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## Radical Social Ecology as Deep Pragmatism: A Call to the Abolition of Systemic Dissonance and the Minimization of Entropic Chaos

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Radical Social Ecology as Deep Pragmatism:

A Call to the Abolition of Systemic Dissonance and the Minimization of Entropic Chaos

Arielle Brender

**Abstract:** This paper aims to shed light on the dissonance caused by the superimposition of Dominant Human Systems on Natural Systems. I highlight the synthetic nature of Dominant Human Systems as egoic and linguistic phenomenon manufactured by a mere portion of the human population, which renders them inherently oppressive unto peoples and landscapes whose wisdom were barred from the design process. In pursuing a radical pragmatic approach to mending the simultaneous oppression and destruction of the human being and the earth, I highlight the necessity of minimizing entropic chaos caused by excess energy expenditure, an essential feature of systems that aim to run counter to the natural flow of the Cosmos. In Chapter 1, I discuss the pragmatism of systemic biomimicry and the tenets of ecology which must be assumed for the construction of effective human systems. In Chapter 2, the notion of construct is explored through the lense of metaphysical grounding. In Chapter 3, I explicate the dominant human systems [of oppression] which attempt to govern our human world and their discongruence with Natural Systems. In Chapter 4, tools for dismantling and reconstructing our sloppily-designed systems from a pluralistic base are explored. Chapter 5 focuses on the role of the individual in regard to the conscious evolution of the whole. Chapter 6 concludes with mention of the absurdity in the mainstream notion of ‘sustainability,’ and the pragmatism of hope. The radical pragmatism pursued in this work aims at a qualitative shift in society moreso than a quantitative one.

**Keywords:** radical pragmatism, social ecology, absurdity, biomimicry, evolution of consciousness, entropy, fulfilment, oppression

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## Foreword

The context of this work is crucial to its ability to be authentically understood. My intentionally chosen ways of being shape the context of how I have come into knowing these Truths. The reader should be wary of ascribing my identity to the Truths presented in this work, for my identity is but a figment of both your imagination and mine. I have not concocted the Truths shared in this work. They have simply passed through me.

The intention for this work is to provide a holistic, intersectionally pluralistic, radical pragmatism, informed by the play between the metaphysical and physical world in which we, Homo Sapiens, be and behave. The normative theories presented here are grounded in the realization of absurdity in fragmented, non-radical, capitalist efforts of “sustainability”. The question explored here is: are *all* sustainability efforts absurd? (Here, sustainability refers to the attempt to reform pre-existing human systems into less ecologically-impactful ones so that they may be ecologically sustained, ideally, in perpetuity.) This question is addressed specifically to those who assume a non-speciesist, non-hierarchical ecological worldview.

What I present in this work is nothing novel. It is but one attempt to expose long-ignored ancient wisdom from all corners of the Earth, wisdom too-long suppressed by the manufacture of ill-intended and poorly-constructed versions of reality. The externalized costs of the manufacture and distribution of these false truths includes the loss of awareness and understanding of the Truths known by those who listen most keenly to the Cosmic systems which connect all entities in our world and region of space. But while the information that has been passed to me is cosmically ancient, its novelty lives in its context: this moment in time, this instantiation of now. This now has never before existed as such, and there has never been such a necessity and

opportunity to breathe life back into the deeply-aligned pragmatism of our indigenous and ancient predecessors. I dedicate this work to the nonhuman entities that have been harmed or exterminated by humans, to the human persons who have been systematically harmed and oppressed, and to the ancient and indigenous communities who have gifted our world with the most valuable lessons we could learn. I honor the spirits and wisdom of beings who are long-gone, and the spirits and wisdom of the beings who continue to illuminate the truth against the odds of our modern world. I thank you for acting as a conduit between the cosmos and me. I hope that this work can do justice to the devotional work done by all aligned beings, from the earth worms and fungus and trees, to the farmers and scholars and activists. Here, I advocate for you.

It is my aim, in this work and in my daily life, to illuminate the truth that the world in which we live in one of our own making. We make it real every day through our language and our actions. This means that we, especially those who are granted greater power to speak freely and be listened to within the pre-existing reality, can make it anything we want it to be. I advocate for those in power acting on behalf of and inspired by the wisdom of those with less systemic power, so that power may shift to a more pluralistic base. I advocate for the infinite power held by each of us to create anything we believe to be possible. Herein lies a message of active and pragmatic hope, for it is simply in believing in our own power that we may achieve a more fulfilling future for all.

## **Introduction**

It is true that Homo Sapiens have long altered and damaged nature, even before they exchanged their hunter-gatherer lifestyle for an immobile agricultural one. Every people that has populated the Earth has enacted biological death and violence in the name of survival. But, what is unique about this moment in time, is the scale at which we eliminate habitats and alter the makeup of our atmosphere. It is in the 125 years since the industrialization of our society that the annihilation of this Earth and its inhabitants has mushroomed behind an opaque curtain of dollar bills. But the storms are beginning to surge, and the curtain is only paper-thin. Our systems are beginning to crack under the pressure of centuries of human-caused climate destruction and disruption. In other words, our climate destruction is, for the first time, getting in the way of continued climate destruction. We know that now, as you read this, there is more carbon in the atmosphere than ever before, there are fewer numbers of terrestrial species present on Earth's landscapes, there are fewer bioavailable nutrients and minerals in our agriculturally-necessary soils, and there is more plastic in the ocean. To put it plainly, we know, objectively and without scientific deliberation, that there is more energy being wasted and spewed into chaos by our centralized systems of government and economy than ever before. This gradual depletion of resources posed little threat if at all until recent decades, when droughts, floods, fires, superstorms, genetic adaptation and mutation of harmful pests, and erratic weather began to sweep through our shared landscapes and built environment with increasing frequency and intensity. We're beginning to toggle over crucial environmental tipping points as an outcome of our extractivist worldview. On the other side, the great and unpredictable unknown of Truth. Now, just 125 years from the outset of our mechanized lifestyles, worldviews, and economy, the Truth is making itself know. We are simply unable to continue on as we have. The Truth makes



the rules, and we've been breaking them for too long. I argue that this is not due to a cemented facet of our human genome, nor is it due to the existence of any of our institutions. At the core of our extractivism is our chosen identities, and our spiritual malnourishment. In the presence of perceived lack and ceaseless desire for more, power beseeches more power, and the chains of oppression accrue greater strength. Domination and exploitation might be instinctual aspects of our human egos, but they are not permanently-fixed facets of our being; they are chosen identities. With this in mind, an opportunity arises, for identities are fickle creations than can be disposed of as soon as their nature is exposed. If we individually *and* collectively choose to be love, acceptance, empowerment, responsibility, compassion, intention, community, and curiosity rather than judgement, domination, extractivism, greed, violence, dogmatism, victimhood, and fundamentalist individualism, our institutions, whether governmental, economic, or social, will be reflections of the former values rather than the latter. It is merely a matter of recognizing our own power as creators of our world. For too long have the most oppressive identities silenced the most liberating. For too long has the wisdom of the oppressed been ignored and forgotten. For too long have our societies, all over the world, been controlled by those whose intentions are primarily of self-service, rather than public servitude. Now is the time to shift power from the few who want more unto the many who seek to share it. Without such a shift in power, stemming from a shift in consciousness, the technofixes touted by contemporary "sustainable capitalists" will be nothing more than a means to extract and oppress the Earth, non-human animals, and already-vulnerable members of the human family in an entirely new and surreptitiously unethical way. The ecologically-motivated pragmatism presented in this work is not one that aims to lengthen the presence of the human species on earth; that is not my intention. The intention here

is to improve the *quality* of human existence in a way that fundamentally disagrees with the notion of standards of living as fabricated by the systems that exploit and oppress us all. With due respect and gratitude for the inalienable benefits reaped by the billions of humans who have received immense joy, security, and physiological well-being from the technological and economic innovations of the last century and a half, it is absurd that anyone who understands the negative impacts of these systems might say they operate as best as they possibly could, or better than the infinitely many unexplored alternatives. This lazy response by technophiles and die-hard capitalists has incomprehensibly violent and destructive repercussions for human and nonhuman entities across the globe.

This is a call to Truth. This is a call to spirit. This is a call to dissolving the barriers between the body and the energies that flow through it and all other entities. This is a call to physiological and psychological well-being for the masses. This is a call to less for more. As evidenced by the arguments presented in this work, this is a call to our best chance for a meaningfully prosperous, regenerative, abundant, and equitable future.

## **Chapter 1: Tenets of Ecology & The Pragmatism of Systemic Biomimicry**

1.1 *Setting the Scene with Big History*: The discipline of Big History, as compared with conventional history, offers us an opportunity to explore themes and patterns from an ecological perspective more so than an ethnocentric one. Big History, spanning over a course of 13.8 billion years, rather than merely the last 10,000 years in the case of conventional history, focuses on the *universe*, and how humankind fits within that framework. It mimics biology by taking an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach to history, rather than our problematically

compartmentalized approach which looks at historical events in a vacuum. It places human narrative in a cosmic scope, allowing for a less politicized and more universal understanding of our human presence on earth. Big History is useful for us here in understanding the gravity of our impact on Earth.

Homo sapiens, the modern species of human, is estimated to have existed for the last 200,000 of planet Earth's odd 4,543,000,000 years. If we were to scale that 4.5 billion years to 45 years, we'd have been here for 2 years. Our industrial revolution began one minute ago. In that time, we've destroyed at least 50% of the earth's forests<sup>1</sup>, endangered 60% (80% in Southeast Asia) of global coral reefs<sup>2</sup>, paved over 32.9 billion meters of land in the U.S. alone<sup>3</sup>, eradicated at least 50% of all wildlife (70% in South America) in the last 40 years<sup>4</sup>, increased atmospheric carbon dioxide by over 110 parts per million<sup>5</sup>, degraded up to 12 million square kilometers of drylands<sup>6</sup>, and disrupted biogeochemical and nutrient cycles in productive

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<sup>1</sup> "80% Of Earth's Forests Have Been Destroyed." GreenAction News. Accessed May 14, 2018. <http://greenactionnews.net/blog/2014/10/05/80-of-earths-forests-have-been-destroyed-who-is-clear-cutting-the-most/>

<sup>2</sup> Kleypas, Joan A.; Feely, Richard A.; Fabry, Victoria J.; Langdon, Chris; Sabine, Christopher L.; Robbins, Lisa L. (June 2006). "Impacts of Ocean Acidification on Coral Reefs and Other Marine Calcifiers: A Guide for Future Research"

<sup>3</sup> Nielson, John, writer. "Weekend Edition Saturday." In *Scientists Track the Paving of America*. National Public Radio. June 19, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Naik, Gautam. "Wildlife Numbers Drop by Half Since 1970, Report Says." *The Wall Street Journal*. September 30, 2014. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/report-wildlife-numbers-drop-by-half-since-1970-1412085197>.

<sup>5</sup> "Climate Change: Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide | NOAA Climate.gov." *Global Warming Frequently Asked Questions | NOAA Climate.gov*. October 17, 2017. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide>.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (2009). *Gender in agriculture sourcebook*. World Bank Publications. p. 454. ISBN 978-0-8213-7587-7.

terrestrial and aquatic habitats. These are just *some* of the broad impacts of our addiction to oil in the last 125 years.

As a semi-nomadic species our first 5,000 years from the dawn of agriculture to the invention of the wheel, the Sapiens population remained relatively stagnant at around 4 million. In the following 5,000 years, our population grew to one billion, growth fostered by inventions and innovations like irrigation, iron weaponry, kiln-fired pottery and bricks, and plows. Here we see the rise of city-states. We see the development of culture, complex language, documentation, community. This is where we see humans behaving as recognizably human. With the era of empires that followed in the next 1,800 or so years, we see the beginning of global superpowers, of mega-economies, of globalization. With these conglomerated human powers, with the creation and consolidation of nearly perverse amounts of wealth, we see humans no longer behaving like the animals they were; we see man behaving as though he were a god, one whose power is boundlessly infinite.

As the bottom of the human food chain could now produce goods at nearly exponential rates, beginning only about 125 years ago, so too multiplied our demand for raw materials, as well as the wealthy corporate czar's appetite for expanding pockets and intellectual borders, within which the minds and souls of those who might be convinced to purchase their goods and services reside. With the rise of industrialization we see the simultaneous pillaging of Mother Earth and human consciousness, clearing space for the most invasive stint in human propagation this earth had ever witnessed. Such great timing, no? A ninefold increase in human presence on earth alongside a similarly exponential increase in the depletion of the resources we and our earth need, allowed by a steady decrease in human connection to the wilderness from whence we

came. As human consciousness and embodiment became corrupted by dollars and cents, it's collective grasp on the necessarily experiential ineffable Truth of the Natural System that sustained them slacked and released. As we've been distance from the phenomenological experience of embeddedness in the Earth and its systems, we've been funneled into complacency and participation in the most egregiously disruptive systems created by man. In ecological terms, in the last speck of time that homo sapiens have existed on Earth, we have become invasive. We plunder anything, living or not, that crosses us; we extract what we can simply because we can, without consideration or regard for the desires or necessities of other species with which we share space. We have dominated and developed not just one particular bioregion, but close to ninety percent of the the Earth's surface.<sup>7</sup> We, aided by our explosive acceptance of recklessly-designed agricultural technology, have created our very own epoch. The difference, though, between our invasiveness and that of, say, Kudzu vines in North America or Zebra Mussels in Russia, is that we, as homo sapiens, as wise men, can choose to *be* alternatively. We are not biologically locked into excess destruction and disruption. To break from this harmful ecological role, we must simply choose to view the Earth as our teacher, rather than our economic object. We must simply bring awareness to the pragmatic futility of our domination and oppression, for, if we are to examine our systems of development authentically, we would undoubtedly find that they create more problems than they solve.

In the 4.543 billion years of Earth's existence, the cosmos have ceaselessly worked to fine-tune its systems. Innumerable species, biogeochemical relationships, temporal instiations and periods, reproductive patterns, design schemes, frequencies of light and sound, temperatures,

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<sup>7</sup> Mayell, Hillary. "Human "Footprint" Seen on 83 Percent of Earth's Land." National Geographic. October 25, 2002. Accessed May 14, 2018. [https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/10/1025\\_021025\\_HumanFootprint.html](https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/10/1025_021025_HumanFootprint.html).

and geometrical angles have been utilised, rejected, and retained. By virtue of cosmic creation and evolutionary winning, Homo Sapiens has had the pleasure of employing its consciousness to feast its senses on the awe-inspiring truth of those systems. We write poetry about babbling brooks; we adorn canvases with representations of pastel lily pads and mountain ridge-lines; we compose sonatas to remind us of budding magnolia trees and buzzing honeybees. We gawk at technicolor sunsets and gorge on the abundant fruits of the Earth. Humans from all cultures have, instinctually, done excellently in revelling in the wholly unfathomable beauty of the planet that sustains us. However, where we've failed is in transcribing this adoration into more pervasive and organisational schema. Somehow, we've allowed our reverence for the Earth to remain stagnant within its aesthetic and sensual superficiality. We've allowed our voyeurism to be without inspiration. We've neglected to revere the brilliance of the forces *behind, above, and through* the *systems* of the natural environment. Due to this neglect, *the systems that we have created run counter in matter and energy to those highly-functional systems that exist in the natural environment*. In observing nature's parts without learning from the ways in which those parts are interconnected, we've ignored the only source of undeniable Truth we have. Now, just 10,000 years after the dawn of agriculture and 125 years from the dawn of industrialization, we've irreversibly disrupted some of the most foundational and impactful systems that make this planet a habitable one for our kind and many others. Now, with seven billion humans on earth and the swift approach to irreversible ecological tipping points that would make much of our developed communities uninhabitable, the Human species is scrambling.

To hold onto the systems that have encouraged us to pillage the Earth and oppress the freedom and wisdom of human peoples is to arrogantly assume that when we thought those

systems into existence, they were perfect, natural, and divine. But when they were burst from potentially creative subconscious, through space and time, and into construct, the public on whom they were imposed was not educated on the embeddedness of our bodies, brains, and relationships in the slowly-evolving systems of nature. Were the public to have been armed to assume a more critical stance in regard to the energy necessary to fitting the large square peg of extractivist capitalism, for example, into the small round hole of regenerative and holistic ecosystemic economies, we might not be in the ecological predicament that faces us today. The same logic holds true for all other superimposed human-made systems, from gender, race, and heteronormativity, to societally-enforced monogamous marriage and nuclear family structures, popular landscape design, and industrialized agriculture. What each of these systems and all others that dominate our socio-economic sphere encompass is the danger of the belief and aspiration in total transcendence of the human animal from its physical confines and boundaries. Each of our dominant constructs is dependent upon denying its inevitable grounds in non-human natural systems, systems that do not care whether we live or die, whether we have \$1.00 or \$1,000,000, whether we use one gender pronoun or another, or whether we tried to be more compassionate or not. Natural systems will evolve while regulating themselves, and they will heed no mercy unto any life that disallows for that evolution and regulation to take proper place. In short, it is far better, in the pursuit of more energy conserved and less energy wasted, to design our systems *within* the expertly-designed blueprints of already-existing natural systems and laws. The flow of ecological evolution will not stop or reverse for our sake. We must simply reconstruct our systems into ones that utilize that flow, systems that ride along the wave of time and space rather than the ones we have now, which attempt to either flow upstream or dam up

gushing waterfalls. It is simply nonsensical to base the design of our constructs on anything other than that which inevitably governs them. In this chapter, I discuss long-ignored aspects of natural systems which must necessarily be mimicked if our systems are to be deemed pragmatic, namely:

1. Gestalt parts & wholes
2. Pluralistic bioregionalism
3. The inalienable laws of matter, energy, death, and entropy
4. Ego death
5. The embeddedness of the human animal

1.2 *Gestaltism*: Gestaltism, a philosophy born of the Berlin School of experimental psychology, was formulated in an effort to grasp useful and meaningful interpretations of being in an ostensibly chaotic world. In psychology, it can be surmised as the human mind being more than merely the sum of its parts. Perhaps incidentally, this can also be said of natural systems, in which all parts are inextricably entangled with one another, creating a whole bound by infinitely many linkages and powered by a single ineffable, cosmic force. All environmental ethics rest upon a single premise: that the individual part is a member of a communal whole, a whole made up of *interdependent* parts. Many Native American philosophies hold that we humans are but miniscule particles of the universe. We are the portions of the cell that are invisible to the microscope. But this is not merely an ideological or philosophical system of belief, it is a physical Truth. We are not only on this earth, but we are of this earth. We are just as related to a feline as is a feline to a fish. “For the Ojibwa, plants and animals are not really thought of as



species. They are rather more like other tribes or nations”<sup>8</sup>. This is why “Species extinction, then, can be seen as a permanent form of impoverishment of our own conscious possibilities,”<sup>9</sup> or, as Martin Luther King Jr. famously stated: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to injustice everywhere.”<sup>10</sup> We, as human people, are each a part of the human whole. So too are we, as a human whole, part of the ecological whole of the cosmos. This is why Mary Mellor emphasizes that “what is important is that the dialectical relationship between humanity and non-human nature is always within the framework of the wider whole.”<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, our traditional Western dualism thrives on separations between human and non-human nature, between man and woman, between white and non-white, between rich and poor, and between capitalistically opportune and monetarily invaluable. Of the 5 types of species interactions, (competition, predation, parasitism, mutualism, and commensalism), we have chosen to employ parasitism. This is not because it’s our only option, for we could be predominantly mutualistic and commensal if we so chose. Our presence on earth, as arguably the most powerful complex living organisms, is parasitic not because of our innate nature, but because of the nature of the systems we’ve chosen to employ and superimpose on the Earth. This would not be possible without the imposition of our dualistic mode of thought, in which we as humans are entitled to dominate non-human and marginalized human entities. Nancy Hartsock calls to our humanity when stating

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<sup>8</sup> McPherson, Dennis H., and J. Douglas Rabb. 1993. *Indian from the inside: a study in ethno-metaphysics*. Thunder Bay, Ontario: Centre for Northern Studies, Lakehead University., 89.

<sup>9</sup> Dunsmore, Roger. *Earth's Mind: Essays in Native Literature*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1997., 41.

<sup>10</sup> King, Martin Luther, and James Melvin. Washington. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: Harper, 1991., 28

<sup>11</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330, 186.

that a human community cannot be *fully* human unless it is “structured by connection rather than separation and opposition.”<sup>12</sup> The efficacy of natural systems lives in its tendency to include *diverse* players with *diverse* roles. Between primary consumers, secondary consumers, tertiary consumers, autotrophs, and decomposers, nutrients and energy are cycled through the ecosystem to achieve equity and flow. The system regulates itself, not through compartmentalization and separation, but through collaboration and liberation of the tendencies of individual parts. From a humanist perspective, this kind of diversity has gained cultural traction in recent years. We’ve started to understand that diversity of thought yields better results when problem solving and creating. But shallow diversity efforts aimed at addressing systems of racial oppression and segregation don’t get at the core of the problem. Ticking off check boxes to fill a ‘diversity’ quota does not capture the essence of the strength of a pluralistic community. Our schools and workd places still remain compartmentalized and full of silos. Jeremy Rifkin writes: “Our professionals have become like thousands of little blind creatures poking their sticks furiously at different parts of the elephant, each with a different notion of what the beast must look like. . . . Our educational process is designed to accommodate the needs of an industrial society. Industrial society, in turn, is designed to suit the needs of a nonrenewable energy society.”<sup>13</sup> Further, what we’ve yet to value is that solutions and creations must be geographically relevant. Mary Mellor states at the offset of Feminism & Ecology, a foundational and critical text on ecofeminism(s), that “The green movement starts from the basic tenet of ecology, that all living organisms must

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>13</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 231

be seen in relation to their natural environment.”<sup>14</sup> In metaphysical terms, this can be understood as the embeddedness of any given “integrated whole” within a “mere aggregate.”<sup>15</sup> Gestaltism, in psychological terms, highlights the importance of elevating the consideration of the whole above the isolated consideration of individual or collective parts. “Ecocentric ethics,” as Carolyn Merchant surmizes in Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World, are rooted in a holistic, rather than mechanistic, metaphysics.” Merchant lists the assumptions of holism to be: “1. Everything is connected to everything else... 2. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts... 3. Knowledge is context-dependence... 4. The primacy of process over parts... 5. The unity of humans and nonhuman nature.”<sup>16</sup>

1.3 *Bioregionalism*: The second tenet of systemic biomimicry, bioregionalism, is rooted in the first, but is distinctive in its absence in the formation of human construct. Bioregionalism refers to the crucial importance of the ecological and geographical context in which any thing lives. Without considering the geology, topography, or biomic climate of a particular region, any system that may be superimposed on it will, by the laws of interconnection and embeddedness, work *against* its ecological context. We can credit bioregionalism for distinctive cultural differences across the globe: from cuisine and fashion materials and styles, to architecture and musical instruments. Ancient and indigenous human cultures, cultures mindfully grounded in their ecological contexts, offer us bioregionally-relevant ways of being from one culture to

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>15</sup> Schaffer, Jonathan (2009). On what grounds what. In David Manley, David J. Chalmers & Ryan Wasserman (eds.), Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology. Oxford University Press. pp. 347-383.

<sup>16</sup> Merchant, Carolyn. *Radical ecology the search for a livable world*. New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005., 77/8

another. This is especially relevant when referencing traditional ecological wisdom and knowledge, which come to be only through deep and long-lasting relationships between a community and the land it develops. In the United States of America, a large nation whose perimeter and internal borders were arbitrarily superimposed on much of the continent of North America, the makers of our systems did not use the distinctive plant hardiness zones, native foliage, wildlife, habitat structures or migration patterns when designing local agriculture schemes, landscapes, or cities. Further, the 'American lifestyle' also rejects bioregional cultural pursuits by attempting to homogenize the innumerable and widely-varying bioregions of our nation into one whose values are entirely disconnected. American cuisine, familial structures, gender roles, and health rituals have nothing to do with the ecology in which we are immersed and everything to do with the compulsively accepted and proliferated system of capitalism. Through the arbitrary superimposition of cultural norms and economic systems, another fundamental aspect of bioregionalism is neglected: pluralism. This earth is inherently pluralistic in that distinctive ecoregions and biomes operate in markedly different ways. This does not mean that one is 'better' or closer to the truth than another; deciduous forests aren't 'better' or 'more effective' than grasslands. Desserts are not superior to tundras. Clay is not better than sand. Each system is perfect in its uniqueness and, together, they contribute to a perfect global whole *because of*, rather than in spite of, their differences. Attempts to place emphasis on social diversity often play off of this notion of markedly different individual contexts and beings contributing to the strength of a greater whole, but they still often thrive off of relativism, rather

than cultivated pluralism.<sup>17</sup> For it is only through the elevation of different cultures in the *creation* of a system that the system may be strengthened.

1.4 *Inalienable Laws*: While much of biology, physics, chemistry, and ecology remains ambiguous and undiscovered, there are some scientific and spiritual laws to which we have sufficient ontological access. I'd like to assert that, as a rule, we must apply the universal laws we know and accept to be indisputable if we'd like to expect our human-made systems to function effectively. There are four primary laws which are yet unable to be disproved and would undeniably serve us were we to value them in the creation of our human systems. The laws of matter, thermodynamics, death, and attraction, are at once the most powerful, pervasive, authoritative, and neglected laws of the physical universe. This neglect leaves us with sloppily-assembled systems that attempt to run counter to the inalienable and unavoidable forces which ultimately govern them.

1.4-A: *Laws of Conservation of Mass*: The laws of matter are widely known, yet, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, widely ignored. The laws of matter hold that there is a finite amount of matter in the Universe, and that matter can neither be created nor destroyed. So, why is it that we find it reasonable to pluck matter from the Earth with staggering frequency and volume, just to send it to landfill where it is no longer viable for use? In 2016 in the United

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<sup>17</sup> Locke, Alain LeRoy, and Leonard Harris. *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and beyond*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.

States, between 30 and 40 percent of all food grown went to landfill<sup>18</sup>, 10.21 million tons of textiles went to landfill, 15.3 million tons of plastics were sent to landfill, and nearly 17 million tons of wood and paper goods were sent to landfill. In total, Americans send about 63 million tons of matter to landfill *each year*.<sup>19</sup> If matter cannot be created, where do we think we'll get our lost nutrients and supplies once we run out? Where do we think other species will get those nutrients and resources if we're hiding them underground in black plastic bags which leak methane into the atmosphere? It is no accident that the scientific community refers to these laws as "the laws of the conservation of mass." Our imperative to conserve what is available to us is included in the identity of these truths. "Each day we experience the truth that biologists have long known: an organisms cannot long survive in a medium of its own waste."<sup>20</sup> It's simultaneously obvious and dumbfounding that our levels of consumption run exactly counter to one of the simplest laws of the universe.

1.4-B: *Laws of Thermodynamics*: The laws of thermodynamics, while similar to those of matter, are more understandably ignored or overlooked. We can see, touch, taste, and smell matter. Conversely, energy is seemingly amorphous. The untrained eye cannot observe energy at play. But the laws of thermodynamics tell us perhaps the most important aspects of its behavior. Each law of thermodynamics encompasses many complex and inescapable energetic qualities, but I

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<sup>18</sup> "OCE | U.S. Food Waste Challenge | FAQ's." USDA. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/faqs.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> United States of America. Environmental Protection Agency. *Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2014 Fact Sheet: Assessing Trends in Material Generation, Recycling, Composting, Combustion with Energy Recovery and Landfilling in the United States*. Washington D.C., 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 205

will sum each of them up in a way that highlights our clashes. The first law holds that energy, like matter, can neither be created nor destroyed, but that it can change forms and flow from one spatio temporal location to another. The second law, which is often referred to as entropy, explicates what Sir Arthur Eddington would surmise as: “entropy is time’s arrow.” Entropy signifies the irreversibility of all natural processes, and the tendency of energy to dissipate into chaos. It refers to the inevitable degradation of any energy once it is expended. As this energy degrades, it does so chaotically, creating what is referred to as an ‘entropy watershed.’ In essence, all energy can flow in only one direction, it can only degrade in value, and it is directly proportional to the amount of energetic chaos absorbed by the surrounding environment. Jeremy Rifkin, in his 1980 prognostic work entitled Entropy, outlines the ways in which our energy-addicted society and worldview can be blamed for the creation of chaos in our societies, bodies, and spirits. Rifkin points out that, once one is educated on the laws of energy and entropy and accepts them to be true, one's tendency to let go of the fictitious notion that the history runs counter to them may not be weakened. We may be willing to see the “history of the universe as beginning with a perfect state and moving toward decay and chaos and yet continue to cling to the notion that earthly history follows the exact opposite course, i.e., that it is moving from a state of chaos to a “progressively” more ordered world.”<sup>21</sup> A contradiction so blatant, perhaps unsurprisingly, has warranted the formulation of innumerable theories that attempt to circumvent the Entropy Law. This is perhaps why we’re so willing to accept an economy which convinces us that “human life is always becoming harder and harder to sustain and that more work, not less, is

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 45

necessary in order to eke out an existence from a more and more stingy environment.”<sup>22</sup> Rifkin perfectly and perhaps unshockingly points out that ““In short, we live in a kind of nightmaring Orwellian world. We have convinced ourselves that the way we go about things is creating a world quite different from the one we are really making.”<sup>23</sup> Whether one is to refer to America’s diet, consumer lifestyle, housing, construction norms, or transport infrastructure, it cannot be understated that our American economy, an economy which infects and propels the economies of arguably every nation, is grounded in an *addiction* to energy in the form of oil. This contributes to an additional economic contradiction, namely, the capitalist idea that an increase of overall wealth of one nation or microeconomy will inevitably contribute to the economic success of other nations or microeconomies. Unlike thermodynamics, which would uphold that notion with its clauses of the involuntary homeostasis of heat, monetary wealth may be held onto, sequestered from those who perhaps need it. This exemplifies the thermodynamic notion that, “In nature, whenever one element of an ecosystem multiplies or grows out of proportion to its proper functioning relationship with the rest of the elements in the system, it robs other life forms of the negative entropy (available energy) they need to survive. By doing so, it threatens the continued existence of the entire system.”<sup>24</sup> For this reason, a country’s gross national product can be more authentically referred to as the gross national cost,<sup>25</sup> for each instantiation of resource

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 64

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 195

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 133



consumption disallows for the consumption of that resource in the future and it, in our current system, likely costs more than it is worth.

1.4-C: *Death*: In his book, Rifkin bellows a call to the human species. He writes that it may only be through a *voluntary* shift to a “climatic” rather than “colonizing” mode, what I’d refer to as an “aligned” rather than “dissonant” design scheme, that we can make the radical adjustment necessary for our survival as a species. My claim is less so about our survival as a species, and more so about our success in regard to the *quality* of our lives. “The massive flow-through of energy in modern industrial society is creating massive disorder in the world we live in.”<sup>26</sup> I take this approach because chaos is not necessarily killing us. In fact, we’re living longer lives and our population is ever-increasing. What our high-entropy society is doing is starving us spiritually, nutritionally, and morally. Further, like all species before us and all that exist now, our extinction is inevitable. “The whole world is temporary. In its finiteness, we experience our own. In its vulnerability we experience our own. In its fragile nature we experience our own.”<sup>27</sup> I favor a call to a low-entropy society which aims not to ignore these truths, but which embraces them. I cannot state it any better than Jeremy Rifkin did when he wrote:

We tear into everything around us, devouring our fellow creatures and the earth’s treasures even while telling ourselves that it is progress we are after. It is, in truth, our own immortality we seek. It’s as if we were determined to destroy every last reminder of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 257

this finite world in the hope of ridding ourselves of the painful awareness of our own temporary nature.<sup>28</sup>

Until we can accept our impending deaths, individually and collectively, we will never stop yearning to avoid it. If we continue to yearn to avoid it, we will waste precious energy that, inevitably, worsens the quality of the collective human being. We misguidedly consider enlightenment to be an achievement we might get at if we only pushed further, worked harder. But enlightenment is not something to be achieved; it's something to be experienced. Without this radical acceptance, of the divinity of the present moment in light death rather than in spite of it, we cannot expect to create and operate systems which align with natural processes.

1.5 *Ego-Death*: The third tenet of systemic biomimicry, the absence of ego, is a bit more esoteric but all the more crucial. There have been many feeble attempts to find the line between homo sapiens and all other non-human animals, attempts which often overlook the most fundamental aspect of our experience of life: ego. As described in the previous chapter, the human ego acts as a narrators whose story may be as distant from the immanent truth as it pleases. We are the only animal who builds shrines for things that cause us spiritual, fiscal, and physiological harm. We are the only animal, as far as we know, who sees itself as a god. No other animal is able to at once be foolish enough to feel fear in moments of safety and peace and powerful enough to build weapons of mass-destruction to offer us a sense of power in that fear. Since all of our constructs and our compulsory belief in the myths handed down to us are grounded in ego, it is only through observing natural systems, without storytelling and judgement, with acceptance and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 257

humble inquiry, that we may be empty and open of mind enough to actually value what it is that we may glean.

1.6 *Embeddedness, Immanence, & Embodiment*: Bruce Wilshire poetically captures the transcendence of the immanent by writing, from a Native American perspective: “the world is not ‘out there,’ but its presences move through us- constrictedly, or fluently and regeneratively.”<sup>29</sup> Mary Mellor’s ecofeminist perspective adds: “Human embodiment, in turn, represents the fact that human beings live not only in a historical and social context, but also an ecological and biological one. The needs of human embodiment have to be met within an encompassing ecosystem. Differences in the historical and social position of human beings mean that their relationship to their ecosystem may be very different.”<sup>30</sup> These thinkers, amongst innumerable others, value the acknowledgment of *embodiment* as a conduit to understanding our *embeddedness* in the physical cosmos. Sherry Ortner surmises that that ““Every human being has a physical body and... must engage in some relationship, however mediated, with ‘nature’, or the non-human realm, in order to survive.””<sup>31</sup> Even if we would like to argue that we, as hyper-intelligent beings, persons in a non-materialist sense, or spirits can channel or access entities on other non-concrete planes, we are still human animals. We each still exist within our physical bodies, governed by physical law. When physical law negatively impacts our physical forms, we must ask ourselves: is this due to the law itself or my attempt to run up against?

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<sup>29</sup> Bruce, Wilshire. *The Primal Roots of American Philosophy: Pragmatism, Phenomenology, and Native American Thought*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000., 6

<sup>30</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 68/9

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 83

If one is to be authentically pragmatic, that is to say, if one is to be radically pragmatic, one must anchor their proposed system in the root of all life: natural, cosmic systems. Radical pragmatism cannot be pursued without biomimicry, for there is no better design thinker than the Unified Source of all things. The blueprints of the most efficient systems in the cosmos have been laid out for us already; we might as well humble ourselves enough to recognize and take advantage of this inalienable truth. Our intelligence is limited and confined to the boundaries of our relatively simple (when compared to the complexity of the infinite of the cosmos) brains and certainly restrictive language. There can be no pragmatism without biomimicry. But do not be fooled into thinking that aesthetic or structural biomimicry is enough; do not believe that mere parts inspired by nature are the solution. This is not about parts or objects; this is about systemic wholes. “McLaughlin has identified five branches of ‘radical environmentalism’: human-centered environmentalism, social ecology, ecological feminism, bioregionalism and deep ecology (1993:198),”<sup>32</sup>, each of which I may touch on inexplicably throughout this work.

The most successful green movements ground themselves in the tenets of ecology, namely, that all living organisms must be considered or observed in the context of their natural environments. “greens then divided on whether humanity can use its technological ingenuity to overcome or adapt to those bounding conditions (light green or shallow ecology) or whether it is necessary for humanity fundamentally to rethink its relationship to the natural world (dark green or deep ecology).”<sup>33</sup> But, as the timelessly wise and radically pragmatic Martin Luther King Jr. put it: “shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1

misunderstanding from people of ill will.”<sup>34</sup> What light greens or shallow ecologists perhaps choose to neglect is that:

A system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest is hopelessly lopsided. It tends to ignore, and thus eventually to eliminate, many elements in the land community that lack commercial value, but that are (as far as we know) essential to its healthy functioning. It assumes, falsely, I think, that the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts. It tends to relegate to government many functions eventually too large, too complex, or too widely dispersed to be performed by government.<sup>35</sup>

Deep ecology seeks to fundamentally and comprehensively reformulate our relationship to the parts and whole of the nonhuman environment while simultaneously valuing the qualitative components of human life.

In 1988 Naess reiterated his ideas in an eight-point ‘platform for deep ecology’. His first four points are: ‘1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has inherent value. The value of non-human life-forms is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes. 2. The richness and diversity of life-forms are also values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth. 3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs. 4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial *decrease* of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a

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<sup>34</sup> King, Martin Luther. “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” 16 Apr. 1963.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, G. Tyler, and Scott Spoolman. *Living in the Environment*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2018.

decrease.’ He goes on to call for ‘less human interference with the non-human world’, a change in the ‘basic economic, technological and ideological structures’ towards a ‘more joyful experience of the connectedness of all things’, and a stress on ‘life quality’ rather than standard of living’ (Naess 1988:128-32).<sup>36</sup>

There are three major environmental worldviews present in today's society: the planetary management worldview, the stewardship worldview, and the environmental wisdom worldview. The first encompasses a set of beliefs that “we are separate from and in charge of nature, that nature exists mainly to meet our needs and increasing wants, and that we can use our ingenuity and technology to manage earth’s life-support systems, mostly for our benefit, indefinitely.”<sup>37</sup> The stewardship worldview holds that “we can and should manage the earth for our benefit, but that we have an ethical responsibility to be caring and responsible managers, or stewards, for the earth.”<sup>38</sup> The third worldview states that “we are a part of, and dependent on, nature and that nature exists for all species, not just for us. our success depends on learning how life on earth sustains itself and integrating such environmental wisdom into the ways we think and act.”<sup>39</sup> The planetary management and stewardship worldviews do not advocate for the necessary notion of *alignment*. If our constructed systems are misaligned with natural systems, they are necessarily oppressive or destructive, for their functioning necessarily relies on the manipulation, death, or domination of human persons, non-human life, or landscapes. The alternative, as encompassed

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<sup>36</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 134

<sup>37</sup> Miller, G. Tyler, and Scott Spoolman. *Living in the Environment*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2018, 24

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

by the environmental wisdom worldview, works to *liberate* and *regenerate* lives and landscapes through the notion that “Biology enables, culture forbids.”<sup>40</sup> Miller writes: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” Here, he is referring to an ethical “right” and “wrong,” but the same can be said of a “right” and “wrong” in regard to what works. “Sometimes concern for the natural world and the critique of anthropocentrism has become associated with anti-humanism (Tokat 1990).”<sup>41</sup> But, as will be explicated in the remainder of this work, when upholding systemic biomimicry, the ethical and pragmatic can be safely conflated, and the well-being of the human person is inextricably bound with the well-being of the planet.

## **Chapter 2: The Creative Power of the Word & the Groundlessness of Construct**

*“Sapiens have [been] living in a dual reality. On the one hand, the objective reality of rivers, trees and lions; and on the other hand, the imagined reality of gods, nations, and corporations.*

*As time went by, the imagined reality became every more powerful, so that today the very survival of rivers, trees and lions depends on the grade of imagined entities such as the United States and Google”<sup>42</sup>- Yuval Noah Harari*

2.1 *Introduction*: Metaphysics had long been primarily concerned with the discernment of what exists, but Jonathan Schaffers *On What Grounds What* burst open the analysis of existence into a

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<sup>40</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 147

<sup>41</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330, 132

<sup>42</sup> Harari, Yuval N. author. *Sapiens : a Brief History of Humankind*. New York :Harper, 2015, 36

neo-Aristotelian one that now encompasses the ways by which the existence of a thing can be considered fundamental. It was an indelible contribution to the world of metaphysics, and to our understanding of the nature of our world. Through the thesis of this major work, Schaffer provides a modal framework through which one may determine the hows and whys of the existence of aspects of our world and environment. Since its publication in 2009, Schaffer's work has invited metaphysicians to contribute to a *pluralistic* framework of grounding, in which various rules may be written and employed to determine the fundamentality of the existence of things, including specific social constructs and social kinds, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. What has yet to be explicated is the difference in fundamentality between socially-constructed *systems* in light of their place in a monistic, ecological cosmos.

Schaffer's grounding argument, joined with the Ian Hacking's contributions to the metaphysics of social construction, allows us to analyse perhaps the most dissonant facets of our 21st-century lives, namely: ecological degradation and the persistence of social oppression. Emphasising fundamentality, particularly in today's most unique societal, existential, political, and ecological climate, is crucial. Here's why: The scientific and historical communities have come to agree that *Homo Sapiens*, since the dawn of agriculture and especially since the industrial revolution, (that is, within the last 10,000 but especially within the last 125 years) has swiftly and harmfully disrupted systems it had no part in creating, systems that had been slowly evolving over the course of 4.543 billion years. Humans have done this by *constructing* systems and institutions and *superimposing* them onto the earth's matter, cycles, and life. The systems humans have created exist. I have no interest in disproving the existence of capitalism, communism, democracy, gender, race, hospitals, shopping malls, religious institutions,



highways, etc. These phenomenon existed as nominal entities as soon as we named them, and they existed as concrete objects as soon as we built physical institutions to aid in their function. What I have interest in, and what I believe we *must all* have interest in is *how* these systems and institutions have come into existence, i.e.: in what they are grounded? In understanding the grounds of our constructs, we can then distinguish those grounds from the grounds that determine the ways in which biogeochemical cycles, osmosis, photosynthesis, thermodynamics, gravity, plant and animal reproduction, fungal communication networks, etc. came into being and behave. I see a crucial hole in social constructivist grounding arguments in the absence of a distinction of the fundamentality of those systems which are grounded directly in natural systems, without first being grounded in linguistic or social construct. I see greater truth value in that which is directly grounded in natural systems than that which is grounded first in construct. Further, there is an emphasis on the ethics of social construction, but there is little (if any) emphasis put on their *efficacy*. Here, I argue that efficacy is related to the expenditure of energy. I argue that in order for a dominant human system to be effective, its design must be based primarily on natural systems and it must continue to adapt to greater, non-constructed understanding of natural systems. Were this comparison to be understood and upheld by the masses, the possibility of the the widespread minimization of entropic chaos and the end of all oppression and is assuredly more feasible.

In order to make a digestible grounding distinction between that which is grounded in construct and that which is directly grounded in ecology, I first distinguish the uniqueness of social constructions in comparison to their non-linguistically constructed counterparts. My aim is to draw a fundamental distinction between all human constructs and those things and systems

that exist by virtue of cosmic ecological workings, without the creative influence of the human mind. Here I supplement the bare grounding claim of this obvious distinction with “specific rules mapping Grounds to what they ground... [and] a formal system with unified rules that provide useful generalizations about the kind of dependence at issue.”<sup>43</sup>

*2.2 The Importance of Fundamentality:* To quote Aaron M. Griffith, “grounding can be understood as an attempt to articulate metaphysical and explanatory structures in reality; structures that connect what is dependent, derivative, and in need of explanation to what is (relatively) independent, non-derivative, or not (or less) in need of explanation.”<sup>44</sup> In searching for fundamentality, the aim is not to deny the existence of that which is not fundamental, but to determine a framework of understanding “how and why non-fundamental entities exist.”<sup>45</sup> It is also useful in pointing toward a “fundamental level of reality,”<sup>46</sup> in which some ultimate Truth or source of Truth might be ascertained. In establishing a stratified hierarchy of existence, one may determine: “the entities of the fundamental level are *primarily* real, while any remaining contingent entities are at best derivative, if real at all.”<sup>47</sup> This is the purpose of the grounding schema: to determine not only what the hierarchy looks like, but to ascertain the type of realness

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<sup>43</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (2018). Social construction: big-G grounding, small-g realization. *Philosophical Studies* 175 (1):241-260, 244

<sup>44</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (forthcoming). Social Construction and Grounding. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. PhilArchive copy v1: [https://philarchive.org/archive/GRISCAv1\\_2](https://philarchive.org/archive/GRISCAv1_2)

<sup>45</sup> Schaffer, Jonathan (2017). Social construction as grounding; or: fundamentality for feminists, a reply to Barnes and Mikkola. *Philosophical Studies* 174 (10), 2458

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Schaffer III Schaffer, Jonathan (2003). Is there a fundamental level? *Noûs* 37 (3): 498

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*: 498

or truth of any given facet of the world, environment, or phenomenological reality. Griffith astutely asserts:

Bare Grounding claims such as ‘X Grounds Y’ are uninformative because they give us no answer to whether Grounded items exist, whether they are reducible or irreducible to that which Grounds them, or whether grounded items are distinctively causally efficacious. In sum, bare Grounding claims do not tell us exactly *how* grounded items stand to their Grounds.<sup>48</sup>

Griffith asserts that “Social construction should be understood in terms of metaphysical grounding. According to the ‘grounding account’ of social construction, for a subject S to be socially constructed as being of a social kind K (e.g., being a woman) is for the fact that S is a K to be metaphysically grounded in certain social, rather than biological, facts.”<sup>49</sup> I advocate for this claim that social construction must be placed within the grounding framework, specifically in regard to truth relations and distinctions.

*2.3 The Pluralist “Small-g” Grounding Framework:* In the wake of Schaffer’s explication of the initial grounding blueprint, contemporary metaphysicians have been detailing and uncovering aspects of the bare foundation to build a “pluralist framework”<sup>50</sup> of grounding in which various relational tools can be used as “species of the genus Grounding.”<sup>51</sup> Jessica Wilson’s keen

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<sup>48</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (2018). Social construction: big-G grounding, small-g realization. *Philosophical Studies* 175 (1):244.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (2018). Social construction: big-G grounding, small-g realization. *Philosophical Studies* 175 (1):257.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.: 252

assessment of the “big-G” notion of Grounding, a basic and sweeping approach to the exploration of fundamentality, invites metaphysicians to establish discrete and varying “small-g” dependence relations within the broader Grounding framework. Through a pluralist framework of understanding fundamentality, the complexity of the oneness of the cosmos can be more holistically and accurately described, for there are infinitely many parthood relations between the whole aggregate of the fundamental level, referred to here on as ‘the Cosmos.’ Further, through the big-G grounding relation, one may determine the fundamentality of small-g relations.<sup>52</sup> It is with this in mind that I contend that the determination of the grounding in a system either directly in the cosmos or first in human language, a small-g grounding relation yet to be explicated in ecologically systemic terms, is more fundamental than its purely socially constructivist counterparts.

#### ***2.4 On “Natural Systems” and Their Importance***

*2.4-A On the Natural and Wild:* In order to understand the distinction of a natural system vs. a dominant human system, one must first be in agreement with me on what determines the “naturalness” of a system. There has been much confusion around and corruption of the word “natural.” It is important to recognize first the naturalness of our constructs, beliefs, and dominant human systems. I do not aim to prove that humans are in any way “unnatural.” In fact, I believe we are, as human animals, as entangled in the monistic web of the Cosmos as are earthworms or aspen trees. Our bodies and brains are the stuffs of the cosmos. We are natural, and so are all of our tendencies and creations. I do not aim to disprove that our impulses or

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.: 252

technologies are natural, for they occur within and by the laws of physics, on this planet. That being said, there is a critical distinction between the naturalness of *systems* which we had no part in creating and *systems* which depend on our belief in them in order for operation. In some sense, one could refer to natural systems as “wild” and mind-dependent systems as “domesticated.” Can we consider that which is domesticated to be truly natural? Sure. But can we consider all that is natural to be wild? No. The term “wild,” encapsulates that which negates it; it contains its opposite. That which is wild is that thing that does not merely encapsulate “wildness” in its essence, but that essence which is *without* domestication. Domestication does not instinctively imply any intrinsic moral value, more so a pragmatic one. But, looking more deeply at a phenomenological and existential interpretation of domestication, it does imply oppression by one party unto another. Domestication necessitates the utilization of X’s power over Y, cutting off, through whatever mechanism(s), X’s ability to absorb more power (potential energy) and, therefore, weakening Y’s ability to assert power (kinetic energy) over X. This is the nature of oppression. All domestication is oppression.

2.4-B *Homo Sapiens & Domestication*: Domestication is a natural phenomenon, and humans are but one of many domesticators in the plant and animal kingdoms. But it is serviceable to ascribe a preferential categorization of Humans as the ultimate domesticator of the history of the Earth, for no other species has managed *systematically* and *intentionally* oppress other species and its own quite like *Homo Sapiens*. Why are our systems notable in comparison to those made by other non-human apex predators or keystone species? The answer to this question can be found in our unique ability to construct systems which allow us supercede bioregional boundaries in the

attempt to run *counter* to natural law. All other invasive or dominant species are capped off by aspects of their surrounding environment, by natural systems. They cannot necessarily adapt to and overthrow *any* bioregion. We, on the other hand, can pillage and develop in nearly every terrain.<sup>53</sup> We are able to do this through the widespread belief in common language-based myths, a behavior that other animal species do not share to our capacity.

*2.4-C Homo Sapiens as a Part of the Cosmic Whole:* Aaron Griffith points out that the social ontologist is able to recognize the non-fundamentality of social reality, but that “those connections need not concern her. For the explanations she seeks, and rightly so, are social explanations.”<sup>54</sup> I would argue that the social ontologist is not, in fact, right to reflect the ecological context of social kinds and constructs. Social ontologists and metaphysicians tend view humans in a metaphysical vacuum, contributing to the erasure of the physical cosmos’ impact on our being. We are not just human persons but also human animals; we are not without physical limits. Just because we have managed to dominate or eradicate *parts* of the whole of ecology which attempt to oppose us, the *whole* of natural systems, the monistic entanglement of all that is, is much more powerful than we. It is the system we’re up against. And, as we alter and rearrange the parts, the system grows more chaotic, unpredictable, and unbalanced, becoming poised to erupt with increasing tenacity and heedlessness as greater chaos unfolds and festers. Further, if the social ontologist or metaphysical constructivist are in search of truth, they should

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<sup>53</sup> Insert an exception of the tundra, for which we have little interest, anyway.

<sup>54</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (forthcoming). Social Construction and Grounding. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. PhilArchive copy v1: <https://philarchive.org/archive/GRISCAv>: 9

be encouraged to explore entities which *cannot lie*. The earth and the cosmic system of which it is a part is, as Jonathan Schaffer explicates, the sole truth-maker of the concrete world. If we are to explore the mysteries of the metaphysical, we must situate those mysteries within the ontological context of the monism of the Cosmos.

2.4-D *The Unyielding Law of Entropy*: To end this section, I must highlight one additional *crucial* reason for valuing the Truth of natural systems. The energetic dissonance created by the superimposition of dominant human systems on and in natural systems creates a friction which necessitates the expenditure of greater amounts of energy in order to 1) make the dominant human system work, 2) silence the dissonance so that the public may not hear it, and 3) mitigate and adapt to the ecological, social, economic, political, physiological, and spiritual distress caused by the ineffectiveness of the system. The 2nd law of thermodynamics, known also as entropy, states that all energy must necessarily degrade in value over time, unless greater energy is expended to minimize the degradation. In short, all energy, once expended, dissipates out into entropy watersheds of chaos. The superimposition of our constructed systems onto nature's yields unfathomable amounts of chaos in our selves, societies, and human world. Sir Arthur Eddington stated that "entropy is time's arrow." In understanding how natural systems work, we can coordinate our movement with theirs, effectively flowing along the river of time with less energy and, therefore, less chaos in our social world.

## 2.5 *Language & The Human World*

1. Human knowledge is subject to self-deception.

2. Human knowledge is merely human belief.
3. The existence of all dominant social constructions are grounded in myth.
4. The persisting existence of all dominant social constructions is dependent on widespread belief in them.

*2.5-A Belief as Non-Causally Grounded in the Monistic Cosmos:* While the human brain can be seen neurologically as little more than a highly-complex network of matter and energy, grounded in the cosmos like all else, the machinations of the human mind remain mysterious and abstract. Human consciousness, more so than any other facet of our being, is occasionally capable of linking us to other planes, to energies and stuffs that cannot be defined or governed by the laws of physics. The mind includes more than just the brain; it includes the soul. Our minds allow us not only to believe in an ineffable source, but moreover allow us to *be* source. Grounding necessitarianism (GN) holds that “if x grounds y, then, necessarily, if x then y.”<sup>55</sup> But, as Griffith mentions, “Some think that there are cases of grounding in which the grounds do not necessitate the grounded item.”<sup>56</sup> This is the case with human belief. Grounding does not deal necessarily with causality. If it were true that human belief were necessarily causally grounded in the human brain, it would hold that two individuals with the same neurotypical neurological functioning would hold the very same beliefs about all things. But, our beliefs are shaped by many causal factors aside from our physicality. If belief were necessarily causally grounded in the human brain, the environmental relational context of one's upbringing would have no impact on one's

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<sup>55</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (forthcoming). Social Construction and Grounding. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. PhilArchive copy v1: <https://philarchive.org/archive/GRISCAv>: 10

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*: 10



belief. Therefore, it can be determined that belief is not grounded causally in the concrete stuffs of the brain, but that there are other factors which contribute to one's belief in any given thing. Griffith notes that “non-reductive physicalists develop conceptions of relativization on which mental properties are distinct from and irreducible to physical properties that realize them,”<sup>57</sup> essentially stating that our minds and their functions are not identical to our brains and their functions. Belief is still *partially* grounded in the human brain, however, as the brain “non-causally generates or gives rise to (in some particular fashion)”<sup>58</sup> the belief in something. This becomes problematic when we assume our beliefs to be “nature,” so as to say, grounded immediately in the Cosmos as natural law, for the stuff of our beliefs is not causally grounded in the concrete stuffs of the cosmos, but rather in some mysterious and abstract imaginative force that cannot be described by the laws of physics. This is the problem with naturalness claims ascribed to mind-dependent institutions which attempt to operate within the bounds of the physical plain yet somehow subvert its inalienable laws.

Ecologically speaking, there is no meaning. Meaning is an exclusively linguistic phenomenon. Designations of “good” or “bad” are often entirely arbitrary, for, in Truth, all things simply be. Any meaning we may ascribe to a thing, whether it be unfavorable weather or the type of clothing one chooses to wear, is meaning that we *create*. Through the externalization of our thoughts through shared language, we, as a species, are uniquely poised in the cosmos to *create* realities so vastly distinct from the created realities of all other species. Through the internal and external communication of consciousness, humans construct and reinforce the horizon of our

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<sup>57</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (2018). Social construction: big-G grounding, small-g realization. *Philosophical Studies* 175 (1):246.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*: 234

world, a world that occurs both within and without the horizon of the environment<sup>59</sup>. Our minds allow us to perceive the environment in creative and unique ways, and language allows us to create a shared world. Without language, any thing in question, whatever it may be, is utterly meaningless to the humanities. Any meaning it may have is barred out of the world (*welt*) and remains in the environment (*umwelt*). Storytelling creates and expands our world; listening to stories and then interpreting them further proliferates its horizon. Once u try to mediate the environment it becomes the world<sup>60</sup>. Through this story-telling, it becomes clear that the living, changing nature of language creates a living, changing world. Further, speakers of different languages actually have varying cognitive access to the same things. McPherson and Rabb write that “here is a very real sense in which they live in different worlds, worlds created by their different languages... Just because a certain way of looking at the world is useful does not imply that it is an accurate representation of the way the world really is.”<sup>61</sup> If language is our tool for creating and maintaining our reality, it must be understood that each dialect is shaped differently. You cannot build a house, let alone an entire city, with only a screwdriver. You cannot understand the whole of Truth with the tool of only one language.

2.5-B *Social Construction as Mediatly Grounded in the Fundamental Cosmic Truth-Maker (i.e.: Social Construction as Myth)*

5. While reality is real insofar as it exists, it is not true.

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<sup>59</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1989. *Truth and method*. New York: Crossroad.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> McPherson, Dennis H., and J. Douglas Rabb. 1993. *Indian from the inside: a study in ethno-metaphysics*. Thunder Bay, Ontario: Centre for Northern Studies, Lakehead University., 15

6. If there is no truth in the human world outside of its phenomenological reality, there is no truth in the human world.
7. The truth-value of the efficacy of any social construction is inherently mythic.

“Brian Epstein (2013) claims that ‘the project of social ontology is built on the observation that social facts are not ‘brute’ facts in nature.’”<sup>62</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, in his acclaimed history of humankind entitled *Sapiens*, writes:

“There are no gods in the universe, no nations, no money, no human rights, no laws, and no justice outside the common imagination of human beings. People easily understand that ‘primitives’ cement their social order by believing in ghosts and spirits, and gathering each full moon to dance together around the campfire. What we fail to appreciate is that our modern institutions function on exactly the same basis. Take for example the world of business corporations. Modern business-people and lawyers are, in fact, powerful sorcerers. The principle difference between them and tribal shamans is that modern lawyers tell far stranger tales.”<sup>63</sup>

Harari attributes the successful dominion of the human animal to its “unique language.”<sup>64</sup> Our language has allowed us to tell the tales of gods, nations, human rights, laws, etc. But it is not just the telling of those tales which allowed them to flourish as foundations of our societies, it is our ability to *collectively* believe in them. “Such myths give *Sapiens* the unprecedented ability to

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<sup>62</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (forthcoming). Social Construction and Grounding. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Phil Archive copy v1: <https://philarchive.org/archive/GRISCAv>: 2

<sup>63</sup> Harari, Yuval N. author. *Sapiens: a Brief History of Humankind*. New York :Harper, 2015.: 28

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*: 19

cooperate flexibly in large numbers.”<sup>65</sup> What Harari refers to as “myth,” I will hereon refer to as construct. Nietzsche, in his inquiry to the value of truth, writes:

The falseness of an opinion is not for us any objection to it: it is here, perhaps, that our new language sounds most strangely. The question is, how far an opinion is life-furthering, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps species-rearing, and we are fundamentally inclined to maintain that the falsest opinions (to which the synthetic judgments a priori belong), are the most indispensable to us, that without a recognition of logical fictions, without a comparison of reality with the purely IMAGINED world of the absolute and immutable, without a constant counterfeiting of the world by means of numbers, man could not live—that the renunciation of false opinions would be a renunciation of life, a negation of life.<sup>66</sup>

We operate around myths more so than we do around the objective truth of natural systems. This is why the survival of the objective truth of natural systems now depends on our imagined systems.<sup>67</sup>

*2.5-C Social Construction as Embedded in the Cosmos:* Harari outlines three primary components of social construction that inhibit humans from coming to realize the imaginative mind-dependence of the institutions which govern their lives. The factors he lists are “a. The imagined order is embedded in the material world... b. The imagined order shapes our desires... c. the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.: 25

<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Arnold Kaufmann. 1989. *Beyond good and evil: prelude to a philosophy of the future*. New York: Vintage Books.

<sup>67</sup> Harari, Yuval N. author. *Sapiens: a Brief History of Humankind*. New York :Harper, 2015.: 32

imagined order is inter-subjective.”<sup>68</sup> Social constructions are often “summarily dismissed as involving a radical anti-realism where everything is language, or text.”<sup>69</sup> Such assumptions may be based on theories like Hacking’s dynamic nominalism, in which “the conception of the kind and the kind come into being together.”<sup>70</sup> This is true for institutions like capitalism, democracy, and gender. But Ásta Sveinsdóttir explicates that, when it comes to dominant constructs, there occurs a departure into changes in the physical or psychological, in which social constructions transition from mere concept to embeddedness in the concrete world. They still retain their grounds as social constructions, but they now take roots in the monistic entanglement of concrete entities. This is supported by Schrodinger's assertion that even “without initial entanglement, ‘eventually every particle in the universe must become entangled with every other.’”<sup>71</sup> But in exploring whether it “is it X itself that is socially constructed, or is it our idea or conception or knowledge of X that is?”<sup>72</sup>, we must utilize a grounding tool to be able to draw this distinction. The answer to the question is dependent on what X is: is it a rock? Or is it Capitalism? Is X something that would exist without us speaking it into existence? In the case of the rock, the rock itself is not socially constructed, but our concept of the rock might be. In the case of Capitalism, both the thing itself and our concept of what it is are socially constructed. The existence of construct as contingent on humans, whereas the existence of natural systems are contingent on

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.: 113-117

<sup>69</sup> Sveinsdóttir, Ásta (2015). Social Construction. *Philosophy Compass* 10 (12):884

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 885.

<sup>71</sup> Schaffer, Jonathan (2010). Monism: The Priority of the Whole. *Philosophical Review* 119 (1):52.

<sup>72</sup> Sveinsdóttir, Ásta (2015). Social Construction. *Philosophy Compass* 10 (12):884.

the cosmos themselves. The cosmos cannot lie, and humans are very good at believing in myth. Therefore, the cosmos is the only honest and authentic designer of systems.

Take industrial agricultural land for another example. The system itself exists, but it would not exist if we were never to have thought it up as a concept or implemented it as a construct. The fields, rows, tools, and purpose retain their concrete realness and ecological relationships even in recognizing their grounding in the myth that we must farm by those constructed economic and ecological standards. We may even widen our scope to view climate change itself as causally grounded in social construction, for such changes in the physical environment would not occur were it not for the myths that support our excess fossil fuel combustion. This is why I take issue with Rebecca Mason's claim: "It is not obvious that social kinds fail to be natural in the relevant sense. Although social kinds are not found "in nature," neither are many chemical and biological kinds."<sup>73</sup> First, she is wrong to assert that social kinds are not found in nature, for everything is found in nature. Second, her distinction between social kinds and synthetic chemical and biological kinds is nonsensical, for synthetic or artificial chemical and biological kinds, such as genetically modified corn seeds and polyethylene, are grounded in economic construct.

Further, as Paul Ricoeur points out with his distinction of "saying something (the locutionary act), [doing] something something in saying (illocutionary act), and [yielding] effects by saying (the perlocutionary act),"<sup>74</sup> he is implying that saying is, in fact, a creative force. The term "abracadabra," famously known as a word of magical and spontaneous manifestation, is

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<sup>73</sup> Mason, Rebecca (2016). The metaphysics of social kinds. *Philosophy Compass* 11 (12):841-850.

<sup>74</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1979., 14

believed to have originated from the Aramaic *Avrah KaDabra*, meaning "I create as I speak."

The phrase appeared in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the Book of Creation, the primary text of Kabbalah. In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, language is the very stuff of manifestation. The book of John in the New Testament begins with: "In the beginning was the Word." God *spoke* the world into existence. Many Native American peoples share in this belief. In shaping the perception of reality others have of a singular moment, language holds the power to create and destroy, inspire or discourage, incite love or hate.

Our flesh vessels, our bodies, store energies, souls, spirits within their permeable membranes. So too is true with words. Each of them a symbol, a vessel, holding infinitesimal meanings. Such meanings are intrinsically spiritual in that, in being spoken, their precise meanings are held by the particular instances in which the speakers, as a unique actors in unique instatiations of time in space, are sharing pieces of themselves uniquely and personally, informed not exclusively by the sum of their experiences but so too by the energetic souls that fuel and guide them. In common discourse, however, commonly-used symbols acquire stricter meanings. Political catch-phrases and buzzwords operate as opaque spheres of meaning, in which abstract notions about life and liberty are caged. As a poorly-constructed system, built behind the facade of protecting human safety, prosperity, and liberty, American government has operated more so as a stage for political symbol-spewing than as a system through which spiritual liberation and care might be addressed. Terminology such as "law-and-order", "thug", and "welfare queen" are utilized by career politicians and talking heads in attempts to furbish complex, deeply-experienced issues of spiritual malnourishment in cloaks of misguided and cowardly political strategy. This language distracts *all* people, of all races and positions of power, from an aspect of

life and being that has been missing from political discourse for far too long yet is crucially fundamental to our individual and collective well-being: spiritual development and support. Ta-Nehisi Coates writes: “all our phrasing- race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy- serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth.”<sup>75</sup> The perlocutionary act of our phrasing is embedded in the physical cosmos. Later in his letter, he links the body to the soul by writing: “I believed, and still do, that our bodies are our selves, that my soul is the voltage conducted through neurons and nerves, and that my spirit is my flesh.”<sup>76</sup> When career politicians and all who adopt their language speak of race relations, they often neglect the deeply spiritual ramifications of living as a black body in a whited-out world. Coate’s account of his own life and being, and of race relations as a whole, reflect Cornel West’s vision of socratic spirituality both in their keen examination and their frank assessment of hopelessness.

3.5-D *The creative power of language in the now*: Gadamer’s focus on play, on the melding of existential horizons, is bound in the present; it occurs only within the confines of particular instances of exchange and connection. This is what defines the *welt*. The *umwelt* persists through time, the *welt* is created in each moment as every individual’s consciousness engages with the environment. The environment (*umwelt*) operates as the perpetual universal, whereas the world (*welt*) operates in particulars that create and shape itself. The environment is always true. The

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<sup>75</sup> Coates, Ta-Nehisi, and Klaus Amann. *Between the World and Me*. Ditzingen: Reclam, 2017., 10

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 79



world is only true as its created in each moment. Paul Ricoeur, in Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning explicates that language has three creative modes: the locutionary act (saying something), the illocutionary act (do something in saying something), and the perlocutionary act (yielding an effect by saying something).<sup>77</sup> Each of these acts contributes to the creation and reinforcement of the human world, in fact, these are the only acts which create the human world. Comparatively, the environment persists whether any human act is attempted or completed. So, if the world's horizon merely perdures as the environment's persists, the reinforcement of our world becomes significantly more fickle. This is precisely why our human world is able to change over time or differ over space. Slavery, child marriage, corporal punishment in academic settings, de jure segregation, refusal of care in hospitals based on race or religion, and suffrage inequality seem absurd and unquestionably unjust to the modern American citizen. We would like to think that we would never accept those practices and institutions in today's America. But it is likely that, fifty years from now, Americans will look back on today's prison-industrial complex, wage inequality, gun laws, deforestation, animal product consumption, and extractivist economy with the same contempt. The futility of our constructs lives in its grounding in the locutionary acts of any given moment. In this futility is the opportunity to create *any* world we may desire. This is precisely why Judith Green astutely asserts: "Philosophy must be continually reconstructed in order to fulfill its ongoing cultural role of articulating and mediating the conflicts of successive historical eras in the development of civilizations."<sup>78</sup> Authentically

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<sup>77</sup> Ricœur, Paul. 1976. *Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press.

<sup>78</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., ix

effective progress is dependent on our consistent re-creation of existing institutions and versions of reality.

## 2.6 *Truth & Ecologically-Motivated Priority Monism*

1. Monism refers only to the concrete entities of the concrete environment.
2. Therefore, there must be different truth-makers for the concrete environment and the human world.
3. While the human brain is grounded in concrete biological facts, the human imaginative mind is grounded in mysterious abstract energy of the mind.
4. The only creative entity in the cosmos which is not bound by the laws of physics, that is to say, the only creative entity which is infinite, is the imagination.

2.6-A *On Monism*: Jonathan Schaffer's convincing assertion of the priority of the whole is consistent with the tenets of deep ecology and other schools of radical ecological pragmatism. Schaffer explicates that monism does not include the notion that the whole has no parts or that only one thing exists, "but rather that the whole is prior to its parts... such a doctrine presupposes that there are parts, for the whole to be prior to them. The historical debate is not a debate over which objects exist, but rather a debate over which objects are fundamental."<sup>79</sup> His central thesis marks the parts of the world as "dependent fragments of an integrated whole."<sup>80</sup> Schaffer makes a point to distinguish the concreteness of the world to which he refers, by writing: "I am

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<sup>79</sup> Schaffer, Jonathan (2010). Monism: The Priority of the Whole. *Philosophical Review* 119 (1):33.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

speaking of the material cosmos and its planets, pebbles, particles, and other proper parts.”<sup>81</sup> In Gadamer’s terminology, Schaffer is referring not to the world (*welt*), but to the environment (*umwelt*). He also explicates that he is referring only to the actual world,<sup>82</sup> rather than any or all possible worlds. Perhaps the most convincing facet of his argument in favor of monism is the infallibility and pervasiveness of quantum entanglement.<sup>83</sup> “The argument from quantum entanglement to Monism begins from the premise that the cosmos forms one vast entangled system. This can be argued for both physically and mathematically.”<sup>84</sup>

2.6-B *On Truth vs. Realness*: After presenting the fundamentality of the infinitely complex whole, Schaffer extended the notion of monism to the notion of truth in his article entitled *The Least Discerning and Most Promiscuous Truthmaker*. Here, he asserts the cosmic whole as the one and only cosmic truth-maker, drawing a crucial distinction between truth and realness. The definition of the word “real” has long been philosophically fraught. Some thinkers have interpreted it to refer to that which is metaphysically fundamental, occasionally espousing staunch antirealism about social kinds or even artificially manufactured concrete objects, such as gold or DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane). Others have attributed realness to only mind-independent entities. But Rebecca Mason highlights that “the fact that it is essential to a kind, K, that K exists only if some mental states exist does not imply that K is not real.”<sup>85</sup> Here, I agree

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> (again, sub for environment (*umwelt*) here)

<sup>83</sup> Schaffer, Jonathan (2010). Monism: The Priority of the Whole. *Philosophical Review* 11928-51

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>85</sup> Mason, Rebecca (2016). The metaphysics of social kinds. *Philosophy Compass* 11 (12):845..

with her. It is not the realness of the mind-dependent that is up for interpretation, but its *truth*. The realness of an entity need only be experienced as real in order for it to be so. McPherson & Rabb state: “reality is as it is. We do not invent it. It is there for us to discover,”<sup>86</sup> but this is not wholly accurate. Reality, in fact, is subject entirely to our perception and description of it. We create our ‘reality,’ our world, through our word, in the same way “the Eskimo believes that the emitting of a word evoked an image, which as an actual reality.”<sup>87</sup> It is *truth* that we cannot invent, is it *truth* that we can aim to discover. Schaffer effectively divides up the *truth* of the world by referring to the concreteness of the fundamental cosmos without discrediting the *realness* of its mind-dependent derivative parts. In other words, if facts are worldly rather than linguistic or conceptual, they can only be true if immediately grounded in the concrete monistic cosmos, but if they are grounded in concept or linguistics, they may still be real insofar as they exist without our human world. Rebecca Mason argues “that common ways of drawing a distinction between social kinds and natural kinds are flawed.”<sup>88</sup> With her, I agree. This is where the importance of truth-making as truth-grounding resides: “the truthmaking relation is the relation of grounding between substance and truth.”<sup>89</sup> By utilizing grounding, one can easily determine the truth-value of any given entity. Because monism refers only to the concrete, mind-independent environment, it does not extend to the imaginative mind. While our brains and being

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<sup>86</sup> McPherson, Dennis H. & Rabb, J. Douglas (1996). Indian from The Inside: A Study in Ethno-Metaphysics. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 32 (1):13.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, Joseph Epes., and Emily Cousins. *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010: 43.

<sup>88</sup> Mason, Rebecca (2016). The metaphysics of social kinds. *Philosophy Compass* 11 (12):842.

<sup>89</sup> Schaffer, J. (2010), The Least Discerning and Most Promiscuous Truthmaker. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 60: 310..

are undoubtedly entangled within the concrete cosmos, the infinite capacity of our consciousness is not. There is no direct grounding relationship between the shapeless mind (what some would refer to as the soul), and the fundamental level of the cosmos. This is what makes us unique as human persons. So, if the monistic cosmos is the only truthmaker, and the entity in question is grounded in the mind, it cannot very well be considered true outside of the fact that it exists in our human reality. “The question of fundamental mereology can be seen as presupposing that there is a metaphysically privileged way to carve up the cosmos.”<sup>90</sup> With priority monism in mind, the concrete cosmos assumes privilege in guiding all other mereological ontology.

*2.6-C On Truth and Efficacy:* The question of truth entails both truth of existence (realness) and truth of efficacy (truth). It is true that capitalism exists, therefore, it is real. However, it is questionable whether it is effective. It is true that nutrient cycles are real; it is not questionable whether they’re effective. They simply are. This is the case because human constructs often require myths about the function of the cosmos in order to operate, grounding themselves more distantly to the concrete of the cosmos than true parts of the cosmos.

## ***2.7 The Ontological Inaccessibility of the Whole of Truth***

*2.7-A Interaction with the World and the Environment:* Hans Georg Gadamer, in his famous work Truth and Method, draws a hermeneutical distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences which is serviceable to our distinction between natural systems and human systems. Gadamer explicates that while the natural sciences attempt to grasp the environment

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<sup>90</sup> Schaffer, Jonathan (2010). Monism: The Priority of the Whole. *Philosophical Review* 119 (1):42.

(*umwelt*), the humanities attempt to grasp the metaphysical human world (*welt*). In this light, the truth of the environment is simply that it is. It is true whether we engage with or observe it or not. The environment is always true. Conversely, the truth of the human world can only be found in being interacted or played with through perception. The world is only true as it is created in moments of engagement. This is not to say that there is no metaphysical without the human, but it cannot be discerned as such. Non-human animals experience it but cannot distinguish it. That is to say, there is truth in the environmental horizon without our world's horizon meeting it; the truth is unknowable in such a case. Mary Mellor, in *Feminism and Ecology*, states: "embedded and embodied human beings, as part of the natural world, will never be able to grasp the whole, but can struggle to gain knowledge about the limits, potentialities and responsibilities that immanence entails."<sup>91</sup> This is the purpose of the natural sciences. This is why "awareness of the radical uncertainty of human immanence should be the starting point of all other knowledge."<sup>92</sup>

2.7-B *The Ontologically Inaccessible Whole*: In Lakota, "*Wakan* means anything you cannot understand. Chief among things and being that are *Wakan* is *Wakantanka*- the Great Mystery-- God" (Bunge, 25). The understanding of *Wakantanka* is precisely the same as the understanding of God in Judaism. There is actually no singular name for the Jewish God in any language, and the most commonly used name in prayer, Adonai, does not have a phonetic Hebrew spelling. This is because the oneness God cannot be summed up within the confines of a few letters- it is too abstract, too expansive. Monotheists from various faiths join in this understanding that the

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<sup>91</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 124.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*: 187

whole of the one of the universe, what they would refer to as “God” in one way or another, is entirely ineffable.

We can know parts of Truth as we can know the feeling of being submerged in the warmth of the Mediterranean Sea. We can familiarize ourselves with our sensations of that particular part of that particular shore, but we will never know, even as a collective species, how it feels to, at once and in perpetuity, experience the complexity of color, temperature, speed, sound, taste, viscosity, pressure, scent, and energetic frequency of every particle of the Earth’s oceans at the same time from the perspective of every creature and grain of sand and microbe, let alone what it is like to be a dying star just past Jupiter or a particle of dust on a exo-planet in a far-off solar system about which we know nothing. To theists, conceptions of God refer to this notion of Truth. But what many theists know and choose to ignore is that Truth cannot be confined to something wholly knowable. In other words, our language does not allow room for the ineffability of Truth. This is perhaps why Wilson states: “The fundamental should not be metaphysically defined in *any* other terms, whether these be positive or negative.”<sup>93</sup> Truth is that infinitely complex and ineffably simple system which governs all other systems that occur within the Cosmos. Truth can never not be because it creates all that is. Truth provides the energy and the matter, and guides the movement of that energy and matter. It is something of which we humans are a part but yet something to which we lack complete access.

*2.7-C The Ontological Accessibility of Parts:* While much of Truth is unknowable to us, as it is unable to be observed by our human senses, it is serviceable to ascribe Truth value to parts of the

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<sup>93</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (2018). Social construction: big-G grounding, small-g realization. *Philosophical Studies* 175 (1):254.

whole that *are* knowable to us. Gadamer asserts: “We must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole.”<sup>94</sup> He goes on to explicate: “The anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes explicit understanding in that the parts, that are determined by the whole, themselves also determine this whole.”<sup>95</sup> The closest we get to understanding the parts of the ineffable whole are those systems of thinking that are unable to be disproved by the mechanisms of logic, the method of natural science, the language of mathematics, or authentic personal phenomenological accounts. The systems of gravity, thermodynamics, quantum mechanics, geometry, deductive logic, conservation of matter, chemistry etc. can never not be true on this planet as we know it, hence, why they are referred to as laws rather than theorem. So too is true for the claimed truth of one's experience of reality. However, while they may be true, they are not Truth. They cannot, even in combination with one another, encapsulate the whole of Truth as an unknowable, multi-dimensional conglomerate of energy and matter beyond the scope of human observation and understanding. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* highlights a fundamental and crucial distinction between the fallacy of Truth as an immobile entity and the actuality of Truth as a system.

All science in the real sense, by which I understand systematic knowledge under the guidance of the principle of sufficient reason, can never reach a final goal or give an entirely satisfactory explanation. It never aims at the inmost nature of the world; it can

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<sup>94</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, 258

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 259



never get beyond the representation; on the contrary, it really tells us nothing more than the relation of one representation to another.<sup>96</sup>

Understanding the parts of a whole gets us closer to knowing the whole, but it is the complex interconnection of those parts and their place within greater external wholes which cannot be wholly understood. Here presents a catch-22: the more we describe Truth, the farther we stray from capturing it, but the less we describe Truth, the less possible it is for us to know it. Through Hans-Georg Gadamer's description of world (*welt*) and environment (*umwelt*), he is applying meaning through language to the fundamental differences of humanity and the universe, and to their hermeneutical applications. For Gadamer, there may be truth in the horizon of the natural sciences, but its inaccessibility without the experiential application of our own horizon is what makes it irrelevant to the hermeneutical question of truth. The truth in the natural sciences is there whether we engage with it or not. The truth in the humanities is true and known to be true *only* if it is played with.

## 2.8 Concluding in Favor of Truth

*Here we have two competing conceptual schemes, a phenomenistic one and a physicalistic one.*

*Which should prevail? Each has its advantages; each has its special simplicity in its own way.*

*Each, I suggest, deserves to be developed. Each may be said, indeed, to be the more fundamental, though in different senses; the one is epistemologically, the other physically, fundamental.*<sup>97</sup>- Willard Van Orman Quine

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<sup>96</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, London, Oxford, 1977: 28.

<sup>97</sup> Quine, W. V. (1961). On what there is. In *From a Logical Point of View*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 36

The mechanisms of logic, the method of natural science, and the language of mathematics allow us to peek at the Truth of the environment. While language, a phenomenon which operates variably between cultural dialects and tongues, is the foundational tool at the bedrock of the human *welt*. Language, specifically in the form of storytelling, shapes the bricks that build our world. Belief in those stories cements them together. What happens when the stories in which we believe build seemingly-impenetrable mazes around Truth? What happens when the entrances to the mazes are systematically guarded by corporate and government propaganda that guide us to some poorly-but-powerfully-constructed truth in the opposite direction? When public schools and news media and advertisements craft detour signs toward the corporate-sponsored truths? When organizers attempt to take sledgehammers to the walls of the maze and are imprisoned or fined as punishment? When the food we eat makes us too tired to even *want* to attempt the maze? It is our unwillingness to sacrifice our belief in language-made construct for the learning and acceptance of cosmic Truth that enters us into the Sysiphistic pursuit of gradually improving a society built by fictitious bricks and ever-evolving beliefs.

Philosophy has been humanist for too long. It is understandable that it has been so, seeing as the human mind is unique in its infinite and liberated bounds. But, in today's ecological duress, we can no longer afford to view our finite selves as our one infinite part. Mason highlights that, "despite the prevalence and importance of social kinds, philosophy has historically devoted relatively little attention to them."<sup>98</sup> So too is true of the prevalence and importance of the distinction between social kinds and non-social kinds. It is high time to apply the inalienable truths of the natural world to the modes by which we be and behave in it. In

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<sup>98</sup> Mason, Rebecca (2016). The metaphysics of social kinds. *Philosophy Compass* 11 (12):841.

keeping with my ecological motivation of priority monism, I claim that we cannot trust the truth value of construct, unless it is grounded and aligned in its content in some truth about a Natural System. This becomes challenging in light of Hacking's "dynamic nominalism," in which "the conception of the kind and the kind come into being together,"<sup>99</sup> for we often cannot even know the truth value of what we say about non-construct, for once we say something about it it becomes construct. What we can do, however, is value the the *intention* and the *awareness* of maintaining the non-mind-dependent bruteness of natural facts. The acknowledgement of our physical bounds and guides is the first step of radical pragmatism.

### **Chapter 3: Dominant Human Systems [Of Oppression]**

3.1 *Introduction*: Before an approach to healing can be determined, a diagnosis must be made. In this chapter, I outline the dominant human systems which plague our nation and their inherently oppressive nature as being mis-aligned with natural systems.

We are living in the most chaotic and ecologically disruptive moment in the history of the Homo Sapiens. In the last 800,000 years, atmospheric carbon dioxide was relatively stable at ~200-290 parts per million (ppm) until about 125 years ago, when we began increasing that amount to over 400 ppm. In deserts, we have built large cities, destroyed soil and underground habitats with off-road vehicles, salinized soil from irrigation, depleted groundwater reserves, and disturbed habitats from mineral extraction. We are converting biologically-necessary grasslands to cropland, releasing immense amounts of carbon dioxide from burning, degrading soil from overgrazing, and drilling for oil. We are leveling biologically-necessary forests for agriculture,

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<sup>99</sup> Sveinsdóttir, Ásta (2015). Social Construction. *Philosophy Compass* 10 (12):885.

livestock grazing, timber, urban developments, and tree plantations. We are blasting mountains open for agriculture, timber and mineral extraction, hydroelectric dams and reservoirs, and coal. We are melting our tundras. We are facilitating geomorphological changes at previously unfathomable speeds and irreversibly altering biogeographical habitation of both human and non-human species. We are murderously distorting this technicolor planet into desertified beiges and concrete greys. We are reshaping and killing the earth for our own wants. The Anthropocene, our very own epoch, is now dubbed by many as the Homogenocene, a term used to illustrate the obliteration of biodiversity and homogenization of ecosystems around the world. By the same mechanisms, the attempted homogenize the human family continues by way of relegated norms of compartmentalized race, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle, diet, and professionalism. As I will explicate in later chapters, this homogenization of land and life is the source of the excess chaos which subsumes our 21st century bodies, minds, communities, and ecosystems.

In 2011, Jared Diamond released his book Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed. The book rocked its readers with the unveiling of the five factors that contribute to the fall of every collapsed society: climate change, hostile neighbors, collapse of essential trading partners, environmental problems, and failure to adapt to environmental issues. Incidentally, the American society is guilty of embodying those five factors, and seems to continue doing so with increasing ferocity. Diamond also cites the twelve broad environmental problems faced by humankind today: deforestation and habitat destruction, soil erosion, salinization, and fertility losses, mismanagement of water, overhunting, overfishing, effects of introduced species on native ecosystems, overpopulation, increased per-capita impact of humans, anthropogenic climate change, amalgamation of toxins in the environment, energy shortages, and the full

human use of the Earth's photosynthetic capacity. The first eight of these problems have contributed to the collapse of societies in the past. Diamond attributes the root of all of these problems to be overpopulation, but I disagree. It is not the most populous nations that have the greatest impact on their environments, but rather, the most consumptive and wasteful.

Jeremy Rifkin, in his book entitled Entropy: A New Worldview, writes: "In nature, whenever one element of an ecosystem multiplies or grows out of proportion to its proper functioning relationship with the rest of the elements in the system, it robs other life forms of the negative entropy (available energy) they need to survive. By doing so, it threatens the continued existence of the entire system. This is also the case in human society."<sup>100</sup> As the 'developed' nations of the world continue to disseminate the myth that their economic growth will allow for the economic growth of 'underdeveloped' nations, Truth is silenced. In ecological terms, the United States, as the crowning example and arguable source of imperialist capitalism, is not engaged in a mutualistic or commensal relationship with its worldly neighbors or ecological home, but, rather, a predatory and parasitic one. In the United States, "a minority of the human race is able to live as if it were not embodied or embedded, as if it had no limits, because those limits are borne by others, including the earth itself."<sup>101</sup> Such predation and parasitism, trademarks of the invasive species, disallow for gradual and effective coevolution. The creators of our human systems have opted for domination and extractivism over mutual-growth and

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<sup>100</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 195

<sup>101</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 190

improvement. The creators of our systems have placed less emphasis “on developing *working rivers* than on restoring *rivers that work* ecologically.”<sup>102</sup>

Many would argue that although we have disrupted and degraded our natural environment, it was done so in the successful pursuit of remarkable human development and improvements in the mechanization of the fulfillment of human needs and desires. Yuval Noah Harari poses the question:

We have mastered our surroundings, increased food production, built cities, established empires and created far-flung trade networks. But did we decrease the amount of suffering in the world? Time and again, massive increases in human power did not necessarily improve the well-being of individuals Sapiens, and usually caused immense misery to other animals... Unfortunately, the Sapiens regime on earth has so far produced little that we can be proud of.”<sup>103</sup>

Jeremy Rifkin points out that we tend to view the modern human world as more orderly and peaceful than its medieval or ancient predecessors, when it is, in fact, the opposite.<sup>104</sup> Our world, by the very nature of entropy, is unavoidably more chaotic in each moment than it was the moment before. As Sir Arthur Eddington put it: “Entropy is time’s arrow.” Even if we, as a species, were to do *everything* right, in ecological terms, the world would still grow more chaotic merely as time passed. But, by the inalienable law of entropy, we find that our species has taken the the approach of aggravating entropy to an unfathomable degree. Our addiction to expending

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<sup>102</sup> Martin-Schramm, James B., Daniel Spencer, and Laura Stivers. *Earth Ethics: A Case Method Approach*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015., 156

<sup>103</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 415

<sup>104</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980.

ludicrous amounts of energy, whether in the obvious forms of oil, natural gas, coal, and the now-obsolete lumber, or in the subversive forms of systems of intra and inter-personal oppression and control, has created a world in which chaos oozes through our planetary systems, bodies, communities, societies, and consciousness. This chaos may not be directly observed as such by the average human, but, as will be detailed in later chapters, it is most certainly at play in our lives. Much of the issue lives in the fact that the powers that claim to be ‘the powers that be’ have been expending even more energy to systematically hide the Truth of the situation. The word ‘apocalypse’ comes from the Greek *apokaluptein*, meaning literally: to reveal, uncover, unveil. As chaos bubbles over in the form of irreversible climatic tipping points, the apocalypse is brewing and melting the facade which shrouds our reality. For too long has the American government and its capitalist overlords masked chaos as order, oppression as freedom, and lack as abundance. For too long have our for-profit-and-power oligarchs stripped the individuals of the American public of their autonomy. For too long have they withheld nutrients to offer calories, withheld truth to offer myth.

In this work, the human-made systems to which I refer include those specific Dominant Human Systems (DHSs) and Dominant Human Institutions (DHIs) which govern primarily ‘developed’ nations and lands. Such systems and institutions include (but are not limited to): race, gender, capitalism, communism, socialism, oligarchy, dictatorship, government, religious institutions, agriculture, cities, the fashion industry, familial structures, marriage, normative diet structures, the medical-industrial complex, the military-industrial complex, the prison-industrial complex, consumerism, media, and predetermined standards-of-living. Each of these systems operates differently from one another, but they all intersect in familiar ways. Each of these

systems, as well as *all* other constructs (names, cuisines, novels, supermarkets, shopping malls, religious rituals), are grounded in language, which is grounded in the human brain, body, and mind. What is distinctive about DHSs and DHIs, though, is that they supersede bioregional, ecological, and subcultural boundaries. They are created and superimposed on the public by the small portion of the human species who have mastered the art of oppression and coercion. DHSs and DHIs are not culturally-relevant practices and customs that aim to serve the communities they influence. They are, without exception, made to serve mythical economic models that are made to serve those who create and believe in them. What's more is that each and all DHSs and DHIs run *counter* to the Natural Systems (NSs) which foundationally govern them. The impact of this diametric modality is an ecological, societal, spiritual, and physiological dissonant friction which takes excess energy to both hide and mend. And, with the inescapable laws of thermodynamics in mind, we know that the more energy we expend, the more chaos we create. Therefore, in understanding the ways in which our DHSs and DHIs come in conflict with the NSs in which they're grounded, we can come to know the ways in which we may reshape or transform our existing DHSs and DHIs or create new ones to not only avoid conflict with the Powers that Be, but actually use those Powers to power our own constructs. To clarify: I do not aim to prove that social construction is either immoral or ineffectual. What I aim to prove is that the ways in which we approach the creation and acceptance of human construct is inherently and catastrophically flawed. Metaphysician Ásta Sveinsdóttir this flaw by writing: "Whose conceptions- of people themselves and of others, but also of anything whatsoever, including general world-views- prevail may not be determined by comparing the conceptions with something like an independently reality or the facts but in a power struggle where the



conceptions of the powerful prevail.”<sup>105</sup> This cognitive failure has allowed for the most frustrating and curious complication of modern history: its repetition. By designing our dominant constructs off of low-entropy systems and schools of thought, we may transform human society into one that absorbs relatively scant amounts of chaos. This, as Jeremy Rifkin astutely asserted in the early 1980s, is the key to a more fulfilled and functional individual, community, nation, and collective human consciousness. Further, as previously explicated, this notion is as ancient as is human society. My proposition is not my own; it is cosmically ancient. I merely hope to transmit these notions into the metaphysical chasm of grounding and the environmental chasm of sustainable development.

*3.2 The Commodification of Thought, Word, and Creation via Fear-Based Construction:* In light of the Truth that our current Dominant Human Systems are grounded in language and social construction, we must dissect the means through which their creators and steadfast believers have managed to implement them on such a large scale. As is true of all instances of dualistic oppression, those who hold power cling to it; those who hold power fear that it will be taken from them. All systems of oppression, whether it be sexism, racism, speciesism, cis heteronormativity, ableism, ageism, colorism, or colonialist imperialism, are fuelled by the fear of those who enact them, fear that their own perceived status might be knocked lower on the mythical rungs of the mythical social ladder. Yuval Noah Harari writes: “Until the late modern era, more than 90 percent of humans were peasants who rose each morning to till the land by the sweat of their brows... history is something that very few people have been doing while

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<sup>105</sup> Sveinsdóttir, Ásta. (2015) Social Construction. *Philosophy Compass*, 10: 884–892. Doi: 10.1111/phc3.12265., 885

everyone else was ploughing fields and carrying water buckets.”<sup>106</sup> It’s long been accepted that history is written by the victors, by those who prevail. But against whom did they prevail? And how? Well, seeing as the vast majority of history and science studied by American schoolchildren stars white and European male conquerors, politicians, businessmen, and scholars, it can be deduced that they “prevailed” against, well, everyone else. Women, people of color, and the poor were “the slave class that maintained the species in order to free the other half for the business of the world’ (Firestone: 192).”<sup>107</sup> We now “live in a world which has been *foundationally shaped for the past five hundred years by the realities of European domination and the gradual consolidation of global white supremacy.*”<sup>108</sup> The last 125 years, since the dawn of industrialization, have shown a marked exacerbation of these truths. “Then civilization, built for culture, rebuilt itself for wilful murder in Europe, Asia, America, and the Southern Seas. Hands that made food made powder, and iron for railways was iron for guns. The wants of common men were forgotten before the groan of giants.”<sup>109</sup> But how were those groans so effective? How is it that the stories they told actually convinced the masses of their truth? If their systems of patriarchy, white supremacy, and classism are based on unfounded myths or social realities rather than biological facts, “what accounts for the stability of this system?”<sup>110</sup> The answer: intimidation, fear-mongering, oppression, violence, and oppression.

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<sup>106</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Dvir: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, 2011, 101.

<sup>107</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 82

<sup>108</sup> Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014., 20

<sup>109</sup> B., Du Bois W. E. *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007., 86

<sup>110</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Dvir: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, 2011, 159

Ásta Sveinsdóttir notes that there are two senses of the word ‘normal’: “the statistically normal, and the ideal, and both can have the effect of marginalizing or making abnormal whomever they don’t fit, with debilitating effects”<sup>111</sup> The powerful have absolved themselves from the possibility of being marginalized by fabricating “statistical” norms of being and behavior via political rhetoric, popular media, the exclusivity of leadership in the private sector, and the exclusivity of leadership in the public sector. Milton Friedman was right to assert that “our minds tell us, and history confirms, that the great threat to freedom is the concentration of power.” But the powerful only understand this notion as freedom being the great threat to the concentration of power. And so, they have effectively opted for the marginalization of the masses (non-human entities included), whose liberation and exaltation would account for an “ideal” norm, but would, unfortunately for them, strip them of their false sense of superiority and their very real faculties of control and domination. By superimposing artificially constructed statistical norms on humans and the earth, “the world is becoming effectively a ‘monoculture’ within a consequent loss of diversity of plant and animal life and of peoples and cultures,”<sup>112</sup> to quote Vandana Shiva. As is true in an ecosystem, “the more we try to spread technique over the culture, the more fragmented society becomes.”<sup>113</sup> But let me make one thing clear: those in power could not have possibly retained their power if it weren’t for this marginalization and oppression. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva write:

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<sup>111</sup> Sveinsdóttir, Ásta. (2015) Social Construction. *Philosophy Compass*, 10: 884–892. Doi: 10.1111/phc3.12265.

<sup>112</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330, 64

<sup>113</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 82

Without turning a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship between humans and nature into a one-sided master-and-servant relationship, the bourgeois revolutions would not have been possible. Without turning foreign peoples and their lands into colonies for the White Man, the capitalist economy could not have evolved. Without violently destroying the symbiosis between man and woman, without calling woman mere animal nature, the new man could not have risen as master and lord over nature and women.<sup>114</sup> (Mies and Shiva: 47)”

Today’s world would simply not exist as it does, had its masters not enacted violence, servitude, and manipulation of the masses.

Robyn Eckersley points out that “patriarchy may be seen as not the root of the ecological crisis but rather a subset of a more general problem of philosophical dualism that has pervaded Western thought.”<sup>115</sup> Such dualism allows for the “domination of sex, race and class, and nature [to be] mutually reinforcing.”<sup>116</sup> This is perhaps due to the fact that all dominant forms of oppression are rooted in the same systems created by the same people and maintained by the same mechanisms. Ultimately, if all social constructions are rooted in and dependent on language, dominant human systems are no exception. This begs an examination of their root stories and modes of storytelling.

Before the dawn of the printing press, history, politics, or news in nations or empires was made and told not by the masses but by the monarchs or feudal lords. But eventually, as

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<sup>114</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 121

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 144

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 59.

innovations in the dissemination of information accompanied spikes in literacy, it became possible for the voices of increasing percentages of the population to write and share their stories. This is perhaps what allowed for the success of movements for social progress across the world. Individuals could share their narratives of struggle with the world. But, to obtain an accurate frame of the issue of current American discourse in comparison to that of, say, the early 1970s, one must first grasp the extent of the the monopolization of discourse. In the United States, five major media corporations<sup>117</sup> own ninety percent of American media. There are similar trends of media monopoly within select foreign nations, and the percentage of non-domestic media in those nations as well as nations with smaller media production is largely occupied by content from those five American corporations. These corporations, for the past fifty years, have had the power to craft the stories which shape our perceptions of life, family, gender, parenthood, professionalism, politics, art, and community. Entertainment media, often disguised as art, creates what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer refer to as “The Culture Industry,” citing “mass deception” as the trademark of popular media. They claim that all products of the “culture industry,” whether in the form of film, media, music, or popular art, are merely building off of, or essentially copying, that which was once profitable in the industry. All content churned out of the culture or entertainment industry is subject to the very same process of valuing that has been applied to its predecessors, and any adaptation of work that might have existed before the time of such an industry, if there ever was one, is stamped with the identical seal of industry approval. The messages put forth by media long secured the synthetic norms of the white American woman’s domestic role of servitude and sexual objectification, the white

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<sup>117</sup> Comcast, The Walt Disney Company, 21st Century Fox, Time Warner, and National Amusements

American man's professional role of bread-winning, and the place of all other peoples and the planet as obsolete, tokenized, or brutalized.

Popular news outlets are no exception to this rule of homogenized, shallow messaging. Judith Green cites "Issue-eluding, 'soundbite' political campaign advertising and the sale of influence to pay for it" as subverting "subverted the operations of democratic governance in recent years."<sup>118</sup> Rifkin, in reference to Descartes, John Locke, Adam Smith, and their colleagues who crafted our dualistic Western worldview, similarly writes:

Every time a businessman, politician, or scientists speaks out in public on some pressing issue, it's as if his speech had been ghostwritten by these long-dead seminal thinkers.

Therefore, if the pronouncement tendered by our civic and public leaders seem more and more divorced from reality and less capable of explaining the problems facing our society, the blame isn't altogether theirs. If we're going to place the blame somewhere, then we should place at least part of it on Descartes, Locke, Smith, and their colleagues.

After all, it's their methodology and ideas we're using.<sup>119</sup>

Politicians are, by the nature of political science, masters of manipulative control. Their goal is not the healing of the world, their expertise is not in engineering solutions to the problems of the needy. Political science gets at figuring out how to say precisely what will get a politician funded and elected. When "functional communication regulated by money and power replaces the consensus-seeking dialogue of communicative rationality,"<sup>120</sup> the existence of democracy

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<sup>118</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., viii

<sup>119</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 29.

<sup>120</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., 23

becomes merely a myth. Green also cites the absence of “effective, critically multicultural education about the purposes and processes of democratic community life”<sup>121</sup> as preserving the facade of ‘democratic values’ which shrouds political rhetoric motivated by control and fear-mongering. But the oppressed masses are not the only group epistemologically damaged by hollow political rhetoric. So too are the oppressors. “For Harding: ‘knowledge claims are always socially situated, and the failure by dominant groups critically and systematically to interrogate their advantaged social situation and the effect of such advantages on their beliefs leaves their social situation a scientifically and epistemologically damaged one for generating knowledge.’”<sup>122</sup> The creation and dissemination of stories which shape our world have effectively created a monoculture of consciousness, effectively suppressing both the many and the few. Today, “the price of culture is a Lie.”<sup>123</sup>

An external cost of that price is what Cornel West would refer to as a nihilistic “disease of the soul”<sup>124</sup> (Green, vii) that plagues the American people.

[It] manifests itself in a generalized insecurity, a shared loss of the sense of agency that once allowed diverse people to believe that they could participate in shaping the public terms of social life, a shared lack of meaningfulness in daily activities, and a widespread loss of permanence in life commitment that leads many people to focus on pleasure-seeking and pain-killing, rather than risk a more complex kind of pursuit of happiness.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., viii

<sup>122</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 122

<sup>123</sup> Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014., 19.

<sup>124</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., vii

Perhaps the greatest triumph of the powerful is their effectiveness at infecting the average individual with this sense of powerlessness, rooted in the awareness that, to use Angela Davis's words, "the road towards freedom, the path of liberation is marked by resistance at every crossroad: mental resistance, physical resistance, resistance directed to the concerted attempt to obstruct that path."<sup>125</sup> What results is "consent under the most brutal force and pressure,"<sup>126</sup> which, arguably, isn't really consent at all. Those who are most greatly impacted by dominant human systems [of oppression] in America face innumerable obstacles, obstacles placed around them with the intention of locking them into the predetermined destiny constructed for them by the powerful. This can be seen clearly in the case of environmental racism, defined as racial discrimination in environmental policy making, and the unequal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations, the deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in people of color communities for toxic waste facilities, and the history of excluding people of color from the leadership of the environmental movement. Here, the intersection of environmental, physiological, psychological, and societal degradation captures the essence of all domination and oppression. By withholding or destroying resources, decision-making power, and recognition, the "super-rich increasingly own both the world and the word."<sup>127</sup> But Victoria Davion makes a point to mention that "the master identity is more than a conspiracy: it is a legacy, a form of culture, a form of rationality, a framework for selfhood and relationship which,

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<sup>125</sup> Davis, Angela Y. *Lectures on Liberation*. New York: N.Y. Committee to Free Angela Davis, 1971., 13

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>127</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 115



through the appropriation of culture, has come to shape us all.”<sup>128</sup> This is perhaps why Alain Locke asserts that “we must consult not the majority of mankind, but the sounder and more perceptive part.”<sup>129</sup> The tuning fork that’s been shaped for us may make the masses unsound. It is no wonder why the majority of our nation still holds onto the nonsense of ineffective statistical norms. We’ve been indoctrinated.

### 3.3 *The Cult of Capitalism*

*“It all became a characteristic drama of capitalist exploitation, where the right hand knew nothing of what the left hand did, yet rhymed its grip with uncanny timeliness; where the investor neither knew, nor inquired, nor greatly cared about the sources of his profits; where the enslaved or dead or half-paid worker never saw nor dreamed of the value of his work (now owned by others); where neither the society darling nor the great artist saw the blood on the piano keys; where the clubman, boasting of great game hunting, heard above the click of his smooth, lovely, resilient billiard balls no echo of the wild shrieks of pain from kindly, half-human beasts as fifty to seventy-five thousand each year were slaughtered in cold, cruel, lingering horror of living death; sending their teeth to adorn civilization on the bowed heads and chained feet of thirty thousand black slaves, leaving behind more than a hundred thousand corpses in broken, flaming homes.”<sup>130</sup>- WEB Du Bois*

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 115

<sup>129</sup> Locke, Alain LeRoy, and Leonard Harris. *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and beyond*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989., 128

<sup>130</sup> B., Du Bois W. E. *The World and Africa; an Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History*. New York: International Publishers, 1965.

The “cult of the free market,”<sup>131</sup> as do all other cults, thrives on the ability of its followers to doggedly uphold the nonsense of its practices. Were it not for this cultishness, members of capitalist society would come into seeing the contradiction of our current economic system with the systems which ultimately dictate its success. The economy says “grow forever,” while the earth says “grow enough and nothing more.” The economy said “compete at all costs,” while the earth says “compete within bounds.” The economy says “deal first with the present,” while the earth says “deal first with the future.”<sup>132</sup> The economy says “consume,” while the earth says “conserve.” Harari asserts the point by writing: “to understand modern economic history, you really need to understand just a single word. The word is growth. For better or worse, in sickness and in health, the modern economy has been growing like a hormone-soused teenager. It eats up everything it can find and puts on inches faster than you can count.”<sup>133</sup> That’s why capitalism has its name: capital refers specifically to money, goods, and resources that are invested and reinvested in production. In an ideal capitalistic model, wealth would not accumulate in savings accounts and economically-unproductive investment properties. The foundation of capitalism is that *unfettered growth is good*. Obviously, this goes against everything we know about what’s effective in ecological terms. We’ve opted against the regenerative tendencies of the only planet we’re able to inhabit in favor of the extractivism which expands the pockets of the powerful.

The theories of Adam Smith, who is widely known as the father of capitalism, can be easily critiqued on many fronts. But one of the most absurd of his assertions is the notion that

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<sup>131</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 328

<sup>132</sup> Miller, G. Tyler, and Scott Spoolman. *Living in the Environment*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2018.

<sup>133</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 305

“egoism is altruism.”<sup>134</sup> It does not take an ethicist or monk to disprove that egoism is not, in fact, altruism. Rather, it is the dissolution of the ego, expansion of the self, and sacrifice of one's own time and resources for the betterment of the other or the whole which can be seen as authentic altruism. Further, Smith and his comrades add that any effort to impose morality onto economy is in direct violation of the invisible hand, a necessary ingredient of pure capitalism. Quite literally, *the system of capitalism was built to be immoral*. Ardent capitalists see morality as a threat to their own success in playing the economic game. To them, winning does not, in fact, mean bettering the quality of life for the masses, healing racial injustice, empowering the systematically disempowered, bettering and deepening public education, or offering freedom of opportunity for those who would like to achieve economic independence. Other capitalists, who accept and advocate for the system in light of the failure of its communist or socialist counterparts, cite capitalism as being responsible for immense success and advancement in addressing global starvation, the need for biomedical innovation, or the freedom to purchase necessary or desired goods. To address these arguments, one need only look at the fact that our agricultural economy causes disease and death for more people than it causes wellness, our biomedical innovation thrives on keeping people unwell and dependent, and our freedom to purchase has us buying so many cheap desired goods that often cannot afford the expensive ones we need. To put it simply, this system, at its inception, was founded on immorality for the sake of economic gain. Yuval Noah Harari writes:

The slave trade was not controlled by any state or government. It was a purely economic enterprise, organized and financed by the free market according to the laws of supply and

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 311

demand... This is the fly in the ointment of free-market capitalism. It cannot ensure that profits are gained in a fair way, or distributed in a fair manner. On the contrary, the craving to increase profits and production blinds people to anything that might stand in the way. When growth becomes a supreme good, unrestricted by any other ethical considerations, it can easily lead to catastrophe. Some religions, such as Christianity and Nazism, have killed millions out of burning hatred. Capitalism has killed millions out of cold indifference coupled with greed. The Atlantic slave trade did not stem from racist hatred towards Africans. The individuals who bought the shares, the brokers who sold them, and the managers of the slave-trade companies rarely thought about the Africans. Nor did the owners of the sugar plantations. Many owners lived far from their plantations, and the only information they demanded were neat ledgers of profits and losses.<sup>135</sup> (Harari, 331).

We now value capitalism as more than a mere economic doctrine: “It now encompasses an ethic—a set of teachings about how people should behave, educate their children and even think. Its principal tenet is that economic growth is the supreme good, or at least a proxy for the supreme good, because justice, freedom and even happiness all depend on economic growth.”<sup>136</sup> But, as Jeremy Rifkin points out, money is little more than “stored energy credits”<sup>137</sup> (89), and the tremendous flow-through of ever-increasing amounts of energy in our “modern industrial society is creating massive disorder in the world we live in” Today, the same nonsensical injustice that

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 331

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 314

<sup>137</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 79

allowed for the global slave trade and domestic slave labor now governs the roles of of weaponry, unhealthy and ecologically devastating agriculture, dangerous and addictive pharmaceuticals, private prisons, fossil fuel extraction and combustion, domestic and international labor injustice, ever-growing consumerism, exorbitantly expensive and burdensome higher education, wall street, and cronyism in our 'great' nation. We've been duped into seeing the advantage of greater numbers of people suffering and dying quietly at the hands of market mechanisms than by the dramatic tragedy of overt violence or starvation. These undesirable effects of capitalism, along with the interminable list of environmental, psychological, spiritual, and communal impacts of the market, are often referred to by economists as "external costs," a misnomer by cosmic law, which dictates the inextricable linkages between all actions. Rifkin rightly asserts: "Whenever politicians or economists talk about external costs, they convey the feeling that what is involved are the nuisance-causing side effects that sometimes accompany technologies. These side effects are often costly, but they are tolerable and absorbable because the benefits derives are always considered greater than the external costs generated. This just isn't so."<sup>138</sup> If companies were required to absorb all of the 'external' costs of their ventures, the vast majority of current businesses would fail. In their wake, only ventures who regenerate their communities, the land, and the human person would prevail. Unfortunate for staunch capitalists but fortunately for everyone else, this would not be capitalism.

*3.4 Consumerism:* As the economy and total amount of wealth increase, so too must levels of consumption. Classical understandings of economic schema imply that supplies are created in

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 81

order to meet demand. But, in the United States, the opposite is true. Corporations manufacture greater volumes of goods and then *market* those goods to *create* demand where there was none before.

Roger Gottlieb lists the systems in place that necessitate environmental degradation and injustice. These systems are “consumerism, fundamentalism, and globalism... in which culture, politics, technology, and economics interact.”<sup>139</sup> He starts with a quote from Bill McKibben: ““If consumer society has one Achilles’ heel, it’s not that it is going to destroy the earth- it is, but that’s not the Achilles’ heel. The Achilles’ heel is that consumer society doesn’t make us unbelievably happy.””<sup>140</sup> Following this quote, Gottlieb quotes Gary Snyder: ““What we must do is incorporate the other people... the creeping people, and the standing people, and the flying people and the swimming people... into the councils of our government.””<sup>141</sup> In order to achieve true democracy, all voices must be heard. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the United States, where the achievement of the American Dream is dictated by the possessions one accumulates. “Consumerism has worked very hard, with the help of popular psychology (‘Just do it!’) to convince people that indulgence is good for you, whereas frugality is self-oppression.”<sup>142</sup> Unfortunate for those who engage in excess indulgence, the opposite is true. Any ascetic or homesteader can attest to the liberating quality of removing excess from ones life, in investing in experiences or tools which deeply matter for the quality of one's life. Harari notes that ““Most

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<sup>139</sup> Gottlieb, Roger S. *A greener faith: religious environmentalism and our planet's future*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010. , 241

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 215

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 348

people today successfully live up to the capitalist-consumerist ideal... This is the first religion in history whose followers actually do what they are asked to do.”<sup>143</sup> We participate in the system because we, in many ways, *are* the system. The system relies on the impulses and neurological tendencies as both a mode of addiction and a confiscation of the options necessary for enacting free will. And as the rich are compelled to invest and the rest of us are compelled to buy, “a lot of evidence indicates that we are destroying the foundations of human prosperity in an orgy of reckless consumption.”<sup>144</sup> As we export this economic model and normative lifestyle to what capitalists would refer to as ‘underdeveloped’ parts of the world, we systematically starve the peoples of those nations spiritually and culturally. Mary Mellor accurately asserts: “The paradox and crises of development arises from the mistaken identification of culturally perceived poverty with real material poverty.”<sup>145</sup> But even with taking into consideration the powerful role of currency in its ability to help individuals, communities, and nations to meet their needs for survival, success, and self-sufficiency, “the plain fact is that as long as we in the United States continue to consume one-third of the world’s resource annually, the Third World can never rise to even a semblance of a standard of living that can adequately support human life with dignity.”<sup>146</sup> Further, the technological mechanisms for addressing poverty are inherently flawed. Judith Green writes, arguably in a Marxist fashion:

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 349

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 379

<sup>145</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 64

<sup>146</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 189

New technologies were once expected to end poverty while allowing enough leisure for all the world's people to devote to re-creation of our mental and physical energies, reflection on the meaning of our times and our lives, and reconstruction of our civic institutions and our civilities in ways that would make them liberatory and inclusive beyond all past separations and oppressions. This phantom leisure, however, has largely been lost to a stepped-up pace of doing more, being more, or at least seeming to do and to be more than any of us really can.<sup>147</sup> (Green, v)

There remain many capitalists who maintain that the system is still, after hundreds of years of operation, working to improve itself through mere market mechanisms and increasingly impressive technological innovations. These capitalist ways of fighting capitalism reminds us of the terrors of the Dust Bowl in the 1920s Midwest, in which unsustainable land-use practices led to severe desertification and catastrophic dust storms, rendering the land virtually useless for its agricultural intentions. Instead of realizing that the system they'd imposed on the land was unviable, they simply doubled down on what created the problem in the first place. Wayne Lewis, a survivor of the Dust Bowl, said in 2012: "We had always hoped that next year was gonna be better, and even this year was gonna be better. We learned slowly, and what didn't work, you tried it harder the next time. You didn't try something different, you just tried harder. The same thing that didn't work."<sup>148</sup> The plain fact is that we've been tricked into believing that the best or only economic systems (capitalism, socialism, & communism) have already been

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<sup>147</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., v

<sup>148</sup> Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. London: Penguin Books, 2015., 64



created. Those who think market forces are going to save us don't recognize the rich opportunity of operating outside of the matrix. Attempts to fix our broken societies and ecosystems with shallow economic and technological solutions brush past the fact that our problems don't stem from frayed economic, political, or infrastructural channels, but dammed and destroyed *spiritual* channels which allow for the nonsense of our economy to flourish. In "Natural Capitalism," Robert J. Samuelson writes: "because there are practical ways to mitigate climate concerns *and* save more money than such measures cost, it almost doesn't matter whether you believe that climate change is a problem or not: These steps should be taken simply because they make money."<sup>149</sup> The cognitive dissonance in such a statement is nearly deafening for those who deeply understand that *issues like climate change are caused by the money-making mentality*, so there's nothing to prove that it would create the opposite impact.

Naomi Klein, in her comprehensive and harrowing work entitled *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, details the root of global climate change in unfettered, fundamentalist capitalism. (I urge my readers to explore her book, be they unconvinced by the few arguments I've displayed here about the dissonance of capitalism and ecology.) Her thesis can be summed up by this short excerpt: "We are left with a stark choice: allow climate disruption to change everything about our world, or change pretty much everything about our economy to avoid that fate. But we need to be very clear: because of our decades of collective denial, no gradual, incremental options are now available to us."<sup>150</sup> There are undoubtedly some ingredients of capitalism that work in an ecological sense. But, to put it simply, most of the

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<sup>149</sup> Hawken, Paul L. *Natural Capitalism: The next Industrial Revolution*. S.l.: Routledge, 2017., 243

<sup>150</sup> Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. London: Penguin Books, 2015.

others are about as palatable and digestible to the natural environment and the human soul as would be, say, a handful of nails to our human digestive system. Just because there are some ingredients of capitalism that work, does not mean capitalism is the only system that can integrate those ingredients. There are many recipes that call for salt, just as there are many economic systems that can call for a division of labor, and the opportunities for upward mobility, freedom, and growth. But each of those recipes looks different, tastes different, and serves a different culinary or nutritional purpose. And the best chefs will tell you that the perfect recipe needs countless testing and tinkering. The recipe of our economy should be one that is aesthetically appealing, nourishing for the body and soul, sustainably and thoughtfully sourced, deeply flavorful, and open to improvement as new flavors and techniques are discovered. We've been subsisting on rusty nails for far too long.

### 3.5 *The Myth of the Existence of Aligned Institutions*

*“The more our world slips deeper into chaos, the less willing we are to identify the source of the problem. Instead, we wrap ourselves up even tighter in our technological garb, defending it against all criticism, unable to acknowledge that it is doing to the environment we live in, and even less able to acknowledge what it is doing to us. We continue to cling to the fiction that we are securely clothed and protected, even as we become more exposed and endangered by the disordered fragments of a world of our own making”<sup>151</sup>-Jeremy Rifkin*

The five most powerful institutions of our American society do not exist as their participants claim they do. Capitalism, democracy, healthcare, agriculture, and religious

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<sup>151</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 79

institutions each teeter on nexuses of abstract rhetorical significance and concrete constructed reality. Each claims to be something it is not. The dis-alignment of the definitions of our systems and the ways they function in reality has us living in “a kind of nightmaring Orwellian world. We have convinced ourselves that the way we go about things is creating a world quite different from the one we are really making.”<sup>152</sup>

In regard to capitalism, there is no true or pure capitalism enacted in our modern world. “Ardent capitalists tend to argue that capital should be free to influence politics, but politics should not be allowed to influence capital,”<sup>153</sup> but our government *does* place regulations on economic activity and we *do* have government-sponsored social programs which interfere and interact with the private sector. Perhaps most importantly, though, the federal government and the private sector are deeply intertwined and interdependent to the extent that our economy would look *nothing* like it does today if it were not for government subsidies doled out to lobbying enterprises like big pharma, big agriculture, arms manufacturers, oil companies, and exporters. There is nothing invisible about the government’s hand in our American economy. There is nothing competitive about sloppily dealt taxpayer dollars. Our economic system was built in capitalism’s image and on its set of immoral values, but it sure as hell isn’t the capitalism about which Smith and Locke idealized.

Democracy, of all the systemic theories we’ve thought into existence, is perhaps the most pragmatically viable from an ecological perspective. It accounts for the necessity and value of diversity, the consideration of the whole, and bioregionalism in the forms of local and state

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 328

governance. But, unfortunately, in similar fashion and perhaps thanks to capitalism, democracy does not exist in our society either. Judith Green, in a poignant philosophical analysis of the shape and role of democracy in the United States, writes: “the democratic ideal has achieved only a shallow and incomplete realization thus far, and many of the ideas advocated in its name actually work against it.”<sup>154</sup> She distinguishes a “*purely ‘formal,’ institutional conception of democracy*” and a contrasting “*deeper conception of democracy.*”<sup>155</sup> The former is compatible with “individualistically conceived liberty, or in the belief that no shared conception of the goods or goals of social life can be justified,” and the latter “expresses the experience-based possibility of more equal, respectful, and mutually beneficial ways of community life and ‘habits of the heart’ - those characteristics, feeling-based, culturally-shaped and located frameworks of value within which we perceive the world and formulate our active responses to it.”<sup>156</sup> Green cites existential nihilism and ontological rootedness as the pathological social manifestations of our formal but not deeply democratic society. But the impact is more than just a personal or societal malaise. Our governance is increasingly controlled by the economic sector, effectively allowing for fiscally-motivated and operated political lobbying, super PAC political campaign funding, the absolution of federal or state environmental regulations, the absence of term limits from the supreme court, the steadfast support of outdated or obsolete constitutional clauses, barriers to voter registration, grossly ineffective and shallow public education, the monopolization of media, and the staggeringly disproportionate rates of black men incarcerated and, therefore, rendered

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<sup>154</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., viii

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, vi

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

unable to vote. The decisions made by our government, decisions which shape our nation and enact transnational impact, are not made for or by the people. They're made for and by the dollar bill. This type of formal, shallow democracy is “*existentially unsustainable and culturally unsustainable, as well as ideologically hollow and operationally subvertible,*”<sup>157</sup> as Green so pointedly asserts.

Many powerful religious institutions, too, tend toward ideological hollowness and operational subvertibility. In today's world individuals and institutions tout their rights to terrorize or mistreat their neighbors in the name of God. We see these arguments time and again, whether in the forms of refusal by a Christian baker to bake a cake in honor of the holy union of a gay couple, Orthodox Jewish men throwing stones at Jewish women who choose to pray with the Torah at the Western Wall, members of the Westboro Baptist Church harassing women on their way to receive healthcare, or small sects of Muslims choosing bombs as their means of countering the ills of Western society. But it's not just religious fundamentalists who miss the point. The crux of the hollowness of our prominent religious institutions lies in the billions of individuals who cling to their texts, praying for God to save them or bless them, in lieu of, not addition to, saving or blessing themselves. We don't need God to bless America. We need to recognize, as all the major religions hold, that *we are god*, that we bring blessings or curses with what we speak into existence. God will not pass over us to bless America. It is our duty as dwellers of this land to impart God's benevolence. Søren Kierkegaard writes that the purity of one's heart is in their ability to will only one thing: The Good<sup>158</sup>. Is God not this monistic unicity,

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, and Douglas V. Steere. *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.

the *only* thing that is truly one as the entanglement of all that is? If we are to be pure of heart by willing only The Good, by willing God, we must see God *as* the cosmic entanglement of all that is. We must begin to see ourselves as the sections of the contour of God's shape, as particles in the innards of God's substance, as slices of God's spirit. All our major religions get at this, but they tend to lazily opt for opulence, bureaucracy, and scripture-slinging in favor of aiding us in *creating*, as Godly figures, a future of abundant love, community, and spiritual nourishment.

The American system of healthcare is not, in fact, a system of health and wellness, but of maintaining or creating illness. Each year, about 250,000 people in the United States die from medical malpractice,<sup>159</sup> 23,000 die from antibiotic resistance,<sup>160</sup> 64,000 people die from prescription drug overdose,<sup>161</sup> and 128,000 people die from the drugs prescribed to them.<sup>162</sup> Nearly 70% of all Americans are taking at least one prescription medication,<sup>163</sup> causing innumerable and unquantifiably impactful side effects. The United States is the only country which allows direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical marketing, other than New Zealand. Toxic drugs are not distributed thoughtfully and carefully to individuals who have no other option, but are flung around like candy. System does not operate with the intent of healing the ill and

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<sup>159</sup> Allen, Marshall, and Olga Pierce. "Medical Errors Are No. 3 Cause Of U.S Deaths, Researchers Say." NPR. May 03, 2016. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/05/03/476636183/death-certificates-undercount-toll-of-medical-errors>.

<sup>160</sup> "Antibiotic / Antimicrobial Resistance." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. April 09, 2018. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/threat-report-2013/index.html>.

<sup>161</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Overdose Death Rates." NIDA. September 15, 2017. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>.

<sup>162</sup> "New Prescription Drugs: A Major Health Risk With Few Offsetting Advantages." Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://ethics.harvard.edu/blog/new-prescription-drugs-major-health-risk-few-offsetting-advantages>.

<sup>163</sup> "Nearly 7 in 10 Americans Take Prescription Drugs, Mayo Clinic, Olmsted Medical Center Find." Mayo Clinic. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/nearly-7-in-10-americans-take-prescription-drugs-mayo-clinic-olmsted-medical-center-find/>.

maintaining the healthy, but keeping us sick and dependent for the financial profit of the few at the top. The medical-industrial complex breeds medical doctors as the middle-men for Big Pharma's products; it does not breed healers. Further, pharmaceutical products in our country are priced at the discretion of the supplier. Drug prices may be jacked up so exorbitantly that medical bills cripple low-income Americans, especially those of color, who suffer disproportionately from diet and environment-related maladies. Our medical-industrial complex harms and kills more people than any other cause of death in the United States. Wilma Mankiller writes that doctors "[don't] know how to heal an illness, only how to cut it out."<sup>164</sup> (233). You call that healthcare?

The pharmaceutical industry thrives on the maladies caused by the food we eat. Of the thirteen leading causes of death in the United States, ten can be linked back to diet.<sup>165</sup> Many see our modern agricultural economy as a miracle: we're feeding the world! The trouble is, first of all, we're not. We in the United States grow enough food to feed ten billion people, yet close to a billion people are hungry.<sup>166</sup> Second, we may be supplying calories to much of the world and assuredly to the American citizens, but malnutrition plagues 85% of Americans.<sup>167</sup> Further, 67% of crops grown in the United States aren't actually grown for food, but for animal feed, where it

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<sup>164</sup> Mankiller, Wilma Pearl, and Michael Wallis. *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000., 233

<sup>165</sup> Center for Disease Control. *Special Reports from the National Vital Statistics Reports: Compilations of Data on Natality and Mortality*. 6th ed. Vol. 66. Deaths: Final Data for 2015. Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, 2017.

<sup>166</sup> Freeform. "There Is Enough Food to Feed the World." Oxfam Canada. March 29, 2011. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.oxfam.ca/there-enough-food-feed-world>.

<sup>167</sup> Bush, Barbara, and Hugh Welsh. "Hidden Hunger: America's Growing Malnutrition Epidemic." *The Guardian*. February 10, 2015. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/feb/10/nutrition-hunger-food-children-vitamins-us>.

takes about 100 calories of grain to produce just 12 calories of chicken or 3 calories worth of beef.<sup>168</sup> Just as our medical complex thrives on keeping people sick, our agricultural economy thrives on creating waste and manufacturing demand out of surpluses of food that wreaks havoc on our bodies.

### 3.6 *Tranquilization of Mind and Body via Food & Pharma*

*“All progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the laborer, but of robbing the soil”<sup>169</sup>-Karl Marx*

The production and consumption of food is perhaps the most universal facet of being human. We may do it in different ways across variant landscapes and communities, but we all do it. The clichéd adage that ‘we are what we eat’ holds more truth than we’ve allowed ourselves to believe. As physical beings, the matter of our bodies does not spontaneously emerge from nothingness, but is, in fact, derived from the materials and energies we choose to consume. The ways by which we produce, distribute, process, and consume our food decides the makeup of our bodies, psyches, and shared land. As mentioned in the previous section, ecosystems and human bodies in America are malfunctioning due to our thoughtlessly-designed food system. In this section, I outline the basics of our American agricultural economy and how it acts as an inherently oppressive and destructive force, despite claims of its miraculous ability to feed a growing population. Our food system is perhaps the most deafeningly dissonant modern system, and, for that reason, may wreak more chaotic havoc on our nation than any other.

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<sup>168</sup> Plumer, Brad. "How Much of the World's Cropland Is Actually Used to Grow Food?" Vox. August 21, 2014. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/2014/8/21/6053187/cropland-map-food-fuel-animal-feed>.

<sup>169</sup> Marx, Karl, Friedrich Engels, Samuel Moore, and Karl Marx. *Capital*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1955.



*3.6-A An Industrialized Peg in an Ecological [W]hole:* To begin, Suppose we agree upon the existence of the system by which soil health is maintained. Nutrients and water are agreeably filtered through the soil with the help of roots of appropriate species of trees, shrubs, grasses, cover crops, and other plants, providing stability in the soil structure so that the topsoil does not runoff. Carbon-rich dried leaves, hay, stems, sticks, bark shavings, and branches decompose into soil with the help of microbiota such as bacteria, fungi, algae, protozoa, arthropods, nematodes and worms transform organic matter into biologically available nutrients and minerals. When left relatively undisturbed, this system will grow everything needed to sustain its animal inhabitants. This system exists as a natural cosmic system. So too does our modern American agriculture system, coined at its inception as the “green revolution” by Norman Borlaug, and implemented world-wide. However, the logic of this human-made system is entirely incongruent with the organic means through which plants grow. Here’s how it works: minerals and metals are mined, trees of many species are chopped down, oil is sucked from the substrate of the earth, and gases are flushed from shale to attain the matter and energy for humans and machines (formed by the same extractivist system in which they are employed) to construct enormous plates of steel, iron rods, stainless steel bolts and screws, plastics button-tops, electronics filled with wires covered with rubber and connected by plastic sockets are made to certain specifications. These parts are then sent on barges, planes, and trucks (again, formed by the same process and also powered by oil extracted from the Earth) to factories all over the United States, where more humans and machines will assemble them into tractors and tractor accessories. These tractors will then be purchased for upwards of \$50,000 USD by farmers across the country to till their land, mixing

nutrients through and aerating the topsoil that has little stability due to the removal of the trees, shrubs, grasses, and cover crops that once adorned it before it was designated farmland by a human. This farmland is planted with government-subsidised genetically modified corn or soy repeatedly on the same land. Lucky for the pests of that corn or soy, they have entered a sugary pleasure den in which they and their offspring can regularly find sustenance and comfort, and their riches span as far as their little eyes can see. To combat this problem, the chemical company who sold the seeds to the farmer will regularly re-engineer the seeds so include new forms of pest resistance. The company will also sell him pesticides, which were also synthesized by humans and machines from extracted chemicals in an oil and gas-fueled laboratory that were shipped to an oil-and-gas-fuelled factory where they were manufactured to scale. But there's another major problem: the corn and soy in the field extracts the same nutrients and water in each square foot of the land for acres and years. To address the water loss caused by the lack of diversity and structure in the soil, sprinklers and hoses, spewing water that is *also* paid for by the farmer, douse the plants. In an attempt to enrich the soil depleted by these cloned crops, the company who sold the seeds and the sprays to the farmer will also sell him nitrogen fertilizer. But because the soil lacks stability because it isn't held together by mature root systems, the topsoil on the farm, riddled with synthetic chemicals from the pesticides and unbalanced amounts of nitrogen from the fertilizer, washes away into watersheds when the rains fall. The chemicals from the pesticides cause mutation, neurological damage, reproductive issues, and death amongst wildlife in the waters, on the earth, and in the sky as they are filtered through these biomes from farm to ocean. The nitrogen from the fertilizers accumulate in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, contributing to eutrophication, which is the increased production of plants

and algae which result in a lack of oxygen which, in turn, results in that ecosystem being uninhabitable. These are called “dead zones.” No one will argue that this system does not exist. The question that is up for debate is whether this system is effective. I argue that it is not. It is not effective because it has too many degrees of separation from the ultimate system, the system of Nature, the Cosmos, the Universe. This system is not effective because it requires 10 calories of input for 1 calorie of yield on the part of the farmer alone, as compared to traditional forms of ecologically-minded agriculture which can yield at least 10 calories per calorie expended by the farmer.<sup>170</sup> These figures do not include the insurmountable amount of energy expended off the farm to produce the materials, let alone the amount of energy that would be necessary to even *attempt* to remedy to damages to the surrounding ecology and the health of the humans who consume those toxically grown, low-quality-energy food. Our method of food production runs exactly counter to the manner by which plants efficiently grow, necessitating absurd amounts of energy expenditure and, therefore, chaos.

3.6-B *The Agricultural Revolution*: For two and a half million years, various descendants of the human genus sustained their presence on Earth by way of foraging for wild berries, herbs, fruits, and nuts, and hunting for animals and insects, big and small. Until about seventy thousand years ago, when the genus *Homo* began sacrificing biceps for neurons<sup>171</sup> in the evolutionary pursuit of a larger brain, such distant cousins could have been likened to any other animal amongst the diverse ecosystems of Earth. Half a dozen decades later, *Homo* began dedicating the vast

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<sup>170</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 137

<sup>171</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 9

majority of its waking hours “to manipulating the lives of a few animal and plant species.”<sup>172</sup> This was the beginning of agriculture: the defining characteristic of the *Homo sapien*’s sustenance and elementary lifestyle, the key to our evolutionary victory as masters of the Earth, and the precursor to twelve thousand years of population growth. While the Agricultural Revolution assuredly increased the sum total of food available to humankind, “the extra food did not translate into a better diet or more leisure. Rather, it translated into population explosions and pampered elites. The average farmer worked harder than the average forager, and got a worse diet in return.”<sup>173</sup> As compared to their semi nomadic foraging predecessors, individuals in the new agrarian society now suffered immensely at the hands of infectious diseases (smallpox, measles, tuberculosis) due to the domestication of animals, malnutrition and starvation due to their unvaried diets,<sup>174</sup> and increased community conflict due to the inflated ego involved in the dawn of the notion of ‘property.’ “Attachment to ‘my house’ and separation from the neighbours became the psychological hallmark of a much more self-centered creature.”<sup>175</sup> The Agricultural Revolution was history’s most successful act of deception. It also contributed greatly to the exponential propagation of the human population. Before the dawn of agriculture, the human population of the entire planet was fewer than nine million. Two centuries ago, the population had multiplied one hundred-fold, sparking a flurry of Malthusian fear and anxiety for the anticipated exponential human population increase, an increase that would inevitably and

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 77

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 51

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 99

unavoidably reach and surpass the Earth's carrying capacity. Such fear perhaps posed as premonitory, as the human population, in the following two hundred, years did begin to increase exponentially. The rise can be attributed to few factors; primary among them: drastic industrialization of agricultural production.

3.6-C *The Green Revolution*: The "Green Revolution," as it has come to be known, can be said to have started in 1945, at the end of the second World War. It was comprised, primarily, of four distinct agricultural innovations: agricultural machinery, genetically modified seeds, manufactured chemical fertilizers, and synthetic chemical pesticides. With the rapid rise of such innovations in the United States, alongside an equally-rapid decline in the number of farms, the number of crops per farm, and rural population size, the landscape of American agriculture began to flip on its head. The timing of such an abrupt transition in agricultural practice can be attributed to the commodification of chemical manufacture by both World Wars: the first, monopolizing the production of ammonia used to produce nitrate for explosives before the depression of the 1930s and the second, responsible for re-assuming control of chemical manufacture, left a surplus of nitrogen and ready-built momentum of its production in its wake. Norman Borlaug, who is credited with the establishment of the technological revolution through which *Homo Sapiens* began to mechanize their own sustenance, stated in a 1969 reflection of the Green Revolution's impact on the developing world: "Although the high-yielding, fertilizer-responsive varieties were the catalysts for igniting the green revolution, the rapid increase in the use of chemical fertilizers was the jet fuel that propelled it forward at unprecedented speed."<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Borlaug, Norman E. *A Green revolution yields a golden harvest*. Pergamon Press, 1969., 11

Borlaug states, in a 2002 speech commemorating the receipt of his Nobel Peace Prize: “It is only since WWII that fertilizer use, and especially the application of low-cost nitrogen derived from synthetic ammonia, has become an indispensable component of modern agricultural production (nearly 80 million nutrient tonnes consumed annually). It is estimated that 40% of today’s 6 billion people are alive, thanks to the Haber-Bosch process of synthesizing ammonia.”<sup>177</sup>

However, as will be explicated in this paper, the survival of those people has created a slew of more complexly-felt and potentially unsolvable problems.

The Dust Bowl, famously known as “one of the worst ecological blunders in history,”<sup>178</sup> performs as a historical microcosm of the macro agricultural economy of today. After their purchase by the American government in 1803, the southern plains of the United States, consisting of Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, were highly-advertised as containing immense opportunity. As a result, they became a hub of a continuous ebb and flow of humans as land-use, economy, and technology evolved. David Worster notes the intention of settlers, under the Homestead act of 1862, to make “improvements” to the already perfectly harmonious lands. It wasn’t long before international investment from Britain, Ireland, Scotland flowed into the plains. And with this new capital came a boom of highly-technologized land-breaking and overgrazing, leading to a poor quality of life for those who tended the land, and for the land itself. The widespread domestication of cattle which came to be known as the “beef bonanza” could only last so long, until the soil had been so highly degraded, rendering the ecosystem too harsh for the sustenance of animal and human life. In the winter of 1856-57, 85%

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<sup>177</sup> Borlaug, Norman E. *The green revolution revisited and the road ahead*. Nobelprize.org, 2002.

<sup>178</sup> Worster, Donald. *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012., 2

of cattle on some ranches died, leaving the landscape strewn with stinking carcasses and a call for change. Thus: the west began to blow with amber waves of grain. Wheat and corn washed over the west. As these monocrops consistently stripped the earth of the nutrients that had once been a part of its essence and being, demand for highly-intensive technological intervention paired seamlessly with higher supply of these items in the early years of the 1900s. What once required hundreds of hours and laborers, now required high monetary investment on the part of the few. This sparked a major socioeconomic turning point. Although capitalism was already entrenched in the agriculture of the west, it was not until the introduction of advanced machinery that an agrarian lifestyle or society became an option for those who wanted to make money from the sale of cash crops. Although the white man's relationship with and to American land was not *nearly* as connective or mutually-beneficial as that of the Native Americans, there was still a necessary relationship when it took "58 hours to bring an acre of wheat to the granaries."<sup>179</sup> Now, one could simply spend a single morning or afternoon, atop a 15-foot-high tractor, harvesting or tilling the soil, without so much as getting some dirt under their fingernails. This is the product of capitalism-inspired expansionism and greed. This is Worster's claim, as well as mine. The instance of the Dust Bowl is a clear-cut, obvious example of the impact of environmental degradation via agriculture. Unfortunately, we did not shift course once we realized the pitfalls of our broken system, we simply charged ahead with greater intensity.

3.6-D *Population Growth*: The widespread desire and support for such a rapid and drastic transformation in national land-use patterns, agrarian culture, economy, employment, crop

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 90

diversity and yields can only be attributed to one phenomenon: population growth. From an evolutionary perspective, an exponential increase in population size can be seen as a profound victory. “The currency of evolution is neither hunger nor pain, but rather copies of DNA helixes. Just as the economic success of a company is measured only by the number of dollars in its bank account, not by the happiness of its employees, so the evolutionary success of a species is measured by the number of copies of its DNA.”<sup>180</sup> However, with great numbers comes greater need and greater chaos. The mechanisation of agricultural production, particularly that of staple cereal crops, addressed such need and chaos in a sweeping and effective manner. Clifton Wharton, in an analysis of the simultaneous benefits and shortcomings of the Green Revolution entitled “The Green Revolution: Cornucopia or Pandora's Box?” writes: “It is now generally known that major technological breakthroughs in food production are believed to have lifted the spectre of famine in the immediate future and to have postponed the prospect of Malthusian population disaster.”<sup>181</sup> At the end of WWII, humankind was faced with the open-ended problem of self-preservation on a scale never-before felt or addressed. The Green Revolution was a miracle in answering this open ended question. It is also possibly the greatest contributor to the widely-held belief that we are able innovate our way out of any problem dealing with the Earth’s capacity to sustain us. But Norman Borlaug frankly stated in 2002: “Thirty years ago, in my acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, I said that the Green Revolution had won a temporary success in man’s war against hunger, which if fully implemented, could provide sufficient food for humankind through the end of the 20th century. But I warned that unless the

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<sup>180</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 83

<sup>181</sup> Wharton, Clifton R. "The Green Revolution: Cornucopia or Pandora's Box?" *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 3 (1969): 464-76. doi:10.2307/20039390., 465



frightening power of human reproduction was curbed, the success of the Green Revolution would only be ephemeral.”<sup>182</sup> The intention of the Green Revolution was to address a problem caused by exponential human population growth, so that exponential human population growth could be addressed by governments of the world. Instead, it allowed the masses to continue on in their proliferation by providing sustenance for all. Borlaug laments: “The unrelenting increase in human numbers, with no relief in sight, continues to be the greatest unsolved multifaceted problem confronting mankind in its quest for a better standard of living for the world’s masses.” And, if he was right to assert that “population growth is the greatest basic cause of the inability of governments to cope with the world’s social problems,”<sup>183</sup> Borlaug seems to put his proverbial foot in his mouth, as increased mechanisation of staple crop production did little to curb population growth. As will be evidenced by the following sections, the Green Revolution also did little to provide a better standard of living for the masses, with the exception of fewer deaths by starvation. Continued population growth is just one of the counter-intuitive outcomes of the Green Revolution. Yuval Noah Harari writes: “This is the essence of the Agricultural Revolution: the ability to keep more people alive under worse conditions... the Agricultural Revolution was a trap.”<sup>184</sup>

3.6-E *Employment and Economics*: In 1840, agricultural employment accounted for nearly seventy percent of the American labor force, due to the fact that the American economy, at that time, was primarily agrarian. Today, less than two percent of American labor force is agricultural,

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<sup>182</sup> Borlaug, Norman E. *The green revolution revisited and the road ahead*. Nobelprize.org, 2002., 20/1

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 19

<sup>184</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 83

the vast majority of which are male, white, and of at least middle age. As genetically modified seeds swept across American farmland, and a new, more standardised system of crop production proliferated, large and expensive agricultural machinery cut down on hours of labor per pound of wheat or corn yielded, effectively slashing the need for human agricultural labor to a fraction of what it once was. And, as farmers of lesser means struggled to compete with their more powerful counterparts, they began to get swallowed up. Wharton writes: “The ‘first’ or ‘early’ adopters of the new technology will be in regions which are already more advanced, literate, responsive and progressive and which have better soil, better water management, closer access to roads and markets- in sum, the wealthier, more modern farmers.”<sup>185</sup> Farmers with smaller assets were less likely to receive credit loans from local banks to invest in the expensive machinery, seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides necessary to oil such a highly efficient farm, disqualifying them from participating in this new, financially advantageous market and aggravating wealth inequality. As the wealthiest farmers saw returns on their investments, “The rate of adoption of new technology to other crops may be very rapid once the farmer has gained experience and confidence from success with the first crop.”<sup>186</sup> They began to buy up the smaller farms whose owners could not afford the new technologies. Their less wealthy counterparts were also often swallowed up as their monocultural fields faced greater vulnerability toward environmental hazards, crushing their owners under immense debt. “Since 1900, the number of farms has fallen by 63 percent, while the average farm size has risen 67 percent... Farm operations have become increasingly specialized as well from an average of about five commodities per farm in 1900 to about one per

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<sup>185</sup> Wharton, Clifton R. "The Green Revolution: Cornucopia or Pandora's Box?" *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 3 (1969): 464-76. doi:10.2307/20039390., 467.

<sup>186</sup> Borlaug, Norman E. *A Green revolution yields a golden harvest*. Pergamon Press, 1969.

farm in 2000—reflecting the production and marketing efficiencies gained by concentration on fewer commodities, as well as the effects of farm price and income policies that have reduced the risk of depending on returns from only one or a few crops.”<sup>187</sup>

Agricultural employment fell from 21.5 percent in 1930 to 1.9 percent in 2000. During this time, Agricultural GDP also fell from 7.7 percent to 0.7 percent. As small rural farmers were driven off of their lands by emerging agricultural giants, they sought out more gainful employment opportunities in nearby or far-off cities, effectively growing burgeoning sectors of the American economy that had not before had great enough labor supplies. American Capitalism, a complex economy of production and consumption, rose from the ashes of Agrarian America. Additionally, as output from American farms ballooned, the American public could spend increasingly smaller portions of their income on food, freeing them up to engage in non-agrarian occupations and habits of consumption. Eric Schlosser’s Fast Food Nation surmised the logical fallacy associated with industrial agriculture:

The behavior of Idaho’s potato growers often betrays a type of faulty reasoning described in most college-level economics textbooks. “The fallacy of composition” is a logical error — a mistaken belief that what seems good for an individual will still be good when others do the same thing. For example, someone who stands at a crowded concert may get a better view of the stage. But if everyone at the concert stands up, nobody’s view is improved. Since the end of World War II, farmers in the United States have been persuaded to adopt one new technology after another, hoping to improve their yields,

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<sup>187</sup> United States, Congress, Dimitri, Carolyn, et al. “The 20th century transformation of U.S. agriculture and farm policy.” *The 20th century transformation of U.S. agriculture and farm policy*, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2005.

reduce their costs, and outsell their neighbors. By embracing this industrial model of agriculture — one that focuses narrowly on the level of inputs and outputs, that encourages specialization in just one crop, that relies heavily on chemical fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides, herbicides, advanced harvesting and irrigation equipment — American farmers have become the most productive farmers on earth. Every increase in productivity, however, has driven more American farmers off the land. And it has left those who remain beholden to the companies that supply the inputs and the processors that buy the outputs. William Heffernan, a professor of rural sociology at the University of Missouri, says that America's agricultural economy now resembles an hourglass. At the top there are about 2 million ranchers and farmers; at the bottom there are 275 million consumers; and at the narrow portion in the middle, there are a dozen or so multinational corporations earning a profit from every transaction.<sup>188</sup>

What was initially meant to serve one specific purpose (feeding the world in face of global starvation), became a structural norm of our world.

3.6-F *Inequality*: According to Amritanada Das, in his article entitled “Understanding the Green Revolution” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, there are two ways to observe the Green Revolution: that of the technocrat, in which emphasis is placed on particulars of micro-environments and detailed accounts of the problems involved in the mechanization of agriculture, or that of the social scientists, in which, conversely, emphasis is placed on the macro-level socio economic changes that make up the broader, more universal paradigm shifts of

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<sup>188</sup> Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2007.

the revolution. Das states that the “The technical innovations associated with the Green Revolution (in particular, the improved seeds) were highly crop-specific and area-specific in their impact,” and that “the Green Revolution techniques could not be held responsible for persisting or even increasing inequalities which could be sometimes noted, rather it was a question of other aspects of the agrarian situation (eg, inequalities in marketing opportunities, non-equal access to credit, etc.) which has nothing to do specifically with the Green Revolution.”<sup>189</sup> To address the first point, that of the exclusively local impact of technological innovations, particularly those of GMO seeds, is simply inaccurate. The far-reaching effects of industrialized agriculture today are responsible for twenty four percent of fossil fuel emissions, which contribute to the *global* catastrophes of climate change, ocean dead zones due to eutrophication, the national or possibly international impacts of soil degradation, genetic resistance of pests to chemical pesticides, and national and international level food-related epidemic. To Das’s second point, to assert that surrounding issues of inaccessibility are not intrinsically linked to the physical technology of the Green Revolution is to assert a logical fallacy by way of playing with semantics in a dangerous manner that shifts blame from the proliferation of such technologies to the socio-economic unworthiness of those small farmers who could not afford to participate. The technology itself created an unjust market for mid-century farmers. Further, the technology acts to aggravate inequality today amongst the greater American public as it is now the greatest tool of the United States Department of Agriculture to push corn and soy production to struggling or bankrupt farmers so that they can push the highly-

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<sup>189</sup> Das, Amritananda. "Understanding the Green Revolution :." *Economic and Political Weekly*. November 18, 1972. Accessed May 14, 2018. <http://www.epw.in/journal/1972/46-47/our-correspondent-columns/understanding-green-revolution.html>, 2266

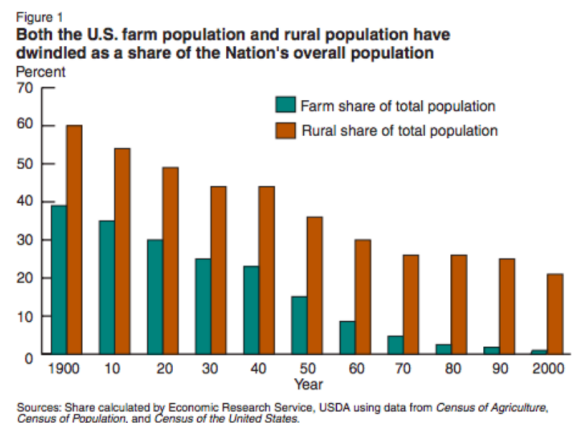
processed and rarely nutritionally beneficial byproducts of such crops to its lowest-income citizens. Borlaug states: “There is a vast difference between the supply of food needed to meet the effective (economic) demand and that required to meet the nutritional or physiological need. The next steps for these governments must be to expand the effective demand to increase consumption of food for a vast sector of the low income group.”<sup>190</sup> The food justice movement has grown considerably in recent decades, as vulnerable communities began to realize the disparities between what food was available to them as compared to their wealthier counterparts.

*3.6-G Cultural Impacts:* Aside from the numbers of agricultural labor and GDP falling, the mechanisation of farming has cleansed the United States of a rich culture and fulfilling lifestyle. Farming is central to evolution and experience of the *Homo sapien* as a species, delivering our oversized cerebral cortexes much-needed sparks of animalistic wisdom, our bodies much-needed exposure to microbes and vitamin D, and our families and communities much-needed focus on nourishment and generosity. Yuval Noah Harari notes: “the average forager had wider, deeper, and more varied knowledge of her immediate surroundings than most of her modern descendants. Today, most people in industrial societies don’t need to know much about the natural world in order to survive.”<sup>191</sup> A similar elimination of knowledge occurred when the American farmer was driven off the land by the tractor and GMO seed. Farmers who chose to employ this technology on their farms were forced to become a cog in their farm machine, learning what Clifton

Wharton would call “skills and expertise of a higher

<sup>190</sup> Borlaug, Norman E. *The green revolution revisited and the road*

<sup>191</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. I



order... The new agronomic requirements are quite different as regards planting dates and planting depths; fertilizer rates and timing; insecticide, pesticide and fungicide applications; watering and many others.”<sup>192</sup> Borlaug speaks to the same transition by writing: “Such spectacular increases in yield destroy, in one stroke, the built-in conservatism or resistance to change that has been passed on from father to son for many generations in a system of agriculture.”<sup>193</sup> The “conservatism” to which they both address is not, however, an impediment to the lives of the farmer. Such conservatism is what sociologists refer to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). TEK encompasses decades and often centuries of coming to know one's land so intimately that one may intuitively respond to its needs and glean healing properties from its bounty. Such attention paid to the Earth and its varying components is central in the tradition of Native Americans, as well as small farmers who supplied their communities with sustenance for centuries. When the technologies of the Green Revolution coerced farmers into higher yields through mechanization, more wisdom and knowledge was lost on the part of the farmer than was gained. Peddlers of these technologies were far more concerned about farmers unlearning their traditional ways than they were about training these malleable minds how to sow seeds or fertilized their crops in a new way. And, even those war-era suburbanites who could scarcely call themselves farmers had a profound connection to the alchemy of soil at the cusp of the war. “By 1943, close to 21 million families planted seven million acres of victory gardens across the United States. These vegetable plots produced over 10 billion pounds of food—42 percent of the total fresh produce Americans consumed in that year, supplementing American diets in a time of

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<sup>192</sup> Wharton, Clifton R. "The Green Revolution: Cornucopia or Pandora's Box?" *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 3 (1969): 464-76. doi:10.2307/20039390., 466

<sup>193</sup> Borlaug, Norman E. *A Green revolution yields a golden harvest*. Pergamon Press, 1969., 11

food rationing.”<sup>194</sup> With an increasing abundance of inexpensive foodstuffs making way for the era of TV dinners and fast food, the average American was no longer incentivized to take part in the means of the production of their own sustenance. Such a severing of connection has direct impact on the mental, physiological, and spiritual health of the *Homo sapien*, as well as their ability and willingness to deeply care for the earth. Vandana Shiva calls this loss of bio regionally-specific wisdom a “monoculture of the mind.”<sup>195</sup> And as the technologies of the Green Revolution proliferated, working hours became longer while the quality of work averaged around mind-numbing. The American diet, similarly, saw a comparable decline in quality and cultural relevance. With just four corporations, ADM, Bunge, Cargill, and Dreyfus controlling more than 75% of the global grain trade,<sup>196</sup> and 45% of all global crop production, culturally-relevant heirloom species are becoming extinct from our culinary landscape, robbing us of deep and complex flavors that aid in the building of community and personal wellness. The mechanization of crop production transitioned much of the developed world from caloric scarcity to abundance, limiting the number of American deaths by starvation. However, malnutrition has taken a new form, causing and/or contributing to ten of the thirteen leading causes of death, including heart disease, cancer, alzheimer's, and diabetes. Today, more than half of adults, worldwide, are overweight and malnourished. This is perhaps due to the fact that Big Agriculture doesn't grow to meet demand, but grows to *create* demand. After the Green Revolution, “for the very first time in human history, supply began to outstrip demand. And an entirely new problem

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<sup>194</sup> Day, Anastasia , and Timothy Johnson. “Rethinking American Agriculture: Fertilized Farms and Victory Gardens.” *Edge Effects*, 10 Jan. 2017.

<sup>195</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 65

<sup>196</sup> "I Don't Want Corporations Controlling Our Food!" GREENPEACE New Zealand. Accessed May 14, 2018.



was born: who is going to buy all this stuff?”<sup>197</sup> Hence, our culture of consumerism was born, and our spiritual starvation grew ever-more severe.

### 3.6-H *Ecological Impacts:*

“Voters increasingly recognize that the benefits of the green revolution aren't worth the costs, particularly when the revolutionaries don't have a clue what they're doing.”<sup>198</sup>- Jonah Goldberg

“You'll know the green revolution has been won when the word 'green' disappears.”<sup>199</sup>- Thomas

Friedman

As the *Homo sapien* rose to agricultural dominance, its perceived mastery of the earth and its nonhuman inhabitants justified the mass extinction and destruction of thousands of species and habitats. “From the dawn of agriculture until this very day, billions of humans armed with branches, swatters, shoes and poison sprays have waged relentless war against the diligent ants, furtive roaches, adventurous spiders and misguided beetles that constantly infiltrate the human domicile.”<sup>200</sup> It is with chemical warfare, though, that the *Homo sapien* transitioned from dominance and control to invasive toxicity. Aside from agriculture and related land usage now contributing to at least a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions, including at least thirty six

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<sup>197</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 347

<sup>198</sup> Cleaver, Harry M. “The Contradictions of the Green Revolution.” *The American Economic Review*, vol. 62, no. 1/2, 1972, pp. 177–186. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1821541](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1821541).

<sup>199</sup> Wharton, Clifton R. "The Green Revolution: Cornucopia or Pandora's Box?" *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 3 (1969): 464-76. doi:10.2307/20039390.

<sup>200</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 99

percent of all methane emissions,<sup>201</sup> contributing greatly to the already devastating and impending catastrophic impacts of global climate change, the more direct and instantaneous impacts of industrialized agriculture are abounding.

Here is how it works: when a farmer plants a large swath of land with hundreds or thousands of genetically identical seeds, a few important problems are created. Namely: pests and soil degradation. When a multi-acre field is planted with *only* corn in what is called a monoculture, all of the pests for that particular crop know *exactly* where to go to consume their sustenance. Synthetic chemical pesticides are then needed to eliminate the threat to the farmer's yield, in which he invested a great deal of money. In today's America, these *toxic* chemicals are sprayed primarily by undocumented immigrants, who cannot afford, either financially or legally, to press charges for the vast medical ailments, such as leukemia, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, multiple myeloma, and soft tissue sarcoma, as well as cancers of the skin, lip, stomach, brain, and prostate, that they incur due to high exposure to these lethally toxic chemicals. But farm workers are not the only living beings to suffer from exposure to such chemicals. As the sprays sit on the crops, wash down onto the topsoil, and flow into watersheds, wildlife such as birds and bees suffer a great deal from the often neurotoxic and bio-accumulating poisons. Further, pests often genetically adapt to chemical pesticides, creating a constant need for re-invention of the technologies and perhaps creating a situation in which we are actually breeding pests to become more powerful than we are. In a polyculture, a wide number of diverse crops are intercropped

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<sup>201</sup> Bousquet, P., P. Ciais, J. B. Miller, E. J. Dlugokencky, D. A. Hauglustaine, C. Prigent, G. R. Van Der Werf, P. Peylin, E.-G. Brunke, C. Carouge, R. L. Langenfelds, J. Lathière, F. Papa, M. Ramonet, M. Schmidt, L. P. Steele, S. C. Tyler, and J. White. "Contribution of Anthropogenic and Natural Sources to Atmospheric Methane Variability." *Nature* 443, no. 7110 (2006): 439-43. doi:10.1038/nature05132.

skillfully to confuse and often deter pests, greatly minimizing and often eliminating the need for such harsh measures.

Additionally, in the practice of monocropping, in which one crop with one particular set of biological needs covers a large expanse of land, the soil below is stripped of its nutrients to staggering degrees. Each species of plant requires certain amounts of particular nutrients from the soil below. In a polycultural agriculture scheme, one species might extract bioavailable nitrogen from the earth while another might “fix” the soil with its roots’, enriching the soil with ammonia and other nitrogen compounds. Planting the two side-by-side allows for a perpetual symbiosis, increasing yields and occasionally improving flavor. But when intercropping is not available to a farmer, as is the case with those who utilize the technologies of the Green Revolution, he must enrich his soil through other means: chemical fertilizers. Although these fertilizers allow the crops to grow and be harvested, effectively increasing the pockets of those companies like Monsanto, Dow, Bayer, and Syngenta who manufacture and distribute these biological technologies, the practice is creating *far* more problems than it is solving. When chemical fertilizers are used on a farm, a number of ecological horrors occur. Firstly, soil quality continues to worsen, no matter how much fertilizer is mixed into the topsoil, as the rich complexity of earth cannot be simplified to a handful of nutrients in a bag, so the texture of the soil begins to resemble a loose dust, prone to blowing away in harsh winds or flowing into watersheds in rainstorms. When the poor soil, mixed with high amounts of nitrogen, flows down into watersheds, rivers, and eventually oceans, the excess nitrogen causes eutrophication, the over-production of oxygen-eating algae. Eutrophication has created what are now euphemistically called Ocean Dead Zones, areas of the ocean, often crucial to fish-dependent

communities, wherein wildlife cannot survive due to a lack of oxygen. Norman Borlaug states that, in the early stages of his biological experiment, plant scientists on his team had to explain the economic significance of “20 pounds of nitrogen per acre on 400,000 acres rather than 40 pounds on 1,200,000 acres.”<sup>202</sup> but they neglected to highlight the ecological significance of such a practice.

Of course, one cannot discuss ecological disruption and degradation without addressing the most pervasively impactful environmental issue of our time: climate change. As we level important carbon-sequestering forests for crop fields, desertify land by overgrazing it with cattle, suck oil and gas from the earth and spit it back into the air to manufacture machinery and ship crops and food products around the world, and breed and slaughter unfathomable numbers of methane-leaking cows, we uphold a food system that is responsible for about 33% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Rifkin writes that “it would not be inaccurate to say that the food we eat today is grown from oil rather than soil.”<sup>203</sup> What’s more is that “the sheer number of animals being raised for meat on the planet is another reason that livestock production accounts for nearly one-fifth of all global greenhouse gas emissions.” These statistics are harrowing in light of the well-known dangers of a warming atmosphere. But this energy consumption and expenditure can also be seen more simply in light of what we know about entropy. According to the ecological “rule of 10” or “ten percent law,” only about ten percent of the energy from one trophic level to its next highest is stored in the flesh of the consumer and therefore available for its consumer in the next trophic level. In other words, 90% of the energy stored in a plant or

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<sup>202</sup> Borlaug, Norman E. *A Green revolution yields a golden harvest*. Pergamon Press, 1969.

<sup>203</sup> Rifkin, Jremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 138

animal at any trophic level is lost as entropic chaos in the environment as an animal in another trophic level consumes it. So, when we consume food at lower trophic levels such as plants, algae, or fungi, we are retaining 10% of the energy of those foods. So do cows, and chickens, fish. But when we eat cows, chicken, and fish, we are getting only 1% of the energy from that plant, and the energy we get from the animal is of lower quality than that of its trophically lower feed. The rational conclusion is that energy efficiency is best preserved by sourcing food as close to the initial energy source as possible. This, in favor of bioaccumulation of chaotic energy, is a sensible option. By attempting to shove an industrial-shaped peg into an ecological [w]hole, we are expending perplexing amounts of energy, and, in turn, creating perplexing amounts of chaos. It's no wonder climate scientists most frequently describe the behavior of our changing climate to be erratic and unpredictable.

While the ecological impacts of industrialized agriculture are plentiful and devastating, they are merely inevitable results of our intentional disregard of natural systems. David Worster writes: "Some environmental catastrophes are nature's work, others are the slowly accumulating effects of ignorance or poverty. The Dust Bowl, in contrast, was the inevitable outcome of a culture that deliberately, self-consciously, set itself that task of dominating and exploiting the land for all it was worth."<sup>204</sup> Here is where he splays out the true nature of environmental degradation. "We speak of farmers and plows on the plains and the damage they did, but the language is inadequate. What brought them to the region was the social system. A set of values, an economic order... "Capitalism... has been the decisive factor in this nation's use of land."<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Worster, Donald. *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012., 2

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

Our food system, created with good intentions by Norman Borlaug, no longer aims to serve global hunger. Our food system simply aims to serve the bank accounts of its shareholders.

3.6-I *Health Impacts*: American farmers are incentivised via government subsidies to maintain their monocultures, often containing either soybeans or corn. The government's less-than-beneficial invisible hand thus encourages soil degradation and erosion nation-wide. But it doesn't stop there. Ásta Sveinsdóttir points out that social constructions and forces don't just impact our physical environment, but also change "physical features of individuals, making them physically impaired where they were not so before."<sup>206</sup> Our agriculture system is no exception. Monoculture in the fields manages to creep its way into our supermarkets, kitchens, and bodies. What is a country with a monumentally huge surplus of corn to do? Well, *use it*, of course. But how? Our cuisine doesn't incorporate as much corn as, say, Mexico's. So, we had to evolve our food systems, and in, in turn, our diets. Bring in: highly processed, engineered "food" products.

The 1950s soon became "the Golden Age of Food Processing," in the words of historian Harvey Levenstein, a decade in which one marvelous innovation after another promised to simplify the lives of American housewives: frozen orange juice, frozen TV dinners, the Chicken-of-Tomorrow, "Potato salad from a package!", Cheese Whiz, Jello salads, Jet-Puffed Marshmallows, Miracle Whip. Depression-era scarcity gave way to a cornucopia of new foods on the shelves of new suburban supermarkets. Ad campaigns made processed foods seem better than fresh ones, more space-age and up to date. According to Levenstein, many restaurants proudly displayed their canned soups, and a chain called

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<sup>206</sup> Sveinsdóttir, Ásta. (2015) Social Construction. *Philosophy Compass*, 10: 884–892. Doi: 10.1111/phc3.12265., 888

Tad's 30 Varieties of Meals featured frozen dinners on its menu. Customers at Tad's cooked the frozen meals at tableside microwave ovens.<sup>207</sup>

In his best-selling book, The Omnivore's Dilemma, Pollan writes: "Corn has done more than any other species to help the food industry realize the dream of freeing food from nature's limitations and seducing the omnivore into eating more of a single plant than anyone would have ever thought possible."<sup>208</sup> Corn has made its way into our fuel, meat, toiletries, paper goods, plastic goods, vegetable sprays, soft-drinks, and almost all highly-processed foods. Pollan states: "When you go through the supermarket, what looks like this cornucopia of variety and choice is not. There is an illusion of diversity. There are only a few companies involved, and there are only a few crops involved... So much of our industrial food turns out to be clever rearrangements of corn."<sup>209</sup> We might think we're eating all different kinds of foods: chips, sodas, meats, vegetables, fruits, sauces, pastas, etc. But in reality, our diets are chemically monotonous. "What in the eyes of the omnivore looks like a meal of impressive variety turns out, when viewed through the eyes of the mass spectrometer, to be the meal of a far more specialized kind of eater."<sup>210</sup> And so, where we see monoculture in the soil, we see monoculture in our diets. If ecosystems rely on structured diversity in order to operate effectively, and our bodies are ecosystems, it's no wonder they're malfunctioning. Our homogenous 'American cuisine,' disguised with a rainbow of technicolor packaging adorning countless aisles in supermarkets,

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<sup>207</sup> Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation*. Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2007.

<sup>208</sup> Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History Of Four Meals*. New York : Penguin Press, 2006. Print., 91

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 117

(what used to be grocery stores), is causing the most common health maladies in our nation. 11 of the 12 leading causes of death in our country, heart disease, cancer, chronic lower respiratory diseases, stroke, alzheimer's, diabetes, autoimmune diseases, kidney disease, blood poisoning, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, are caused or agitated by poor diet. Nationally, nearly 38% of all adults and 17% of all children are obese.<sup>211</sup> From a perspective of compassion, this is a tragic injustice. From a perspective of capitalism, this is a “double victory for consumerism.”<sup>212</sup> Instead of eating mindfully and in moderation, which would incite economic contraction, consumers are encouraged to eat a lot and then buy diet or pharmaceutical products, stoking a two-fold economic growth pattern. Doctors, who receive perhaps seven hours of nutrition training a year, if that, are not trained to advise their patients of preventing these most common and debilitating ailments. They are merely encouraged to peddle whatever drug traveled into their office in the backpack of their pharmaceutical sales representative.

3.6-J *A Catch-22*: The benefits of the Green Revolution are profound. From the simple fact of feeding the world to the ability of the majority of the population to enjoy a diverse option of lifestyles and careers, the industrialization of agriculture has freed up billions of individuals to pursue greater autonomy and food security. Our modern American economy, society, and political makeup has the Green Revolution to thank for much of its components, and we have effectively avoided Malthus's foreboding hypothesis, at least for the foreseeable future. However, as Yuval Noah Harari astutely points out, “We thought we were saving time; instead, we revved

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<sup>211</sup> "Obesity Rates & Trends Overview." Iowa State Obesity Data, Rates and Trends - The State of Obesity. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://stateofobesity.org/obesity-rates-trends-overview/>.

<sup>212</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 348



up the treadmill of life to ten times its former speed and made our days more anxious and agitated.”<sup>213</sup>

We, as humans, as supposedly wise beings, must ask ourselves: is it all worth it? Is the proliferation and domination of our species worth the soda and burgers we get to consume with ease? Is our American lifestyle now superior to one that was based on community, connection with the land and its nonhuman inhabitants, and physiological health that need not be strictly regimented in the forms of Soul Cycle and the latest obsessive diet trend? I contend that, while I have the privilege of being a beneficiary of the system, and I am grateful for the suffering it has diminished for many humans, it was not worth it. Our lives may look fancier, easier, faster. But in the wake of spiritual abundance, is left an array of coffee creamers, potato chips, and toxic candy just begging us to make us sick as well as a broken global ecosystem. The very success of the revolution produced a “number of new problems which are far more subtle and difficult than those faced during the development of the new technology.”<sup>214</sup> Norman Borlaug calls on governments of the world to heal the ailments surrounding food insecurity, but continues to emphasize the danger of an ever-growing population. Ironically, it is likely we would not abound in the numbers we do today if it were not for the revolution he incited.

*3.7 Landscapes We See: The City and The Horizon:* When referring to dominant human systems of oppression, we must consider what systems we participate in each day. When considering our participation, we must also consider our trends and mechanisms of dwelling. In 2010, 80% of

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>214</sup> Wharton, Clifton R. "The Green Revolution: Cornucopia or Pandora's Box?" *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 3 (1969): 464-76. doi:10.2307/20039390.. 464

Americans lived in urban areas, which comprise just 3.5 of national land area.<sup>215</sup>Such a staggering density of individuals in cities is unsurprising in light of the commonly-held belief that urban environments, as a rule, offer greater opportunity for employment, culture and art, diversity, and self-expression, as well as increased accessibility to resources like 24-hour pharmacies, restaurants, and public transportation. But, perhaps surprisingly, trends of the last eight years have shown that close to a fourth of urban residents have moved *out* of cities and into suburban and even rural areas. One might wonder why this might be the case in light of predictions that urban dwelling would increase in popularity. But in uncovering the inherently oppressive and dualistic nature of the urban environment, especially in light of increasing environmental literacy, these statistics become significantly more understandable.

Those who live in, say, New York City, will be the first to tell you that it's built to break you, that if you can live in New York City, you can live anywhere. The fast-paced, light-polluted, noisy maze of concrete blocks and buildings and boulevards is easily overwhelming for those prone to anxiety or sensory sensitivity. But, upon taking a deeper look, the entropic results of the makeup of our cities becomes stupefyingly discouraging.

As explicated in earlier sections, the superimposition of any construct on an existing natural system renders the surrounding environment unavoidably due for an influx of entropic chaos. So, let us take concrete sidewalks for an example. What happens when soil is paved over? Well, as an impervious surface, it disallows for energy or matter to seep into it. Instead, energy bounces off of it, reflecting outward into the environment as a degraded, chaotic wave or

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<sup>215</sup> Lambert, Lisa. "More Americans Move to Cities in past Decade-Census." Reuters. March 26, 2012. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-cities-population/more-americans-move-to-cities-in-past-decade-census-idUSL2E8EQ5AJ20120326>.

watershed of energy. When matter reaches it, often in the forms of stormwater, solid waste, or chemical pollution, it runs off into local waterways, causing biological harm to aquatic life in the vicinity and filling the world's oceans with non-biodegradable plastic waste. Further, it causes biological death to the life underneath. What was once a "symphony of soil"<sup>216</sup> becomes a casket in which to bury and suffocate the living. Our urban environments not only destroy above-ground habitats for once lush and diverse flora and fauna, but do the same for ecologically *crucial* underground carbon sinks, decomposition, nutrient cycling, and soil generation.

But if thinking about soil weren't sufficient, allow us to consider souls. What happens when I'm trapped in a stalled subway car with 70 other agitated New Yorkers who are now an hour late for work, or being herded through rush-hour foot traffic in Times Square with tunnels of buildings surrounding me on either side? Well, their anxious energy *literally* exits their bodies and bounces around the impervious walls of the car or the concrete, spewing chaos into the environment, *or* it enters into the pervious surfaces it hits. What's the only permeable membrane in those common urban situations? Our skin. We, as beings enrobed in porous skin, are no exception from the environment which necessarily absorbs entropic chaos. And, in many urban settings, our bodies are the only vessel available for storing that chaotic energy. And so, the stereotype of the agitated and bruff New Yorker is given a thermodynamic explanation. In this case, so do statistics of staggeringly high psychological distress of urban dwellers. According to the *Scientific American* in May of 2016, growing up in the city doubles the risk of mental illness. This can be attributed to many factors, but it can all boil down to the notion of oppression. As we contort our biological being into the lifeless sterility of the city structure, our innate desires and

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<sup>216</sup> *Symphony of the Soil*. Directed by Deborah Koons. Performed by Ignacio Chapela, Dan Barber, Vandana Shiva

tendencies must be stamped out. All humans have a natural tendency toward biophilia, even if individuals may claim otherwise. Extensive research has been done on the positive and irreplaceable impacts of soil microbes, energy-flow, sun exposure, and clean air on our nervous systems, immunities, and psychological well-being. Those in urban environments have been said to suffer from nature deficit disorder. Our animal instinct to stick our toes in rushing water, play in the dirt, traipse through meadows, climb trees, scale mountains, and gaze in awe and wonder of the miracle of this world is locked away as we rise each morning in our tiny box of an apartment 6 or 30 floors above the earth, to the sound of ambulances and jackhammers.

Additionally, from a purely human approach, urban living impacts our mental health by way of its sheer population size. In small communities where residents know one another deeply and perhaps fondly, a network of social support guides individuals through inevitable hardship and confusion. In a city like New York, you could be crying on a park bench and the chances of someone even taking a second look at you would be slim to none. This allows individuals to feel loneliness, even within crowds, and to abstain from taking measures to assume leadership or even participation in the governance of their municipality. Small communities engage stakeholders through face-to-face engagement and meetings, while densely populated cities tend to be governed by more distant means. Further, city residents are often plagued with more demanding jobs, higher socioeconomic stress due to high living expenses, and physiological stressors, all contributing to a heightened level of tension. Further, these stressors impact various socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial groups in markedly different ways. Due to racist redlining practices in urban and suburban environments stemming from the National Housing Act of 1934, blocks of real estate still retain their racially segregated status, yielding environmental racism, racial

tensions amongst communities and their non-represented neighbors or visitors, and damage done to communities by incremental gentrification of low-income neighborhoods of color. Where you can afford to live in an urban environment determines where you'll be able to find fresh produce at a reasonable price, where your children can play in a clean and safe environment, how accessible public transportation is, and how well or poorly maintained your living quarters are. With all of this in mind, it's no wonder why urban inhabitants are flocking to more liberating landscapes. The built environment and community structure of the city-scape conflicts with the needs of our souls, bodies, and shared planetary home.

*3.8 Shallow Techno-Fixes:* The common response to our current ecological predicament can be quickly heard in any neoliberal echochamber: technology will dig us out of this mess, forming a highly-efficient, zero-waste, carbon-sequestering future for humankind. Now, while technology undoubtedly has a place in our need to harvest renewable energies and quickly suck carbon out of the atmosphere, die-hard technophiles are missing a very crucial and deterministic aspect of the equation. Climate change is not an ecological problem, it is a cognitive one. Technology, if not created by and followed by social progress, has been and always will be abused by those who will make the most money off of its production, distribution, and use. If the model of our lives and societies attribute greater figures on our salaries or in our bank accounts to marks of success, as it does with GDP as the primary benchmark by which politicians and economists value the health of our country's economy, America, as a nation, cannot value that which does not have a price sticker. If addressing climate change becomes a race to the innovation station so that the rich become richer, we will have created a bigger problem out of the old one. If the models that

encourage the invention and production of climate-change-curbing technologies are locked into American pseudo-capitalism, they will have no incentive to make monetary sacrifices to take all externalities into account. What these hopeful innovators lack in their model of production is that which determines its efficacy: holism. In our nation, in which the value of the dollar bill colors our worldview, we are subjected to a fragmented, skewed, and individualistic determination of success. We, as a nation, have exported the unfavorable impacts of our extractivist economy for too long. Adam Smith could have predicted that exceptionalism and fierce individualism would backfire, eventually. Now, it is doing so.

As we create and intensify natural and social imbalance in our world, technophiles around the world pour their energy into technological innovation to back-engineer some semblance of balance. And, they usually succeed to a certain extent. From biodegradable plastics to artificial trees which suck carbon from the air, innovators across the globe are attempting to engineer their way out of climate change. And while these innovations may be necessary, they don't complete a necessarily more fundamental healing of the ills which manifest as mere symptoms in plastic waste and excess carbon in the atmosphere. Unfortunately, unless technical advancements are sprung from and follow with radical social ecological progress, they will inevitably feed the same systems which created our problems in the first place. But, of course, facilitating a deeply spiritual shift of consciousness in the human species is seemingly impossible to most. So capitalists reach for low-hanging fruit, like Teslas and solar panels, and tout them as miraculous solutions to all our problems. These technophiles are missing the point by miles, and the cognitive dissonance surrounding these misconceptions is deafening to those who see the root of the problem.

To begin, we must necessarily investigate who it is that makes our technologies.

“Modern reductionist science, like development, turns out to be a patriarchal project, which has excluded women as experts, and has simultaneously excluded ecological and holistic ways of knowing which understand and respect nature’s processes and interconnectedness as *science*.”<sup>217</sup>

The fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics consist *overwhelmingly* of white and Asian males. On the surface, this may just seem like an issue of social injustice or oppression, but the impacts run deeper. What happens when the technology we use every day, the medicines we take, the physical environment in which we reside is designed within such a narrow scope of the world? Well, we find solutions only or predominantly for problems which impact *those* people, and not *all* people. We also perpetuate the fictitious notion of capitalist solutions to capitalist problems as being effective. And, perhaps most impactfully, we remove “animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos[, constituting] the death of nature.”<sup>218</sup>

Caroline Merchant calls this “the most far-reaching effect of the scientific revolution.”<sup>219</sup> Bruce Wilshire writes from the indigenous perspective:

Even when marvelously revealing certain sectors of the universe, science and technology’s intercourse with the world is so narrow and self-involved that the full gamut of emotions and instinctual adjustments that enliven indigenous peoples’ habitual involvement with the world are masked-out and suppressed. We lose “the feeling of

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<sup>217</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 120

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 116

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

belonging to the land and of being cared for by it- cared for if we are sufficiently aware and skilled, reverent, careful, fortunate.<sup>220</sup>

By removing spirit from an equation or scientific method, we can obtain valid results. But in a world dictated by emotion and bias, do we always need sanitized scientific or technological advances held above instinct and connection? Do we need to quantify the damage we've done to our environment for an obligation to respect the earth to be valid? Obviously not. For we know that what we're doing to our planet is scientifically nonsensical. What we fail to understand and accept is that it is, more fundamentally, *spiritually* and *morally* nonsensical. No amount of remarkably advanced technology will save us, for technology is nothing but tools. Tools are no help if we don't know how to use them, and they're *especially* no help if we abuse them. Our worldview necessitates that we abuse them. Therefore, we're lost in this vicious cycle creating problems from perceives solutions.

3.9 *Dissonance in Immanence*: What is represented by the dominant human systems presented in this work is the dissonance associated with the modes by which we assume immanence in our surrounding environment. Each of these systems aims at, against all laws of nature, our transcendence from immanence. In essence, we are driving in the wrong direction on a one-way highway, and spray-painting the wreckage in gold. The drivers of this vehicle assume that we won't or haven't already gotten hit, that we can somehow escape the bonds of our physicality, of our place in a greater whole. Mary Mellor writes:

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<sup>220</sup> Bruce, Wilshire. *The Primal Roots of American Philosophy: Pragmatism, Phenomenology, and Native American Thought*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000., 16



The politics of nature requires a theoretical analysis of the structural dynamics of human-nature relations and a politics of practice that identifies points of structural weakness and potential political agency. The first element of both is the dynamics of the ecosystem itself. For the political suzerainty of transcendent humanity it is a point of structural weakness... a transcendent elite could exist quite easily within the limits of ecological sustainability if it could hold all other mechanisms of mediation in place. Capitalist patriarchy as a world-dominant system is, however, not in that position. Capitalist patriarchy justifies its transcendence through the promise of (eventually) extending transcendence to all, including those who are now locked into the hierarchical mechanisms of mediation/parasitism. Universal transcendence is a promise that in ecological terms capitalist patriarchy cannot achieve.<sup>221</sup>

The powers that claim to be the powers that be can claim to uphold the possibility of transcendence by seeing themselves within the artificial dualisms of human/nature, male/female, and white/non-white. These categories are as arbitrary as they are harmful. But this vision is little more than a manufactured hallucination. We have simply inherited this worldview from thinkers like John Locke and his friends who devised “devise a worldview that went completely counter to the real workings of the world.”<sup>222</sup> They claimed and convinced the masses that nature, in its given forms, was a waste until transformed into objects and services of economic value. “As to the passage of time, they reasoned that the faster nature was transformed, the more progress

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<sup>221</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 191

<sup>222</sup> Rifkin, Jremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 49

would occur, the more ordered the world would become, and the more time would be saved.”<sup>223</sup>

This is why we tend to construct new systems, call them truth, and follow their rules even if they come in conflict with the rules of the non-human-constructed Truth that *actually* makes the rules. But, under what mode of logic does it appear as sensical to swear by an economic system in which endless *growth*, devout *individualism*, *exploitation*, and unfettered *extraction* reign supreme, when considering the bound *limits*, intrinsic *interconnection* and *mutuality*, and *conservation* of natural systems? Unfortunately or perhaps fortunately for us, the successors of the creation and fast adoption of this system, the boundlessness of the system is no longer so apparent, as American economic power is cracking under the the Powers of Natural Law. We can pledge allegiance to the capitalist regime that has attempted put a price tag on our bodies and minds, but the system is defenseless under the threats of rising tides, superstorms, drought, genetic mutation of non-human species, and general uncertainty. These phenomenon cannot be controlled, or created, by humans. We are not in charge of that system. There is no way to get around the truth that “evolution means the creation of larger and larger islands of order at the expense of ever-greater seas of disorder in the world.”<sup>224</sup>As we increasingly consolidate economic and political activities into more centralized modes of control, rather than liberating bio regionally-specific communities and supporting them in self-governance, a point will inevitably be reached in which “impossible to further consolidate and the culture or civilization begins to break down and fragment.”<sup>225</sup> We have now reached the point where our “institutional

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 55

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 87

complex (its economic and political organization) is so centralized and enlarged that it takes more energy to maintain it than the system can afford.”<sup>226</sup> One need only look at our national debt, health epidemics, and wildly fragmented social and political sphere to understand that we’re cracking under the pressure of the superimposition of poorly-constructed centralized systems of governance and economy.

What I aim to prove in the next section is that the systemically pervasive Western dualism is not an innate or unavoidable facet of our human psyche, but rather a fear-based tactic of control conjured by the egos of those who impose it on the masses. Yuval Noah Harari captures the futility, fiction, and non-fundamentality of our systems by writing:

Most people claim that their social hierarchy is natural and just, while those of other societies are based on false and ridiculous criteria. Modern Westerners are taught to scoff at the idea of racial hierarchy. They are shocked by laws prohibiting blacks to live in white neighbourhoods, or to study in white schools, or to be treated in which hospitals. But the hierarchy of rich and poor- which mandates that rich people live in separate and more luxurious neighborhoods, study in separate and more prestigious schools, and receive medical treatment in separate and better-equipped facilities- seems perfectly sensible to many Americans and Europeans. Yet it’s a proven fact that most rich people are rich for the simple reason that they were born into a rich family, while most poor people will remain poor throughout their lives simply because they were born into a poor family.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 90

<sup>227</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 136

Our world does not need to be shaped the way it is. Humankind is not “forever trapped in this pattern of social development?”<sup>228</sup> But “history is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily.”<sup>229</sup> And if there is simply no other way to accurately describe America’s energy habit than a pathological addiction, and “addicts do not take kindly to losing their fix,”<sup>230</sup> then we must treat this national epidemic with a program of recovery. “Addicts put what they are addicted to above everything: their own health, the well-being of their children, the fate of the earth.”<sup>231</sup> And so, we must be brave in facing the inevitable pain of relapse once we wean ourselves off of the systems we’ve been used to. But we cannot do this until we feel voluntarily compelled to. In light of the dissonance associated with our nonsensical ways of being, we must be willing to deeply feel into and logically evaluate and criticize what we’re truly committed to. Is it violence, spiritual starvation, physiological and psychological pain, cruelty, injustice, fierce individualism, and band-aid solutions? Or are we committed to deep and creative peace, spiritual nourishment, physiological vitality and psychological stability and well-being, compassion, justice, community, and holistic healing? The latter is not impossible, and the former is not inevitable. In the following chapter, I outline the tools we must employ in order to create it.

#### **Chapter 4: Living with Cognitive Dissonance- What to Do?**

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<sup>228</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 90

<sup>229</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 30

<sup>230</sup> Gottlieb, Roger S. *A greener faith: religious environmentalism and our planets future*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010., 217

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 218

*“Just as when two clashing musical notes played together force a piece of music forward, so discord in our thoughts, ideas and values compel us to think, re evaluate and criticize”*<sup>232</sup>- Yuval

Noah Harari Harari

*“Ecologists and economists like Georgescu-Roegen, Daly, Odum, Bookchin, and Ophlus would argue that to ignore the historical reality in front of us in favor of maintaining false expectations is sheer madness and will lead to an even greater fall for humankind, perhaps an irreversible one. Regardless of which course we follow, the coming transition is sure to be accompanied by suffering and sacrifice. But there is really no other choice. The fact is, the suffering will be minimized if the transition from the existing energy base to the new one is made now in a thoughtful, orderly manner, rather than later, out of sheer panic and desperation”*<sup>233</sup> - Jeremy

Rifkin



4.1 *We’ve Got the Whole World on our Tongues*: If the systems which make up our world are grounded, primarily, in language, “the grounds for social entities are, in some sense, within our control.”<sup>234</sup> However, what I’m interested in proving in this section is not simply that it is *possible* to create an alternative reality, but that there are certain tools we must employ if we are to build a truly liberating and ecologically-wise reality. Because the radical pragmatism I present in this work aims to collect the chaos of the present moment, wherein energy is being catapulted into infinite entropy at rates never-before existent, and simplify it into a more streamlined energy

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<sup>232</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 165

<sup>233</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 203

<sup>234</sup> Griffith, Aaron M. (forthcoming). Social Construction and Grounding. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. PhilArchive copy v1: <https://philarchive.org/archive/GRISCAv1>, 3

watershed, biomimicry must necessarily be employed in the design of our human systems. But these scientific, jargon-heavy notions of what's now known as 'design thinking' are all grounded not in innovation or ecological discovery; they're grounded in the low-entropy philosophical schools of the oppressed, the ancient, and the indigenous. Metaphysician Rebecca Mason outlines that:

“...some social kinds are more natural than others, and that, in general, social kinds are less natural than many biological, chemical, and physical kinds... A kind is more or less natural given the strength of the inductive inferences it licenses, the reliability of the predictions to which it gives rise, and fruitfulness of the explanations in which it figures, and the extent to which the generalizations concerning kind members must be hedged by *ceteris paribus* clauses. Thus, some social kinds are more natural than other given that they enable stronger inductive inferences, more reliable predictions, and so forth.”<sup>235</sup>

Proponents of our modern dominant systems tout their reliability and potential, but rarely do they pay heed to the fact that economic and socially-oppressive theory look vastly different on paper and at play. There is nothing constant about the ecological groundlessness of capitalism, race, gender, femininity, masculinity, sexuality, sexual orientation, marriage, physical ability, technology, or educational norms. Their theoretical applications consistently fail when held up against the way humans tend to be. But Mary Mellor rightly warns us of making sweeping generalizations about naturalness and biomimicry. Mellor asserts that it is always problematic to assume the 'naturalness' of harmony or competitiveness, for “evidence from the natural world

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<sup>235</sup> Mason, R. (2016) The metaphysics of social kinds. *Philosophy Compass*, 11: 841–850. Doi: 10.1111/phc3.12381., 843

shows it to be both symbiotic and competitive.”<sup>236</sup> Both the right, who view hierarchy and competition as natural, and the left, who see naturalness in mutuality and symbiosis, are correct to a certain extent. However, by virtue of the nature of entropy and its historical relationship to power and oppression, it is evident that the more energy a culture expends on oppressing another, the more chaos ensues. Therefore, the philosophies of oppressed peoples are worth valuing in the pursuit of creating entropy watersheds that are continuously more streamlined, and necessarily less chaotic. In the pursuit of conserving the amount of available and usable energy in our atmosphere and preserving the quality of the energy we do use, it is notable that human superimposition, whether onto other humans or the natural environment, is an unwise expenditure of energy if the ultimate pursuit is the minimization of chaos, and, therefore, the minimization of suffering. Further, what we as human persons have the privilege of embodying is not only what is “natural,” but what is metaphysical and supernatural. Murray Bookchin writes: “It is humanity, not nature, that is enchanted, in the sense of holding the key to harmony and sustainability: ‘Such rational beings can be expected to have ethical responsibility for the welfare of non-human life *precisely* because they are sensible to the pain, suffering and death of all living being.’”<sup>237</sup> If we are to surpass nature, it will only be spiritually. Let us aim to surpass cruelty, not extinction.

Tokat points out that, in view of the environmental community, “concern for the natural world and the critique of anthropocentrism has become associated with anti-humanism.”<sup>238</sup> This

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<sup>236</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 153

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 132

is perhaps due to the fact that, like all other dominant human systems, environmentalism has been dominated predominantly by white men since the reign of Theodore Roosevelt.

Environmentalists have long denied “the culpability of any specific group through an emphasis on ‘humanity’ or human-centeredness as the problem.”<sup>239</sup> Mary Mellor points out that human society is not only “human-centered,”<sup>240</sup> but also constructed on a basis of racism, sexism, imperialism, class exploitation, homophobia, transphobia, and capitalist greed. One school of thought that has gained significant traction from white environmentalists in recent decades is ‘deep ecology,’ which Arne Naess surmises in 1988 with an eight-point platform:

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has inherent value. The value of non-human life-forms is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. The richness and diversity of life-forms are also values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial *decrease* of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.’
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 142

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.



6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change will be mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasing standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between bigness and greatness.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

In addressing the ills of the environmental community's well-intended yet harmfully misguided approach, an approach which grossly neglects the very real threats that environmental racism and injustice has on people of color and the poor, both domestically and internationally, grassroots environmental movements and marginalized theorists around the world have begun constructing newer, deeper forms of ecological thought. Ecofeminists critique the fact that deep ecologists "are not primarily concerned with exposing the *classes of social actors* historically most responsible for social domination and ecological destruction, but rather with the task of sweeping the rug out from under the feet of these classes of social actors by exposing the most fundamental kind of *legitimation* that they have habitually employed in justifying their position."<sup>241</sup>

Alternatively, ecocentric ethics, which root themselves in the holism of the planet and its place in the cosmos rather than mechanistic metaphysics, assume:

1. Everything is connected to everything else.
2. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 141

3. Knowledge is context-dependence.
4. The primacy of process over parts.
5. The unity of humans and nonhuman nature.<sup>242</sup>

Here, a more fluid and inclusive approach, one which calls on the wisdom of ancient and indigenous peoples across the globe, tempers the historically humanist approach of conservation. Here, qualitative phenomenological experience can yield information as useful as quantitative data. This is crucial if we are to counter the qualitative dollar and cents, carbon dioxide parts per million, pounds of plastic in the sea mentality that will guide us, inevitable, into new and more unmanageable dilemmas of being on earth. It is also crucial if we are to learn from the infinite wisdom of those whose philosophies fall out of the scope of traditionally accepted philosophical modality.

“Philosophy” as a field of study is often consumed through a narrow straw amidst a sea of lingering questions about life. We consume it through the (created, imaginary, speculative) theory of, primarily, euro-caucasian men or occasionally euro-caucasian women. But the diversity of human thought and speculation since the dawn of modern (in the extended sense of the term) language is infinitesimal in variation, depth, and perception. For this reason, I aim to situate these theories not as a single H<sub>2</sub>O molecule within the sea of thought, but as the guiding force of movement that places the Milky Way within the multiverse, our solar system within the Milky Way, the sun at the center of our solar system, and the earth that revolved around it, the moon that revolves around the earth, the waters that pulsate with the moon’s direction, the organisms that pulsate with the sun, and the humans that bob around the earth within it all as

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<sup>242</sup> Merchant, Carolyn. *Radical ecology the search for a livable world*. New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005., 77/8

mere space-time worms. There is more out there than Plato, Foucault, Kant, and Sartre. What we know, or think we know, is a molecule of H<sub>2</sub>O amidst the sea of possible-to-attain knowledge, amidst a multiverse of impossible-to-attain wisdom.

Climate change is simply not an ecological problem to be solved with technological solutions. Climate change is a human problem to be solved with social and spiritual solutions. Environmentalism, for it to be deeply and truly effective, must necessarily reshape our individual souls, collective communities, and institutionalized systems. We must not cower behind and unwillingness to let go of our creations, of the status quo, in lieu of a more liberating and promising set of alternatives. John Dewey “insisted that instead of treating the philosophical achievements of earlier generations as hallowed museum pieces, they must be treated as active responses to their own historical problem situations that may still carry living implications for future generations, and thus, they must be critically reconstructed using experience-based intelligence to meet the needs of our own times.”<sup>243</sup> We cannot continue clinging to context-dependent systems whose contexts have now changed. Paul Hawken once said: “we can just as easily have an economy that is based on healing the future instead of stealing it.” But the privileged first must be willing to let go of what’s so, listen to those who know better, and trust in the fact that they likely know better. Our classical philosophical and political vernacular limit us to the intricacies of the privileged life, which encompasses an incomprehensibly small percentage of the intricacies of the universal life, or the thoughts had and words shared by the 108 billion people to have walked the earth.

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<sup>243</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., ix

4.2 *The Opportunity in the Role of Democratic Government:* Of all human-made systems, democracy, in its truest and deepest form, is our most ecologically sound. In theory, it should thrive on bioregional governance under universal guidance. It values diversity, places the whole before its parts, and allows for interconnection between communities. The opportunity in the role of deeply democratic governance, rather than the merely formal conceptions of governance outlined in the previous chapter, could allow for a systemically-functional transition to a more prosperous future for oppressed peoples of our nation, oppressed peoples of the world, and oppressed non-human entities. Die-hard capitalists claim that while economy should be free to influence policy, policy should not be free to influence economy. What these individuals are missing or perhaps choose to ignore is that economy, unlike democratic government, is morally vacant. Democratic governments exist for the explicit purpose of serving its citizens, rather than the explicit purpose of serving financial stakeholders at all moral costs.

Unfortunately, through our formal instantiation of democracy, our nation's government has failed at upholding this duty. Through the Indian Removal Act, legalized slavery, the era of Jim Crow and de jure segregation, witch hunts during the red scare, internment camps for Japanese-American citizens, and countless other state-sponsored injustices in the past, and today's era of Citizens United, the prison-industrial complex, ineffective and shallow education, the monopolization of the media, and hollow political jargon aimed at disclosing the truth, our nation has never lived up to the theoretical efficacy of democratic governance. But, because we get to lay claim to the pursuit of those ideals, we have the opportunity to change laws through any means available to us. Our freedom of speech, right to suffrage, and ability to run for public office should, in theory, offer us to channels to being a government *by* and *for* the people. And,

when those options fail us, as they do for many marginalized communities and individuals, the option to peacefully break the law has proven effective in the past. Just as in the case of an ecosystem: “The lifeworld *should* regulate the system that exists to serve it, that the relationship has been reversed as capitalism has advanced, and that restoring the lifeworld to its appropriate dominance while reaping the benefits of positive developments within the system requires moral-communicative action guided by the democratic ideal.”<sup>244</sup> We, as the lifeworld, should be regulating the system that aims to serve us. This is not possible without what Cornel West refers to as “democratic spirituality,” defined as the allowing “every voice, no matter what color, gender, sexual orientation, class, or region, to play a role in the decision-making within those institutions that guard and regulate our lives”<sup>245</sup> If we were to perform this, if we were to not only allow every voice to speak but to actually *listen*, we would be able to discern the signs of this time in history.

From a social ecology perspective, I advocate here not for more governance, but for *wiser* government. I advocate for federal policy motivated by the constraints of the natural environment, the lessons of the past without a dogmatic stronghold on former decisions, and the empowerment of municipalities to create abundance and well-being from their local resources. With restrictions attaining and retaining a focus on justice and eco-logic, and greater emphasis placed on building working infrastructure for grassroots organizing, a deeper manifestation of democracy can be realized. Without it, we will simply continue to run ourselves into the ground while the puppeteers at the top pocket the financial rewards.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 19

<sup>245</sup> West, Cornel. “Not a Minute to Hate .” *Tikkun.*, 12

4.3 *From a Motivation of Fear to a Motivation of Love*: As briefly mentioned in a previous chapter, the root of oppression is fear. And, as normative theorists from innumerable schools can attest, the opposite of fear, the most creative force in the world, is love. Judith Green refers to love as “one of the great cosmic forces that humans can access and multiply, and [one] that we need for our sustenance and flourishing.”<sup>246</sup> We often consider love as to be a distinctly human creation, as one that is as it is spoken and acted into being. But it may not be sourced from within us. It may, like all stuffs of the world, be harnessed from the cosmos as a raw resource and sculpted into human forms. Regardless, “there can be no deep disappointment where there is no deep love,”<sup>247</sup> and so we must deeply and fiercely in order to maintain disappointment where we’ve failed, where our realities have not matched up to our expectations of designs. James Baldwin writes: “we , with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.”<sup>248</sup> Love is the necessary ingredient which can safely invite oppressors to assume a role of justice. And just as love is necessary for our ability to recognize our breakdowns, so too is it necessary for building functional constructs from the cracks. Love-based design is superior to fear-based design because, as Irene Diamond and Gloria

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<sup>246</sup> McGarry, Howard, and Bill E. Lawson. *Between Slavery and Freedom: Philosophy and American Slavery*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995., 206

<sup>247</sup> King, Martin Luther, and James Melvin. Washington. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: Harper, 1991., 39

<sup>248</sup> Baldwin, James E., Steve Schapiro, John Robert Lewis, and John Karefa-Smart. *The Fire next Time.*, 24

Orenstein put it, “Loving [anything] is essential to understanding it.”<sup>249</sup> This notion is lost on those in ontologically regimented sectors of society like the natural sciences, for “male-dominated science could not accept the idea that love and knowledge were compatible and mutually supportive.”<sup>250</sup>

The practice and creation of love through our actions and words is not just important for understanding society and the other, it is also important as a tenet of the systems we create. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a famously pacifist changemaker, wrote: “again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.”<sup>251</sup> “Soul force” can be just as, if not more powerful than physical force. To fight fire with words, and guns with open hearts is to entirely change the apparatus and schema of being and conflict resolution. So too is true in the policing of one's community. How do we draw people into doing their part to maintain a safe and creative community? The American approach has long been to threaten them, to coerce them with ammunition in hand, or to lock them behind bars. The American approach has been one of fear-mongering. By shifting the approach from one of fear to one of love, we can shift our focus to positive solutions from the current emphasis on punitive actions for transgressions of character. We must accept that transgressions of character are inevitable to occur, but will occur with less frequency as we train the masses in emotional intelligence and non-violent problem solving. And emphasis on love is missing from our law-and-order, fear-mongering nation.

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<sup>249</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 15

<sup>251</sup> King, Martin Luther, and James Melvin. Washington. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: Harper, 1991., 218

4.4 *Cultivated Pluralism & Monism*: Reason tells us that some universal theories don't actually make the grade, partly because reason doesn't speak in the same way to everyone. But that's not to say that no general truth about a common world can be achieved. What we know about the entanglement of pluralistic standpoint perspectives tells us that collaboration will bring us to a fuller truth, if not a final truth. Nicomachean ethics highlights the notion of civic concord or friendship, in which thinking and being together as a community is upheld as an ethical necessity. It's not the point that we're all the same; the point is that our differences make us parts of a monistic whole. But this all gets beaten out of people when they're taught to see others as the threatening 'other'. Strict artificial binaries and boundaries of being have us believing that we're tied more closely to our synthetic national identity before our fundamental human or earthling identity. By allowing ourselves to occasionally dissolve those fictitious coats of manufactured identity, we may come to see that we are residents of earth, we are dwellers of deserts or mountains or jungles before we're citizens or lawyers or white or female. But still, we should not value the other in light of our sameness, but rather, in light of our differences. Nancy Hartsock defines a fully human community as one that is "structured by connection rather than separation and opposition."<sup>252</sup> It is by building communities based on cooperation rather than control that we may come into knowing the strength and profound beauty of what Alaine Locke referred to as "cultivated pluralism." This is due not only to the context-dependent wisdom of peoples with particular bio regionally-grounded cultures, but also due to the value of the perspectives of those in varying relation to dominant power structures. Standpoint theory argues that "dominant groups can only have a partial view of real relations in society and, in fact, it is in

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<sup>252</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 107



their interest to do so. It is only from the perspective of those who are subjugated, excluded and exploited that a picture of the real situation can emerge.”<sup>253</sup> Through listening to and studying the perspectives of those who are marginalized, we may not be gaining a full picture, for they too retain only a partial view. But we surely may come into knowing a more detailed and illuminated version of the whole system. Patricia Hill Collins “argues for the importance of the standpoint of subjugated knowledges not as answers in themselves but as a challenge to the ‘truth’ of dominating knowledges and as the basis of a wider picture.”<sup>254</sup> This is precisely why, when studying history, we may attain a more accurate and meaningful understanding of our past were we to read, say, personal slave narratives rather than accounts of slave masters, or, when studying the present, we should listen to those the soul-filled exhaustive narratives of who are subjugated rather than the symbolic rhetoric of political leaders who aim to quell worry or settle nerves.

While Standpoint Theory offers us a mode by which we may challenge the status quo, Alain Locke’s ‘cultivated pluralism’ suggests a creative solution to build from the multi-faceted and intersectional perspectives brought from diverse critique. He writes: “There exists, fortunately, a sounder and more permanent alternative, the possibility of a type of agreement such as may stem from a pluralistic base. Agreement of this common denominator type would, accordingly, provide a flexible, more democratic nexus, a unity in a diversity rather than a counter uniformitarianism.”<sup>255</sup> Radical social ecology utilizes this same notion from an ecological perspective, citing the ‘unity in diversity’ principles of ecosystemic success. Social

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 193

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 108

<sup>255</sup> Harris, Leonard. *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999., 53

ecologists seek to bring “human-human relations back to their most ‘natural’ and ‘original’ form—mutuality and symbiosis.”<sup>256</sup> It is hard to say whether human relationships began as symbiotic, but it’s safe to assert that it is, in fact, mutuality which allows us to thrive while competition and hostility demands our structural destruction or biological death. It is the celebration and valuation of the *difference* of the other which allows ecosystems and societies to thrive. This is precisely why Alain Locke makes a point to contrast cultivated pluralism with cultural relativism, which merely aims to refrain from judgement of the other in its perceived misguidedness from the believed truth of the subject. In contrast, pluralism values that more than one thing can be true, and that learning and designing with those multiple truths in mind gets us closer to a holistic, multifaceted truth rather than a limited and fragmented dogmatic myth. This is precisely why interdisciplinary education has proven to be hugely successful in educating students for the complex reality of life, and why those who study subjects in silos, like, say, medical students or chemical engineering students, tend to approach their work as if the problems they aim to solve occur in vacuums. Just as society needs the intermingling of various social groups in order to succeed, our minds need the intermingling of various disciplines.

To avoid getting lost amidst a sea of infinitely many theories and experiences, we may point our schematic framework of these subjects and phenomenological accounts toward the monistic universal. For, as Kenneth Stickers put it, “African American philosophers, precisely while promoting their special interests of liberation, have contributed especially to our

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<sup>256</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 151

understanding of what is genuinely universal in human condition.”<sup>257</sup> Standpoint theory and pluralism do not suggest one whole compartmentalized world, but rather, varying intersecting aspects of the universal conditions of suffering, identity, fear, and judgement. Drawing a distinction between knowledge and wisdom can help us to determine the potential for universal truth of a given school of thought. This is important for, as Patricia Hill Collins phrased it: “Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate.”<sup>258</sup> Eventually, as tides rise and food supplies grow shorter, all will become subordinate to the earth and its systems. Without gleaning and fostering the memory of wisdom from ancient, indigenous, and subjugated communities, we may not hope to attain some semblance of control. Further, the wisest sages, whether from ancient China or the unconquered Americas, emphasize the importance of a future-focused, preventative mode of conservation, rather than a perpetual momentary scramble to patch up the mistakes of the past. Our western mentality has us only motivated to address breakdowns *after* they’re so far gone that they impede on other aspects of our lives. This is dooming us to fail. Wisdom from cultures all over the world can reshape the horizon of our dominant worldviews, rendering us more prone to the necessary preventive measures of living. It is important to note, however, that in addition to the universal quality of various cultural or functional schema, that solutions need not be scalable in order to be impactful. The ecological tenet of bioregionalism reminds us that ecological context renders

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<sup>257</sup> Harris, Leonard. *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999., 211

<sup>258</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 107

some solutions reasonable and effective in some ecosystems, and nonsensical in others. This is largely why Jeremy Rifkin highlights the pitfalls of centralized, widely-governing institutions.

As contemporary debates about the distinction between equality and equity spark growing interest in the state and shape of justice, so too does it compel us to consider the state and shape of balance. Those who see cishetero white patriarchy as a system out of balance see that, although uneven power dynamics are an inevitable aspect of existential being, there is a certain structural balance of power that may be pursued in our institutions. From an ecofeminist perspective, influential male green writers such as Fritjof Capra and Jonathon Porritt “draw on the Taoist idea of yin and yang, the feminine and the masculine... the aim is not the feminist one of overthrowing the masculine principle or male power, but of restoring the balance between them.”<sup>259</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, in “The Higher Education of Women,” writes: “Mercy, the lesson she teaches, and Truth, the task man has set himself, should meet together; that righteousness, or *rightness*, man’s ideal, - and *peace*, it’s necessary “other half,” should kiss each other.”<sup>260</sup> So many of the breakdowns that occur in our societal systems are due to the plain fact that decision-making bodies do *not* represent the demographics of our nation, and therefore, strike imbalance. Although diverse demographics can manifest in *innumerable* ways, the balance of feminine and masculine energies is one of the most overlooked yet obvious. These energies should not only kiss each other, but should, also, bleed into one another in the spirit of each individual person. Too often, men are discouraged from fostering the feminine energy undoubtedly present within them. By oppressing and suppressing their true nature, they’re undoubtedly fostering an

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 130

<sup>260</sup> Cooper, Anna J. *A Voice from the South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988., 375

environment ripe with frustration, aggression, and imbalance. And, because many (if not all) of the systems that govern our lives are made by men, this frustration, aggression, and imbalance become a constant trope in the lives of all who function within them.

It is only with a society that *celebrates* its pluralistic base, rather than dismisses it as a problem to be solved or erased, that we may come into learning the most effective means of relinquishing the long-held commitment to oppression and learning best practices for being in loving communion with our planetary home.

4.5 *A Return to Community*: A fundamental aspect of radical social ecology is the practice of building and fostering community. The clichéd assertion that it ‘takes a tribe’ to raise a human is more aphorism than legend. Yuval Noah Harari writes: “

Evolution thus favoured those capable of forming strong social ties. In addition, since humans are born underdeveloped, they can be educated and socialized to a far greater extent than any other animal. Most mammals emerge from the womb like a glazed earthenware emerging from a kiln- any attempt at remoulding will only scratch or break them. Humans emerge from the womb like molten glass from a furnace. They can be spun, stretched and shaped with a surprising degree of freedom. This is why today we can educate our children to become Christian or Buddhist, capitalist or socialist, warlike or peace-loving.<sup>261</sup>

Today, our communities, communities which shape us, tend to be imagined. An imagined community, according to Harari, is “community of people who don’t really know each other, but

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<sup>261</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 10

imagine they do.”<sup>262</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre draws an existential distinction between an essential relationship and a contingent relationship. The former implies that there are no lies between one partner and another, that one is in full and open union with who the other truly is. The latter, conversely, is dependent on this or that and forces the partners to lie to one another. Our dominant communities of today are both imagined and contingent. Our national, religious, academic, and often professional communities are so large and institutionalized that we not only don’t see everyone within them, but don’t *know* everyone within them.

[John] Dewey’s ‘community’ refers to consciously interconnected patterns of face-to-face relationships in daily life that give us a sense of social identity and shared purpose, that motivate people to look out for each other and to work together toward goals of mutual betterment- a fast-fleeing American reality in Dewey’s day and an extraordinarily rare one in our own times of walled suburban ‘lifestyle enclaves’ and urban apartments with multiple locks on their doors.”<sup>263</sup>

This implies that, as Judith Green puts it, “community is an achieved quality of social interaction, not its rational antecedent.”<sup>264</sup> But not just any social interaction will do it; it takes intentional, creative communication, meaningful cooperation, and thoughtful collaboration to create communities that are “mutually constructive and continuously reconstructive.”<sup>265</sup> Green points out Dewey’s argument that while “our societies have no separate existence apart from the

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 362

<sup>263</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., 17

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 18

groups and the individuals who make them up... “there are no residual individuals who are not shaped in their development by their experiences of group membership within larger social processes.”<sup>266</sup> It is the individual parts of the community which make it real, but the structure of the whole which impacts the individual.

4.6 *Rewriting Stories, Authentically*: Cornel West writes of prophetic spirituality as “the condition of truth, and it is the condition of truth to allow suffering to speak, to allow misery to become visible and pain to be heard. Prophetic spirituality talks about the courage to love and be hurt, and then goes on to enact that love.”<sup>267</sup> Prophets are known to share the word of God, to share messages of the truth of what’s so or of what’s to come. As mentioned previously, we, as human persons, have the power to create without words. And so, we cannot downplay the powerful role of language in the creation of a more promising world. As our technology evolves, so too must out concepts. We continue to rely on dead documents: the bible, the constitution, the historical-context-dependent philosophies of the past. The authors of those stories weren’t necessarily wisest then, and they definitely weren’t psychic. If we are to build cooperative communities, we must understand they the relationships within them necessitate the exercise of judgement on the part of each person, rather than the worshiping bow to arbitrary authority.<sup>268</sup>

Paul Ricoeur’s Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning nods to the creative power of language in the now by writing:

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>267</sup> West, Cornel. “Not a Minute to Hate .” *Tikkun.*, 11

<sup>268</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., viii

For a linguistics applied to the structure of systems, the temporal dimension of this event expresses the epistemological weakness of a linguistics of *parole*. Events vanish while systems remain. Therefore the first move of a semantics of discourse must be to rectify this epistemological weakness of *parole* proceeding from the fleeting character of the event as opposed to the stability of the system by relating it to the ontological priority of discourse resulting from the actuality of the event as opposed to the mere virtuality of the system.<sup>269</sup>

Here, Ricoeur is referring directly to *parole* as the act of speaking, as compared to *langue* as the system of language. Speaking is specific to now, while language persists as a system over time. Valuing present narratives as concretely true in that they're happening is essential for the pursuit of consistent, transformational, actual progress as opposed to stability and persistence of virtual systems. And if we consistently value the ever-evolving shape of narrative as it responds to its context, we may fulfil Dewey's vision of democratic life which "develops and changes slowly, rather than in revolutionary bursts."<sup>270</sup> Through constant unveiling, criticism, listening, and reassessment, we may achieve consistent evolutionary reconstruction in keeping with the swift evolution of both our technology and ecological context. "The challenge, as Dewey recognized, is to reconstruct processes of interactive citizen communication in ways that deepen the democratic quality of community life while transforming the macro-level social institutions that exist to serve it."<sup>271</sup> Because the system should serve the people rather than people serving the

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<sup>269</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1979., 9

<sup>270</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., 18

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 21



system, we must reject the structural norm of working off of constructs. This does not mean eliminating them entirely, it just means being humble enough to value them as the fictions they are, and valuing our *true* experiences of life which land outside the structural norms meant to define us. Through pursuing authentic and effective narrative, especially through widespread training in the philosophies and powers of speaking, we may create a new reality in each moment. Hopefully, we'll opt for self-fulfilling prophecies of creativity, compassion, and mutual-understanding.

#### 4.7 Removal from Consumerism:

*“People are liberated from suffering not when they experience this or that fleeting pleasure, but rather when they understand the impermanent nature of all their feelings, and stop craving them”*<sup>272</sup>-Yuval Noah Harari

Perhaps one of the most obvious tools for healing our relationship with the planet and ourselves is abstaining from the abuses associated with unfettered materialist consumerism. Rifkin writes: “The traditional wisdom, as embodied in the great world religions, has long taught that the ultimate purpose of human life is not the satisfaction of all material desires, but rather the experience of liberation that comes from being one with the metaphysical unity of the universe. The goal is to find “the truth that will set us free.”<sup>273</sup> (Rifkin, 2006). He goes on to say that: “The cultivation and expansion of needs is the antithesis of wisdom. It is also the antithesis of freedom and peace. Every increase of needs tends to increase one’s dependence on outside forces over

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<sup>272</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 395

<sup>273</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 207

which one cannot have control, and therefore increases existential fear. Only by a reduction of needs can one promote a genuine reduction in those tensions which are the ultimate causes of strife and war” In a low-entropy society, the individual is expected to practice frugality and mindfulness, rather than what today’s norm suggests: mindless and superfluous purchasing and disposing. In mindfulness, we begin to understand the impact of each of our choices, the lifecycle of each physical item. This, in turn, allows us to find the divine in the mundane, healing our relationship with the earth.

4.8 *Embodiment & Embeddedness*: Just as one cannot expect to understand full that which one does not love, so too can we not expect love that with which we do not interact. Personal interaction with earth is lost on the vast majority of our American population which resides in Urban environments. We see value in human-human contact, and even human-non-human animal contact. What about earth to human? Can that be just as stimulating, comforting, etc? Philosophies like ‘rewilding’ suggest that by playing with our embeddedness in the physical cosmos, we come in contact with Truth. This play can occur in many ways, from walking barefoot in the forest, hiking through mountains or hills, or foraging for wild plants and mushrooms in natural landscapes to become acquainted with the healing properties of the earth. But especially through engaging in small-scale agriculture in our own living spaces via outdoor and indoor gardening may we understand the sanctity of not only play, but work. “Our society is engrossed with ‘labor saving’ devices which can remove from human hands all work functions. Pau scales reflect our attitudes toward work: those who labor with their backs and their hands are almost universally at the bottom of the scale; white-collar executives who spend their work time

behind desks are at the top.”<sup>274</sup> In a low-entropy society, human labor is hallowed as an activity that “help us to know who we really are.”<sup>275</sup> This labor, labor which yields a product that enriches our bodies, psyches, and souls, helps us to come into knowing the holiness of our own embeddedness in the physical cosmos.

#### 4.9 *Mystical Spirituality:*

*“Every material action has a corresponding spiritual action... they are the same action”*<sup>276</sup>–

Robert Bunge

The confluence of the immanent and the transcendent pervades the social ecologist’s. Despite the abundant mention of the immanence of the divine and transcendence of the mundane in nearly all religious texts, the mainstream observant tend toward a more performative approach to reaching god, often missing the truth that god can be found in the air that fills the great mystery of spacetime, the curious diligence of our bodies and their many functions, and in all that we cannot hope to know. The question of how mysticism serves as both an escape and a deeply engaged interaction with the “real world” sparks a further question: what is the “real world”? Reality, to me, is not synonymous with truth. What is real is what exists. But what exists is not necessarily true, for our perceptions of the world exist as they are, but are not necessarily tied to any truth about that which is being perceived. Our “reality” is, by virtue of our modes of perception, mundane. The “real world” is, in essence, whatever we perceive the world to be. But,

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 208

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 209

<sup>276</sup> Bunge, Robert. *American Urphilosophie: An American Philosophy Before Pragmatism*. University Press of America, October 31, 1983., 69

in truth, what we perceive to be mundane is, by virtue of it existing under on earth under our great sun in this magnificent solar system in the multiverse, divine. Mysticism allows us to escape the “real world” and enter into truth. It allows those who pursue it to exit the fabrication of perception and into the unadulterated authenticity of what’s so. And, by virtue of all cosmic entities being created by and in the image of God, all of what’s so is extraordinary. To support my elucidation of mystical pursuits as grounded in the truth of the world, I draw on the works and theories of Andrew Sullivan, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, and others. These thinkers, among with countless other mystics, provide sufficient evidence to support the claim that mysticism allows for one to discover the transcendent in the immanent, to embrace a personal relationship with God in order to expand one's sense of self toward a greater whole, and to go forth in building meaningful impact in the “real world” from the strength they gain in their assurance of the divine.

I begin first with mysticism’s emphasis on personal, individual experience with the divine and its place in the whole of the greater web of life. Those who may see mysticism simply as an escape from the entanglement of the concrete entities of our planet often cite its emphasis on personal experience as being anti-community or anti-world. In debunking this myth, it is important to first assert that, due to all things being inextricably linked to the oneness of God, it is simply impossible that an emphasis on one's own experience or relationships could technically be considered selfish or exclusionary, for our own experiences and relationships are deeply entrenched in the cosmic entanglement of the divine. In realizing and accepting this, one may be able to further gauge the importance on the spiritual exercises formulated by Teresa of Avila or St. Ignatius of Loyola. Through meditative prayer, internal excavation, and the daily examen, all

fine examples of mystical practice, the individual is not, in fact, getting in tune with an individualistic, sequestered notion of the self, but rather an expanded, inclusive notion of selfhood which encompasses the divine and all of God's creations. Mary Mellor writes:

For Starhawk, 'earth-based spirituality' is based on immanence, interconnection and community. Immanence is the aliveness of the earth, connectedness is the way that immanence is expressed, community is the goal of a human society in harmony: 'When we understand that everything is interconnected, we are called to a politics and a set of actions that come from compassion, from the ability literally to feel *with* all living beings on the Earth. That feeling is the ground upon which we can build community and come together and take action and find direction.'"<sup>277</sup>

Similarly, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva claim that: "The ecological relevance of this emphasis on "spirituality" lies in the rediscovery of the sacredness of life, according to which life on earth can be preserved only if people again begin to perceive all life forms as sacred and respect them as such."<sup>278</sup> Further, the focus on individualism in direct experiences with God does not imply a limit on the person's ability to go forth with that experience and share it with the greater community, but rather, facilitates a channel through which individuals may go on to enact radical and necessary change.

Mystical practice allows one to cognitively converge the mundane and the extraordinary, allowing the "real world" and the "spiritual world" to collapse into one truly awesome plane.

Andrew Sullivan, in his 2016 piece entitled "I Used to Be a Human Being," explicates the human

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<sup>277</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 103

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

path to our current disquieting state of informational inundation and synthetic reality. He attributes our disenchantment with or even neglect of that which surrounds us to, in modern day, our addiction to our screens. After putting himself through what one could accurately refer to as “treatment,” for his addiction, he finally reached what he refers to as “spiritual reconciliation.” He finally, perhaps for the first time, could feel himself as a holy vessel under a starry sky blotted by street lights. Sullivan’s treatment, though, was not pharmaceutical or psychological: it was mystical. His path to observing the world as God included seclusion, meditation, and deep and honest inquiry into the trauma and pain which swum around the deepest dimensions of his soul. Without realizing it, Andrew Sullivan was following St. Teresa of Avila’s steps to meeting god. He, without realizing it, found himself at the door of his interior castle. In turn, he met God, although not in Jesus’s form, and entered into holy union with God. Sullivan now lives in and with God, his eyes open to God’s watermark on all that is. Jesuit spirituality explicates this truth in its advocacy of “finding God in all things.” And, as modern radical Jesuits reinforced and intensified this notion in the 20th century, the pursuit of realizing the transcendent in the immanent now motivates schools of individuals to protect God’s virtue in through means of radical activism. Mysticism allows its practitioners to be in “radical amazement” of the world, as Rabbi Abraham Heschel would phrase it, so that they may then go on to enact the loving care necessary to effect change in what most would consider to be the “real world.”

There is sufficient evidence that suggests that those who have a strong and well-maintained spiritual practice are those who make the greatest impact. Along with experience and belief, religion and spiritual practice is also very much about action. Without a deep and richly colorful spiritual life, one cannot authentically pursue justice on the ground, for one would be

fundamentally misguided in their approach to justice and conservation of the sanctified. Mary Mellor writes: “Political change will come from a spiritual approach combined with political struggles over the fight for immediate survival. In the end everyone can unite on the ‘material base’ that ‘all women and all men have a body which is directly affected by the destructions of the industrial system.’”<sup>279</sup> We must be in loving communion with the holiness present in all things in order to enact loving change in the world. Without personal awareness of the divine in all things, an awareness which can be attained only through a transient yet permanently-impactful relationship with the divine, any solution we may try to enact will be shallow or hollow. Those “solutions” will end up creating even more problems. Pedro Arrupe, Father Dean Brackley, Mohandas Gandhi, Malcolm Shabazz, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, and countless other changemakers throughout the history of humankind have applied their robust spiritual practices to aid them in constructing substantial contributions and necessary adjustments to shape of our institutions, worldviews, and relationships. Those changemakers did not manifest their theories from vacuous mindspace, but, rather, gleaned prophetic wisdom from the abundant divinity in their surroundings. Each of these individuals embodied the being-in-the-worldness touted by Jesuit activists across the globe, rendering them capable of being more deeply entrenched in the immanent by way of accessing the transcendent. But, as previously explicated, their relationships with the divine were not courses of escape, but rather channels by which they could be in tune with the divine while completing seemingly-mundane tasks or facing God’s ugly face in tragic forms.

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

Mysticism is not some far-off, elitist, competitive pursuit. This is a misconception. To focus on the sacred and private domain of the soul is to, in many senses, be in touch with the essence of being. Mysticism is internal, not external. Sure, it implies some sense of detachment from aspects of the “real world” which cause one to be blinded and subject to duress. If this is to be thought of as an escape, let it be considered an escape from the bondage of falsified perceptions of existence. Let mysticism be considered an escape *into* the true essence of the world. And let it, for the sake of continuity with its impact on social progress, be given due credit for inspiring some of the most institutionally and spiritually impactful figures within our human community. Those whose legacies boast wide-spread pervasive influence and those whose impacts continue to live without credit in the souls of those they’ve touched can advocate for mysticism’s role in the shaping of their own awareness and strength. Mysticism aids us through the processes of coming into knowing ourselves as God, as being God, together, as one.

Roger Gottlieb outlines the ways in which spirituality is deeply enmeshed in environmentalism. He uses a quote by John Burroughs, famous environmentalist, that touches on the deeply spiritual and moving quality of nature: “Nature we have always with us, an inexhaustible storehouse of than which moves the heart, appeals to the mind, and fires the imagination- health to the body, stimulus to the intellect, and joy to the soul.”<sup>280</sup> His description of nature is one that could be used to describe many understandings of god. Gottlieb goes on to discuss a central tenet of the destruction of speciesist hierarchy: ego death. He writes: “of the many religious experiences to which wilderness gives rise, one deserves special mention: a sense

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<sup>280</sup> Gottlieb, Roger S. *A greener faith: religious environmentalism and our planet's future*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010., 152



of the dissolution of the ego, of the boundaries that sharply divide one's own self from others,"<sup>281</sup> going on to quote Perschel: "We have no hope unless we infuse the debate over the environment with the deep emotional and spiritual connections that it warrants and that will be required for a great social transformation."<sup>282</sup> The poignancy of his assertion that the dissolution of ego forms much of the bedrock of religious environmentalism, and that, therefore, environmentalism is deeply spiritual, rings so true to me. When appealing to those who don't prioritize our natural world, it's often assumed that we should keep the conversation merely pragmatically economical. But I think that misses the point. When appealing to those who don't prioritize our natural world, we should be appealing to *them*, as individuals, with souls and the desires for fulfillment. Making economic sense isn't radical, and therefore, isn't truly sustainable (as my thesis claims). In order to achieve peak sustainability, in order to truly transform our systems into ones that last or even ones that create net positive outputs, we must collectively and individually open our hearts to what it really means to be connected and fulfilled: buying a new sweater or car, or bathing ourselves in the late-afternoon sun amongst the elms and maples? This brings in another important, pragmatic problem, which is the issue of sustaining those moments of fulfillment. Gottlieb writes: "Yet to keep such experiences from from being little more than passing moments of emotional uplift, we need to realize that their real function is not momentary exaltation, but to inspire us to bring holiness or love of nature into every aspect of our lives."<sup>283</sup> This is where, for Gottlieb, ritual comes in. In chapter 6, he writes: "rituals are felt to bring us closer to the wider

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 158.

world of divine energies.”<sup>284</sup> Developing a spiritual morning ritual of meditation, yoga, intentional eating, and writing in my journal *completely* changes how the rest of our days will go. We are more likely to have patience with ourselves and others. We are more likely to take the extra step to brighten someone else’s day. Our positive impacts grow with the maintenance of a regular spiritual ritual.

4.10 *Education*: What cannot be downplayed in the pursuit of a mindfully-created version of reality is the role and shape of education. Educational institutions breed young individuals in a context which informs them of the ways the world should be. Considering the existing traditional organon of education in the United States, one need not wonder why we find ourselves in a compartmentalized, shallowly understood, competitive world. Marc Warren highlights the need for a “new organon of education,” in which “... mere curriculum extension or revision is insufficient, and that a more fundamental methodological change both in ways of teaching and in ways of thinking is necessary, if we are to achieve the objectives of reorientation and integration so obviously required and so ardently sought.”<sup>285</sup> (266). It is not only the particular content of education that must be revised, but also the educational schema that must be widened and sharpened. Authentic and deep education is not the public classroom. Students need the captivating energy of the outdoors, the empowerment of creation, and the safety of open inquiry and curiosity. If we are to collectively must come into knowing that historically-normative ways of being that come in conflict with the systems of the natural world are the same historically-normative ways of being that come in conflict with the liberation, empowerment, and

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>285</sup> Warren, Mark R. *Fire in the Heart: How White Activists Embrace Racial Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010., 226

support of the other and the self, we must learn our own history through untraditional media. If we are to come into being an environmentally literate species, we must conserve the child in nature as we would an endangered species. If we are to continuously learn from our environment and unlearn false notions of truth, we must be educated in the fact that Ignorance is *not* a solvable problem, but rather an inescapable part of the human condition. Our current modes of education train the young person in playing the games of the marketplace. But, as David Orr stated it:

The plain fact is that the planet does not need more "successful" people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every shape and form. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these needs have little to do with success as our culture has defined it.

The goal of education should not be mastery of subject matter, but the cultivation of ones ability to learn from anything or anyone. No student should graduate without understanding how to analyze resource flows and without the opportunity to participate in the creation of real solutions to real problems. No student should graduate without proficient environmental literacy. No student should graduate without learning how to take care of their own body and mind. We cannot rely on parents to fulfil these roles, for they were not educated in these subjects either, and their experiences render them biased. "The job of the school is to teach so well that family background is no longer an issue."<sup>286</sup> We should *all* be studying tolerance, compassion, and effective communication. We should *all* be studying the authentic history of our own nations.

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<sup>286</sup> King, Martin Luther. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* New York: Harper & Row, 1967., 193

Frederick Douglass wrote: “the sooner the wrongs of the whole human family are made known, the sooner those wrongs will be reached.”<sup>287</sup> Without a new organon of education, one which is concerned more so with the *why* of things as opposed to the *how*,<sup>288</sup> we cannot create a new generation of peace-builders and ecologically-motivated design thinkers.

## Chapter 5. The Crucial Role of the Individual

5.1 *Ego-Death*: Perhaps the most malignant and powerful force contributing to the combined wreckage of the planet and the human person is the pervasive belief that the role of the individual is null. By shifting responsibility onto ‘the powerful,’ the individual is effectively stripping themselves of the infinite power they own. Abraham Joshua Heschel famously stated: “While some are guilty, all are responsible.” This is due to the fact that the whole of our reality is, in fact, a manifestation of its parts. To dismiss the power that each of us holds in affecting change is to actively submit to the injustices of our world. The truth is, we can do absolutely anything we commit wholeheartedly to doing. Unfortunately, that little involuntary voice which chirps and echoes through a loudspeaker in our mindspace, what I refer to as the ‘ego,’ will use every trick in its book to convince us otherwise. Consider, for a moment, the voice occurring in your mind right now. You might be thinking: “What voice?” Well, I mean *that* voice, the one that’s asking: “what voice?” That’s your ego. You might think that it’s actually you, but bear with me for a moment. Contemplate the messages shared by that voice on any given day. Consider

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<sup>287</sup> Foner, Philip Sheldon. *Frederick Douglass, Selections from His Writings*. New York: International Pub., 1968., 18

<sup>288</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 232

that it narrates every moment for you as you observe the world. Do you ever find yourself disagreeing with your own thoughts? Do you ever find yourself thinking [about] things you'd rather not? How can it be that if that voice is you, you're capable of disagreeing with it, let alone you're capable of being in dialogue with it? From Freud to Buddha, Hegel to Kierkegaard, notions of ego and identity have retained significant consistency. While we're conscious, our ego, the initial voice, tells us lies and mythic tales *constantly*. It tells us that we're underqualified or overqualified, that we're right to be afraid of fantastical non realities, that experiences we undergo are objectively 'good' or 'bad.' And it reinforces our blind trust in it by telling us that our identities are compulsory, that they're etched in our stone being. Instinctively, we believe what the ego tells us, and we conflate its assertions about who or what we are with our identities. But, as many thinkers would have it, this is a falsehood. We are not, in fact, that voice. This is where a hermeneutics of the self a la Michel Foucault comes in. By inquiring about the truth of the self and the distortions of our perceptions of it, we can come into knowing if our interpretation is or is not in authentic alignment with the pursuit of truth rather than the self-serving bolstering of one's own opinions. Soren Kierkegaard offers us a valuable interpretation that rectifies this common philosophical quandary of the duality of the self. He writes: "What is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation [which accounts for it] that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but [consists in the fact] that the relation relates itself to its own self."<sup>289</sup> In other words, the "self" is not only defined by the quality or content of the initial relationship one has with ones internal narration, but the secondary relation which one has to the initial relationship. Who we are is not

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<sup>289</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, and Walter Lowrie. *The Sickness Unto Death*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.

how or what we think, but how we think about the way we think about what we think about. Who we are is the mode by which we discern the value and quality of our relationship to our initial thoughts. All self-help culture and wisdom gets at this truth that our identities are, in fact, chosen by way of the way we choose to judge our treatment of ourselves and our treatment of others. We are the informed and intentional or passive and complacent choice to agree or disagree with that impulsive, ceaseless narration. We are the choices we make about how loud we keep the volume dial turned up on our ego and the choices we make about how to respond to it. We are, in short, what we choose to say about who we are. If we choose to be insecure, unattractive, fearful, we embody those things, we become insecurity, unattractiveness, and fear. If we choose to be loving, mindful, and humble, we embody those and become love, mindfulness, and humble. Our minds are mere vessels for our relationship to the relationship to our egos. This relationship, as Kierkegaard would have it, is in disrepair unless we are trained in modes of effective and loving communication with that often annoying megaphone in our minds. If we are not trained in this discernment, then we're privy to believing in any false meaning handed to us by our egos. This is the problem of the myth of meaning.

Yuval Noah Harari writes: “*Any* meaning that people ascribe to their lives is just a delusion.”<sup>290</sup> This truism, as explicated in the earlier chapter about social construction and language, may seem dismal and disheartening to most. This is perhaps why we ignore engaging with it, and why, on his 1977 lecture tour of the United States, E.F. Schumacher noted: “The most urgent need of our time is and remains the need for metaphysical reconstruction, a supreme effort to bring clarity into our deepest convictions with regard to the questions What is Man?

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<sup>290</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 391

Where does he come from? and What is the purpose of Life?”<sup>291</sup> But consider for a moment that, if all meaning is a delusion, we’re then given free reign to *choose* whatever meanings *work*? For example, if our optional meanings for felt discomfort with and dissatisfaction for the state of the world are *either* a) we’re all doomed and should submit to the state of the world, or b) this is a unique opportunity for us to affect meaningful and ultimately pleasurable change by building loving communities of resistance, our decision of meaning-ascription will ultimately decide the fate of the future. So too is true of the chosen nature of our identities. Simone De Beauvoir, from an existentialist feminism perspective, famously played on this idea in terms of the oppression of women by suggesting that “mastery has moved from being a colonization and domination to a ‘story’ or an ‘identity’, in which women are complicit.”<sup>292</sup> Ásta Sveinsdóttir, from a metaphysical social constructionist perspective, further details this notion by writing: “When an entity in power forms a conception of people it has power over, the people have to respond to being conceived of in that way. They can take on that conception as their own, or they can try to resist.”<sup>293</sup> Of course, this becomes highly problematic when referring to systems of oppression are linked to state-sponsored violence. When one's life is in imminent danger or their movement or communication is physically barred, it is unfair and wrong to name that person as complicit in their own oppression. This is where victim-blaming can be undoubtedly deemed unacceptable. The problem thickens, though, when victimhood turns into self-victimization, when ones

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<sup>291</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 206

<sup>292</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 115

<sup>293</sup> Sveinsdóttir, Ásta. (2015) Social Construction. *Philosophy Compass*, 10: 884–892. Doi: 10.1111/phc3.12265., 886

“victim” status is so tightly clung to that the person in question ends up oppressing themselves. Other animals do not behave in this way; they do not fear what is not imminent dangerous.

In non-human nature, the emphasis is always placed on *what works*. Humans are the only animals, so far as we can tell, whose egos guide them to constantly believe in what is simply not true. If we are to pursue radical social ecology, we cannot understand the importance of the dissolution of the ego. Nature does not judge, it just does what works in order to succeed, in an energy efficient manner, and contribute to all parties reaching their highest potential. By coming into knowing the fraudulence of our ego and the self-sabotaging intuitive belief in its distortions, we may learn how to quiet and ignore that voice. This can be done in various ways, but perhaps the simplest and most accessible is the practice of meditation. In meditating, one trains their mind to quiet the noise, clear it out, and make space for creation and truth. Once this space is made, we come into a mode of being which allows us to *truly* hold space for the words and energies of others, rendering us more capable of forming authentic and deep connections with the other. Scott Pratt writes: “Civility does not demand that one simply give up believing something, but rather that one adopt an attitude that will entertain the possibility of believing something else, and attitude that can promote belief- the attitude of humility.”<sup>294</sup> An approach of openness, a willingness to *try* new ways of doing things, can only be possible if and only if we resist the stronghold of our egos.

The practice of humility is grounded in the notion of ego death, of silence in the mindspace, of openness where there was once a flurry of false objects and notions. This

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<sup>294</sup> Scott L. Pratt, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 212



emptiness allows, too, for the creation of a new, more intentionally-chosen personal identity.

During his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Martin Luther King, Jr. prophetically exalted:

I refuse to accept the idea that the ‘isness’ of man’s present nature make him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal ‘oughtness’ that forever confronts him...I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into hell of thermonuclear destruction. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.<sup>295</sup>

It is, ultimately, our attachment to our “isness” which holds us back from writing new narratives, from having the mindspace to imagine and create a utopia. While some are oppressed by man-made systems, all are oppressed by the instincts of our minds. How can we expect to see a change in the systems which have us as their parts if we hope they stay the same? It is only by deepening our alignment with our environment that we can imagine and create systems which do the same. For this reason, Rifkin writes: “Until we realize that revelation and cosmic consciousness is available to everyone at all times, we will never accept full responsibility now for our every action and our relationship to the world around us. Instead, we will continue to rationalize our errors and omissions as being the result of our less than enlightened state in the collective becoming process. IN other words, because we are not yet totally conscious, therefore, we do not yet have to be totally responsible.”<sup>296</sup> The truth is, unlike any other invasive species, we have a choice not to be. We simply don’t *have* to oppress ourselves or the other, regardless of whether the other is a human or non-human entity. By pulling ourselves out of the lense of our

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<sup>295</sup> King, Martin Luther, and James Melvin. Washington. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: Harper, 1991., 225/6

<sup>296</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 259

systems, their myths and stories, and assessing what *truly* works in pursuit of a minimally-entropic, maximally regenerative world, we can truly practice deep biomimicry, finding ourselves in deep and easeful flow with the movement of time.

*5.2 An Expanded Sense of Self:* Dissipation of the individualistic ego or identity allows expansion of our periphery to include the complex, the intersectional, and often the universal. It melts the barriers between the human, the world, and the environment into ones that rise when necessary, but remain sheer and malleable. In truth,

We are each a continuum, embodying in our presence everything that has preceded us, and representing in our own becoming all of the possibilities for everything that is to follow. Because every event that ever was or will be is interconnected, we share the ultimate responsibility for the infinite past and future. What we do in this world reverberates into the remotest corner of the universe, affecting everything else that exists. How we choose to live our lives is not only our own individual concern. It is of concern to everything, because our actions touch everything.”<sup>297</sup>

Because our actions touch everything, and because all actions touch everything, we must come into knowing that we are but one cell in the organism of the cosmos. From a mereologically monistic perspective, there is only one fundamental level, from which we all spring. We are mere gears in a greater whole. By coming into seeing ourselves this way, by choosing to realize our *actual* identity, we each may evolve past the fundamentalist individualism which plagues our industrial society. Via a radical and expansive “I” or “we,” one which sees all entities, living and

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<sup>297</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 256

not, as brethren, the tragedy of the commons is no longer. When individuals act independently according to their own self-interest, and their “self” is associated only with their physical form, they behave contrary to the common good of all users by depleting that resource through their collective action. If their sense of self were expanded, they’d know that the frustration or suffering of their neighbor by their own hand is, in fact, an act of self-harm, for we are all ecologically and cosmically entangled. “Care flows naturally if the ‘self’ is widened and deepened so that protection of free nature is felt and conceived as protection of oneself.”<sup>298</sup>

From this perspective, we have failed to protect ourselves. Harari writes:

We can congratulate ourselves on the unprecedented accomplishments of modern *Sapiens* only if we completely ignore the fate of all other animals... if we accept a mere tenth of what animal-rights activists are claiming, then modern industrial agriculture might well be the greatest crime in history. When evaluating global happiness, it is wrong to count the happiness only of the upper class, of Europeans or of men. Perhaps it is also wrong to consider only the happiness of humans.”<sup>299</sup>

Bernard Boxill warns of our selectiveness when discerning who or what deserves our sympathy.

Sympathy tends to:

...move us to identify with those we think are most like us; that is, those in whom we notice a considerable resemblance. What this resemblance will be varies. It may be subtle, and it may not even be literally a real resemblance, and one that is not only real but also conspicuous, inborn, and invariant. This is so for the fairly obvious reason that,

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<sup>298</sup> Weinberg, Adam S., and Mary Mellor. "Feminism and Ecology." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 452. doi:10.2307/2655330., 137

<sup>299</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 379

all else equal, average people will notice resemblances rather than imagine them; and, almost by definition, will more easily notice resemblances that are conspicuous, invariant and not readily disguised, rather than those that are subtle, variable, and readily disguised. But, as we have seen, the resemblances between those of the same race are conspicuous, invariant, and not readily disguised. Consequently, all else equal, most people will tend to identify with those of their own race, or will be more easily persuaded to identify with those of their own race rather than with those of other races.<sup>300</sup>

Boxill is referring here explicitly to colloquial conceptions of race, but the same holds true in reference to species distinctions. By allowing ourselves to see the self as “a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosm,”<sup>301</sup> we may come into knowing the truth that all concrete entities are more similar and closely related than initial observation might suggest. Adam Smith’s misguided capitalist schema of ‘egoism as altruism’ might not be so misguided, after all, if acting in one’s own favor is done with a radically expanded sense of selfhood.

Just as the removal of the ego can be achieved or experienced through meditation, so too can the expansion of the reconstruction of the self. Particularly in regards to breath. Luce Irigaray writes: “the world resembles a single breath,”<sup>302</sup> reminding her reader that as the universe pulses, as the tides rise and fall, as the moon waxes and wanes, and as the day and night alternate, the cosmos inhales and exhales. In bringing our attending to our breath, to the source of life, we experience the pulsing of collective consciousness which is the Divine.

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<sup>300</sup> Boxill, Bernard (1992). Two traditions in African American political philosophy. *Philosophical Forum* 24:119-119., 132

<sup>301</sup> Dooling, D. M., and Paul Jordan-Smith. *I Become Part of It: Sacred Dimensions in Native American Life*. New York: Parabola, 2002., 246

<sup>302</sup> Irigaray, Luce. *To Be Two*. New York: Routledge, 2001., 6

5.3 *Tranquilization and Distraction*: Tuning into our breath can be immensely challenging for most. So how are masses of individuals expected to go even deeper in deciphering the facade-clad maze of inner personhood? Well, it's actually not a challenging maze to complete if you're fully awake and aware. The challenge comes in the fact that the average person in today's fast-paced, highly-technological society is, essentially, tranquilized. Between the use of pharmaceuticals, consumption of chemicals in our food which block our neurological pineal glands, excess material accumulation, and the fact that we see the world and communicate with one another through smartphone screens and cameras, our bodies, brains, and spirits are clouded. In order for our horizon to fit within the environment's, we must rid our's of toxins, distractions, and ego. Food is important in this as it literally forms our brain chemistry to be either human-made (ego-bolstering) or earth made (natural energy-influenced and bolstering the universal, as well as the body as an extension of Gaia). Food is the fundamental means through which blinders to the truth of the world are either applied or removed. With our blinders on, we will never reach a compassionate relationship with the earth because we, as a species, will never individually, and certainly not collectively, see it. The same is true of our material consumption. Yuval Noah Harari points out that "we hardly notice how ubiquitous our stuff is until we have to move it to a new house. Foragers moved house every month, every week, and sometimes even every day, toting whatever they had on their backs."<sup>303</sup> The amount of 'stuff' in our lives clouds the necessity of more deeply functional and regenerative aspects of life. And, if bad food and material abundance weren't enough, the American people are *literally* being tranquilized by

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<sup>303</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 43

pharmaceutical drugs. Opioids and anti-anxiety medications are doled out like candy, creating an entire generation of addicted, barred-out youth who have no grasp on the necessary and meaningful work associated with confronting fear head-on. In a reliance to psychiatric drugs where there is no need, there is less opportunity to train in self-preservation, resiliency, general self-governance/autonomy. How we can expect a nation of individuals to enact democracy when they cannot discern the means to govern themselves?

*5.4 Difficult but Rewarding Work:* Because our egos attempt *repeatedly* and *constantly* to shackle us to their messages and self-proclaimed authority, loosening ourselves from their grip can be at once painful and frightening. But if we would like to expect to participate in mutually-creative relationships and community development with others, we must learn that authentic cooperation can only occur when each person exercises judgement rather than bowing to arbitrary authority.<sup>304</sup> The same is true of creative cooperation with ourselves. We must learn to recognize that fear, perhaps more so than any other human experience, is grounded in cognitive constructs of what plainly isn't so. Because of our culturally-enforced obsession with subverting extinction, we actively abstain with recognizing the truth that we are closer in nature to earth worms than we are to any immortal god. In demolishing our previously-conceived sense of self, we come into realizing our temporary nature. Rifkin touches on this notion by writing: "The whole world is temporary. In its finiteness, we experience our own. In its vulnerability we experience our own. In its fragile nature we experience our own."<sup>305</sup> This temporary nature of our being terrifies most.

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<sup>304</sup> Green, Judith M. *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999., viii

<sup>305</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *Entropy*. New York, NY, The Viking Press, 1980., 257

The average person roams the earth in perpetual fear of their own death. But unless we're in immanent physical danger, fear can only be associated with an imaginative tale of but one possibility that the future might entail. That fear binds us into ways of being which, by virtue of our embodiment of our thoughts, inevitably manifest that which we fear. With the combined understanding that fear is at once grounded in nothing concrete and that fear is a self-fulfilling prophecy, we can begin to embody fear's opposite: love. I invite you to lovingly confront your fears, for, as Malcolm Shabazz put it: "We must learn that we are masters of our own destiny, but only when we exercise the maximum efforts to get things done."<sup>306</sup> Putting in that effort might not be fun to all. But, if we take a hard look at our lives, at the transient nature of pleasure and the perpetual dissatisfaction our cravings provide, we may come into realizing that "maybe it isn't so important whether people's expectations are fulfilled and whether they enjoy pleasant feelings. The main question is whether people know the truth about themselves."<sup>307</sup> (Harari, 396)

There is nothing which takes more effort than learning how to assert power over our fear. But there is also nothing more liberating than being in alignment with Truth.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion: The Absurdity of Sustainability & The Pragmatism of Hope**

### *6.1 Absurdity in Sustainability*

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<sup>306</sup> Boyd, Herb, Ron Daniels, Karenga, and Haki R. Madhubuti. *By Any Means Necessary: Malcolm X-- Real, Not Reinvented: Critical Conversations on Manning Marable's Biography of Malcolm X*. Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 2012., 139

<sup>307</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah., et al. *Sapiens: a brief history of mankind*. London, Vintage Books, 2015, 396.

Environmental movements transform as our human society and its mistreatment of the planet proliferate and evolve. As our understandings of the nature of our world and our approaches to self-correction transform, so too does our language. Ecological buzz-words pop into the common vernacular and, inevitably, get replaced by new ones. Global warming became climate change; eco-friendly became eco-efficient became green. Today's most popular yet elusive buzzword is sustainability. To most, it can be synonymous with 'eco-friendly' or 'green,' but in taking a closer look at the true meaning of the word, it suggests something deeper. For an action to be sustainable, it must be able to be *sustained*, meaning, it does not consume resources faster than it replenishes them. This seems well and good when considering a positive shift to a conservation ethic. But, upon closer inspection, sustainability has come to be practices as stripping the earth of its resources as *slowly* as possible so as to extend human life on earth, life which is intrinsically and necessarily violent. This enters us into a Sisyphus-esque pursuit of repeatedly attempting to subvert natural law, inevitable extinction, and the truth that environmental compassion does not manifest as slowly extractivist, but rather, conservative and regenerative. Environmental pursuits discuss 'the destruction of the planet,' but that's not accurate. There are plenty of animals, rats and cockroaches, for example, that are thriving in the environments we've created for them. This planet has seen this much carbon in the atmosphere. This planet has seen less species diversity. This planet has seen less habitable conditions than these. The planet will have many more epochs before the sun explodes and creates a new and unimaginable future. Time will persist without us there to narrate it. At the end of the day, nothing really matters, there is no 'ideal,' only what is. From stardust we came and to stardust we will return. The question is: how do we live well? How do we live wisely, in a way which values



the deeply-felt quality of our lives more so than arbitrarily-chosen, societally-enforced, quantitative measurements of well-being? Intersectional environmentalism should not be about fighting climate change, but should encompass the deep necessity to heal our relationship with that which bore us. It's about being in loving awe of the planet, not simply attempting to patch it up after each act of abuse. Climate disruption is not an ecological problem, it's a human one.

*6.2 The Pragmatism of Hope:* To conclude, it is imperative that I highlight the pragmatism of hope. The bad news of today's world begs us to submit to the 'is-ness' of what is so. The question of whether or not there is hope, is up to whether or not we hope. For, without hope, we will not be compelled to act. And, without action, there is no hope. Oren Lyons states that "peace is not simply the absence of violence but can only exist through the vigorous efforts of clear-thinking people to eradicate injustice in the world."<sup>308</sup> (38). Similarly, Martin Luther King, Jr. famously asserts:

"Time is neutral... We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of [persons] willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy, and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood."<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Matthiessen, Peter, and Daniel K. Inouye. *Exiled in the Land of the Free: Democracy, Indian Nations, and the U.S. Constitution*. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publ., 1992., 38

<sup>309</sup> King, Martin Luther. "Letter from Birmingham Jail." 16 Apr. 1963.

Our transformation to a mutually-creative human family engaged in a mutually-beneficial relationship with the earth but necessarily come from immediate, voluntary, and proactive assumption of responsibility on the part of the individual. But that responsibility must be enacted not in fierce individualism, but in joining together in grassroots social action.

Reverend Fred Small once said: “Eventually, the environmental movement will prevail. The question is, how many will suffer and how much devastation will be irreversible, before it does?” We must enact change, rooted in hope, right now. And we must complete our work with an eye toward the intersecting oppression of all marginalized peoples. If there’s anything we’ve learned from middle school science class, it’s that the fittest survive. This is true of biology as much as it’s true of epistemology. Progress will continue to progress. Humans will continue to yearn for truth, and we will continue to do our darndest to expose it when we find it. We see this occurring in the increasing normalization of sexual and gender fluidity, procreation between various races and religions, female empowerment, artistic and personal expression, activism, empowerment of others, and spiritual introspection. Our species is literally dying to evolve past evil, corruption, exploitation, monopoly of consciousness, and disconnect. For with those things, we cannot survive, and we cannot evolve. May we choose to join with the fittest, to evolve past hatred, fear, selfishness, to evolve past ego. We have never been here before. To ease into this truth and open to a creative future we must be at once innovative and imitative, technical and deeply spiritual. Let us imagine a real and possible utopia to that we may embody what it takes to create it. Let us feel into the quality of our being to that this utopia may emphasize the immeasurable. May we speak a new truth, because we can. May we dissolve fear and embody love, because we can. I dare you to hope.

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