Community and the Ecological Self

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Abstract

Small face-to-face communities provide conditions for the growth of relational selves, which, unlike the individualistic selves of liberalism, are predisposed to empathy, and hence arguably to an ecocentric perspective. The relationality of community in this sense, however, needs to be distinguished from abstract forms of holism, such as nationalism and globalism. Community can nevertheless to some extent meet the challenges of transnationality by itself assuming certain transnational features, without thereby losing its roots in particularity and concreteness and assuming the abstract character of globalism.

In this contribution I shall explore some of the tensions between liberal democracy and the requirements of thoroughgoing ecological reform, where by this I mean a degree of reform commensurate with the current world-wide ecological crisis. I propose to adopt an ecocentric rather than an anthropocentric yardstick of reform since, as is explained in the introduction to this collection, ecocentrism affords an exacting standard for ascertaining the true environmental potential of political systems. I shall argue that liberal democracy fails to provide the kind of social conditions conducive to the large-scale emergence of an ecocentric consciousness, and hence that ecocentric environmentalism is bound to remain a minority concern in liberal regimes. I shall then outline the kind of social conditions which I consider generally to be a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for the emergence of an ecocentric outlook.1 Up to this point my paper recapitulates, though in an ecological vein, some of the lines of argument developed by communitarian, socialist and feminist critics of liberalism. Thereafter, however, I subject the notion of eco-communitarian selfhood, developed in the first half of the study, to closer scrutiny, distinguishing it from abstract forms of collectivism or globalism, yet also expanding it into a transnational frame. It is also worth noting that the overall argument is largely programmatic, as space does not allow the full development and

defence of all the claims and inferences involved along the way.

Liberal Democracy and Morality
What are the underlying principles of democracy? There is of course no agreed-upon answer to this question. But I would suggest that the basic aim of democracy, as it was understood both in classical Greece and in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was for the individual members of society to achieve some degree of control over social decisions that affected their lives. That is, the aim was to take the power to make those decisions out of the hands of absolute authorities, and to place it, to varying degrees, into the hands of the people whom those decisions affected. In other words, people were to be given the power to conduct their lives as freely as possible from the control of 'higher' authorities. Indeed no 'higher' authority was recognised: individuals themselves in principle had the final authority over their own lives. In this sense, all individuals were equal: no individual or class of individuals was of a higher order than any other. A certain notion of equality is thus implicit in this conception of democracy. But even more deeply embedded in this conception, I think, is the value of autonomy. Advocates of democracy insist on individual freedom from higher authorities not so much because they think that this is the best way to get what they want, in the sense of satisfying their immediate needs and desires, but rather because they value self-rule for its own sake. Hence even were they offered a political system in which everything they wanted would be granted to them by a benevolent, paternalistic authority, they would not be satisfied, for the point of their preference for democracy is not so much that it delivers what they want, in a material sense, but that it provides some degree of self-rule.2

Following a number of feminist, socialist and communitarian critics *[Sandel, 1982; Poole, 1993; Jaggar, 1983; Pateman, 1988; Nye,1988],* I would argue that democracy in this sense valorises individualism, where this is understood as a particular sense of identity on the part of the members of the society in question. Or rather, it presupposes such individualism in theory, and helps to create or reinforce it in practice. Members of societies which are democratic in this sense see themselves as ultimate social units, of which society as a whole is merely the aggregate. The interests of these units are logically given independently of, and prior to, the interests of society; indeed the function of society, from this point of view, is merely to facilitate the unfettered self-realisation of such individuals - to enable these individuals to pursue their conception of their own good in their own way.

I propose to call democracy understood as a system of governance dedicated to individual freedom and self-rule 'liberal democracy', though I understand such a form of democracy to be capable of taking direct and indirect forms - from the participatory democracies of the ancient world to the representative or parliamentary democracies of the modern West. However, I am using the term 'liberal democracy' here, and in what follows, to denote an ideal type, rather than any actual flesh-and-blood historical society, for I am stripping the notion of its institutional and procedural and even economic3 particularities, and focusing only on its ideological base - that is, its over-riding commitment to individual freedom and autonomy (where this, as I argue below, also implies a contractarian view of the foundations of society). In this sense, my use of the term 'liberal' is narrower than that of some liberal theorists, and the critique of 'liberalism' that I offer may not apply to some more encompassing theorisations of liberalism.4

It is liberal democracy understood in the sense of this ideal type that is, in my view, in tension with the requirements of an ecocentric outlook. This is for at least two related reasons, the first pertaining to morality, the second to identity. I shall examine the problem of morality in the present section, and that of identity in the next.

The view of human nature that I am here characterising as 'liberal' implies that people come together in democratic societies for the purpose of securing the conditions for self-rule, rather than on account of fellow feeling, or a desire to create social bonds or relationships as ends in themselves or for altruistic purposes. In other words, such democratic forms of society might be seen as having a contractarian rather than a moral basis. Adapting Rawls's veil-of-ignorance strategy to this purely contractarian end, it might be argued that if our ultimate interest is individual self-rule, then democratic organisation is simply prudentialism of the highest order - it involves our setting up society so that whatever happens to me (or my children) - however my fortunes (or those of my children) change - 1 shall still be free, to some degree, to pursue my own good in my own way. (However rich I am, I may become poor; however powerful, I may become weak; however able, I may become incapacitated; whatever social roles accrue to my gender now, they may give way to others; whatever my sexual orientation now, it may change; whatever my own race, that of my children or my grandchildren might be different. Given the inevitable uncertainty of the future, I can best secure my own long-term autonomy, or freedom to

legislate for myself, by granting such freedom to all.)

Democracy in this contractual sense, then, has the satisfying characteristic of *appearing* to be 'moral' - it appears to rest on a principle of disinterested respect for the autonomy of all - without in fact requiring any moral or altruistic commitment from its members. It can be justified purely in terms of the interest of each individual in ruling themselves, and of their fitness to do so. Indeed such democracies *cannot* consistently require any common moral or altruistic commitment from their members - they *cannot* be founded on a public morality - since if they were, this would in itself violate the autonomy of their members, such autonomy entailing as it does the freedom of individuals to choose their own conception of the good.

It is this implicit lack of moral basis in liberal forms of political organisation that presents an obstacle to ecopolitics. For if the justification for individual self-rule or autonomy for all is that each individual is thereby assured of their own autonomy in any circumstances, then since neither I nor my children can ever become non-human, my interest in securing my own autonomy under all circumstances will not lead me to grant autonomy (in the sense of freedom from undue interference) to non-human beings: there is no reason for me to insist on their protection from the rest of society, since I can never be in their place.

In other words, in the absence of any common moral or altruistic underpinning to society, which might be generalised to non-human beings, there are no grounds intrinsic to liberal democracy for protecting the non-human world for its own sake.

Of course this is not to say that individuals in a liberal society are free to interfere with the environment in whatever ways they please. Some human actions have consequences for the environment that encroach on the autonomy of other human beings. Thus liberal democracies may attempt to deal with the problem of environmental protection by treating nature anthropocentrically as a set of resources which must be distributed and conserved in accordance with liberal principles of justice. Contemporary liberal philosophers seek to limit the destructive use that individuals and corporations make of the environment basically by appeal to the 'harm principle'. The freedom of a timber company to make commercial use of a forest 'resource' has to be offset on the one hand against the freedom of other groups to make, say, recreational use of the forest and on the other hand against the harm that, say, pollution from the timber mill may entail for

residents downstream. The main innovation that liberal philosophers introduce into their arguments in addressing the problem of environmental degradation or resource exhaustion is the idea that the harm principle applies not only to present individuals but to future generations as well. Our use of the environment must be such as not to harm or unduly limit the choices of human beings of the future as well as of the present. But this concern for future generations need not be interpreted in a strongly moral sense if we take my interest in self-rule to include the interest of my children therein. However, although liberal societies are not founded on a public morality, but on a particular form of individual self interest, namely the interest in self-rule, this is not to say that individuals, in exercising their freedom, might not commit themselves to moralities of their own choosing. That is, the 'good' that individuals are free to pursue in their own way may of course be a moral good as much as an egoistic good - so long as the realisation of such a 'moral' good does not contravene the harm principle or compromise the individual's own freedom to rule himself.5

From this point of view then, it is open to an individual with an ecocentric conception of the good to pursue this conception of the good in a democratic society, but on the understanding that this good is part of *her* interest, and counts for no more than that in computations of the collective good. In other words, her concern for the well-being of other life-forms is not taken at face value in this scenario, but is in effect converted into a kind of psychological interest of the individual in question. Her concern for other life forms is taken into consideration, if at all, out of respect for her freedom to pursue her own interests as she sees fit, and hence it is taken into consideration for *her* sake rather than for that of the other life forms themselves. Liberalism thus collapses the interests of multitudes of non- human beings and systems into a portion of the interests of perhaps no more than a handful of human advocates, and to the extent that those interests are taken seriously, it is out of a calculated deference to human autonomy.

In reply to this, however, a defender of liberalism might point out that liberal forms of democracy are not incompatible with communicative mechanisms within society. To the principle that each individual should be free to pursue her own conception of the good in her own way may be added the principle that as a society we should have mechanisms for communicating about significant conceptions of the good (Dryzek, this collection). In other words, the liberal might take the view that it is simply up to those who hold an ecocentric perspective to persuade the other members of society to share this

perspective. If they are successful in inducing everyone to share it, the liberal might argue, then liberal democratic societies would have no difficulty in implementing an ecocentric polity, since human interest would in this case be enlarged to encompass the interests of the non-human world.

However, while it is true that if a majority of individuals in a liberal democracy adopted an ecocentric worldview, then an ecocentric polity might be forthcoming, it is unlikely - for reasons that will become apparent below - that most individuals in a purely liberal democracy *would* adopt an ecocentric worldview. And as long as there is significant conflict over ecocentric and anthropocentric perspectives, ecocentric outcomes are bound to be less likely than anthropocentric ones. This is because the ecocentric interests of individuals will always appear relatively lightweight compared with the direct material interests of their opponents: the 'psychological' or 'aesthetic' desires of wilderness *aficionados,* for instance, are always likely to seem trivial compared with the direct bread-and-butter interests of workers in the timber and mining industries. The freedom of the wilderness *aficionado* would seem to be less compromised by the logging of a forest than the freedom of a timber worker would be by the preserving of it. Thus when ecocentric values are subsumed under the interests of the human individuals who subscribe to them, the prospects for the protection of non-human life for its own sake are likely to remain bleak.

Liberal Democracy and Identity
I have argued in the previous section that there is a tension between liberalism and an ecocentric environmentalism, in so far as the foundation of liberal societies is not altruism - which might in principle be extended to the non-human world - but rather individual self-interest, specifically an interest in self-rule. This lack of an intrinsic or definitive concern for others on the part of liberal individuals is, I think, precisely a function of their individualism, the individualism implicit in the liberal premise - that is, that individual self-rule is the ultimate desideratum in politics. The priority of the principle of individual self-rule in liberalism means that in a liberal society people are neither expected to be altruistic, nor determined to be so through the structure of their social institutions. They are rather expected to conform to a view of human nature which is, *au fond,* individualistic and basically egoistic rather than altruistic, at least in the social and political domain (Plumwood, this collection), and liberal institutions shape them in such a way as to fulfil these expectations.

How do these institutions achieve this? Liberal institutions foster individualism by allowing social status to be won (or lost) through competition, rather than inherited through bloodlines or custom. In this way liberal societies historically broke up the fixed patterns of premodern societies, and set each individual in motion. Competing with their fellows to climb the ladders and avoid falling down the snakes of an hierarchical social structure, individuals could no longer define themselves in terms of permanent relationships with particular communities or places. In a world in which everything was potentially in flux, and no social destiny was guaranteed, individuals were forced to fall back on their own personal attributes and private relationships for their sense of identity.

However, the fact that liberal individuals are disposed to be self- interested and hence competitive does not, as observed in the previous section, entirely obviate the possibility of their contingently forgoing competition in favour of co-operation or even service-to-others, if these courses are sanctioned by reason or instilled by socialisation. But in this event, reason and/or socialisation will have to overpower the egoistic disposition of the individuals in question. In short, in liberal societies individuals are neither expected to be, nor constituted so as to become, disposed to fellow-feeling, empathy, spontaneous identification with others and their interests.6 Without such an innate disposition, it is unlikely that more than a minority of such individuals will ever arrive at that perhaps most altruistic of all commitments - that is, the commitment to protect the non-human world for its own sake, as well as for the sake of its human beneficiaries.

Let us look a little more closely at the idea of the liberal individual. Liberal individualism may in fact be seen as exemplifying a principle of individuation that is quite general in its application, in the sense that it may be used to define what it is to be an individual across a range of domains, including physics, society and psychology *[Mathews, 1991]*. This principle, which is at bottom metaphysical, may be characterised as one of separation or division: it gives rise to *atomistic* realities, realities made up of ultimate units, where these units are, or are analogous to, substances in the traditional metaphysical sense - they are logically capable of standing alone. In such a substance scenario, it is the individuals that are given - it is they which have ontological priority. Assemblages of such individuals are mere aggregates, whose identity is derived from their constituent units. Moreover, since each individual is logically independent of all others, its properties belong to it, and it alone. Hence it is quite possible for a particular class of individuals,

defined in terms of a common property, to be considered as categorically distinct from another class, whose members lack the property in question. If the property in question is a highly valued one, the class of individuals that possesses it might then be ranked above the class that lacks it. In this way, separation or division as a principle of individuation permits dichotomisation and value hierarchism (and hence reason/nature dualism, as we shall see below) to inform ontology.

It is easy to see how such a substance criterion of individuation is translated into social terms in liberal philosophy. From a liberal point of view, society is made up of discrete, independent individuals (social atoms), which can logically exist asocially, but who choose to place themselves in social settings with a view to furthering their own individual interests. Social structure is ultimately explained in terms of the actions and intentions of such individuals — that is, individuals are given; the identity of societies is derived from that of their constituents - that is, the individuals or social atoms.

Liberal individualism is an abstract form of individualism in the sense that, in the shift from metaphysics to politics, liberals simply presuppose that human individuals, like metaphysical atoms, are logically capable of 'standing alone'. That is, they simply presuppose that people are logically capable of existing as rational (and therefore human) beings, independently of society, even though, from an empirical point of view, rational beings of course never are simply 'given', independently of social relations.7 In this sense, liberal notions of human identity are based on an abstract idea of 'the individual', and liberal identity is accordingly an abstract form of identity, rather than one that is grounded in our actual experience of the process of identity formation. On the other hand, however, liberals so arrange society as to vindicate to some extent their presuppositions with regard to human nature. Through institutions that promote competition and social mobility, and which to a significant extent instrumentalise and contractualise relations (at least between adult people), liberal society goes some way towards countering the relational aspects of early (and later) identity formation and making actual the abstract individuals prefigured in its theory.

Understanding the way a substance criterion of individuation is used in liberalism also helps to throw light on another aspect of its worldview for, as noted above, the division of the world into discrete, self-contained units makes it possible to treat mind and matter as separate metaphysical

categories - attributes which some individuals possess and others lack, absolutely. Since mind is valorised by liberal, and other Western, philosophers, the class of beings that possess mind may be set apart from, and above, the classes of beings that lack it. In this way, the substance principle of individuation permits a dualistic ranking of mind over body, and humanity over nature, where this has been seen as a hallmark of liberalism by feminist critics *[Jaggar, 1983; Plumwood, 1993]*. Such a dualistic ranking of mind over body, and humanity over nature, also clearly vitiates liberalism as a vehicle for ecocentric politics.

Let me explain the latter point a little more fully. From a liberal point of view, human beings earn their political status, and are entitled to the political prerogative of individual self-rule, on the strength of their capacity for reason. It is reason that qualifies us to legislate for ourselves in matters that affect us directly. But in liberal thought reason is understood dualistically, as that which sets human beings apart from, and above, nature. It seems to follow, then, that the whole edifice of *modern* liberalism, at any rate, is raised, from the very start, on the ideological ruins of nature: human beings are invested with 'natural rights' to freedom and equality on the grounds that they, *qua* human beings, transcend nature.8 The substance principle of individuation thus generates a tendency towards dualism and hierarchism in liberal thought, which vitiates liberalism as a vehicle for a polity based on respect for nature. However, liberal individualism, based as it is on a substance principle of
individuation, does not exhaust the possibilities of human identity. Alternative modes of identity may offer more promising ontological foundations for human empathy with, and compassion for, both the human and non-human worlds. And there may be forms of society which mould human identity along lines more conducive to such an altruistic, and hence potentially ecocentric, outlook than liberal democracies do.

Ecological Identity as a Function of Community
I wish to suggest that a form of human identity defined not in terms of its independence from others but rather in terms of its relationships with them would provide a more appropriate ontological foundation for an ecocentric polity than liberal individualism does. It is the 'relational self ', rather than the 'separate self ' of liberalism, that regards the interests of others as inextricable from its own, and is accordingly imbued with fellow-feeling.

How to understand this contrast between the 'relational self ' and the

'separate self ' of liberalism? One way is to consider the metaphysical principle of individuation which underlies the 'relational self ', in the same way that we have just considered the principle which underlay the 'separate self '. The principle of individuation which produces 'separate selves' is, as we saw, a principle of separation or division, which, like a pastry-cutter, carves reality up into substances or substance-like entities. That which results in 'relational selves', in contrast, may be characterised as a systemic or relational principle *[Mathews, 1991]*. From a relational perspective, reality is not divisible into units. It is rather a system or web of relationships. Individuals are, in this scheme of things, constituted by their relations with other individuals - it is these relations that determine their identity. Such individuals cannot stand alone - their identities are logically intermeshed with those of others.

In this scenario, then, it is the system of relations as a whole that is given, or has ontological priority. Though the identities of individuals are 'real', in the sense that they are objectively determined rather than nominal or illusory, they have a derivative status: without the system as a whole, the individuals would not exist.9

Since the attributes of any element of such a system are in fact a function of the attributes of other elements, or of the system of relations as a whole, the credit (or blame) for attributes that happen to be more prized (or reviled) than others cannot be assigned exclusively to the individuals who manifest those attributes, but must be distributed more diffusely throughout the system. Hence attributes cannot properly be dichotomised, nor the classes which ostensibly possess them ranked one above another. Now the relational principle of individuation is, of course, invoked in contemporary ecological metaphysics, which is relational to the core *[Naess, 1973, 1979; Mathews, 1991]*. But how is it to be translated into social terms? Before answering this question, it might be worth pointing out that it is not my intention here to attempt to legitimate a particular social order (in this case, as it happens, community) by arguing that it reflects a particular (in this case, ecological) order of nature. Dryzek criticises this well-worn ideological strategy ('social structure P is right because it is natural') in his contribution to the present collection. While I do not entirely agree with Dryzek on this, since I think there is a sense in which our notions of personhood and society do need to be aligned with the metaphysical, physical, biological and ecological facts of our world if our arrangements for living are to be viable in the longer term, I do not need to settle this issue here. For my present aim is only to discover

the sociopolitical conditions that will produce the kind of selves capable of experiencing themselves and their relation to nature in a way that is likely to induce in them an attitude of sympathetic concern for the natural world, and hence an ecocentric outlook.

How then, returning to our earlier question, is a relational principle of individuation to be translated into social terms? If, as we have seen, a separate self lacks a sense of involvement in the identity of others, and is hence capable of arriving at concern for the interests of others at most through reason, a relational individual is likely to enjoy a sense of self which encompasses others, and hence includes concern for their interests, independently of the dictates of reason. One way of characterising this contrast in the grounds of the respective moral outlooks of the two types of self is through the distinction between rationalistic (justice) and empathetic (care) perspectives in epistemology and ethics.10

According to a number of feminist psychologists," the rationalistic perspective emanates from a psychology that foregrounds the self and backgrounds others and the self's relations to them (this corresponds to what I am here describing as a separate self). The empathetic perspective emanates from a psychology of relatedness, which backgrounds the self and foregrounds the self's relations to others (where this corresponds to what I am here describing as a relational self.) Of course, the main danger associated with a psychology of separateness is that it will not emanate in a moral outlook at all. But if it does, it will tend to be an outlook formed by reason - a 'justice perspective', which seeks primarily to lay down the rights and duties of individuals, abstractly and impartially, in such a way that it is not even in principle necessary for us to know others in order to discover what is right or wrong for them.

From the empathetic perspective, morality is not the rather cold-blooded business of working out that to which others are rationally entitled, whether one likes it or not, and whether one knows them or not, but is rather a matter of *responding* appropriately to those we do know - those with whom we are in communication, in relationship. In other words, morality from this perspective does not rely on tablets of commandments, or rules of conduct, but trusts our own responsiveness to those we know and about whom we accordingly care. Its primary goal is the preservation of the web of relationships which define or sustain both the self and others.

To draw a distinction between these two perspectives is not to say that they are mutually exclusive, or that one is right and the other simply wrongheaded. I would indeed argue that moral sentiment - nourished through sustained relationships with particular others - is a necessary condition for any kind of moral outlook: we have first to learn through experience to care for others before moral argument can have any force. However, once I have learned to care about a particular being of a certain kind, I am more likely to arrive, through reflection, at a generalised concern for beings of that kind than I would if I had never been acquainted with any of the beings in question (this point is particularly important in an ecological connection, as we shall see below.)

If the separate self, with either its unapologetic egoism or its merely intellectual appreciation of justice, is constituted through liberal regimes of individual self-rule, with their concomitants of competition and conflict, what are the sociopolitical conditions for the emergence of a relational self, with its disposition to empathise with others?

I would suggest, along with some communitarians, anarchists and feminists *[Sandel,1982; Ritter, 1980; Elshtain, 1981, 1986; Held, 1987],* that a society in which individual identity was constituted through relations with others would be one in which self-realisation would be achieved through reciprocity and interdependence rather than through autonomy. Co-operation and communion rather than competition and conflict would be the fundamental principle of such a society. This principle suggests the idea of *community,* for it is in small, face-to-face communities that people can achieve genuine interconnectedness through sustained experiences of mutuality and reciprocity.

That community is a logical expression of an empathetic perspective, the moral perspective of a relational self, might be explained as follows: empathy is, from the feminist perspectives of Benjamin, Belenky *et al,* Gilligan, Fox Keller and others, a function of relationship. Clearly, however, 'relationship' must be intended in a special sense in this connection: the term cannot refer merely to instrumental relationships, or relationships of convenience or expediency, let alone of domination or exploitation. It refers rather to relationships based on mutual recognition, on a mutual understanding of the true needs and desires of the other. For this reason, relationship, in the present sense, requires communication: we can know others, and in this sense 'relate to' them, only by communicating with them.

However, when we know others in this sense - when we understand the forces that drive them and the sources of their various forms of self-expression - it is impossible not to feel compassion for them, as spiritual traditions invariably attest. (It is not necessary that we delve into the specific secrets of others' psyches to know them in the present sense; it is sufficient that we establish a certain *rapport,* and a corresponding sense of the reality of their subjectivity, to know that they are feeling, striving, hurting beings, just as we are, where it is this insight that generates empathy on our part, and elicits our sympathy.)

In light of the importance of communication in this scenario, a major moral imperative, from this point of view, is to *keep the channels of communication open.* As long as we are genuinely communicating with others, we shall feel appropriately towards them - that is, communication will help to ensure empathy. An obvious way to ensure that the channels of communication remain open, at a social level, is to organise ourselves into small communities - communities on a human scale, in which it is possible for each individual to communicate effectively with all others.

So it would seem that community is a clear socio-political expression of and condition for relational selfhood, and that relational selfhood provides an ontological foundation for an empathetic outlook and the moral sensibility which accompanies it.

However I would like to dwell a little longer on the ideal of community and the notion of relationality that underpins it. For community may be dismissed as an ontological basis for a moral outlook on the grounds that many traditional communities have been hierarchical in structure. Individuals in such communities may indeed have been interdependent, and constituted by their relations of interdependence, but these relations were often those of the master-to-slave type. In other words, it seems pertinent to ask whether domination and subordination are not forms of relationship which can inform the identities of those who are party to them, and if so, whether relationality is not compatible with hierarchy, and hence inadequate as an ontological foundation for an altruistic outlook?12

In describing a relational self as one constituted by its relationships with others, I have already remarked that the relationships referred to in this context must be of a special type. But it is now imperative to specify this type more precisely. The relations connoted by 'relationships' in the present

context are, I would suggest, not contingent relations but in some sense necessary ones: they are essential to the identity of those who are party to them. But this implies that the relationships in question are such that they contribute to the *self-realisation* of those who are their relata: the individuals in question could not come into being, and flourish, as the kinds of individuals they are, in the absence of these relationships. A certain reciprocity or mutuality is, as I indicated earlier, thereby implied: A depends on B to realise itself, but B also depends on A. Such reciprocity need not be directly one-to-one: A may depend on B without B's directly depending on A, yet A may be necessary to other elements of the system which are in turn necessary for the self-realisation of B. An example drawn from ecology might serve to illustrate the type of relationship in question here: in some parts of Australia, the bettong (a small kangaroo-like marsupial) appears to depend on truffles for its 'self-realisation', though the truffles themselves do not seem to need to be eaten by bettongs. However the *forest* depends on the digging-out activities of bettongs for the health of its root system. When the bettongs die out, as a result of predation by feral species, for instance, the forest dies-back. In this way, it transpires that truffles are indirectly dependent on bettongs for the maintenance of their habitat. Bettongs and truffles may thus be seen as mutually constitutive within a wider framework of relationships.

When this analysis of relationality is applied to the human case, it becomes clear that a relational self is one that depends on certain kinds of relationships with others for its self-realisation, for its coming into being and flourishing as a self. What is it to flourish as a human self? Without digressing for a hundred pages or so, it seems reasonable to say that a minimal condition for human self-realisation is the full realisation of subjectivity: a self can scarcely be regarded as self-realised if it lacks a sense of itself as subject, but instead experiences itself as an object-for- others. In light of this we might redefine the relational self as one whose subjectivity - the essence of its selfhood - is constituted intersubjectively: the self becomes aware of herself as subject by recognising the subjectivity of others and by having her own subjectivity simultaneously recognised and affirmed by them *[Benjamin, 1990; Poole, 1993]*.
It now becomes clear that selves in this sense cannot be constituted by relations of domination and subordination. Hence although master and slave may be logically co-defining, under the descriptions of 'master' and 'slave', they are not mutually constituting *qua* selves - that is, their relationship is not conducive to their mutual flourishing as selves. For, following Hegel,

Sartre, de Beauvoir, Benjamin and others, we might expect the master to objectify the slave, and the slave to have little sense of her own subjectivity - she may identify her master as subject, and, in her fantasies of subjectivity, imagine herself doing as he does (that is, dominating others). No intersubjectivity occurs in such a situation of denial and illusion, and there is certainly no self-realisation for the slave. Even the subjectivity of the master rings hollow, resting as it does on denial, on an inability to confront the reality of the other, where this implies the master's lack of belief in the reality or adequacy of his vaunted 'subjectivity'.

In any case it seems clear that relations of domination and subordination are not the kinds of relationships through which selves, *qua* selves, are mutually realised. So communities which permit relations of domination and subordination will not give rise to relational selves - that is, to the kinds of selves that are given to empathising with one another, and taking each other's interests as seriously as their own. In other words, communities must be *egalitarian* if they are to produce relational selves. Community as a foundation for an empathetic outlook then must be understood in an egalitarian sense."

But how is this empathy and moral sensibility to be extended from the human to the natural world? Clearly community needs to be understood here not merely in human terms, but also as community with nature. That is to say, the eco-community will be such as to facilitate relationships not only amongst its human members, but also between its human members and their biotic neighbourhood. Human individuals will in this way come to experience themselves as constituted through their relationships with the natural world as well as with the human world. But what will such relationships consist in? Clearly I have in mind here something more than purely biological relationships, such as those defined by the food chain: such relations are already, perforce, in place, yet they conspicuously fail, in and of themselves, to generate empathy on our part for those beings who comprise our food.

What I have in mind is rather face-to-face relationships with a variety of particular non-human beings on a day-to-day basis, relationships which enable us to come to know those beings in all their variousness and individual uniqueness. How could we come to know them in this way? Presumably we could do so through communication, where communication is to be understood in a relatively straightforward manner in relation to the

so-called 'higher' animals, and in a more figurative manner in relation to the so-called 'lower' animals, and plants, and plant communities such as forests. In making sense of the notion of communication in the latter case, we might appeal to epistemologies of 'attentiveness', invoked by some theological and feminist thinkers *[Weil, 1962; Buber, 1970; Fox Keller, 1985; Ruddick, 1984; Holler, 1990; Warren, 1990; Mathews, 1994a]*. These point to forms of human-to-non-human encounter, in which each party discovers the subjectivity of the other, through a process of overture and response. Clearly it is the relational self, with its readiness to recognise the subjectivity of others and receive their affirmation in return, that is likely to be open to the possibility of the subjectivity of non-human others. And since it is only through readiness to recognise the subjectivity of the other (through addressing it as a 'thou' rather than an 'it') that one is likely to receive the response that will indeed confirm its subjectivity, it is the relational self that is best placed to discover the putative subjectivity of non- human others, and to feel appropriately towards them in consequence.

Communication in the above sense is possible only with *particular* others. Hence to communicate with the natural world, and thereby come to empathise with it, is to be engaged in ongoing encounters with particular others - where this means, in practice, nature as it is embodied in a particular place. The eco-community will thus be a situated community, tied to place, as deep ecologists, social ecologists and bioregionalists attest.14

When we have engaged in sustained, face-to-face relationships with a range of non-human others, and recognised them as complex and responsive centres of subjectivity, with their own unique and mysterious purposes and imperatives, we shall be much more likely also to take seriously the interests of non-human others who lie beyond our ambit. Thus while eco- community may draw us into emotional and moral involvement with the lives of those in our immediate biotic neighbourhood, it will also tend to awaken in us a more generalised concern for nature.

It is worth pointing out that eco-communities need not necessarily be located only in rural areas. Community-with-nature may of course be more readily realisable in the countryside, but it is also eminently realisable in cities. There are numerous ways in which we can cultivate a sense of community with the natural world in urban neighbourhoods *[Plant, 1989; 1990]*. One of the more imaginative ways is to devise new forms of totemism, by, for example, declaring each child, at birth, a 'guardian' of some local species,

perhaps including the name of that species amongst the child's given names. Other more hands-on ways include acquainting ourselves with the natural and indigenous history of our own area; greening streets and vacant land; restoring rivers or creeks; establishing neighbourhood gardens and permaculture projects; initiating alternative technology projects, compost and sewerage systems. Particularly important, I think, is the establishment of 'mixed communities' *[Naess, 1979; Devall, 1988]* of humans and animals, via urban and backyard 'farms' and sanctuaries, where these would provide opportunities for us to share our life world with non-human beings, and thereby discover for ourselves their complexity and individuality, their intelligence and capacity for responsiveness. (Modern western cities are increasingly becoming animal- free zones, where even such 'honorary persons' as dogs are barely tolerated any longer, so strong is the public sense that all living space should be for the exclusive use of humankind.) Through efforts such as these, urban eco-communities can eventually come to emanate a 'magic', and command a passionate loyalty, that even their rural counterparts cannot match, precisely because of their significance as beacons of hope and 're-enchantment' in a spoiled and uncaring world."

My overall suggestion in this section, then, is that community, rather than liberal democracy, is the primary political prerequisite for the development of the kind of identity conducive to an ecocentric outlook (in this I am in agreement with Barns, present collection.) I do not wish to suggest however that eco-community is a *sufficient* condition for such an outlook. People may live in small rural communities, in daily face-to-face interaction with the natural world, yet, if they have been taught to regard non-human beings as mere objects, and means-to-ends, rather than as subjects, and ends-in-themselves, they may never experience the kind of intersubjective relationship with the natural world which I have described. Relationality facilitates open-ness to the possibility of inter-subjective engagement with the natural world, but does not guarantee it. On the other hand, a merely reasoned or taught belief in the moral considerability of non- human beings would not have much force in the moral field of action, unless it were underpinned by a deeply felt, concrete sense of the living receptivity and responsiveness of such beings. My conclusion, then, is that an ecocentric outlook is rendered possible, maybe even probable, but certainly not inevitable, by eco-communitarianism. It will generally be the case that, in Western societies at any rate, anthropocentric prejudices will have to be challenged before people will become open to the possibility of the kinds of *encounter* with the natural world that I have described. So although I have

argued here that some experience of relating to nature is a necessary condition for an ecocentric outlook, such experience cannot, of course, be taken as conceptually unmediated: different understandings of nature will vitiate or enhance the possibility of human-to-nature relationships.

Having now conveyed something of the meaning I wish to assign to the notion of community in the present context, I would like to clarify further the relation between community and liberal democracy. Earlier I characterised liberalism in terms of individual self-rule, but I suggested that self-rule could be achieved to varying degrees in different types of liberal democracy, ranging from the direct and participatory to the indirect and representative. However, many authors equate participatory forms of democracy with community. How then can liberal democracies which take such participatory forms be distinguished, in practice, from communities in the present sense?

The short answer is that they cannot be so distinguished, at least not in any black-and-white way. This is because in fostering individual participation, small-scale direct democracies also incidentally tend to foster social relationships, while small-scale communities, in fostering social relationships, tend incidentally to induce individual involvement in public affairs: the two forms of political organisation thus in practice tend to converge. It is none the less important to bear in mind that they are dedicated to different ends: the end of liberal forms of democracy is to free individuals from political domination and to enhance their sense of autonomy, while that of community is to bring individuals out of self- absorption, into sympathy with others. Both envisage a form of self- realisation for individuals, but they conceive of the conditions for such self- realisation in different ways. The distinction may be illustrated by the significance attributed to consensus decision making from the two perspectives respectively. Some advocates of small-scale societies, such as Bookchin *[198J],* insist on the importance of consensus in community contexts, but see that importance as residing in the status of consensus as an extension of self-management and self-determination: in the absence of consensus, individual wills are over-ridden and individual autonomy accordingly diminished.

Feminists and ecofeminists *[Plant, 1989; Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989]* who insist on consensus, however, tend to do so with a view to the opportunity for extensive communication that the process of consensuality affords: in the lengthy discussions which the process entails, mutual understanding

amongst the participants is increased, and relationships tested and strengthened.16 Since I am arguing that it is community that is conducive to an ecocentric outlook, it will make a difference in the long run whether a small society is conceived as first and foremost a direct democracy or as a community. The eco-anarchism of a theorist such as Bookchin, whose small direct democracies seem to be conceived primarily as vehicles for self-management and self-determination, exhibits strong liberal tendencies, which may militate against the possibility of its also serving as a vehicle for an ecocentric environmentalism.

In this connection I think it is important to notice that community, in the present sense, is not at all compatible with the modern ideal of individual freedom. The aim of community is to cultivate and preserve social bonds. But social bonds do bind - they create responsibilities and obligations from which one is not supposed to walk away. An individual woven into a web of such relations will indeed have a place in the scheme of things - she will 'belong', she will never be alone, she will be assured of human succour in all circumstances. But she will not have much room to move. She will be supported by the web, but also caught by it.

Community, then, does have its price. To take the communitarian path in the present sense is very much to forfeit autonomy, at least in the sense of individual freedom. One forfeits this autonomy not to 'higher' authorities, but to the needs and expectations of one's own people, the people with whom one's own destiny is interwoven.17

Although I have argued that eco-communitarianism is the primary political prerequisite for the development of ecological identities, such eco-communitarianism must be qualified in various ways if it is to be effective as an instrument of ecocentric environmental reform. I shall explore two of these ways.

First, the relational form of identity constituted through community must be distinguished not only from liberal individualism, but also from identities based on abstract identification with greater wholes or unities - that is, wholes or unities which have a basically abstract significance for the individual in question (for example, the nation).

Second, given that many ecological problems are now global in scope and result from forces which are themselves transnational in character (such as

the forces of corporate capitalism), small local communities will be of limited efficacy as instruments of either innovation or resistance in the face of these problems *[Eckersley, 1992]*. Can new forms of community evolve to meet these challenges posed by globalism? Is transnational community possible, and, if so, would it be a match, politically speaking, for the transnational forces of environmental destruction currently arrayed against it?

I shall discuss each of these questions in turn, under separate headings.

Relational vs. Holistic Identity
When individual identity is described as being a function of community, this is sometimes understood to imply a holistic form of collectivism. That is, when I say that the community is logically prior to its members, I might be understood as saying that the identity of individuals is subsumed under that of the collective - that the individuals in question are no more than individual bearers of the collective identity, and in this sense have no independent identity of their own. Similarly, when ecophilosophers speak of the 'ecological self ', they are sometimes understood holistically, as declaring that individuals are constituted by such identification with the biotic community as a whole, and accordingly lack any independent ontological status." But this is not how I intend the notion of the relational self to be understood in the present context. Relational identity does provide an alternative to the individualism of liberalism, but this alternative should not be read in over-simplified holistic terms. The relational self is constituted by a system of relations - it is a nexus within the wider web. The wider web does indeed constitute a whole, in the sense that it is indivisible - it cannot be broken down into self-subsistent parts, since when we attempt to excise parts from it, the entire system begins to unravel. Hence while the web of relations is holistic in the sense of indivisible, its holism is systemic in nature, rather than substantival (block-like).
Individuals are identified through the system inasmuch as they come into existence through interaction with other elements of the system - they do not 'stand alone', in the manner of substances. Their identity is thus a function of that of the system. But this is quite different from saying that they are simply one-with, undifferentiated within, a block-like whole. Relational selves enjoy unique individual identities - they are what they are as a result of their unique positioning in a dynamic web of relations. Holistic selves, in contrast, are uniform in nature, in that in so far as they achieve identity at all, it is only as bearers of that of a greater homogeneous whole.

How to illustrate this distinction between relational and holistic selves? Consider an indigenous person whose identity, let us suppose, has been constituted through her relations with her people. Her people are part of her, they are her life-blood. But this is because she has been in continuous interaction with them since infancy. Her identity is based, not on an abstract identification, but on a lived interaction with concrete particulars. It would not make any difference to this identity, *qua* relational identity, if the woman in question were unaware that the people amongst whom she had lived were in fact members of a particular tribe, with a particular name and cultural identity. They are 'her people' primarily because they inform her very being, rather than because she has conceived of them as an abstract unity, and identified with her concept of them. Moreover, since the identity of this woman is a function of her own unique history of relations with particular individual members of the tribe, her identity will be different from those of other tribe members, even though the identities of all members are a function of their positioning within a single greater whole - that is, a particular field of relations.

Nationalism would qualify as an example of the contrasting case, that of holistic identity. In this connection, individuals identify with an entity which has only abstract significance for them, since no individual can experientially encompass a nation in all its concrete particularity. Indeed it is doubtful whether the idea of a nation can be exhausted by concrete particulars in any case. It seems to include an abstract dimension - an abstract unity, and perhaps value, which are not grounded in any of its concrete features. In any case, when seized by the sense of nationalism, entire populations do indeed become 'as one': as Australians, or Americans, or Japanese, they are uniform in nature, mere bearers of a common abstract - national - identity."

The dangers of such holistic identification are manifest. When the identity of individuals becomes subsumed under that of wholes in this way, the interests - and rights - of individuals may become subordinated to the perceived interests - and rights - of the abstract whole, where this immediately summons up fascistic and totalitarian associations.

But this familiar danger of holistic identity is not the only one. When an individual identifies, not with particular others but with an abstract entity, she comes to see others not as particular living presences inextricably intertwined with her own living being. Rather she tends to view them under abstract categories - as instances of this or that abstract identity, congruent or

dissonant with her own. Perceiving others in this way does not generate fellow-feeling for them - it does not induce a sharing of one's immediate sense of aliveness - and vulnerability - with them. This is not to say that it may not elicit *sentimental* attitudes towards the others in question - as bearers of *this* cherished abstract identity, or *that* despised one - but these attitudes are sentimental rather than authentic precisely because they are based on hollow preconceptions rather than on direct encounter with the reality of the others in question. Identification with abstract wholes or unities can thus have a dehumanising effect, allowing the true needs and nature of others to be ignored in favour of abstract stereotypes.20 Another - more fashionable - way of putting this point is to say that when individuals identify with abstract wholes - whether these be as large as the cosmos itself, or 'Gaia", or the cosmopolis, or the nation, or as small as one's own city or neighbourhood - *difference* will be suppressed, the manifold real differences amongst individuals will be dissolved in homogenising or exclusionary abstract categories.21

This is not the last of the dangers of holistic identification in this abstract sense. When an individual subsumes his identity under that of a greater abstract entity or unity, one might expect him to suffer a sense of diminution, but in fact the opposite seems typically to take place: the individual becomes subject to inflation, or ego-aggrandisement - he feels as big and important and perhaps as powerful as the greater entity or unity purportedly is. Such a sense of omnipotence works, again, against the possibility of empathy - although again it might express itself in grandiose acts of charity or aid, as well as in a deadly hubris or arrogance.

In light of these remarks about the nature of holistic identity, I think it is clear that the abstract individualism of liberalism on the one hand, and a form of abstract holism, such as nationalism, for instance, on the other, can ultimately appear as flip sides of the same coin. As I have already explained, the identity of abstract individuals is abstract in the sense that it rests on the abstract idea of a pre-social individual, an individual who can logically exist as a fully rational, and therefore fully human, being independently of social relations with others. This idea is abstract inasmuch as such an individual is not - originally, at any rate - encountered in experience, since from an empirical point of view human individuals are invariably formed through social relations of interdependence.22 (However, as I have already remarked, later exposure to liberal institutions can to some extent counter the relational aspects of the early processes of identity formation.) The

liberal individual thus arrives at a sense of self not so much through attending to the data of his own experience, which reveal the irreducibly relational bedrock of his identity, as through identifying with an idea.23

The identity of holistic individuals is, I have suggested, abstract in a similar fashion: ideas of greater wholes - such as 'the nation' (or indeed 'Gaia', or the 'world society') - with which holistic individuals identify are also abstract in the sense that these wholes are not encountered in experience. An entity such as 'the nation' is not encountered in experience in two senses: it cannot be *encompassed* in the experience of a single individual; and as a unity it cannot be experienced because it does not *exist;* all that exists is a field or manifold of heterogeneous elements. (The latter objection may not apply to all contenders for the title of 'greater whole'. Gaia, for instance, may have a unity which is objective rather than nominal. However the former objection will still apply: from the viewpoint of the individual it is abstract because it cannot be encompassed in experience.)

A deeper contrast than that between the relational and the holistic self is here emerging. This is the contrast between concrete and abstract selves; while the concrete self is relational, the abstract self may take individualistic or holistic forms. The idea of self with which the relational individual identifies is based on processes which it has encountered in its own experience. These processes include relations of interdependence with others. Being dependent on others, and being identified with this dependence, the relational individual has to try to understand the reality of others, in all their concrete particularity: in other words, in order to understand himself, he must seek to understand others. The abstract individual, on the other hand, is 'out of touch' with his experience. Whether he sees himself as a liberal individual or as a bearer of a national identity, he has no need, logically speaking, to understand the real nature of particular others, since their nature - whatever it is - will make no difference to his own identity: he does not need to understand them in order to understand himself.

Finally, returning to the issue of holism again, I think that the significance of this distinction between identities that are concretely relational and those that are abstractly holistic is particularly important to appreciate in the present era of 'globalisation'. People from various different ideological camps are today anxious to identify themselves as 'global citizens'. Clearly such a global identity involves identification with an abstract concept of a global whole, since individuals cannot interact concretely, in face-to-face

fashion, with all the (human and non-human) particulars included in the global domain. It matters little, in this connection, whether the abstract global unity with which one identifies is the system of corporate capitalism or the biosphere or planet itself. Global identity in either form would presumably be subject to the dangers I have just enumerated. However, the undeniably global nature of certain ecological processes and problems and threats to the environment, do seem to call for some kind of expansion of locally-based identities towards wider horizons. Whether or not this can be achieved without entraining holistic identity in the above sense will be considered below.

Transnational Communities
The idea of eco-communitarianism has a *prima facie* connotation of political decentralisation and regionalism. These are positions in favour with many of the more radical ecological thinkers, such as deep ecologists and bioregionalists: when people 'dwell in place', and live in true community with their own biotic neighbourhood, they are expected to become responsive to, and responsible for, that neighbourhood *[Sale, 1985; Naess, 1989; Plant, 1990]*. However, the suitability of small local communities for all ecopolitical purposes may be challenged on a number of grounds *[Eckersley, 1992],* including the following:
(i)   Since ecological processes are not confined by national boundaries, many ecological problems are now international in scope, and therefore not manageable by local agencies,
(ii)   External authorities are occasionally needed to over-ride regional authorities that wittingly or unwittingly fail to meet their ecological responsibilities, either to their own bioregion, or to those downwind or downstream.
(iii) The political power of small local communities is no match for the forces of transnational capitalism currently arrayed against the environment world-wide.
These objections to small, local communities as the privileged vehicle for ecopolitics may lead to calls for more centralised or more global forms of political organisation, or both. I propose to concentrate here on the third problem, which is a problem of power, and the seeming inadequacy of small local communities to function as effective instruments of resistance to the forces of transnational capitalism, where these now arguably constitute the major threat to the world's environment.24 My question is whether political formations are conceivable which retain a relational - that is, communitarian - structure yet which also demonstrate a capacity to resist the forces of

transnational capitalism. If such formations are indeed conceivable, they might prove to be adaptable to management and coordination roles as well (Dryzek, Thompson, this collection).

The question I have posed is, I think, particularly important at the present time because of the accelerating pace of the processes of globalisation. These processes are driven by the increasingly stark imperatives of capitalism, where the ultimate such imperative is simply that of profit maximisation. The bedrock requirements of social life are, as we know, at the present time increasingly being subordinated to the bottomless requirements of capitalism. Societies in the grip of global competition, for instance, can no longer 'afford' such fundamental social goods as welfare and publicly-owned utilities and amenities. In this climate, the function of the state itself is seen to be that of ensuring conditions favourable to commercial enterprise. Since profit-making tends to be optimised as the scale, level of mechanisation and computerisation, and monopolising potential of companies increase, states find themselves dedicated to facilitating the rise of corporate colossi, which rival the states themselves in economic, and hence ultimately in political, power. Principles of economic natural selection ensure that such corporations in due course become transnational in scope and structure. Since such transnational organisations easily gain control of the economies of smaller states, their operations cannot be effectively controlled by those states. This process of corporate giantism accordingly seems self-reinforcing and therefore set to continue. In the middle future we might envision a situation in which states have faded into the political background, except as auxiliaries to corporations, and the corporations themselves have become not only the major economic players, but the primary political formations as well. States would no longer then be in a position to protect either their citizens or their environments from corporate agencies - they could no longer insist on either human or ecological rights, or even on the rights of states themselves to the means of their own self-perpetuation, such as taxes.23

In this scenario, then, the state as an independent regulatory power would wither away, although individual states might linger on as puppet-like enforcers of the will of corporations. As the state *qua* independent political agent withered away, so would the nation, until individual countries retained their identities only as geographical entities. This dissipation of national identity, together with the thoroughly transnational character of the corporations themselves, would ensure that individual members, or

employees, of corporations would no longer identify themselves either in terms of nationality, nor even in terms of regionality, since they would have to stand in readiness to move from post to post around the world at the behest of their companies. Such individuals would accordingly be likely to identify
directly with the companies themselves, in the abstract way I described in the previous section: the true 'corporation man' and woman would finally be born!

The scenario I have outlined here might be characterised as a kind of *corporate feudalism.* To the extent that corporations would still have to compete with one another for personnel, they could be expected to look after their employees - providing them with training (but not necessarily a general education), accommodation, health care, pensions, and so on. To this extent the corporation might effectively take over the social functions of the by-this-time defunct state. But those individuals whose services were not needed by the corporations would simply drop through the net of social provision, where this would mean that whoever was not supported by kin would fall into social oblivion.

Those whose services were not needed by the corporations would include any who were, for whatever reason, unemployable and, even more significantly, any who simply constituted surplus labour. The class of those who would satisfy the latter description is likely to be extremely large - to include entire populations, in fact. For as production of all kinds (primary as well as secondary) becomes - in the interests of economic efficiency - increasingly mechanised and computerised, and accordingly centralised, the requirements for labour (at manual, technical and managerial levels) progressively diminish.26 The combination of exploding populations in Third World countries with the dwindling need for labour on the part of the corporate capitalist interests which have appropriated the resources of the countries in question poses a truly terrifying prospect. As noted, entire populations could be discarded in this scenario, and those individuals who were not so discarded would be effectively owned, body and soul, by their corporate providers, since these individuals, like the vassals of the medieval period, would depend on their corporate masters for their very survival.

The picture I have painted here - of corporate feudalism - is undoubtedly an apocalyptic one, but my intention has been merely to highlight a particular trend in current events, where the world is, thankfully, sufficiently complex

to contain all kinds of other, countervailing and tangential trends as well. However, in light of the particular trend in question it would seem to be important, from environmental and other, social, perspectives, to develop transnational structures of resistance now - structures which by-pass the state in order to apply direct pressure to corporations themselves. My question here is again, can such structures be developed in such a way as to preserve and reinforce the relational identities of their members - identities which have been formed in genuine eco- community - or will they inevitably reinforce, at the existential level, the very processes that led to the kind of thinking they are attempting to resist? In other words, will transnational structures of resistance inevitably foster that abstractness of identity which allows us to become 'out of touch' with the real, felt needs of others, human and non-human alike?

I think the key to this question lies in discovering a type of political formation which is not bounded in the conventional way - that is not defined in terms of regional, national or even global boundaries, but rather retains its connective or relational structure. To this end I would like to propose here two models of political structure.

(1) The substance or nuclear model: This model depends upon the notion of a boundary: political formations are bounded, either in space or by formal means, such as legal incorporation. It is relative to such a boundary that a centre can be defined. Hence it is only within the terms of this substance model of political structure that the dichotomy between centralisation and decentralisation arises: investing political power in the centre of course gives rise to centralised political structures; when power is returned to elements at, or closer to, the periphery (the boundary), however, the structure becomes decentralised. Such patterns of the distribution of power may be illustrated as follows:

FIGURE 1 SUBSTANCE OR NUCLEAR MODEL
lower-order nuclei
centralised

It is apparent from this, I think, that centralisation and decentralisation, as conventionally conceived, are merely different modalities of the same basic model of political structure - decentralisation is not the radical alternative to centralisation it is generally taken to be. In either case, political power is invested in larger or smaller political units - substance-like entities which, logically speaking, stand on their own. Autonomy is still the operative

notion here. Decentralisation involves devolution of power away from larger nuclei to smaller ones. However, whether larger or smaller, these nuclei are still centres of power in their own right, centres of self-rule, not subject to interference from without. Even when such an organisation is decentralised to the point of returning power to mere individuals, the individuals are conceived as units of sovereignty, mini-centres of power, capable of making for themselves the kinds of decision relevant to the aims of the organisation. In political structures of this type then, power is located in autonomous or semi-autonomous centres, or nuclei.

When political structure is understood in this way, there will be a tendency for the individual to see herself both as a liberal individual (ultimate unit of political power and hence smallest potential unit of decentralisation) and as the bearer of the abstract identities of the higher order units under which the individual is subsumed - whether these be regional entities (such as municipalities, cities or nations) or functional organisations, such as corporations. In light of this, we might expect liberal individuals to exhibit tendencies to abstract forms of holism, such as nationalism.27

(2) The lattice or relational model of political structure: In a lattice structure, power is invested not in the elements of the structure themselves, but in the relations between them. Such structures accordingly cannot be described in terms of either boundaries or centres, but rather in terms of the lines of communication between the elements. Nor can they be characterised as either local or global, because they traverse geographical space, rather than encompassing it. The distribution of power in such structures may be illustrated as shown in Figure 2.

The centralised/decentralised dichotomy does not apply to structures of this lattice or relational type. Autonomy is no longer the operative notion in this context. Decisions are made neither by large nuclei at the centre of the organisation nor by small nuclei at the periphery, but rather in the lattice itself, as a result of everyway communication and information transmission. Structures of the lattice or relational type are, of course, more familiarly designated as 'networks'. Network structures are already favoured by activists on many political fronts. However, the term 'network' is used loosely, and may not always refer to the kind of structure I have outlined here. I have used the term 'lattice' to provide a more precise designation for the structure in question.

FIGURE 2 LATTICE MODEL

individuals

To the extent that lattice structures are effective in shaping or modifying identity, they will clearly promote relational rather than substantival (whether individualistic or holistic) forms thereof. Our question here then is, can such lattice or relational structures take transnational form? Can we in effect establish transnational *communities* of individuals, dedicated to specific environmental ends?

For lattice structures to qualify as communities in the present sense they would have to be such as to permit face-to-face interaction between members. Clearly this is not possible in a transnational context. However to the extent that individuals have access to computer and telecommunication facilities, sustained person-to-person interaction is feasible for members of networks. Such concrete, though technologically mediated, interaction between individual members of a transnational network may be expected to reinforce existing relational aspects of identity, forged in local communities, while adding important new, transnational dimensions to them. These will not be the abstract dimensions implied in the ideas of 'global citizenship' or 'global cosmopolitanism' currently in vogue in political theory *[Archibugi and Held, 1995]*. They will rather be aspects of identity grounded in actual relations with particular others, relations that will add, in a small but real way, particular transnational threads to the existing fabric of our identity. In this case I shall no longer be merely an Australian of European descent, for instance, for I might blend a few strands of Bardi, Penan, Sioux, New Yorker, Icelander, and so on into my sense of self.28 This is important, I think, for two reasons.

First, ecosystems themselves are relatively unbounded. Hence if our goal is an ecocentric polity, our loyalties cannot be too fixated on our own local bioregion - we must be aware of and responsive to wider ecological horizons. Yet simply to identify with wider and wider (and hence less and less concretely known) circles of nature, as some deep ecologists *[Fox, 1984; 1990]* advise, is surely to court the dangers of abstract holism, explored above. Perhaps transnational lattice structures afford an opportunity to expand our sense of ecological selfhood, without risking abstraction and inflation. To the extent that we are communicating in an ongoing, sustained way with individuals actively involved with ecological issues in their own regions or countries, we might achieve more meaningful forms of identification not only with the individuals in question, but with particular parts of the natural world beyond our own biotic neighbourhood.

Second, the forces presently threatening the environment worldwide are largely, if not predominantly, transnational in character. As I remarked earlier, small local eco-communities appear to be politically insignificant in the face of such forces. Transnational networks or communities of resistance, however, are potentially highly effective, even though small in terms of membership. Part of the secret of the strength of transnational corporations is, of course, that when political pressure is applied to them in one country, they simply transfer their operations to another. The availability of this option protects them even from strong state pressure within any given country. However, although a transnational activist network can generally bring to bear only pinpricks of pressure within any given country, it can apply its pressure directly to markets (for example, through picketing), and - unlike nation states themselves - it can reproduce this pressure in many countries. Even a relatively small pressure, reproduced in this way, is likely to provide sufficient irritation to induce a corporation to comply with the political demands in question. In other words, transnationality confers on organisations of resistance precisely the same kind of strength it confers on corporations themselves - a strength that cannot be computed in terms of the size (or scale of membership) of the organisation in question.29

So the present age of transnational corporations, which have largely escaped the rule of law - this being still essentially a function of the nation state - calls forth organisations of resistance which are themselves transnational in structure, and which seek to exercise some control over the corporations not through law, but by applying painful stimuli directly to those most sensitive of corporate nerve-endings, the retail outlets. With their lattice structures, these organisations can hopefully begin to address the global aspects of the environmental challenge without reproducing in their own structures the very forms of identity which result in the abstractness, the 'out-of-touchness' with the urgent living reality of other beings, that arguably underlies our present epic blindness to their needs.

Is There a Role for the Liberal State?
In this study I have questioned the appropriateness of liberal democracies as vehicles of an ecocentric environmentalism. I have argued that they provide neither the moral nor the ontological basis for ecocentric consciousness, and that small egalitarian communities are more suited to this end. Such communities, which may be local or transnational in their scope, help to cultivate relational - and hence ecological - identities. In their transnational

guise, they also constitute a political instrument well adapted to resisting the environmentally destructive forces of transnational capitalism, and perhaps to assuming environmental administrative and co-ordinative roles as well.

There are many problems with such a communitarian scenario in addition to those which I have addressed here. These include problems concerning institutional and procedural arrangements both within and across communities. I do not have space here to offer a total picture of a communitarian world. Nor is my intention in any case so Utopian. I am interested rather in the steps that we can take towards achieving a general ecocentric will, and devising political tools for such a will, within the framework of existing liberal democracies. I have argued that the creation of communities of various types would take us some distance in this direction. The shape that politics would take thereafter probably cannot be anticipated from the present point in time.

I do not wish to claim here, then, that there is no role for liberal democracies in a green future. On the contrary, although the emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy that is characteristic of liberal regimes works against the emergence of ecological identity and consciousness, the safeguarding of individual freedom remains important for ecopolitical purposes. For it is this commitment to individual freedom - and 'human rights' generally - that makes it possible for us to form ourselves into the ecological communities and to create the transnational structures of resistance that I have been advocating in the previous sections; As the corporate titans gain a stronger grip on states, they will - if my forecast of corporate feudalism is at all on track - tend either to replace existing liberal states with repressive 'puppet' states, or establish a directly corporate world order amongst themselves. In either case, individual participation in communities of ecological initiative or resistance is likely to be curtailed, whether through legal means or economic reprisals. It would seem to be necessary, then, to try to protect our liberal freedoms, even while seeking to create less individualistic, more relational identities for ourselves in communities of our own making. There is a tension in this position, but it is not a paralysing one.

Ironically, it is not only the environment but the liberal state itself which is at risk from that state's present one-sidedly economistic course. For, as I argued earlier, that course is likely to strengthen corporate formations, which may in time come to rival states themselves as the primary locus of power. One of the first steps towards protecting the liberal state then, with the

opportunities for experimenting with communitarian initiatives that it affords, is surely to try to ameliorate its present excessive economism - to try to awaken it to the fact that if it continues down its present path, it will eventually no longer be in a position to ensure the autonomy of its citizens, nor hence to discharge its definitive duty as a liberal state: it will no longer be a liberal state, and possibly not even a state at all.

Moreover, as long as the liberal state is in place, there is every reason to green it to the best of our ability, through green parties, social movements, lobby groups, and so on, as long as we do not invest all our hope for an ecocentric sea change in these mechanisms, but rather continue to work on the ontological foundations for an ecocentric consciousness. Even centralised international agencies, such as Greenpeace, Worldwide Fund for Nature, and so on, are not ideologically ruled out by my argument. Although centralised and hierarchical in structure, and hence not in themselves conducive to the development or reinforcement of ecological identities, they may be effective tools of resistance or initiative in international forums for those who have already arrived at ecological consciousness by other means.

My argument then is that, while liberal forms of democracy do not in themselves provide conditions likely to foster widespread ecocentric consciousness, they do provide a starting point and a safe space, politically speaking, in which we can begin to create such conditions for ourselves. To that extent, liberal democracy remains important to ecocentric environment-alism, even though we shall have to attempt to counteract its individualistic effects in the limited space of political freedom that it makes available to us.

Notes
1. Throughout this study I take the position adopted by Dryzek in his contribution to this collection, namely that, in environmental matters, at any rate, particular forms of political organisation tend to induce (or pre-empt) particular types of policy outcome, or that 'green values' cannot be fully separated from 'green agency' *[Goodin, 1992]*.

2. In this sense I think that a purely utilitarian conception of democracy - which seeks to maximise individual utilities - misses an important part of the original point of democracy, since 'the greatest happiness (or satisfaction)

for the greatest number' could in principle be realised under a benign dictatorship.

3. Such a conception of liberalism of course entails its eminent compatibility with capitalism, but my intention here is to investigate the environmental implications of liberalism as such, rather than of liberal capitalism.

4. Those theorists, such as Kymlicka *[1993],* who regard liberalism as a theory about the state and its limitations rather than about society, are a case in point. From such a point of view, society might take communitarian forms and give rise to non-individualistic modes of identity in its members, while still falling within the framework of a liberal polity. This is not altogether unlike the sort of provisional compromise with liberalism that I reach at the end of my paper.

5. Recall Mill's well-known refusal to countenance any exercise of freedom intended to extinguish freedom itself eg the selling of oneself into slavery.

6. In Kant's terminology, they might, through reason, arrive at *moral* judgements, but they will not be capable of *beautiful* acts (see Naess *[1993]).*

7. In fact, as feminists such as Pateman *[1988]* have shown, the individuals who were deemed party to the social contract in the original social contract theories, such as those of Hobbes and Locke, were male heads of families. It was tacitly recognised, then, that individuals are formed through relationships with others, but the sphere of such 'domestic' relationships was relegated to the 'state of nature'. In so far as individuals are members of society, they were considered by liberals as logically independent of others. The actual original (and ongoing) social interdependence of individuals was thus glossed over in favour of an abstract ideal of autonomy. The whole question of how women, with their greater enmeshment in domestic relationships, could match this ideal was of course not even raised by the early contract theorists: autonomy was understood to be an ideal for men.

8. Plumwood (this collection) makes the point that though this dualistic elevation of reason above nature serves as a rationale for equality in the rhetoric of liberalism, it at the same time serves to inferiorise a whole range of social groups which are, in liberal societies, associated with nature. In this way, such reason/nature dualism naturalises and justifies social and political

inequality.

9. There is, in my view, more to the metaphysical story than this: a purely relational ontology does not account for the substantiality - in the sense of concreteness - of things. A field of relations is only actual, and hence constitutive of a world of concrete particulars, if it is in some way embedded in a substance continuum, such as space. For further metaphysical elaboration, see Mathews *[1991]*.

10. The contrast between purely rational and more emotionally informed ways of knowing, and ways of thinking morally, has been explored by a number of feminist thinkers, for example, Gilligan *[1982]; Belenky et al. [1986]; Fox Keller [1985]; Benjamin [1990]; Benhabib [1992]; Catherine Keller [1986]; Noddings [1984]; Ruddick [1984]; Hartsock [1985].* However the contrast may also be found in Hume, who argued that the basis of morality is moral sentiment rather than moral reason.

11. Feminist object relations theorists, such as Nancy Chodorow *[1978]* and Jane Flax *[1990],* originally provided models of the separate and relational selves. These models have been refined by Benjamin *[1990],* and applied by psychologists such as Gilligan *[1982]* and Belenky *et al. [1986].*

12. This is an important question because many commentators have shied away from communitarianism on the assumption that it is a basically conservative ideal. Certainly many of the values implicated in communitarianism have been embraced by conservative thinkers.
The contrast between interconnected or relational social organisations and aggregate or individualistic ones has a long history and was elaborated most notably perhaps by Ferdinand Tonnies, in the nineteenth century. In his book, *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft,* he distinguished between 'community' and 'society' in the following terms: community (Gemeinschaft) is to be understood as real, interacting, face-to-face community, where people are known to each other in many different roles, and are accordingly perceived by one another as whole persons, ends-in-themselves, rather than as mere functionaries. Community in this sense is held together by custom, ties to locality and bonds of kinship and inherited status. In society (Gesellschaft), in contrast, relationships between persons are formed as means-to-ends, and based on contract rather than custom, habit or affection. People encounter one another in limited, functional and often transient roles, and accordingly form no conception of one another as whole persons. Society in this sense is

built on an instrumental and contractarian foundation.

Tonnies's own preference is obviously for community, which, sustained by bonds of kinship, status, locality, affection and affinity, creates a way of living conducive to a sense of wholeness, or fulfilment, and instils in people a sense of belonging, of their own inalienable place in the scheme of things. Tonnies's vision has striking affinities with that of contemporary communitarians, yet the communities to which Tonnies nostalgically looks back for inspiration are the feudal and patriarchal communities of the pre-modern era. It is clear in the light of this that we need to scrutinise more closely the notion of community that I have advocated here as a foundation for an altruistic and hence potentially ecocentric polity.

13. This conclusion - that relational selves require egalitarian forms of community as a precondition for their very existence - dovetails with my earlier observation, that relationality, when it is an established fact, compels an admission of equality. For when it is understood that the identities of others permeate my own, and *vice versa,* then it is also understood that no attribute of mine is referable to myself alone: my attributes, like those of all other elements of the system, are a function of the relations which constitute them, and hence of the system as a whole. No element of the system can count itself 'higher' than any other, nor on that account in a position to dominate another. Hence any community which in fact achieves a relational structure will *ipso facto* also achieve egalitarianism, at least at an ontological level - though the logic of this will not necessarily be reflected in peoples' perceptions, or their politics. However, since relationality can only be achieved in an egalitarian context, according *to* the above arguments, the egalitarianism of peoples' perceptions in such a community is already assured on other grounds in any case.

14. Deep ecologists *[Naess, 1989; Devall, 1988]* and bioregionalists *[Sale, 1985; Plant, 1990]* enjoin us to 'dwell in place'.

15. Ursula Leguin's novel, *Always Coming Home [1988],* is a treasure trove of ideas as to how human beings can live in community with the natural world. Admittedly the novel is set in the distant future, and in a rustic ambience, but it is a wonderful study in mixed communities. The novel is also noteworthy in this connection in that, although it depicts an eco-communitarian Utopia, it does not suggest that the problem of evil has been solved therein, but rather shows how such a society manages and contains, but does not eliminate, human tragedy.

16. This also seems to apply in some indigenous communities. See Rose *[1992]*.

17. Some of the more traditional Aboriginal communities illustrate this point. Individuals are indeed woven into an extensive and complex web of blood and customary relationships *[Rose, 1992],* but nor can they escape these relationships and the obligations they entail *[Graham, 1992].* Lacking individual freedom and being beholden to others in this way effectively militates against not only a liberal ethos of individual freedom, but the capitalist ethos as well: one cannot simply follow the trail of opportunity wherever it might lead, and one's relatives will help themselves to whatever wealth one happens to attract in any case. Community in this sense then seems to imply a trade-off between freedom and belonging, between material wealth and social wealth.

18. This has been pointed out by Cheney *[1987];*Plumwood *[1993];*Kheel *[1990].*

19. Mary Daly *[1979]* makes an interesting (though typically rhetorically loaded) distinction between male comradeship, which involves loss of individual identity, and female sisterhood or friendship, which results in mutual individual self-realisation.

20. Identification with abstract classes may occur as well. Racism, sexism and classism may rest on such a form of identification.

21. Some authors have raised this objection to communitarianism itself- that is, they have argued that communities homogenise their members, in the sense of making individual difference unacceptable *[Young, 1990].* I hope to have shown here that this objection can only apply if community is understood in a holistic rather than a relational sense.

22. In saying that human individuals are invariably formed through social relations, I am not ignoring wolf and gazelle children, and such like. To the extent that these children do acquire a coherent sense of self, it is presumably more likely to be as honorary wolves or gazelles, though they will not of course perform entirely satisfactorily as such.

23. I am not intending to set up a sharp division between (abstract) ideas and experience here. All ideas are abstract, and all human experience is mediated

by ideas. In qualifying certain ideas (and identities) as 'abstract' in the present context, I am intending to signify that they go beyond what is or can be encountered in experience.

24. Clearly overpopulation is also a factor contributing to environmental degradation worldwide. I do not wish to enter into the debate about the relative weightings assignable to these factors. Corporate capitalism is unquestionably at the very least a threat of the highest order.

25. If a major corporation did not wish to pay taxes, nor wished its employees to pay taxes, then the state, being in the pay of, and under the control of, such corporations, would not be in a position to extract the corporation's compliance.

26. Computerisation does not always entail centralisation. The kind of access and responsiveness to specialised markets that computerisation allows also makes small, highly specialised ('boutique') production ventures economically feasible *[Mathews, 1989]*. However these are likely to be co-opted by larger corporations in due course too. Centralised management is of course perfectly compatible with any degree of diversification and specialisation in production.

27. This is presumably not the only route to nationalism, since peoples not traditionally perceived as either individualistic or liberally inclined, such as the Japanese, have demonstrated strong propensities for nationalism. Identification with the nation or the corporation could, perhaps, in the case of the Japanese, have come about as a result of filial sensibility. Confucian-style deference, devotion or loyalty to the father, the executive director, or the Emperor may lead, via a different psychology, to a result convergent with that of abstract holism *[Yamauchi, 1995]*.

28. For further elaboration of this idea, see Mathews *[1994b]*. 29. An example of a such transnational organization of resistance which exerted considerable
political influence on corporations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, is the worldwide Rainforest Action Network.

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