails. It requires further that producers "explicitly agree to exchange their products and services on terms that are not merely 'equitable' or 'fair' but supportive of each other."[54] Such an analysis assumes that if the prevailing system of economic exploitation and the dominant economistic culture based on it are to be eliminated, a sphere must be created in which people find new forms of exchange to replace the capitalist market, and this sphere must be capable of continued growth. Bookchin sees this realm as that of the municipalized economy, in which property becomes "part of a larger whole that is controlled by the citizen body in assembly as citizens."[55]

However, for the present at least, it is not clear why the municipalized economic sector should be looked upon as the primary realm, rather than as one area among many in which significant economic transformation might begin. It is possible to

[52] Ibid.

[53] Brian Tokar, in his book *The Green Alternative*, has sketched an even more extensive Green economic program, based on what is fundamentally a social ecological analysis. Tokar's concise and well-written introduction to the Green movement should be consulted for a clear example of an experimental, non-dogmatic social ecological politics and economics. See *The Green Alternative: Creating an Ecological Future* (San Pedro, CA: R. & E. Miles, 1992).

[54] Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1986), p. 91.

[55] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 263.

cratic discourse" that should "encompass the affective as well as the cognitive mode."[50] Such concerns echo recent contributions in feminist ethics, which have pointed out that the dominant moral and political discourse have exhibited a one-sided emphasis on ideas and principles, and neglected the realm of feeling and sensibility. In this spirit, a social ecology will explore the ways in which the transition from formal to substantive democracy depends not only on the establishment of more radically democratic forms, but on the establishment of cultural practices that foster a democratic sensibility.

Social Eco-nomics

In view of the dominance of the economic in contemporary society and the importance of the economic in any society, a social ecology must devote considerable attention to the means of creating a socially and ecologically responsible system of production and consumption. Bookchin has stressed the contribution that can be made by such alternatives as community credit unions, community supported agriculture, community gardens, "civic banks to fund municipal enterprises and land purchases" and community-owned enterprises.[51] In a discussion of how a municipalist movement might be initiated practically, he presents proposals that emphasize cooperatives and small individually-owned businesses. He suggests that the process could begin with the public purchase of unprofitable enterprises (which would then be managed by the workers), the establishment of land trusts, and the support for small-scale productive enterprises. He concludes that in such a system "cooperatives, farms, and small retail outlets would be fostered with

[50] Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 176.

[51] Murray Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1987), p. 276 and "Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview" in Green Perspectives 24 (1991): 4.

cial as well as visual variety."[10] Following Geddes and prefiguring bioregionalism, Mumford believes that the local community must be rooted in the natural and cultural realities of the region. "Strong regional centers of culture" are the basis for "an active and securely grounded local life."[11] Regionalism is not only an ecological concept, but also a political and cultural one, and is the crucial link between the most particular and local dimensions and the most universal and global ones. "The rebuilding of regional cultures" Mumford says, "will give depth and maturity to the world culture that has likewise long been in the process of formation."[12] Mumford contends that an epochal process of personal and social transformation is necessary if the course of history is to be redirected toward a humane, ecological, life-affirming future. Much in the spirit of communitarian philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965), he foresees a humanized, cooperative world culture emerging out of regenerated regional cultures that arise in turn out of a regenerated human spirit.[13]

While he begins with a general perspective on society and nature that is close to Mumford's, Bookchin makes a number of crucial contributions to the further development of a social ecology.[14] Most significantly, he broadens the theoretical basis of the communitarian, organicist, and regionalist tradition de-

[10] Ibid., p. 471

[11] *The Condition of Man* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1944), p. 403.

[12] Ibid., p. 404.

[13] An adequate account of the eco-communitarian tradition would explore Buber's enormous contribution. See his major political work, *Paths in Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), including his chapters on his predecessors Kropotkin and Landauer, and, especially, his essay, "In the Midst of Crisis." Significantly, Buber defines the "social" in terms of the degree to which the "center" extends outward, and is "earthly," "creaturely," and "attached." (p. 135).

[14] Bookchin's best presentation of his version of social ecology is found in *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982).

veloped by Reclus, Geddes and Mumford by making dialectical analysis a central focus. He thereby opens the way for more critical and theoretically sophisticated discussions of concepts like holism, unity-in-diversity, development, and relatedness. He also develops Mumford's defense of an organic world view into a more explicitly ecological theoretical perspective. Mumford's analysis of the historical transformation of organic society into the Megamachine is expanded in Bookchin's somewhat broader account of the emergence of diverse forms of domination and of the rise of hierarchical society. He devotes more detailed attention to the interaction of the state, economic classes, patriarchy, gerontocracy, and other factors in the evolution of domination. Of particular importance is Bookchin's emphasis on the central role of the developing global capitalist economy in ecological crisis, which corrects Mumford's tendency to overemphasize the technical at the expense of the economic.[15] He also adds some additional chapters to the "history of freedom," especially in his discussions of the mutualistic, liberatory and ecological dimensions of tribal societies, millenarian religious movements and utopian experiments. Finally, while his predecessors presented a rather general vision of a politics that was anti-authoritarian, democratic, decentralist and ecological, Bookchin gives a concrete political direction to the discussion of such a politics in his proposals for libertarian municipalism and confederalism.

Some of these contributions have come at a considerable cost. Although Bookchin develops and expands the tradition of social ecology in important ways, he has at the same time also

[15] Unfortunately, he lapses into the undialectical "fallacy that technology is a neutral tool to be used or abused by the one who wields it," as David Watson notes in *Beyond Bookchin: Preface for a Future Social Ecology* (Brooklyn, NY and Detroit, MI: Autonomedia and Black & Red, 1996), p. 119. See the entire chapter, "The social ecologist as technocrat" (pp. 119–167) for a careful dissection of Bookchin's technological optimism from a social ecological perspective.

municipalism, but rather work in many political, economic and cultural realms.[49]

A social ecology recognizes that political forms, as important as they may be, are given meaning and realize whatever liberatory and communitarian potential they may have within a larger political culture. The political culture is thus both historically and theoretically more fundamental. Consequently, when contemplating a promising political form, a social ecology will consider the ways in which the political culture may limit or liberate the potentials in that form. The institution of the assembly, for example, possesses not only the potential to foster freedom, authentic democracy, solidarity and civic virtue, but also a considerable potential for the generation of elitism, egotism, domineering personality traits, and power-seeking behavior. Such dangers are avoided not only through procedures within assemblies themselves, but above all by the creation of a communitarian, democratic culture that will express itself in decision-making bodies and in all other institutions. For assemblies and other organs of direct democracy to contribute effectively to an ecological community, they must be purged of the competitive, agonistic, masculinist aspects that have often corrupted them. They can only fulfill their democratic promise if they are an integral expression of a cooperative community that embodies in its institutions the love of humanity and nature.

Barber makes exactly this point when he states that "strong" democracy "attempts to balance adversary politics by nourishing the mutualistic art of listening," and going beyond mere toleration, seeks "common rhetoric evocative of a common demo-

[49] Bookchin's reduction of eco-communitarian politics to libertarian municipalism is a deeply flawed, undialectical and fundamentally dogmatic political problematic, and it is not possible to discuss most of its shortcoming here. For a detailed critique, see John Clark, "Municipal Dreams: Murray Bookchin's Idealist Politics" in Andrew Light, ed., *Social Ecology After Bookchin* (New York: Guilford Publications, forthcoming).

This conception of regional democracy based in local democracy is a corollary of the general social ecological conception (expressed by Geddes) of regional and larger communities growing out of household, neighborhood, and local communities.

Bookchin has carried on this tradition in arguing for the liberatory potential of the town or neighborhood assembly, and has given his libertarian predecessors' ideas of social and political decentralization a more specific and concrete expression. He and other social ecologists point out the ways in which such an assembly offers the community an arena in which its needs and aspirations can be formulated publicly in an active and creative manner, and in which a strong and vital citizenship can be developed and exercised in practice. The community assembly offers a means through which a highly-valued multiplicity and diversity can be unified and coordinated, as the citizens engage practically in the pursuit of the good of the whole community. It is also on a scale at which the community's many-sided relationship to its specific ecological and bioregional milieu can be vividly grasped and achieve political expression.

What is debated vigorously among social ecologists is the validity of a "libertarian municipalism" that would make a program of creating local assembly government and federations of libertarian municipalities into a privileged politics of social ecology. In this ideology, the citizens (as Bookchin defines them) and the municipalist movement assume much of the historical role of the working class and the party in classical Marxist theory, and are endowed with a similar mystique. Yet, it seems clear that the municipalist program and Bookchin's new "revolutionary subject" cannot be uniquely deduced from the general premises of social ecological analysis, nor can they be shown to be the only plausible basis for an ecological politics. It is therefore not surprising that most activists influenced by social ecology do not direct most of their efforts into

narrowed it through dogmatic and non-dialectical attempts at philosophical system-building, through an increasingly sectarian politics, and through intemperate and divisive attacks on "competing" ecophilosophies and on diverse expressions of his own tradition.[16] To the extent that social ecology has been identified with Bookchinist sectarianism, its potential as an ecophilosophy has not been widely appreciated.

Fortunately, the fundamental issues posed by a social ecology will not fade away in the smoke of ephemeral (and eminently forgettable) partisan skirmishes. Inevitably, a broad, vibrant, and inherently self-critical tradition like social ecology will resist attempts to restrict it in a manner that contradicts its most fundamental values of holism, unity-in-diversity, organic growth and dialectical self-transcendence. Thus, despite its temporary setbacks, the project of a social ecology continues to develop as a general theoretical orientation, as an approach to the analysis of specific problems, and as a guide to practical efforts at social and ecological regeneration.

A Dialectical Holism

A social ecology, as a holistic vision, seeks to relate all phenomena to the larger direction of evolution and emergence in the universe as a whole. Within this context, it also examines the course of planetary evolution as a movement toward increasing complexity and diversity and the progressive emergence of value. According to Mumford, an examination of the "creative process" of "cosmic evolution" reveals it to be "neither random nor predetermined" and shows that a "basic tendency toward self-organization, unrecognizable until billions of years had passed, increasingly gave direction to the process."[17]

[16] All done in the name of such values as "mutuality" and "cooperation," and on behalf of an "ethics of complementarity"!

[17] Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, p. 390.

This outlook is related to the long teleological tradition extending "from ancient Greek thought to the most recent organicist and process philosophies. It is in accord with Hegel's insight that "substance is subject," if this is interpreted in an evolutionary sense. There is no complete and "given" form of either subject or substance, but rather a universal process of substance-becoming-subject. Substance tends toward self-organization, life, consciousness, self-consciousness, and, finally, transpersonal consciousness (though the development takes place at all levels of being and not merely in consciousness). Social ecology is thus linked to theories of evolutionary emergence. Such a position remains implicit in Hegel's dialectical idealism,[18] receives a more explicit expression in Samuel Alexander's cosmic evolutionism,[19] underlies the metaphysics of Whitehead and contemporary process philosophy,[20] is given a rather technocentric and anti-naturalist turn in Teilhard de Chardin,[21] is synthesized with Eastern traditions in Radhakrishnan and Aurobindo,[22]

[18] "But God does not remain stony and dead; the stones cry out and raise themselves to Spirit." Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* 247, cited in Harris, *The Spirit of Hege*l, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993), p. 103.

[19] See Alexander's classic evolutionary treatise, *Space, Time, and Deity*. 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1966.

[20] The ecological and cosmic evolutionary implications that are implicit in a Whiteheadian "philosophy of organism" are elaborated eloquently in Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life* (Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990).

[21] See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961) and *The Future of Man*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

[22] See S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1964), ch. vi., "Matter, Life and Mind," and Sri Aurobindo, *The Essential Aurobindo (*New York: Schocken Books, 1973), part one, "Man in Evolution."

obscured nature as *zoon politikon* and to explore new dimensions of that nature. By this term is meant not simply the "political animal" who participates in civic decision-making processes, but the social and communal being whose selfhood is developed and expressed through active engagement in many dimensions of the life of the community.

A social ecology investigates the ways in which we can encourage the emergence of humane, mutualistic, ecologically-responsible institutions in all areas of social life. It sees not only "politics," but all areas of social interaction, including production and consumption, personal relationships, family life, child-care, education, the arts, modes of communication, spiritual life, ritual and celebration, recreation and play, and informal modes of cooperation to be political realms in the most profound sense. Each is an essential sphere in which we can develop our social being and communal individuality, and in which a larger communitarian reality can find much of its basis. Such a conception of the political requires that practices and institutions be humane in spirit and scale, life-affirming, creative, decentralized, non-hierarchical, rooted in the particularity of people and place, and based on grassroots, participatory democracy to the greatest degree practically possible.

The social ecological tradition has long emphasized the importance of local democracy. Reclus and Kropotkin both wrote extensively about its history, and Mumford argues that

> "the neighborhood … must be built again into an active political unit, if our democracy is to become active and invigorated once more, as it was two centuries ago in the New England village, for that was a superior political unit. The same principles apply again to the city and the interrelationship of cities in a unified urban and regional network or grid."[48]

[48] Mumford, "The Human Prospect," p. 471.

priority of social ideologies (like dualism, anthropocentrism, or patriarchal values).

But both sides in this dispute have often seemed less than dialectical in their approach. The roots of ecological crisis are at once institutional and ideological, psychological and cultural. A critical approach to the issue will avoid both one-sided materialist explanations (identifying economic exploitation or other "material conditions" as "the problem") and one-sided idealism (identifying a system of ideas like anthropocentrism as "the problem.") It is indeed tempting to see the emergence of certain hierarchical institutions as the precondition for human destructiveness toward the natural world. Yet these very institutions could only emerge because of the potential for domination, hierarchical values, objectification, and power-seeking that have roots in the human psyche and which are actualized under certain historical conditions. Furthermore, as a system of domination develops it does so through its dialectically interacting institutional, ideological and imaginary spheres, all of which are related to a "transhistorical" human nature developed over a long history of species evolution. Any account of the origins of hierarchy and domination and of their possible "dissolution" must therefore address at once the material, institutional, psychological and even ontological moments of both the development of these phenomena and the process of reversing it.

Eco-Communitarian Politics

A social ecology seeks to restore certain elements of an ancient conception of the political, and to expand the limits of the concept. According to a classic account, if ethics is the pursuit of the good life or self-realization, then politics is the pursuit of the good life in common and self-realization for the whole community. A social ecology affirms the political in this sense, but reinterprets it in ecological terms. It seeks recover our long-

and finds its most developed expression in Ken Wilber's recent effort at grand evolutionary synthesis.[23]

A social ecology interprets planetary evolution and the realization of social and ecological possibilities as a holistic process, rather than merely as a mechanism of adaptation. This evolution can only be understood adequately by examining the interaction and mutual determination between species and species, between species and ecosystem, and between species, ecosystem and the earth as a whole, and by studying particular communities and ecosystems as complex, developing wholes. Such an examination reveals that the progressive unfolding of the potentiality for freedom (as self-organization, self-determination, and self-realization) depends on the existence of symbiotic cooperation at all levels — as Kropotkin pointed out almost a century ago. We can therefore see a striking degree of continuity in nature, so that the cooperative ecological society that is the goal of a social ecology is found to be rooted in the most basic levels of being.

Some critics of social ecology have claimed that its emphasis on the place of human beings in the evolutionary process betrays a non-ecological anthropocentrism. While this may be true of some aspects of Bookchin's thought, it does not describe what is essential to a social ecology. Although we must understand the special place that humanity has within universe and earth history, the consequences of such understanding are far from being hierarchical, dualistic, or anthropocentric. A dialectical analysis rejects all "centrisms," for all beings are at once centers (of structuration, self-organization, perceiving, feeling, sensing, knowing, etc.) and also expressions of that which exists at a distance, since from a dialectical perspective, determination is negation, the other is immanent in a being, and the whole is immanent in the part. There exists not only unity-

[23] See Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995) and *A Brief History of Everything* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996).

in-diversity, and unity-in-difference but also unity-in-distance. We must interpret our place in nature in accord with such an analysis, comprehending the ways in which our being is internally related, we might say "vertically," to more encompassing realms of being, and, we might say "horizontally," to wider realms of being. By exploring our many modes of relatedness we discover our social and ecological responsibility — our capacity to respond to the needs of the human and natural communities in which we participate.[24]

The use of metaphors such as community and organism in a dialectical and holistic account of diverse phenomena is certainly not unproblematical. There has rightly been much debate in ecophilosophy concerning the status of such images, and their function and limitations must be a subject of continuing reflection.[25] A dialectical approach assumes their provisional nature, the importance of avoiding their use in a rigid, objectifying way, and the necessity of allowing all theoretical concepts to develop in the course of inquiry. Thus, there are certainly senses in which the earth or the biosphere cannot be described as a community. One might define community as a relationship existing between beings who can act reciprocally in certain ways, taking the criterion for reciprocity to be showing respect, carrying out obligations, or some other capacity. If one adopts such a "model" of a community, the earth is certainly not one, any more than it is an organic whole, if that term is taken to mean having the qualities of a biological organism. Yet the term "community"

[24] We do not simply "identify" with a larger whole, but rather explore specific modes of relatedness and develop our outlook and feelings in relation to what we discover about self and other. In this analysis, a dialectical social ecology has more in common with eco-feminist thought than with those ecological theories that stress "expanded" selfhood.

[25] As in Eric Katz's very useful discussion in "Organism, Community, and the 'Substitution Problem'" in *Environmental Ethics* 7 (1985): 241–256. Katz raises many important issues, though he overstates the opposition between the two approaches by interpreting them as rather rigid "models."

natural processes, and although a restorative ecological practice is undoubtedly required, a social ecology must also help humanity regain its capacity for creative non-action, for the Taoist *wu wei*, for "letting-be." The social ecological conception of freedom as spontaneous creative order points to the need for a larger sphere of wild nature so that biodiversity can be maintained and evolutionary processes can continue their self-expression, not only in human culture and humanized nature, but in the natural world substantially free of human influence and control. A social ecology therefore implies the necessity not only for wilderness preservation but for an extensive expansion of wilderness (and relative wilderness) areas where they have been largely destroyed.

A social ecology's vision human freedom and "free nature" is closely related to its fundamental project of critique of the forms of domination that have stood in the way of human and planetary self-realization. However, there have been some widespread misconceptions about the social ecological analysis of domination. These result in part from Bookchin's definition of social ecology as the view that "ecological problems arise from deep-seated social problems,"[47] and his claims that the "quest to dominate nature" results from actual domination within human society. In a sense, contemporary ecophilosophies in general assert that ecological problems stem from social ones. For example, deep ecology holds that ecological problems result from the social problem of anthropocentrism, and ecofeminism holds that ecological problems result from the social problem of patriarchal ideologies and social structures. But there remains a fundamental dispute between those who, like Bookchin, give causal priority in the creation of ecological crisis to social institutions (like capitalism or the state) and others who stress the causal

[47] Ibid., p. 354.

possibility of humans as complex social beings attaining their good through a highly-developed and respectful relationship to other humans and the natural world. The realization of such freedom requires that humanity attain consciousness of its place in the history of the earth and of the universe, that it develop the ethical responsibility to assume its role in larger processes of self-realization, and that human social institutions be reshaped to embody the conditions that would make this knowledge and ethical commitment into practical historical forces. Bookchin's conception of "free nature" focuses on the way in which human self-realization, culminating in creation of an ecological society, establishes a growing planetary realm of freedom. This occurs as humanity "add[s] the dimension of freedom, reason, and ethics to first [i.e., non-human] nature and raise[s] evolution to a level of self-reflexivity …"[45] The activity of humanity and human self-realization are thus seen as central to the achievement of freedom in nature.

But there is another, larger ecological dimension to freedom. The realization of planetary freedom requires not only the human self-realization that is emphasized in Bookchin's "free nature," but also the human recognition of limits and the human forbearance that is expressed in Arne Naess's usage of that same term.[46] In this sense, "free nature" is the spontaneous, creative nature that has given rise to the entire rich, diverse system of self-realizing life on this planet. It has also given rise to humanity itself, and dialectically shaped humanity through our interaction with the all the other expressions of this free activity, and made us the complex beings that we are. As necessary as it is for humanity to rectify its disastrous disruptions of

[45] Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1990), p. 182.

[46] The extent to which Bookchin holds a Promethean view of human activity is suggested when he asks how humanity is "to organize a 'free nature.'" ("What Is Social Ecology?" in Zimmerman, et al. *Environmental Philosophy*, 1st ed., p. 370.

has in fact much more expansive connotations than those just mentioned. A community is sometimes thought to include not only competent adult human beings (moral agents), but infants and children, the mentally incompetent, past generations, future generations, domesticated animals, artifacts, architecture, public works, values and ideals, principles, goals, symbols, imaginary significations, language, history, customs and traditions, territory, biota, ecosystems and other constituents that are thought essential to its peculiar identity. To be a member of a community is often thought to imply responsibilities of many kinds in relation to some or all of the categories listed.

Questions are also raised about the totalizing implications of holism. Critics of holism sometimes identify it with an extreme organicism that denies the significance, reality, or the value of the parts.[26] It is important therefore to understand that "holism" does not refer exclusively to a view in which the whole is ontologically prior to the part, more metaphysically real than the part, or deserving of more moral consideration than the part. In fact, a dialectical holism rejects the idea that the being, reality or value of the parts can be distinguished from that of the whole in the manner presupposed by such a critique.

This is sometimes misunderstood when critics overlook an important distinction within a dialectical holism. In its comprehensively holistic analysis, the parts of a whole are not mere parts but rather holons, which are themselves relative wholes in relation to their own parts.[27] The good of the part can there-

[26] The most flagrant case is Tom Regan's attack on "Holism as Environmental Fascism" in his essay "Ethical Vegetarianism and Commercial Animal Farming," reprinted in James White, ed. *Contemporary Moral Problems* (St. Paul MN: West Publishing Co., 1988): 327–341. Note Mumford's severe critique, from a holistic, "organicist" perspective, of the extreme, totalizing holism of Teilhard de Chardin in *The Pentagon of Power*, pp. 314–319.

[27] The concept of the "holon" was first proposed by Arthur Koestler in *The Ghost in the Machine* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1967), ch. 3 and pas-

fore not be reduced to a function of its contribution to the good of the whole. Its good can be also be considered in relation to its participation in the attainment of the good of a whole which it helps constitute. But beyond this, to mention what is most relevant to the critiques of holism, its attainment of its own good as a unique expression of wholeness must also be considered. There is a striking irony here. An authentic holism is capable of appreciating the value of kinds of wholeness (realized form, self-organization, attainment of good) that are often ignored by "individualisms" that defend one level of wholeness against its possible dissolution in some larger whole. Holism does not mean the fetishization of some particular kind of whole, which would constitute a version of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, but rather an exploration of the meaning of many kinds of wholeness that appear in many ways and on many levels within developing unity-in-diversity.

No Nature

So much for the truth of the whole. However, a dialectical holism refuses to objectify, reify or absolutize any whole, including the whole of nature. Just as our experience of objects or things points to the reality of that which escapes objectification and reification, our experience of the whole of nature points to the reality of that which which cannot be reduced to nature.[28]

sim. Its fundamental importance has recently been defended by Ken Wilber. For a concise discussion of Wilber's analysis of holons, their characteristics of "identity," "autonomy" and "agency," and their constitution of "holarchies," see *A Brief History of Everything*, ch. 1.

[28] One of the most dialectical moves in recent ecological thought is Gary Snyder's choice of the title "No Nature" for his collected poems. Starting out from Hakuin's allusion to "self-nature that is no nature," he reminds us corrigible logocentrists, "Nature is not a book." *No Nature* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), pp. v, 381.

civilizations in their times."[43] Through the universe and earth story, people see themselves as part of larger processes of development and "unfolding of the cosmos." They thus achieve "a sense of relatedness to the various living and nonliving components of the earth community."[44] These powerful, indeed sublime narratives relativize cultural absolutes and shake the dominant imaginary, just as they give new imaginary meaning to human existence, consciousness and creativity.

Freedom and Domination

The larger processes of self-realization and unfolding of potentialities have often (since Hegel) been described as the emegence of freedom in the history of humanity, the earth, and the universe. A social ecology carries on this tradition and seeks to give an ecological meaning to such a conception of freedom. It rejects both the "negative freedom" of mere non-coercion or "being left alone" of the liberal individualist tradition, and also the "positive freedom" of the "recognition of necessity" found in many strongly organicist forms of holism. A social ecological conception of freedom focuses on the realization of a being's potentialities for identity, individuality, awareness, complexity, self-determination, relatedness, and wholeness. In this sense, freedom is found to some degree at all levels of being: from the self-organizing and self-stabilizing tendencies of the atom to the level of the entire universe evolving to higher levels of complexity and generating new levels of being. In our own planetary history, embryonic freedom can be found in the directiveness of all life, and takes on increasingly complex forms, including, ultimately, the

[43] Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 3.

[44] Ibid., p. 5.

the carnavalesque, in dreams, in the unconscious, in wilderness. We find it in the living earth, and in the processes of growth and unfolding on the personal, communal, planetary and cosmic levels. The point is not to find the wild in any "pristine" state; it is always intermixed with civilization, domestication, and even domination. The discovery of the wild within a being or any realm of being means the uncovering of its self-manifestation, its creative aspects, its relative autonomy. It is the basis for respect for beings, but even more, for wonder, awe, and a sense of the sacred in all things. The revolts and individualisms of the dominant culture appear quite tame when civilization is subjected to the critique of the wild.[42]

The image of the earth as "Home," or planetary household, and humans as members of the earth community has great imaginary power. As we develop greater knowledge of ecological complexity, and as we rediscover the marvelous richness of place, the earth image begins to incorporate within itself a rich regional and local specificity, and become a holistic representation of planetary unity-in-diversity. As the horror of economistic-technocratic globalism becomes increasingly apparent, and as the world is remade in the image of the factory, the prison and the shopping mall, the rich, dialectical counter-image of the earth will necessarily gain increasing imaginary force.

The ecological imaginary can be expanded further to cosmic or universal dimensions. All cultures have felt the need to imagine the macrocosm and orient themselves in relation to the whole. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry contend that the universe story, taken from contemporary cosmology and transformed into a culturally-orienting narrative "is the only way of providing, in our times, what the mythic stories of the universe provided for tribal peoples and for the earlier classical

[42] See Gary Snyder's classic essay, "Good, Wild, Sacred" in *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990).

Since the beginnings of philosophical reflection, dialectical thinkers of both East and West have proposed that beneath all knowing and objects of knowledge there is a primordial continuum, the eternal one-becoming-many, the ground of being. It is what Lao Tzu described in the *Tao Te Ching* as the reality that precedes all conceptualization, or "naming," and all determination, or "carving of the block":

> "The Tao (Way) that can be told is not the eternal Tao;
> The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
> The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth …"[29]

This reality is ontologically prior to ecological differentiation, and indeed, to "nature" itself — which is one reason that a mere "naturalism" can never be adequately dialectical. It is an apprehension of the conditional reality of all phenomena that drives dialectical thought to an affirmation of both the being and non-being of all objects, categories, and concepts. This ground is what social ecological theorist Joel Kovel refers to as the "plasma of being." It is also what mystical philosophers like Böhme have, quite dialectically, called "the groundless Ground," attempting to express the idea that it is a non-objectifiable grounding of being, rather than an objectified ground, or substance, on which anything can be thought to stand, or which "underlies" other realities. If we wish to attach any concept to this ultimate, it should perhaps be (following Whitehead) "creativity."

Kovel points out, contemporary science has shown that such a continuum underlies the diversity of beings.

[29] *Tao Te Ching* 1 (Chan trans.) in Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 139.

> "In the universe as a whole, there is no real separation between things; there are only, so far as the most advanced science can tell us, plasmatic quantum fields; one single, endlessly perturbed, endlessly becoming body."[30]

Kovel's account of the our relation to this primordial ground is both phenomenological and psychoanalytic. It reveals the ways in which we are ecological beings, and indeed spiritual beings, because our being extends beyond the limits of the ego or socially constructed selfhood. Much of our experience reveals to us that this self is not sufficient, or primary,

> "but is rather that ensemble of social relations which precipitates out of a primordium which comes before social causation — a core which, crucially, remains active throughout life. Before the self, there is being; and before being is the unconscious primordium. Society intersects with the individual through a set of cultural representations. It is a naming, a designation, an

[30] *History and Spirit: An Inquiry into the Philosophy of Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), p. 161. It is in relation to this idea of the primordial continuum of being that Merleau-Ponty's dialectical phenomenology can make an important contribution to a social ecology. David Abram explains Merleau-Ponty's concept of "the Flesh," as "the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its spontaneous activity." [David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996), p. 66.] This concept unites subject and object dialectically as determinations within a more primordial reality. Merleau-Ponty himself refers to "that primordial being which is not yet the subject-being nor the object-being and which in every respect baffles reflection. From this primordial being to us, there is no derivation, nor any break; it has neither the tight construction of the mechanism nor the transparency of a whole which precedes its parts." ["The Concept of Nature, I" in *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France* 1952–1960 (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 65–66.]

ever the shortcomings of Marx as economist and political theorist, he is unsurpassed as a prophet insofar as he revealed that the fundamental irrationality of economistic society is in its spirituality — the fetishism of commodities.

An Ecological Imaginary

One result of the careful study of the social imaginary is the realization that a decisive moment in social transformation is the development of a counter-imaginary. Success in the quest for an ecological society will depend in part on the generation of a powerful ecological imaginary to challenge the dominant economistic one. While this process is perhaps in an embryonic stage, we have in fact already developed certain important elements of an emerging ecological imaginary.

The image of the region poses a powerful challenge to the economistic, statist and technological imaginaries. Regions are a powerful presence, yet have no clearly definable boundaries. This is the case whether these regions be ecoregions, georegions, bioregions, ethnoregions, mythoregions, psychoregions, or any other kind. Regionalism evokes a dialectical imagination that grasps the mutual determination between diverse realms of being, between culture and nature, unity and multiplicity, between form and formlessness, between being and nothingness. The concept of regionality implies an interplay between the overlapping, evolving boundaries of natural spaces and the flowing, redefining boundaries of imaginary spaces.[41]

The region is intimately connected to another powerful ecological image — that of the wild. The wild is present in the spontaneous aspects of culture and nature. We find it in forms of wild culture, wild nature, and wild mind: in the poetic, in

[41] For a discussion of the radical implications of regionalism, see Max Cafard, "The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto" in *Exquisite Corpse* 8 (1990): 1, 22–23.

epoch that is defined above all by the dominant economistic institutions. This dominance is exercised through all the major institutional spheres: economistic forms of social organization, economistic ideology, and an economistic imaginary. But the dominant economism is far from simple and monolithic. Most significantly, it is divided into two essential moments which interact in complex and socially efficacious ways.

These two essential moments, productionism and consumptionism, are inseparable and mutually interdependent. As Marx pointed out long ago in the classical dialectical inquiry on this subject, "production, distribution, exchange and consumption … all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity."[40] While Marx's analysis was profoundly shaped by the productionist era in which he lived, all subsequent inquiry is a continuation of the dialectical project that he suggests in this passage. A social ecology ignores none of the moments Marx identifies, but rather looks at distribution and exchange as mediating terms between production and consumption.

But it will focus on the contemporary world as the scene of a strange dialectic between abstract, systemic rationality and social and ecological irrationality. The economistic society drives relentlessly toward absolute rationality in the exploitation of natural and human resources, in the pursuit of efficiency of production, in the development of technics, in the control of markets through research, and in the manipulation of behavior through marketing. At the same time, it rushes toward complete irrationality in the generation of infinite desire, in the colonization of the psyche with commodified images, in the transformation of the human and natural world into a system of objects of consumption, and most ultimately and materially, in undermining the ecological basis for its own existence. What-

[40] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 99.

> affixing from without. Without this naming, the stuff of a person would never take form. But the unconscious, in its core, is prerepresentational."[31]

Thus, there are fundamental aspects of being that connect us, physically, psychologically and ontologically, with greater (or deeper) realities — with other living beings, with our species, with the earth, with the primordial ground of being.

This idea of connectedness leads us to the question of the place of the concept of spirit in a dialectical holism. The most radical "critical" and dialectical views after Hegel, beginning with the Young Hegelians — Feuerbach, Stirner, Marx and their peers — were intent on banishing Hegel's central category from the philosophical realm. The post-Hegelian dialectical tradition has been dominated by a reductive materialism that has dogmatically rejected the possibility of dialectical inquiry into the most fundamental ontological questions. Some versions of social ecology have inherited this anti-spiritual tendency of Western materialism. Thus, while Bookchin has sometimes invoked the concept of "ecological spirituality" in his writings, it has usually been in the weak sense of a vague ecological or even ethical sensibility and he has increasingly sought to banish any strong conception of "spirit" from his social ecological orthodoxy.

It is becoming evident, however, that the most radically dialectical and holistic thinking restores the ontological and political significance of the concept of spirit. Without implying any of the dogmatic and one-sided idealist aspects of Hegel's conception of spirit, a social ecology can find in the concept an important means of expressing our relationship to the evolving, developing, unfolding whole and its deeper ontological matrix. Kovel begins his discussion of spirit with the statement that it concerns "what happens to us as the boundaries of the self

[31] Kovel, *History and Spirit*, pp. 166–67.

give way."[32] The negation of ego identity that he intends by this concept takes place when we discover our relationship to the primordial continuum and to its expressions in the processes of life, growth, development, and the striving toward wholeness. A social ecology can give meaning to an ecological spirituality that will embody the truth of the religious consciousness,[33] which is a liberatory truth, however mystified and distorted it may have been for purposes of domination and social conformism. Such a spirituality is the synthesis and realization of the religion of nature and the religion of history. It consists of a response to the sacredness of the phenomena, of the multiplicity of creative expressions of being, and of the whole that encompasses all beings. It is also an expression of wonder and awe at the mystery of becoming, the unfolding of the universe's potentiality for realized being, goodness, truth and beauty.

The Ecological Self

A social ecology applies its holistic and dialectical approach of the question of the nature of the self. While it emphasizes wholeness, it does not accept the illusory and indeed repressive ideal of a completely harmonious, fully-integrated selfhood. Rather it sees the self as a developing whole, a

[32] Ibid., p. 1.

[33] According to Harris, Hegel sees religion "as the felt awareness and conviction of the infinite immanent and potent in all reality, in both nature and history, and transcendent above all finite existence," and as "one form of that final self-realization of the whole which is the truth, and without which there would be no dynamic to propel the dialectical process," so that, consequently, "[t]o repudiate spirit and reject all religion is thus to paralyze the dialectic, and in effect to abandon it." Harris, The Spirit of Hegel, p. 54. If we are careful to read "transcendent" as "trans-finite" and not as "supernatural," and if we remember that no self-realization of the whole is "final," then this also describes an important aspect of the meaning of "spirituality" for a dialectical holism.

embodied in its very mode of being — is a value-generating whole. Ultimately, the earth must be comprehended as, for us, the most morally-significant value-generating whole. We must fully grasp the conception of a planetary good realizing itself through the greatest mutual attainment of good by all the beings that constitute that whole — in terms of both their own goods and their contribution to shared systemic goods of the various wholes in which they participate.

An Ecology of the Imagination

If a social ecology is to contribute to radical ecological social transformation, it must address theoretically all the significant institutional dimensions of society. It must take into account the fact that every social institution contains organizational, ideological, and imaginary aspects (moments that can only be separated from one another for purposes of theoretical analysis). An economic institution, for example, includes a mode of organizing persons and groups, their activities and practices, and of utilizing material means for economic ends. It also includes a mode of discourse, and a system of ideas by which it understands itself and seeks to legitimate its ends and activities. Finally, it includes a mode of self-representation and self-expression by which it symbolizes itself and imagines itself. The social imaginary is part of this third sphere, and consists of the system of socially-shared images by which the society represents itself to itself.

One essential task of a social ecology is to contribute to the creation of an ecological imaginary, an endeavor that presupposes an awareness of our own standpoint within the dialectical movement of the social world. A social ecology of the imagination therefore undertakes the most concrete and experiential investigation of the existing imaginary. To the extent that this has been done, it has been found that we live in an

noted, a central aspect of the human good is to enjoy and indeed celebrate the goodness of the universe, a goodness that is most meaningfully manifested for us in the beauty, richness, diversity and complexity of life on earth (the social and ecological unity-in-diversity).

A dialectical and holistic theory of value attempts to transcend atomistic theories, without dissolving particular beings (including human beings) into the whole, whether the whole of nature or of the biosphere. Holmes Rolston's holistic analysis, and especially his critique of the conventional division of value into intrinsic and instrumental varieties, can contribute much to the development of a social ecology of value. When value is generated in a system (or, as a social ecology would state it, within a whole that is not reducible to a mere sum of parts), we find that it is not generated in an "instrumental" form, for there is no specific entity or entities for the good of which the value is generated as a means. Nor do we find "intrinsic" value in the sense that it there is a single coherent, definable good or *telos* for the system. Therefore, we must posit something like what Rolston calls "systemic value." According to this conception, the value that exists within the system "is not just the sum of the part-values. No part values increase of kinds, but the system promotes such increase. Systemic value is the productive process; its products are intrinsic values woven into instrumental relationships."[38]

Such a holistic analysis helps us to reach an authentically ecological understanding of value within ecosystems or eco-communities. For Rolston, the "species-environment complex ought to be preserved because it is the generative context of value."[39] The ecosystem — that is, the eco-community which has shaped the species, is internally related to it, and is

[38] Holmes Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University. Press, 1988), p. 188.

[39] Ibid., p. 154

relative unity-in-diversity, a whole in constant process of self-transformation and self-transcendence. The very multiplicity of the self, "the chaos within one," is highly valued, since it attests to the expansiveness of selfhood and to our continuity with the larger context of being, of life, of consciousness, of mind. Such a view of selfhood shows a respect for the uniqueness of each person, and for the striving of each toward a highly particularized (in some ways incomparable) good that flows from his or her own nature. But it also recognizes that personal self-realization is incomprehensible apart from one's dialectical interaction with other persons, with the community, and with the larger natural world. The development of authentic selfhood means the simultaneous unfolding of both individuality and social being. The replacement of the voracious yet fragile and underdeveloped ego of consumer society with such a richly-developed selfhood is one of the preeminent goals of social ecology.

Within this general orientation, there remain many areas for development of the social-ecological conception of the self. As Kovel points out, the realm of signification creates an imaginary sphere in which there is a necessary degree of separation from nature, and even from oneself as nature. He explains that

> "we are at one time part of nature, fully participating in natural processes; and at the same time we are radically different from nature, ontologically destined by a dialectic between attachment and separation to define ourselves in a signified field which by its very 'nature' negates nature."[34]

[34] "The Marriage of Radical Ecologies" in Zimmerman et al., *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, 1st ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), p. 410–11. While social ecology and other Western ecophilosophies have come to terms with unity-in-diversity, perhaps they would do well to consider the radically dialectical concept of difference-non-difference, the bhedabhedavada of Indian philosophy.

Because of this "basic negativity" in the human standpoint toward the world,

> "the relationship between the self and nature cannot be comprehended though any simple extrapolation of an ecological model grounded in unity in diversity."[35]

Moreover, the "thinglike" aspects of the self — the realm of the preconceptual and of the most primordial layers of desire — can never be fully transcended in either thought or experience. Part of the social ecological project of comprehending "unity-in-diversity" is to theorize adequately this duality and the necessary experiential and ontological moments of alienation, separation, and distance within a general non-dualistic, holistic framework (rather than merely to explain these moments away).

In doing so, social ecology will delve more deeply into those inseparable dimensions of body and mind that dualism has so fatefully divided. As we explore such realities as thought, idea, image, sign, symbol, signifier, language, on the one hand, and feeling, emotion, disposition, instinct, passion, and desire on the other, the interconnection between the two "realms" will become increasingly apparent. The abstract "naturalism" of Bookchin's social ecology will be transformed into a richer, more dialectical, and many-sided naturalization. As Abram notes,

> "[w]e can experience things — can touch, hear, and taste things — only because, as bodies, we are ourselves included in the sensible field, and have our own textures, sounds and tastes. We can perceive things at all only because we are entirely a part of the sensible world that we perceive! We might as well say that we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and that the world is perceiving itself through us."[36]

Such a holistic concept of human-nature interaction is a necessary complement to the conception of humanity as "nature becoming self-conscious" or "nature knowing itself," which might otherwise be taken in a one-sidedly intellectual, objectifying, and ultimately idealist sense.

A Social Ecology of Value

For a social ecology, our ecological responsibility as members of the earth community arises from both our relationship to the interrelated web of life on earth and also from our place as a unique form of nature's and the earth's self-expression. As we accept the responsibilities implied by our role in "nature becoming self-conscious," we can begin to reverse our presently anti-evolutionary and ecocidal direction, and begin to contribute to the continuation of planetary natural and social evolution. We can also cooperate with natural evolution through our own self-development. The overriding ethical challenge to humanity is to determine how we can follow our own path of self-realization as a human community while at the same time allowing the entire earth community to continue its processes of self-manifestation and evolutionary unfolding.[37] A crucial link between these two goals is the understanding of how the flourishing of life on earth is constitutive of the human good, as we dialectically develop in relation to the planetary whole. As Thomas Berry has

[35] "Human Nature, Freedom, and Spirit" in John Clark, ed., *Renewing the Earth: The Promise of Social Ecology* (London: Green Print, 1990), p. 145.

[36] Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 68.

[37] This is precisely the social ecological problematic first proposed by Lao Tzu two and a half millennia ago.