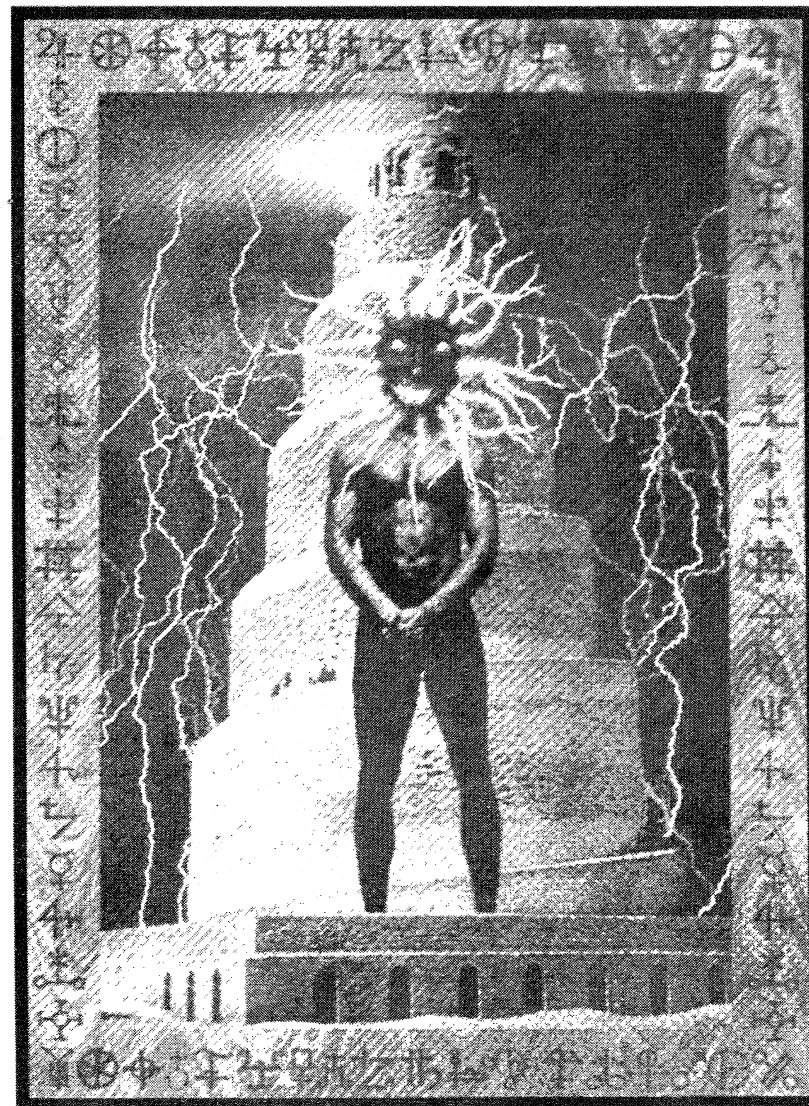


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EGOIST PERSPECTIVES



ON CIVILIZATION

*Civilization tends toward the anthill: mechanical organization.
Then will come the giant heel of Anarchy to smear it into the
dust.*

—Benjamin DeCasseres

Max Stirner on Civilization

(excerpts from *The Unique and Its Property*)

Our societies and states *are* without our *making* them, are united without our uniting, are predestined and exist, or have an independent existence of their own, are the imperishable established order against us egoists. Today's global battle is, as they say, directed against the "established order." Still people are in the habit of misunderstanding this, as if the present established order should only be exchanged for another, better established order. But war might rather be declared against the established order itself, i.e., the *state* (status), not a particular state, nor, for instance, only the current condition of the state; people aren't aiming for another state (say, a "people's state"), but at their *union*, their combination, this ever-fluid combination of all that exists. – A state exists even without my assistance: I am born and raised in it, placed under an obligation to it, and have to "pay homage"¹ to it. It takes me up into its "favor,"² and I live by its "grace." So the independent existence of the state establishes my lack of independence; its "naturalness," its organism, demands that my nature doesn't grow freely, but is cut to fit it. So that it can develop naturally, it applies the shears of "civilization" to me; it gives me an education and culture suitable to it, not me, and teaches me, for example, to respect the law, to abstain from the violation of state property (i.e., private property), to revere a divine and earthly sovereignty, etc.; in short, it teaches me to – *not be culpable*, by which I mean to "sacrifice" my ownness to "sacredness" (everything possible is sacred, for example, property, the lives of others, etc.). This is the sort of civilization and culture the state is able to give me; it teaches me to be a "useful tool," a "useful member of society."

...

What was originally *mine*, but by *chance*, instinctively, was conferred to me as the property of the human being; I became a fief-holder when I loved, I became the vassal of humanity, only a specimen of this species, and in loving acted not as *I*, but as a *human*, as a specimen of the human being, i.e., humanly. The whole condition of civilization is the *feudal system*, the property being *the* human being's or humanity's, not *mine*. A vast feudal state was founded, the individual robbed of everything, everything left to "the human being." The individual finally had to appear as "sinner through and through."

...

1. "huldigen"

2. "huld"

The state endeavors to tame the desiring person; in other words, it seeks to direct his desire to it alone and to *appease* this desire with what it offers. To satiate the desire for the desiring person's sake, doesn't enter its mind; on the contrary, it rebukes the human being who breathes out unbridled desire for being an "egoistic human being," and the "egoistic human being" is its enemy. He is this to the state, because it lacks the ability to come to terms with him; it simply cannot "comprehend" the egoist. Since the state has to act only for itself, as nothing else is possible, it does not take care of my needs, but only takes care of how it snuffs me out, i.e., makes out of me a different I, a good citizen. It takes measures for "moral improvement." – And with what does it win the individual for itself? With itself, i.e., with what is the state's, with *state property*. It will be constantly acting to make all partakers of its "goods," to present to all the "good things of civilization"; it grants to them its education, opens to them the access to its cultural institutions, and qualifies them, by means of industry, to come into property, i.e., into a fief, etc. For all these fiefs it requires only the fair rent of constant gratitude. But the "ungrateful" forget to pay this *gratitude*. – Now, in essence "society" cannot act differently than the state.

Reclus may inspire those who seek refuge in the past. I am most inspired by those I meet and play with today. Perhaps the whimsical words of one of my very much alive anarchist friends, Apio, will inspire you to explore some of the thousands of wild possibilities of being in your own world:

Sometimes, if I am out on a cloudless night when the moon is full, I will reach up and grasp the moon between a finger and my thumb. I close my eyes and pop the moon into my mouth. It leaves a taste on my tongue that is icy and sweet like wintergreen or mint. But that taste is really the taste of a star-filled, winter mountain-top sky glowing icily in an infinite brilliant dance of the darkest night with the exquisite light of countless stars. I open my eyes with joy at seeing the moon still dancing before me. It's wonderful to be able to take something so completely into yourself without losing it, to be able to experience it so completely.

Max & I

By (I)An-ok Ta Chai

I've had an interesting proposition set forth before me, something that I've been avoiding clearly looking at for a while. How would I delineate a connection between the philosophy of the famous 19th century German individualist anarchist writer Max Stirner and the general "green" or anti-civilization approach to anarchy? I've been daunted by this question, for one, because Stirner is so old – a dead European intellectual of days gone by – and anti-civilization anarchy in its current expression, in my opinion, is quite cutting edge. For another, Stirner is quite individual-oriented, some may even say "narcissistic", while green anarchist analyses address all of world history, the global eco-sphere, and all aspects of life. And finally, I've seen a lot of different people name-drop Max Stirner, from Platformists to Libertarians to green anarchists – and all of them strike me as intense and weird individuals, and I'm not quite sure I would want to attract their attention.

Nonetheless, I must confess – I love Max Stirner. I always have, as long as I have known of the guy. Then I realize – I don't really like Stirner as a person, or even as a writer. He was a German girls school teacher who hung out with snotty intellectuals like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and he was married to a wife who admitted to never loving nor respecting him. His writing often went off on unnecessary rants about European history or some other philosopher guy, and he frequently informed his readers about how bad-ass he was because of how free and uncompromising he supposedly was. This is not why I love Max Stirner.

I love Stirner because of what I personally *get out* of his writings or ideas attributed to him. I would sum this up as – you experience your life as *you*, not as anyone or anything else. As far as you know, this is the only life that you've got. Therefore, you should make sure that all of the relationships and ideas that you come across actively help you to live your life in a way that is free, fulfilling and enjoyable to you in the here-and-now. And *fuck* anyone or anything that gets in your way.

A lot of modern-day commercialized self-help shit vaguely has this same message, so aside from being the original quotable self-help guru, Stirner had some integral, unique iconoclastic components to this philosophy on life. Stirner took an anarchist approach by saying that all forms of government, capitalism, and authority destroy people, thereby eliminating the possibility of achieving this self-supporting aim in life. Stirner also had an amoralist angle by holding that the concepts of good/bad, right/wrong, duty and obligation cloud one's vision away from this self-chosen focus. He came from an

individualist direction by believing that conceptually placing society, the collective and/or the group *first* deters from valuing one's own life as primary. And he took an existentialist stance by saying that concepts, belief systems, and ideas have no inherent meaning in and of themselves – that *you* put the meaning into them yourself, and then act accordingly. When you put this all together you then have a direct line of sight straight to yourself – what are you doing *here* and *why* are you doing it? Stirner pointed out how chances are that in any given situation you're not even *trying* to take care of yourself – you've in effect *lost yourself* in the process.

Stirner helped me to take my anarchist beliefs and outlooks *personally*. He helped me to clearly situate *myself* in the midst of all this bullshit society that surrounds me. Government and capitalism directly screws me over, right here and right now, so if I want to personally live a free, fulfilling, and enjoyable life, then it's all got to go.

More striking for me was how Stirner helped to expose the ghost-like nature of all these different ideas of morality, obligation, family, property, government, and society itself – how so often I view these things as being tangible entities in and of themselves (as opposed to being just concepts in my head) and as a result I see them as making demands and threats upon me. Stirner reminded me that it is people and the physical world that hurts or obstructs me, that all thoughts and relations to that are based on ideas inside my head, so why not choose to think and act differently, in a way that helps *me*?

One concern that comes up around Stirner's approach, particularly when considering it in conjunction with green anarchy, is that it can be used as an excuse for consumption, gluttony, and over-indulgence. To this, I can only say that I believe that there is a certain joy and fulfillment that occurs in human experience that is more profound and far reaching when health and balance is reached than when consumption and over-indulgence is engaged in. I believe that because one's body is a natural organism, we can trust an inner felt-sense (as opposed to whim and habit) to guide us in finding our own personal health and balance, and that we can trust to make our decisions based on that.

This is all great so far, but the tricky part comes when trying to apply Stirner's ideas to establishing mutually-supportive relationships with other people and non-human life. Stirner had a suspicion that relationships of mutual support and respect with other people were indeed possible, but he really did not know how to do it.* His relationship with his wife is an example of that. And as far as non-human life goes, Stirner was more of a "dominate nature, make it serve you" kind of guy – not exactly eco-conscious.

back from those who wrest it from us daily. Or to whom we give it up so willingly. To live our own lives as we choose, not in servitude to others and their ideas, but in impassioned explorations, experiments, and uncertainties. To take all we want, but with a wholism that includes a direct, sensual, intellectual, emotional "consciousness" (what I have come to think *instinct* might actually be). To locate that place where we can't fail to heed the warnings of others when we go too far; when we cause irreparable harm to the world we love and wish to keep. Can we get back to ourselves, those strong and free individuals who cavort with all the natural wonders that we choose and who choose us? How do we prepare ourselves to confront the consequences of those choices?

Reclus was "ahead of his time" and his life's work added a depth and breadth in much of the early environmental movement. But we would be foolish to lay our faith at Reclus' enlightened feet. Faith in scientific, technological—that is, Progressive—solutions has led directly to the dire straights we find ourselves trying to navigate. Despite his atheism and break with "conservative" religion, despite his dedication to an anarchist ideal of liberation, Reclus' view of the world was rooted in a belief that humans have a Special place in Nature. He—like so many—merely exchanged his patriarchal god above for the equivalent below, a universal morality that does not, cannot, and ought not exist. His much acclaimed statement, "Humanity is nature becoming self-conscious", exemplifies my greatest concern with his legacy.

What need has the free-flying dragonfly for a human consciousness? Where would the wild river go, once so imbued, that it has otherwise avoided? The earth and all its inhabitants are reeling from the great human consciousness!

Until each domesticated human grasps the fullness of life in her own eager hands; feels its possibilities coursing through her veins; screams their own warnings; and recognizes their individual connection to the wretched, beautiful whole that Reclus at times so eloquently described, the "environment" and "nature" will remain separated abstractions shaped by yet another external authority. An authority that delivers solutions through the stick of objective universal righteousness and the carrot of progress. Some, including Reclus, say that primitive humans understood this symbiotic connection with life. Perhaps this is true, but we are *here* now. Can we create paths to our own liberation and release our choke hold on all the rest?

If Hurricane Rita³ had had a human consciousness, would it have spared this city on the edge?

Suddenly, the dragonfly charged right at me, aiming at my head then quickly disappearing from my view. But, never again from my awareness. With that single startling act even more thoughts leap into my mind. Was it drawn to me because of my great human consciousness? Was it as curious and appreciative of me as I was of it? Could the dragonfly have known the thousand possibilities of its demise at my hands and so was warning me away? Or was I just another obstacle to be dodged on its afternoon free-flight?

Alas, the most horrific thought of all could not fail to enter into the realm of Fire and dragonfly possibilities: this beautiful creature could be—if not now, one day all too soon—a replicant, a robot, a spy, or worse. This thought wrenches me toward a paranoia only possible in a world where the architects of the future go unopposed as they design the next new-and-improved version of surveillance and killing technology to deal with those whose wings (however weakly) send disturbing ripples across the surface of their artificial landscape.

With this last raging thought, I am finally able to shrug away the intellectual games and feel the simple pleasure of sharing a warm, vibrant full day filled with that moment of beauty, of the wild and expansive freedom of a dragonfly dance.

Elisee Reclus is dead, but he is not alone.

In the years since he ceased breathing—and I think it's time I stopped breathing for him—countless billions have joined him. The massive human-caused extinctions that continue to escalate are a direct result of a refusal to recognize, contemplate, and challenge every new, progressive incursion into our worlds. This is not because we don't question authority. It is because we don't reject it at base. We rely on the authority of scientists, politicians, professors, leaders and thousands of other mediators to tell us what is right, what will work and what won't, what makes sense and what will bring our salvation. Layers of civilized logic have all but severed our connection to what it is we really need and might expansively desire; forcing us to see these two as separate far too often. We are even more removed from how to fulfill our wildest dreams without destroying the environment that contains it all.

All the world is ours, each one of ours. But we can only know it from our own center where all we need/want is within our grasp. And we must take it

3.(Transcriber's footnote: Hurricane Rita struck New Orleans in 2007. DARPA is asking scientists to submit design proposals that will allow implantation of engineered material into insects, such as dragonflies and moths for surveillance and attack.

This is where I think that it is important to take Stirner's ideas and "run wild", so to speak. I see this as best being done by first keeping in mind some basic principles of human social dynamics – if you disregard or screw over other people, then they are less likely to keep *your* interests in mind. Therefore if you want social relationships that help *you*, you need to keep in mind to help out others, too. Mutual respect and support, voluntary cooperation; a.k.a – anarchy.

Next, if you want people to help you out in a thorough and personal way, then you need to really know each other and trust each other. After a certain number of people, the personally-knowing quality begins to diminish, and hence the ease and depth of mutual trust goes as well. This puts a cap on the number of people that a group can have while still maintaining this kind of integrity. Therefore it becomes desirable to personally choose to organize in small-scale groups based on trust and affinity – "tribes".

If you want to live for yourself, to respect your own enjoyment, satisfaction, and freedom in life, and if you want to include the often overlooked realms of the sensual and the spiritual, *all* aspects of life as you experience it – chances are that you wouldn't be choosing to work in factories, till the fields, sit in traffic, go to war, wait in lines, numb yourself to the incessant grating background noise of industrial society, wade through continually-growing piles of trash, or other trade-mark features of Civilized life. When living your life in this different way, work itself clearly becomes seen as an undesirable choice.

Domestication, an essential pillar of civilization, is clearly at odds with Stirner's philosophical approach to living. Domestication unmistakably requires displacement from yourself and that which naturally supports you. Stirner's approach is that of finding yourself and consciously putting yourself in alignment with that which effectively supports you. How can you tacitly accept programming and training from outside of yourself when your whole chosen basis for living is to clearly find and carry out your *own* standards, assumptions, and actions to best support *yourself*?

Living with others who also choose to live their lives in this way, and respecting and supporting each other in this, then, establishes a social norm which is inherently antithetical to the driving force of agriculture and industrial society, ergo, civilization itself. This social norm could spread as a generalized mode of interaction among people, or it could serve as a foundation from which to attack civilization or defend against its encroachments. Either way, this mode of relating socially and living your life is inherently fulfilling and supportive of **yourself**, therefore it is of value. Stirner's philosophy then becomes antagonistic to civilization.

Living an uncivilized, undomesticated life consciously chosen and meaningful for myself within a context of a small group of known and trusted people engaged in mutually supportive and respectful relationships towards this end – this is Stirnerite green anarchy. The thought of this as an applied practice in my life sends chills up my spine. The thought of this generalized to the rest of humanity – no civilization at all – is simply exhilarating. That crazy dead German loner wingnut didn't know what he was getting into.

*Stirner called his vague notions of anarchistic social relationships “unions of egoists”, and his ideas on this became a foundation for what was later fleshed out in insurrectionary and post-left anarchist models for decentralized self organizing groups.

morality in place of instinct, experience, and non-linear adaptation? Oh, but wait! Could my dragonfly be giving thanks and praise to the Buddha cemented into the artificial pond? Can it absorb Buddha consciousness through a concrete icon? Can you? So many possibilities. Far more than language, no matter how poetic, can describe.

Looking through the mirror of history, all sorts of justifications and rationalizations have been built into our consciousness. Reclus may have abandoned the official religion of his preacher father, but he held onto the notion that humanity would be saved by a higher purposed, globalized morality. A morality that has ALWAYS been used to bend all of life to others' wills. That requires someone to determine and enforce it. What morality and unquestioned rules and judgments frame your reality? What ideologies underlie your perception of the world, thus consciously directing your actions? How many and which acts have become quite unconscious?

I don't know if other creatures have this thing called consciousness, but I am disturbed by Reclus' glorification of a human consciousness that no matter how one defines it, has brought with it a power so strong it has overridden all other possibilities of how humans might be truly of their world.

Is it my particular madness to think I'd be better off with the consciousness of a dragonfly than of a domesticated human?

“When the cities grow, humanity progresses and when they shrink the social body is threatened with regression into barbarism.”

Reclus was a great fan of Progress, so he did not sufficiently question the pervasive notion that humans have an innate mandate to advance their lot through the Sciences and particularly through its materialization in more and more advanced technology. His dialectical approach to the question of cities, culture, agriculture, institutions often seems more an apology than a means of questioning. Cities are an absurdly complex way of organizing human life. They require authorities and bureaucrats in institutional setting who “know” how to keep them going. Cities require the importation of even the most basic necessities: food and water. Importation that has always meant and will always mean theft from other life from outside the city. The city requires massive amounts of human and non-human energy just to maintain its fragile equilibrium. How can this mean anything other than a continued exploitive division of labor as glorified in Reclus' and others' “worker”? No one has yet described how cities can continue to exist without more and more advanced technology. Technology which first enlarges the human impact then spreads it farther and deeper than humans with only the energy of their bodies and simple tools in hand could ever accomplish. The polis exerts a pressure so great upon the land and air and water – on all life within and without – it has never failed to create an explosive discord.

unpredicted – and unpredictable – human-directed geographical and social change (a.k.a. Progress) scraped from our bones since his time?

“Humanity is nature becoming self-conscious.”

What is this great self-consciousness Reclus insists humankind must develop and spread? From *conscientia*, knowledge with or shared knowledge, numerous systems of thought have evolved around the notion of consciousness. Commonalities include subjectivity, self-awareness, sentience, sapience, and the ability to perceive oneself in relationship to one’s environment. It is often tied quite closely to conscience – a moral sensibility.¹ Is it an inherent aspect of “higher” life forms as most Thinkers suggest? Or does it emerge from human intelligence and its constructs? Particularly ideology.² Over and over Reclus speaks of human AND nature, maintaining the artificial separation that continues to pervade the modern world view where humans are invariably placed outside of – and most often above – all other life forms. Reclus does attempt to overcome this hierarchy and concomitant domination through rhetorical exercises that are wholly unconvincing despite any sincerity of attempt. What was the state of Reclus’ consciousness when he chose to explore and map the world and its human inhabitants? Did he, could he, with his great intelligence and moral consciousness KNOW that his works would be used by states and empires to conquer and destroy? By the industrialists he railed against to further exploit the coexisting land and life? By scientists and technologists to further the reach of human domination? Reclus suffered, as surely as we all do, from a certain shortness of vision. Our eyes shaded by motivations imposed by society, by ideological preconceptions and presumptions left unquestioned.

One test for the existence of consciousness is based on the human observation of animals gazing into a mirror. If said authority deems the animal has recognized itself, the animal may be conscious. If he could look in the mirror today, what would Reclus see?

The dragonfly appears to be gazing at its own reflection. Am I witnessing – or am I influencing – a beginning of self-awareness? Is it situating a human

1. The French word for conscience and conscious are one and the same – conscience.

2. Thomas Aquinas describes the *conscientia* as the act by which we apply practical and moral knowledge to our own actions. Descartes described conscious experience as imaginings and perceptions laid out in space and time, as viewed from some point. Marx considered that social relations ontologically preceded individual consciousness, and criticized the conception of a conscious subject as an ideological conception on which liberal political thought was founded. Nietzsche was the first one to make the claim that the modern notion of consciousness required the modern penal system, which judged a man according to his “responsibility”. Perhaps the most accurate description of the modern conscious is W. E. B. DuBois’ double-consciousness – the awareness of one’s self as well as how others perceive us, which has led to an unconscious conformance to their perception.

Nature as spectacle: The image of wilderness vs. wildness

by Feral Faun

(Author’s note: The frequent use of quotation marks in this essay is to reinforce the idea that nature and wilderness are concepts, not actual beings.)

Nature has not always existed. It is not found in the depths of the forest, in the heart of the cougar or in the songs of the pygmies; it is found in the philosophies and image constructions of civilized human beings. Seemingly contradictory strands are woven together creating nature as an ideological construct that serves to domesticate us, to suppress and channel our expressions of wildness.

Civilization is monolithic and the civilized way of conceiving everything that is observed is also monolithic. When confronted with the myriad of beings all around, the civilized mind needs to categorize in order to feel that it is understanding (though, in fact, all it is understanding is how to make things useful to civilization). Nature is one of the most essential of civilized categories, one of the most useful in containing the wildness of human individuals and enforcing their self-identification as civilized, social beings.

Probably the earliest conception of nature was something similar to that found in the old testament of the Bible: the evil wilderness, a place of desolation inhabited by ferocious and poisonous beasts, malicious demons and the mad. This conception served a purpose especially important to early civilizations. It induced fear of what was wild, keeping most people in the city walls and giving those who did go out to explore a defensive posture, an attitude that they were in enemy territory. This concept, in this way, helped create the dichotomy between “human” and “nature” that keeps individuals from living wildly, that is, in terms of their desires.

But a totally negative conception of nature was bound to reach its limits of usefulness since it made civilization into an enclosed and besieged fortress, and to survive civilization has to expand, to be able to exploit more and more. “Nature” became a basket of resources for civilization, a “mother” to nurture “humanity” and its civilization. It was beautiful, worthy of worship, contemplation, study...and exploitation. It was not evil...but it was chaotic, capricious and unreliable. Fortunately for civilization, “human nature” had evolved, rational and needing to order things, to bring them under control. Wild places were necessary so that people could study and contemplate “nature” in its untouched state, but precisely so that civilized human beings could come to understand and control “natural” processes in order to use them to

expand civilization. So the "evil wilderness" is overshadowed by a "nature" or "wilderness" that has positive value *for civilization*.

The concept of nature creates systems of social value and morality. Because of the apparently contradictory strands that have gone into the development of "nature," these systems also may appear contradictory; but they all achieve the same end: our domestication. Those who tell us to "act civilized" and those who tell us to "act natural" are really telling us the same thing: "Live in accordance with external values, not in accordance with your desires." The morality of naturalness has been no less vicious than any other morality. People have been imprisoned, tortured and even killed for committing "unnatural acts"- and still are. "Nature," too, is an ugly and demanding god.

From its beginnings, nature has been an image created by authority to reinforce its power. It is no surprise that in modern society, where image dominates reality and often seems to create it, "nature" comes into its own as a means of keeping us domesticated. "Nature" shows on TV, Sierra Club calendars, "wilderness" outfitters, "natural" foods and fibers, the "environmental" president and "radical" ecology all conspire to create "nature" and, our "proper" relationship to it. The image evoked retains aspects of the "evil wilderness" of early civilization in a subliminal form. "Nature" shows always include scenes of predation and the directors of these shows have been said to use electric prods in attempts to goad animals into fights. The warnings given to would-be "wilderness" explorers about dangerous animals and plants and the amount of products created by "wilderness" outfitters for dealing with these things is quite excessive from my own experiences wandering in wild places. We are given the image of life outside of civilization as a struggle for survival.

But the society of the spectacle needs the "evil wilderness" to be subliminal in order to use it efficiently. The dominant image of "nature" is that it is a resource and a thing of beauty to be contemplated and studied. "Wilderness" is a place to which we can retreat for a short time, if properly outfitted, to escape from the humdrum of daily life, to relax and meditate or to find excitement and adventure. And, of course, "nature" remains the "mother" who supplies our needs, the resource from which civilization creates itself.

In commodity culture, "nature" recuperates the desire for wild adventure, for life free from domestication, by selling us its image. The subliminal concept of the "evil wilderness" gives venturing into the woods a tang of risk that appeals to the adventurous and rebellious. It also reinforces the idea that we don't really belong there, thus selling us the numerous products deemed necessary for incursions into wild places. The positive concept of nature makes us feel that we must experience wild places (not realizing that the concepts we've had fed into us will create what we experience at least as much as our

Reclus: An Egoist Green Anarchist Exploration

by Fire

Elisée Reclus ...

Just as I begin my exploration, a huge periwinkle blue dragonfly enters my mid-autumn world. Hovering just above the pond a few feet away. I appreciate its lacy wings that seem so delicate yet are strong enough to carry the creature great distances. Strong enough to cause ripples across the water's surface. What is it doing? Is it looking for something to eat? What shall I do with it now that it has entered my world? An infinite number of possibilities exist for me and this unique creature. I could study the movement of its wings and their effects on other lives of the pond. I could capture and cage it for further examination (or to merely admire it whenever I wished). Then again, I could kill it and dissect it to better understand the mechanics of flight. I wonder if it is edible? How would it taste? Would it nourish me?

A thousand possibilities, a thousand thoughts flying around inside my head. Filling the spaces between us ... I begin again.

Reclus is ...

Sharp and darting movements mark my dragonfly's maneuvers. Is it searching for something beneath the water? Is it dancing with its own reflection? Is it awakening to its consciousness? Is it ... ARGH! I do love my curious nature, my inquisitive and contemplative mind. But these qualities keep getting in the way of simply enjoying the dragonfly's marvelous presence. Its gift to my day. Why can't I simply dwell in its freedom of movement and of time; far more expansive than mine. Or so it seems from the perspective of one who is limited by boundaries far more insidious than of a perceived absence of proper consciousness or shorter lifespan or ...

Reclus is dead!

And here I am, spending my too-quickly-waning fall days aiding in his resurrection. Bringing back to life yet another long-departed, enlightened-European, male anarchist. Beyond the obvious academic credentialing that his revival has brought, why do we care about the word and activities of one dead for over a hundred fifty years? Did he discover something profound in his world travels as a preeminent geographer? Can he further clarify our perspective on the current and potential future of our worlds? Is there anything in his ancient assessment that remains relevant today given the scale of

the fulfillment of wild human desires. This activity is done to fill the needs of power and capital, nation-states and commodity exchange, the whole military-industrial-national-empire. It should rightly be called production-centered or power-centered or death-centered since we must kill our wild natures to be part of it. Our daily activity is done to keep this 'machine' running. This machine is what is devouring the earth, nature, wilderness and humanity. To work in the entrails of this 'leviathan' requires that we submit all our wildness to the needs, schedules and routines of it. On a daily basis, this is how we individually kill our desire for our nature, our wildness.

To do this, to suppress our own wild, human, animal instincts, we must put on successively thick layers of emotional 'armor' to protect ourselves from the pain of a murdered nature trying to break through. Like asphalt and herbicide to keep the wild plants from destroying the roadbed, this armor must be constantly added to or it begins to fall away. This armor can also be thought of as the *internalization* of the machine, its logic and schedules. Eventually the armor can be mistaken for what it is suppressing in the same way that so many people today mistake concrete, machinery and media images for the real world. This is the success of the System, the goal of our education, the triumph of Domestication over Wilderness.

It is only such armored beings, domesticated humans who have internalized the machine, that would engage in self-destructive/nature-destructive activity. Herein lies the danger of all modes of ideological (pseudo) awareness and activity (of which Biocentrism is but one of many, many). By encouraging us to follow that which is external to us, that which negates our own *human* wildness and desires, these ways of thinking and acting, *help build our emotional armor against nature!* They encourage self-repression and domestication. Ideology causes us to further distrust our wild natural instincts to be free. In this way, we are more able to destroy the world while at the same time we are that much less able to transcend and break free from this very mode of destructive behavior. What is needed is a subjective, critical, internal-human-nature-centered type of 'self-theory' that helps us peel away the mystification surrounding our relation to ourselves, our world and our daily activity. We need to see domestication and the suppression of wilderness and freedom clearly and without illusions before we can begin the wild, liberatory celebration of our nature, the creation of planetary wilderness and the pitiless annihilation of everything which stands in the way.

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actual surroundings). In this way, civilization successfully recuperates even those areas it seems not to touch directly, transforming them into "nature," into "wilderness," into aspects of the spectacle which keep us domesticated.

"Nature" domesticates because it transforms wildness into a monolithic entity, a huge realm separate from civilization. Expressions of wildness in the midst of civilization are labelled as immaturity, madness, delinquency, crime or immorality, allowing them to be dismissed, locked away, censured or punished while still maintaining that what is "natural" is good. When "wildness" becomes a realm outside of us rather than an expression of our own individual free-spiritedness, then there can be experts in "wildness" who will teach us the "correct" ways of "connecting" with it. On the west coast, there are all sorts of spiritual teachers making a mint selling a "wildness" to yuppies which in no way threatens their corporate dreams, their Porsches or their condos. "Wilderness" is a very profitable industry these days.

Ecologists- even "radical" ecologists- play right into this. Rather than trying to go wild and destroy civilization with the energy of their unchained desires, they try to "save wilderness." In practice, this means begging or trying to manipulate the authorities into stopping the more harmful activities of certain industries and turning pockets of relatively undamaged woods, deserts and mountains into protected "Wilderness Areas." This only reinforces the concept of wildness as a monolithic entity, "wilderness" or "nature," and the commodification inherent in this concept. The very basis of the concept of a "Wilderness Area" is the separation of "wildness" and "humanity." So it is no surprise that one of the brands of "radical" ecological ideology has created the conflict between "biocentrism" and "anthropocentrism" - as though we should be anything other than egocentric.

Even those "radical ecologists" who claim to want to reintegrate people into "nature" are fooling themselves. Their vision of (as one of them put it) a "wild, symbiotic whole" is just the monolithic concept created by civilization worded in a quasi-mystical way. "Wildness" continues to be a monolithic entity for these ecological mystics, a being greater than us, a god to whom we must submit. But submission is domestication. Submission is what keeps civilization going. The name of the ideology which enforces submission matters little - let it be "nature," let it be the "wild, symbiotic whole." The result will still be the continuation of domestication.

When wildness is seen as having nothing to do with any monolithic concept, including "nature" or "wilderness," when it is seen as the potential free spiritedness in individuals that could manifest at any moment, *only then* does it become a threat to civilization. Any of us could spend years in "the wilderness," but if we continued to see what surrounded us through the lens of civilization, if we continued to see the myriads of beings monolithically as

"nature," as "wilderness," as the "wild, symbiotic whole," we'd still be civilized; we would not be wild. But if, in the midst of the city, we at any moment actively refuse our domestication, refuse to be dominated by the social roles that are forced upon us and instead live in terms of our passions, desires and whims, if we become the unique and unpredictable beings that lie hidden beneath the roles, we are, for that moment, wild. Playing fiercely among the ruins of a decaying civilization (but don't be fooled, even in decay it is a dangerous enemy and capable of staggering on for a long time), we can do our damndest to bring it tumbling down. And free-spirited rebels will reject the survivalism of ecology as just another attempt by civilization to suppress free life, and will strive to live the chaotic, ever-changing dance of freely relating, unique individuals in opposition both to civilization and to civilization's attempt to contain wild, free-spirited living: "Nature."

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other. They are both ideologies. They both are external, packaged thought for consumption and directed action. Both have adherents who purport that the ideology must be allowed to do the thinking for us, and that we must act out of motivations it prescribes. Ideological thinking requires that we relinquish our desires, our unpredictability, our ability to change and adapt and submit them to the category, label, doctrine, guru, bible or, in the case of Biocentrism, to an abstracted nature; *an idea of nature*.

When we relinquish our desires and our wild animal instincts, we are relinquishing what is most *natural*, what is most *human* about us. Ideological thinking (false consciousness, since the thoughts and actions are not our own) is the enemy of nature. It is the enemy of humans because it deprives us of what makes us human—our human nature, our wildness. *All* authority—since it is ideological, externally imposed—is the enemy of nature and wildness. All domination and obedience kills nature in us, deprives us of our natures by depriving us of our humanity, our dreams, desires and wildness. This is the mistake of claiming to act or think in the name of something external to us—whether it be Biocentrism, Marxism, non-violence, 'The Cause', America, Deep Ecology or an *abstracted idea of nature itself*. These all kill our unruly, natural wild humanity. To say we are thinking or acting for Deep Ecology or the Earth or Nature or the Spotted Owl is to act for reasons external to us. To do this we must submit our desires to our ideological forms of thought, we must suppress our wildness, our individuality—our nature. What a bizarre circumstance, to be risking injury or imprisonment to defend *an idea of nature* while killing the *real living nature* in ourselves! Of course, if you are doing/thinking those things for yourself and not killing wildness, not killing nature, not involved in ideological activity, then there is no reason to invoke labels as justifications. Be able to say: "I'm doing this out of my own desires for wildness, for my own human nature (or whatever)." And herein lies the way out of the contradiction.

Both Biocentrism and Anthropocentrism are ideologies and therefore anti-nature. If we act out of Biocentrism we are actually killing our nature, *not* being nature-centered. If we act out of Anthropocentrism, we are *not* acting out of our human-centered desires and wild animal instincts. We are acting out of ideological demands. So, Biocentrism is anti-nature and Anthropocentrism is anti-human! So they are both anti-human and anti-nature.

So, big deal? But this becomes critical when we see that it is this same mode of self-denial or self-repression of wildness that allows us to do anti-human activity and anti-nature activity in this society. Biocentrism (and all ideologies), therefore, reinforces this precondition, reinforces our domestication. The actual daily activity, the dominant mode of human existence on the earth today is *mislabeled* by the Biocentrists. It is not Anthropocentrism, not human-centered. It is not done to meet human needs, not done as a result of

"Biocentrism says". Who is Biocentrism? When we begin to ask such questions, we can peel off layers of mystification and confusion like the skin of an onion until we can see what lies beneath: actually, biocentrism doesn't say anything. Actual people do and say things such as "Biocentrism this and that...", not some mystical biocentrism force or creature. It's important to uncover the real source of the ideas we hold so they can be fully evaluated in their actual content and meaning. If we then really do agree, then we can say "I think this and that..." and the ideas will no longer have control over us. We will control the ideas. Beware the dangers of attributing concrete activity and thinking to abstract concepts or doctrines or slogans.

In response to attacks, the person who engages in ideological thinking and activity simply builds bigger and higher walls. To continue this imagery for a moment longer, we can see that eventually the ideologist will be overwhelmed by the theorist who, being free to think, evaluate and rove around, will eventually find the cracks and weak spots that will bring the whole thing down with little effort. Imagine a guerilla group with a radical self theory challenging a monolithic state force under the grip of a rigid chain of command (external control, ideology). This whole preceding discussion has obvious relevance for anyone engaged in direct subversive resistance – or think they are: ideology creeps up where you least expect it. But you can draw your own conclusions on that. I've tried to present a fairly clear and simplified (if not simplistic) picture of what ideological activity is, how it operates and how it can limit us. I've tried to contrast that with theory, a better way to understand the world and think and act. What I'll try to do now is to explain how ideology is the death knell of radical change, of humanity, of nature and of the earth and wilderness. I showed at the very beginning how biocentrism (an ideology, a category of nature-ally correct thought and activity, a label used to discredit opposing views, an external source of ideas and action, an authority) is premised on the view that humans are separate from nature and act out of human-centeredness (anthropocentrism) and this is what is destroying the earth. But I also showed that the apparent *opposites* of biocentrism and anthropocentrism both in fact mean the same thing. I said that this dichotomy was made by breaking out of *ideological* forms of thought. This is what I mean.

I'd like to start with this assertion: humans are not separate from nature. Our 'nature' is that which is most 'natural' to us - our deepest needs, desires, dreams, internally defined ideas (self-theory), our emotional wants and expression, our wild, animal instincts. Our human nature is our wild, free animal instinct and subjectivity. This is what is *most natural* and also what is *most human* about us since these qualities arise *naturally* and from *within* us. 'Human' and 'nature' are not contradictory, mutually exclusive terms.

Both Biocentrism (life/nature/earth-centered) and Anthropocentrism (human-centrism) mean the same thing, yet one is defined as being opposed to the

Biocentrism: Ideology Against Nature

That humanity is somehow 'out of balance' with nature is hardly a topic of controversy nowadays. There is little question that humans are fouling the world to the point of suicide for us and mass extinction for all other life. To claim otherwise is ludicrous. In a variety of ways, people have attempted to grasp the problem, define it, and seek solutions. Of the many new and more faddish results, few have been as popular as Deep Ecology—also known as Biocentrism—the view that humans are acting out of excessive human-centeredness (anthropocentrism) and thus destroying the planet and the rest of the species which have just as much 'intrinsic right' to live out their biological destiny as we do. Accordingly, Biocentrism (life/earth/nature centeredness) calls for a new way of acting. Specifically, it calls for 'earth-centered' activity and thinking—putting the 'earth first' (instead of putting ourselves first) as a way out of the global dilemma.

In the following rant I wish to take a critical look at these assertions and show them for what I believe to be false, misleading and even counter-productive. I don't mean this to be a sermon or some statement of absolute truth. No way!

What follows is, more than anything else, just my initial attempt at deciphering and understanding the relationships between some types of ideas and activity that I've discovered to be true to the best of my experience. The points I take on here, and their broader implications, have been of critical importance to many of the great disputes and inconsistencies within what can be called the 'radical ecology movement'. Hopefully, my efforts here will help to encourage further discussion.

According to its proponents, Biocentrism is nature-centered living. It therefore must be premised on an irreconcilable separation of humans and nature. This is so because if humans were inherently natural beings—i.e., an equal part of nature, fully integrated into the natural flow of life—then to be human-centered (anthropocentric) would also imply being nature-centered (biocentric). But Biocentrism has already been defined by its practitioners to be the opposite of Anthropocentrism. So, according to Biocentrist thought (nature-centered philosophy) humans are irredeemably estranged from nature—or were never part of it in the first place—because 'human' is posited as the opposite of 'nature' (Anthropocentrism versus Biocentrism). Oddly, Anthropocentrism implies the very same thing. If Anthropocentrism is human-centered living and this is the opposite of Biocentrism, or nature-centered living, then once

again, "human" and 'nature' are opposite and therefore separate. It is a contradiction to say that two positions which are identical are, in fact, opposite. I will try to resolve this dilemma by going outside of what is common to both Biocentrism and Anthropocentrism— ideological thinking.

Ideological thinking is false consciousness. In other words, it is ideas and activity which originate elsewhere, outside of our own emotional and intellectual subjectivity, our identity. Ideology is when we mistake others' thinking for our own or when our own thoughts become rigid and fossilized and those thoughts come to control us – instead of the other way around. Marxism, all religions, and guru cults are all very clear and obvious examples of ideological thinking. The politically correct, sacred or official line is what one must adhere to. These demands on our activity originate not out of our own needs or desires, or ideas or personal lived experience or community, but from outside of us, externally to us. Other examples of ideological (false) activity include: all political ideologies, 'causes' (doing things for 'the cause' instead of for our own needs), consumerism (externally created wants and preferences) and philosophies.

Both Biocentrism, and its necessary component Anthropocentrism, are ideologies. They both place *external* demands on our thinking and activity. Biocentrism differs from, say, Marxism, Christianity or the Moonies only in *content*. In *form* it is identical. How it differs is that it demands that we act, not according to the politically, morally or guru determined correct line, but to the 'naturally' correct one. 'Nature' – or an abstract overruling idea-of-nature replaces the guru, bible, or party doctrines. There is no room in these (or any other ideologies) for the vagaries of human wildness, independent thought, activity or desire – or nature. All thought and activity is pre-scribed, determined externally to our human needs and desires. At times we may agree with something that is also part of an ideology. But at this point, if it is truly no longer ideological, no longer external, no longer false consciousness, then we need not invoke the label, category, guru, or other 'authority' to justify our ideas and activity. In other words, instead of saying "according to the Marxist doctrines...", or "The bible says...", or "Deep Ecology says...", we would say "I think that...", "I've noticed that...", "I feel that...", or "I'm doing this because...". In this case – authentic subjective ideas and activity are based on our constantly changing needs and desires and always personally checked out against our own everyday lived experience – we can defend and explain our ideas and activity with arguments and examples that we know to be true because we've thought about or actually experienced them. (This has been called 'theory' – more on that later). In other words, we claim our ideas as our own.

When we are in the grips of ideological thinking and acting we cannot do this because the ideas are not our own – we did not think, feel or experience

them for ourselves. (Ideology, in this way, is administered thought, directed action – more on that later.) Therefore, we cannot argue, explain or justify them ourselves. Instead when someone opposes and challenges our ideology, we must put them into a category – i.e., label them as 'other'. The label (authority, justification) of the ideologist is then used to justify *evasion* of any challenge. Some examples are "That's just Marxism...", "That's violence, we follow the Non-violence code...", "She's a humanist...". Thus, any challenge to an ideology can be dismissed as that of an 'outsider' in the eyes of the Party faithful who will all nod their heads in agreement at how clever the ideologist is.

Earlier I referred to 'theory'. Theory is (to clearly define it at least for the sake of this discussion) the opposite of ideology. Ideology is inside-out theory. In ideological activity, the motivations come from without. With theory, the motivations come from within, from our own *subjective ideas*, experiences, longings and needs. Thus theory can also be called 'self-theory'. Most people today are walking around inside-out, motivated and directed by a myriad of things – anything but themselves. Theory is never static, never rigid. Our theory, if we fail to constantly evolve and test it against our experience and new information, quickly fossilizes into ideological thinking.

When we base our activities and ideas on our self theory, we can clearly see what the actuality behind new information is and choose to take or leave whatever we want. The self theorist skips and dances through the great supermarket of ideology, tearing open every package, scattering the contents and appropriating what seems good and nourishing and discarding the rest. The ideologist shops carefully, or even perhaps on impulse, looking for just the right fit of prepackaged ideas to take home and consume wholeheartedly – after paying at the register of course! Ideologists often are brand switchers. They'll stick with one package of (non) thought only until the next one in a shinier package comes along and lures them in. Other ideologists maintain life-long brand loyalty!

In the earlier discussion about ideologists using labels to evade challenges, we can say that the self theorist can easily see – and see past – the ideological boundaries of the opponent by watching for examples of ideological thinking such as statements like "Deep Ecology says that...", "Marxism says that...", "Gandhi would have said that...". The person under the influence of an ideology, a false consciousness, on the other hand, having constructed these barriers, cannot see out. It has become a wall, a real barrier to advancement, a very un-radical thing to do.

Note also that just as the ideologist isn't the originator of his/her ideas, so s/he neither claims the credit for them (e.g. "*biocentrism* says..."). But here is another example how the ideologist is mystified. Doctrines, ideologies and the like do not *themselves* talk and so it is wrong and misleading to say