

**Human Rights:
An Earth-based Ethics**

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There exists the misconception that rejecting strong anthropocentrism or human-centeredness equates with denying or rejecting the special nature of human-human relationship. Drawing attention to and calling for care towards nonhumans does not disadvantage humans. An ecocentric ethics promotes an ethics of care that is inclusive of all life, human and nonhuman, whereby the kinship and welfare of humans are neither diminished nor neglected. All life benefits from an ecocentric approach. An ecophilosophical perspective needs to be a foundational element for the theory and practice of human rights. Although I will be discussing human rights specifically, we should keep in mind that the ecophilosophical basis to human rights that will be introduced advocates for the rights of all life, not only human life. Indeed, the subject of nonhuman rights will be understood as integral to human rights, and a necessary consideration within any honest effort to understand and help resolve situations characterized by extreme violations of human rights, in particular military conflict and terrorism.

To what does the term 'human rights' refer? Although rules and the concept of the dignity of humans have long existed and have continued to evolve, we can consider that it is not until relatively recently that the term 'human rights' has become common in philosophical and political discourse, and has been central to the ethical attempt to see all as equal. A

history of human rights could note that religions and past civilizations had social laws, however we could also observe lawful inhumane social relations, such as slavery. The development of human rights through the British Magna Carta (1215), the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), The American Bill of Rights (1789), Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1792) or the Geneva Convention (1864), are significant but different to the contemporary scope of human rights discourse. Robyn Eckersley charts the political history of human rights and states that "rights now form a part of ordinary language."¹ 'Human rights' seems in some ways to be a uniquely modern notion, having grown into a global discourse only in the past fifty years.² Arguably, human rights could be described as a predominantly post World War II movement. The crimes against humanity perpetrated by fascist powers consolidated a new resolve to improve the human condition, though the modern commitment to developing human rights cannot be attributed solely to reactions against these atrocities. We repeatedly witness humans doing terrible things to other humans in many contexts other than WWII, or for that matter in situations other than war. However, it is surely important to single out modern war as a context for extreme violations of human rights. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, the American led 'War Against Terror' that has followed, and ongoing instances of terrorism and military activity that are threatening communities world-wide, such as terrorist bombings, have compelled many of us to seek renewed insight into humanity's strengths and flaws. This project has today become a part of human rights development.

In 1945 the United Nations was established, and in 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. Consisting of a preamble and thirty articles, the simple sentences of the Declaration each bear a message, a hope: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." "Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."³ Reading the Declaration from beginning to end takes about ten minutes and despite its ideal vision for humanity – or precisely because of this vision – the experience can be disturbing. Readers cannot help but recognise the acute disconnection between the ideal and the real, and are struck by the awareness that human rights are commonly violated. While not a legally binding document, the Declaration provides international aspirations and ideals, stating that the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights [is] a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive."⁴

That these ideals are, at the very least, in some form *familiar* to people almost everywhere is an achievement which gives the concept of 'human rights' its global currency and shape. Undoubtedly though, the thoughts and feelings of ordinary people play a significant role in constituting and securing human rights. Ultimately, it is individuals and the individual in relation to community that becomes a manifestation of the practice of human rights. Although human rights appears to be an increasingly familiar concept, an inconsistency between the theory and practice of human rights betrays a critical problem. Increasing numbers of people recognise the notion of human rights, and most governments and social powers throughout the world would claim to recognize others in accord with theoretical definitions of human rights. Yet this apparent consensus around the notion of human rights is doing little to abate the abuse of human rights which goes on, and looks like going on for the foreseeable future.

Given the degree of violations of human rights evident in the context of modern war, it is unsurprising that the predominant subject of human rights discourse is the human-human relationship. Modern ethical inquiry has consolidated within theoretical frameworks what many peoples' life experiences recount to them daily: human coexistence is a critical matter in need of radical change if we are to better our collective reality, if we are to establish some sort of peace for our interconnected present and future lives. I use the words 'we' and 'our' to emphasize how humans belong to a kind *and act upon each other*. Therefore this 'we' does not diminish the fact of human differences but represents it, and does not imply an ideological unity.

In recent decades concern for the human-human relationship has brought attention to the human-nonhuman relationship. The argument that the crises faced by humans do not exist in isolation but are inseparable from environmental crises is seldom rejected outright.⁵ It is clear to many that humans and nonhumans live interdependently – a conviction at the heart of the environmental movement. In 1982 'The World Charter for Nature' was adopted by the UN General Assembly and in 1997 an Earth Charter Commission was formed to oversee a "worldwide, cross-cultural conversation" that produced the 'Earth Charter' document.⁶ The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles "to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace."⁷ It appears similar in form and purpose to the Universal Declaration. Both documents share the same visionary quality and both resonate with a determination to initiate positive change for the future. A crucial difference is the extent to which the Earth Charter's vision for world peace centralizes environmental ethics. Rockefel-

ler describes the Earth Charter as “a declaration of *global interdependence* and universal responsibility.”⁸

Despite the soft legal status of the ideals articulated within the Earth Charter and the Universal Declaration, they may be regarded as sets of principles which influence disciplines and practices that provide direction for humanity, including ethics and international law. They help establish internationally shared principles essential for international or cross-cultural dialogue. For example, the principles of the Earth Charter underlay the World Summit for Sustainable Development, which ostensibly promoted the interdependence of humankind and the natural environment.⁹ The roles of the Earth Charter and Universal Declaration do not extend to identifying “the mechanisms and instruments required to implement [their] ethical and strategic vision.”¹⁰ Acting upon ideals in order to change reality is a collaborative task to be undertaken by the plurality of subjects and their knowledges which construct human culture. I am considering here the contribution of a perspective based in ecophilosophy and environmental ethics.

Ecophilosophy and environmental ethics are raising understanding of human-nonhuman interdependence, and nonhuman value, in an effort to end denial and inaction. Three distinct modes of recognizing nonhuman rights have developed and may be summarized as follows. One approach views nonhuman rights through the condition of human benefit; the perceived worth of nonhuman life is derived from human interest. For example, we should value and prevent the destruction of the river, the fish, the soil, or else we shall destroy ourselves.¹¹ This is a reconfiguration of working to prevent humans abusing humans, but here the abuse is manifested through abuse of the earth. Human responsibility towards the nonhuman is indirect and the value of nonhuman rights precarious. Another mode for developing nonhuman rights has been to extend human rights. Basic human rights are modified, or partly or fully extended to certain nonhumans that are compared to humans. For example, many people understand that animals may possess significant consciousness and are able to suffer from cruelty, and therefore animals should not be subjected to cruel treatment.¹² Nonhuman rights are conferred according to a qualification process that is biased towards human qualities and against nonhuman qualities, so many nonhumans are not recognised or treated by humans as significant beings with rights. Mick Smith is critical of popular animal rights ethicist Peter Singer for this reason: “Singer’s thesis of the expanding circle, and moral extensionism in general, is a graphic representation of anthropocentrism. Humanity sits at the center of a concentrically ordered nature, as the archetype of ethical value – both the measure and the measurer of all things.”¹³ Val Plumwood criticizes Peter Singer and Tom Regan as moral dualists

who continue Cartesian frameworks, and as theorists who “have successfully put some issues about animals on the philosophical and social agenda, but have no larger conceptual resources to critique the rationalist framework of commodification that makes so many animal lives a living hell.”¹⁴ Thus, while we might extend certain rights to animals deemed sentient, those that are not, along with a myriad other entities, such as rivers or forests, are awarded no moral standing. These human-centred modes of developing rights for nonhumans deny them inherent value.

Arguing that nonhumans are inherently valuable, that is, nonhumans have rights independent of human interest or human resemblance, is met with general resistance, which is exceedingly powerful when coming from a dominant modern culture. Consumption by humans is a core tenet of this dominant modern culture. Recognising the inherent value and rights of nonhumans leads to recognising the necessary responsibility and care of humans towards nonhumans, and threatens the ideal, or rather the ideology, of unconditional consumption, because it is nonhumans who are being consumed excessively and without respect.¹⁵ That a foremost cause of humans violating other humans’ rights follows directly from this culture supporting a slight minority of humans who consume excessively and indifferently at the expense of all others, is an established criticism that I will not address directly.¹⁶ For now, I am skeptical of any reasoning which suggests that showing care towards nonhumans compromises human well-being.

If at all, it is the human-centric theories for admitting nonhumans into ethical consideration that are likely to be accepted within the dominating modern culture. Even then, such acceptance of an ethical code is irregularly or improperly conducted into practice. As for valuing nonhumans for their inherent selves – this possible social development is at the farthest peripheries of theoretical ethical consideration, let alone being a code evident in practice within the human-nonhuman relationship typical of the dominant culture.

An argument for human rights may be drawn by examining the foundations of present human rights work. A fundamental cause of the failure of human rights work to achieve an enduring and positive difference can be identified in its underlying reasoning. It seems sound: strengthen human rights by targeting those who appear to violate them. Nearly all human rights work is based upon bettering the human-human relationship. The ideal human-human relationship, the kind envisioned by the Universal Declaration, has been established as the theoretical foundation of world peace. By implication we perceive real human-human relationship as the basic problem. Supposedly, if we fix the way humans treat each other, then the

world's problems will disappear. I partly agree. Without doubt, human beings are today an unprecedented and fierce force. The immediate future of earthly life does appear to be dependent upon what we humans do. However, I would disagree that what we humans do to each other is the essential determinant of peace. I am not sure, in other words, that the mistreatment of humans by humans is the foremost problem.

The centralization of human-human relationships continues into the burgeoning work for nonhuman rights, which is largely developing as secondary to human rights: either as a reinforcement or extension of human rights. It is significant that work for nonhuman rights follows on from work for human rights. The ideal human-human relationship is constructed as a pre-existent, or *a priori* ethical ideal for the human-nonhuman relationship. *Taking human rights as the foundation for nonhuman rights misdirects ethical development.* Although I might proceed by bringing nonhuman rights solely into the foreground, my specific intention here is to develop human rights. Orientating discussion towards the development of human rights *specifically* does not undermine my belief that human and nonhuman rights cannot be treated as exclusive subjects or forked ethical paths. Continual and inevitable recourse to the subject of nonhuman rights will attest this.

My rejection of human-centric ethical development is not driven entirely by the failure of human-centrism to really recognise nonhuman rights. Taking human rights as the foundation for nonhuman rights misdirects ethical theory and practice to the detriment of nonhumans *and humans*. The rest of this discussion aims to clarify how recognizing nonhuman rights independent from human interest lays a true foundation for human rights. Arguably, an ethical human-nonhuman relationship is a prerequisite for an ethical human-human relationship. To support this argument, I'll start by drawing attention to epistemological processes within human-nonhuman abuse, and will continue by considering how violations of human rights by humans originate in human-nonhuman abuse in the context of contemporary war, including terrorism.

If reflecting upon how we relate to others is constitutive of human rights work, then understanding why we practice those relations, or thinking about the *epistemological* foundation of our selves, is critical. The dominant modern relationship between human self and other is shaped by an epistemology of hyperseparation. Modern paradigms of rationality and objectification have constructed others as *radically* other. We might note how common and standard are the critiques that expose modern technoscience, politics and economics as socially powerful and potentially selfish agents that may act to disengage from, marginalise, exclude and control that which gets otherized.¹⁷ There is nothing unfamiliar about humans regarding

themselves as exceptional and superior to the 'other'. History is a chronicle of human mistreatment of the 'other' predominantly identified as nonhuman nature: the human/nature dualism appears in classical epistemology.¹⁸

At present, the extremity of environmental destruction is grossly and dangerously demonstrating the human attitude of superiority towards the other, and underlies the modern human-human relationship forged by epistemic hyperseparation. An inclusion of humans into the prior construction of 'radical nonhuman other' has escalated in the modern world. These humans are identified and otherized as variously continuous with nonhuman nature and thereat discontinuous with the human. Human difference is constructed as radical difference. Human others have typically included people with 'other' skin colour or 'other' religions, cultures or languages, women, the poor, or minorities. In the interest of human rights then, our reconsideration of dominant modern epistemology, and its inherent epistemology of hyperseparation, should be unreserved. This reconsideration, then, involves challenging human/nonhuman, mind/nature, mind/body dualisms.

The ethical implications of centralizing the human-human relationship through an epistemology of hyperseparation are immense. Nonhumans are excluded from ethical concern on the premise that, as a human-human field, ethics is disengaged from the radically other.¹⁹ *Developing from an epistemic rejection of human-nonhuman interrelationship, and subsequently upon the radical exclusion of those classed as 'other', ethics is a flawed agency for human rights.*²⁰ As philosopher and sociologist Mick Smith puts it, "the ethical cannot be located entirely in the systemic interchanges between individual humans. Ethics also has to include our relations to nature; it is a lived multidimensional relation of care for natural (and human) others, a relation that originates in part from the environment itself."²¹

The ethical consequences of human-nonhuman hyperseparation for human-human relationship can be demonstrated readily in the context of war, partly because it regularly devastates the natural environment, but also because there is probably a unanimous view that human rights are violated in the context of war. My intention is to clarify how violations of human rights during war may originate from human-nonhuman hyperseparation.

Analysts can enumerate many causes of war, and probably countless more causes are untold. Certainly though, notions of territory commonly instigate international or intranational conflict. Today's terrifying conflict between Israel and Lebanon is one such example of humans killing each other through powerful convictions of land ownership. The radical otheriza-

tion of nonhuman nature as that without mind or as lifeless (and right-less) supports our understanding of nonhuman nature (such as 'land') as a human resource. Governments interested in national resources and economy value land as commodity and property to be amassed and defended.²² Land figures in war in another basic but highly consequential way. However it is instigated, *warring takes place within the land*. This also applies to terrorism: the psychological expectation of a terrorist attack *taking place within the land* makes the threat acute. I'll consider how the epistemology of hyperseparation operates firstly in war by military conflict and then by terrorism.

Damage by military conflict is generally palpable damage to land or to a place. Bombs that blast the ground apart, radioactive, chemical, biological and nuclear weapons: this abbreviated and inexpert list of modern weaponry is sufficient to signal the disturbing nature of modern war. In this discussion, rather than particularizing a technical inventory of modern implements of war and elaborating upon what precisely these do or have the potential to do (the term 'weapons of mass destruction' is self-explanatory), it is more helpful to question why *challenging the epistemology* that supports such things is not *the* prioritized task in a world where war is frequently, if not continually, witnessed in the modern global context?

The dominant understanding of land and sea as intrinsically lifeless, and therefore as morally valueless, is fundamentally implicated in the violations of human rights. Firstly, the root of many conflicts – the very notion and practice of human ownership of land (the nonhuman) – originates from failing to recognise and denying nonhuman inherent rights. Secondly, as long as land and sea are understood as lifeless, they will remain insignificant and a morally acceptable location for an immoral activity: military conflict. There exists the perception of the land or sea merely as somewhere for war to take place. A region becomes a circumscribed 'war-zone' wherein humans supposedly confine their attacks upon each other. Physical human conflict is the only registered activity in this zone. Or it is at least the only activity of real concern, for land understood as lifeless and morally valueless cannot be understood as that which can be killed or killed with regret. Environmental activist Captain Paul Watson recognises the habitually unrecognised victims of war: "When I see the daily bombing on television, I am not thinking of the Taliban or Bin Laden or even the victims of the absurd concept of 'friendly fire'. My thoughts and concerns go to those species of nonhumans, both plant and animal that are dying under that military assault."²³ Watson pushes us to view the problems of war from beyond the anthropocentric position of perceiving it as an exclusively human crisis. From an ecophilosophical perspective, an absence of ethical consideration

for the nonhuman derived from denying their inherent rights continues into unethical treatment of humans. I have now started to support this claim by putting forward the simple assertion that to accept that war can take place as though *the literal place* does not matter ethically exposes a critical omission and failure in human ethical codes. The illusion of a radically autonomous human self-identity constructed by radical otherisation (and epistemic hyperseparation) is part of the problem.

The complexity of the human relationship to place is not fully comprehended. Military weapons are invented to ensure 'efficient' destruction and this efficiency is derived in part from a particular level of *understanding* of human-nonhuman interrelation. Effective weapons are designed to devastate nonhuman nature precisely *because* human life depends upon water, soil, air, plants, animals and other living things. The impact of war-ravaged land upon humans is incontestable: humans suffer and die along with the suffering and dying more-than-human community of life. Watson writes: "Vietnam was a horrific killing field where humans died alongside elephants, tigers, trees, frogs, water buffalo and birds – burned by napalm, riddled by claymores, incinerated by bombs, defoliated by agent orange."²⁴ War destroyed land equals war destroyed life forms, including people, maybe for unforeseen generations.

If some weapons are designed through a level of understanding human-nonhuman interdependence, on another level the epistemology of hyperseparation counteracts an understanding of human-nonhuman inseparability and conceals the extent of warfare's destruction. Although the land and much life living on (and as) the land is destroyed, this destruction is perceived as localized and isolated. Not only may a nation targeting a locality claim, and possibly believe, that it is not targeting civilians but that it targets national resources, it views itself as discontinuous from the locality and its destruction. The denial of human-nonhuman (or self-other) interrelation and ecological connection is self-destructive. There do not exist ecological boundaries that comply with human notions of territory, no matter how distant warring nations on earth are geographically.²⁵ So called 'localized' destruction of life affects all other life, *including* humans. The conjecture that a 'localized' war initiates widespread impact is not incredible, particularly considering the kind of weaponry used, or threatened to be used, and the numerous wars taking place within the world that are devastating places and people, physically, socially and emotionally.

The epistemology of hyperseparation also operates strongly in terrorism in a number of ways. Firstly, both the terrorists and terrorized perceive each other as *radically* other. In part, this demarcation may be self-cultivated. For the terrorists it amplifies their effect upon the terrorized, and

for the terrorized it justifies constructing the terrorists as radically uncivilized or as the dehumanized other. Otherisation strengthens the perception of self as the civilized and blameless victim. The civilized/uncivilized dichotomy reconfigures the self/other dichotomy, and is derivative of the classical human/nature or human/nonhuman dichotomy.

We can investigate how understanding terrorists as radical others endorses a military response for dealing with terrorism. Earlier I argued that the nonhuman other is excluded from ethical consideration. Denying the ethical status of the nonhuman continues into diminished ethical responsibility towards the other identified as uncivilised/dehumanized human other. Moral accountability of actions towards the other (terrorists) is lessened, or is at least qualified and legitimized in favour of a military response. Depending on who you are and who your other is, some human lives are worth more or less than others. The saying 'violence begets violence' remains unheeded by both the terrorists and those directing the 'War Against Terrorism'.²⁶ Defining 'violence' is partially dependent upon the ethical inclusion of the other (the target of violence) by the self (the sender of violence). The classification of violence, with its ethical implications, is irrelevant to those operating within self-interested ethical frameworks that exclude the other. In other words, what I do is not violence if it is done to a subject outside my ethical framework. Marking the boundary for ethical inclusion and exclusion originates from the perception of human-nonhuman hyperseparation.

With the psychological or emotional target being so significant in terrorist attacks, in some cases it may appear more accurate to locate terrorism in mindscape rather than following my earlier assertion that warring takes place in landscape. The psychological preoccupation with possibility, with 'what if' scenarios, is a key means of maintaining terror beyond the actual event of a physical attack. Nevertheless, psychologically registered possibility remains a highly *situated* threat. The possibility of a terrorist attack taking place is only a possibility and only terrifying in its connection to the possibility that *it takes place in my place*. Furthermore, while psychological abuse is imperative for effective terrorizing, ultimately the psychological domain is physically embedded. Every terrorized mind is embodied, and our bodies, our selves, inhabit physical places that can be targeted, invaded, attacked, bombed, poisoned, etcetera.

An understanding of human dependency upon the nonhuman is apparent within the anxiety that a place may be attacked. The terrified person perceives their self as connected with the place they inhabit. Naturally, perception of human-nonhuman interdependence is clearer within the immediate context. If the air I breathe is contaminated with bio-chemical agents

then I am in danger. Terrorism exploits this context specific perception of human-nonhuman connection by *widely* generating the possibility of *localized* targeting – that something terrible could happen where *I* live. People are not terrified – or are terrified to a much lesser degree – if they feel that an attack on the place which they inhabit or value is a remote possibility. The sense of discontinuity from another place reduces or eliminates terror. For example, much more concern is shown towards nuclear conflict between other countries if the direct fallout could reach *our* country and therefore us.

To some extent, terrorism relies upon the epistemology of hyperseparation by utilizing the deeply established illusion of the self's radical autonomy from the other. The sense of safety fabricated through the illusion of disconnection, can be challenged by terrorist threat only because it has been established in the first place. The strength of illusory safety established by hyperseparation is itself a susceptible target for terrorists. The psychological safety mechanism of confining terrorist attacks to an other place has been largely dismantled. Christian Reus-Smit describes international terrorism as “essentially a faceless and territorially unbound enemy.”²⁷ Hence, the fear and suspicion of any ‘others’ are raised even in relatively stable communities, resulting in tense, hostile social conditions. The sense of safety in disconnection is an *extreme* illusion then vulnerable to being converted into an *inverse extremity of fear*. Without this illusion of safety in disconnection, the threat of attack would be a less effective agent of terror. I am not then claiming that holding an understanding of our connections to the nonhuman and to other places would result in us living with a permanent degree of terror in our recognition that the destruction of landscape, near and far, affects all life including our own. Instead I am wondering, if the dominant epistemology of hyperseparation were reconsidered, if hyperseparation no longer strongly informed what we do and how we understand self, other and world, would we then relate in such destructive unethical ways?

How we relate to each other and overcoming our tendency towards destructive relations remains the preoccupation for those working to establish a level of world peace. However, if efforts to resolve global conflict remain exclusively preoccupied with the relations between human ‘selves’ and ‘others’ an important consideration will be overlooked. Watson writes: “Osama Bin Laden is not the problem nor is George Bush or Saddam Hussein. They will be gone tomorrow and replaced by new hominid clowns. The problem is us. As Pogo once said, ‘We have met the enemy and he is us’.”²⁸ Watson’s words should not be interpreted as a call to intensify our focus upon our human selves as the problem, in the egocentric manner we

have predominantly followed. We might clarify the condition of Watson's "us" by adding that the problem is *us humans in our relationship with the nonhuman other*. The aim is to re-view the global problem by viewing human conflict in connection with the wider earth community. An ecophilosophical approach towards conflict resolution aims to balance the anthropocentric mindset towards human relations with a perception of human relations on a comprehensive scale. The perception of an interdependent earth community takes into account destructive human behaviour as it impacts not only upon humans but also nonhumans. Watson puts this more provocatively and perhaps less carefully, however he better expresses a frustration with the anthropocentric blindspot that turns our focus inwards and away from a biocentric perspective that could help resolve global problems:

So we can either waste our time rooting for this side or that side – West vs. East, North vs. South, Right vs. Left, Muslim vs. Jew vs. Christian vs. Hindu, Conservative vs. Liberal, Communist vs. Capitalist. Or we can turn our back on all these anthropocentric concepts and see the world for what it is – one world, one planet, one complex biodiversity of life whose one purpose is simply to live and let live according to a design that has been billions of years in the making.²⁹

I would like repeat the question I posed earlier: If the dominant epistemology of hyperseparation were reconsidered, if hyperseparation no longer strongly informed what we do and how we understand self, other and world, would we then relate in such destructive unethical ways? Such a question may not be answerable at present, however as the epistemology of human-nonhuman hyperseparation is arguably a foundation for the violation of human and nonhuman rights, it seems likely that overcoming hyperseparation would have profound ethical and political implications. This discussion about war has made clear that epistemology – in particular the epistemology of hyperseparation – may lay the foundations for the violation of human rights.

The misidentification and assumption of the source of violation of human rights as internal human-human relationship has overruled human rights work, preventing the identification of a more primary source of human rights abuse.³⁰ We must consider that abuse of human rights by humans has extended from the initial abuse of nonhuman rights by humans, and then centralize the human-nonhuman relationship.³¹ Coexistence is at the heart of human rights in theory and in (attempted) practice. So far, human rights work has given extensive attention to human-human coexistence, and has posited the ideal human-human relationship as the foundation for world peace. This demonstrates a limited understanding of coexistence.

Developing nonhuman rights independent from human interest also makes a commitment to coexistence – the interdependent coexistence of all earth beings. The greatest danger that is destroying this all-inclusive coexistence, with horrifying momentum, is human activity *that does not honestly recognise or admit human-nonhuman interdependence*. Ecophilosophy seeks to improve human rights by developing the understanding that the epistemology of hyperseparation sustains harmful illusions, in particular the self-denial of not recognizing human-nonhuman relationships as the foundation of human life.

At present, the global human dialogue around the notion of ‘human rights’ has not examined how hyperseparation – inseparable from human-nonhuman dualism – is part of the violation of human rights, and is a constituent of war. If dialogue continues to exclude the nonhuman, then human and nonhuman rights will continue to be violated, and the quality of life for all will continue to deteriorate.

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NOTES

- ¹ Robyn Eckersley, “Greening Liberal Democracy: the rights discourse revisited”, in *Democracy and Green Political Thought: Sustainability, Rights and Citizenship*, edited by Brian Doherty and Marius de Geus (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 212.
- ² For a discussion about the “three generations” of rights see Eckersley, “Greening Liberal Democracy”, pp. 212–236.
- ³ Articles 3 and 14 respectively, ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ (1948), United Nations website, www.un.org/Overview/rights.html (accessed 07/03/04).
- ⁴ Preamble, *ibid*.
- ⁵ Social ecologists have concentrated on establishing this interconnection and debunking the myth of human society existing in isolation from the rest of the earth community. For example, Mick Smith argues that “the critique of environmental destruction necessarily becomes a critique of contemporary society”, in *An Ethics of Place: Radical Ecology, Postmodernity, and Social Theory* (Albany: State University Of New York Press, 2001), p. 3.
- ⁶ See “History of the Earth Charter” (anonymous), *Earth Ethics* (Winter 2002): 16–20.
- ⁷ Quoted from the preamble of “The Earth Charter”, *Earth Ethics* (Winter 2002): 8–11, p. 8.
- ⁸ Rockefeller, ‘September 11th and the Earth Charter’, p. 3 (my italics).

- ⁹ The World Summit for Sustainable Development was a conference organized by the United Nations, 26 August – 4 September, 2002, Johannesburg. For further detail visit the Summit website: www.un.org/events/wssd/
- ¹⁰ “History of the Earth Charter”, p. 20.
- ¹¹ This is the only basis on which Kant extends ethical considerability to animals – if harming an animal will harm a human. Plumwood writes that “Some philosophers, most notably Kant, have advocated admitting the others of the earth indirectly to ethical status, because we can learn from cruelty to animals ‘bad habits’ that affect our behaviour towards those who really count, human beings.” Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, p.115.
- ¹² Modification of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”
- ¹³ Smith, *An Ethics of Place*, p. 42.
- ¹⁴ See Plumwood, “The ethics of commodification”, ch. 7 in *Environmental Culture*, pp. 143–166, p. 144. For criticism on Singer and Regan also see: Deborah Slicer, “Your Daughter or Your Dog?: A Feminist Assessment of the Animal Research Issue” *Hypatia* 6:1 (Spring 1991): 108–123. Slicer writes: “Singer and Regan extend the moral community to include animals on the basis of sameness. They do not acknowledge, much less celebrate, difference between human and other animals.” (p.112).
- ¹⁵ See Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*: “We can, and should, I think, have great respect and reverence for trees and be grateful to them for the many ways in which they support our lives. This means, amongst other things, that we must never count their lives for nothing, or treat their deaths or destruction lightly or casually as of no consequence or significance. We can honour them both individually, and in species and ecological community terms as great time-travellers and teachers, and be grateful for the wisdom they have to give us. We do them injustice when we treat them less than they are, destroy them without compunction, see them as nothing more than potential lumber, woodchips or fuel for our needs, (a form of incorporation), fail to attend adequately to them, radically dissociate from them and deny their organisation as intentional (and perhaps communicative) beings, or adopt the stance of ethical closure or dismissal.” (p. 105).
- ¹⁶ For a rigorous and impressive critique see Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*.
- ¹⁷ These are precisely the societal structures discussed by Plumwood in *Environmental Culture*. She states: “The hypothesis I am recommending here is that dominant forms of reason - economic, political, scientific and ethical/prudential - are failing us because they are subject to a systematic pattern of distortions and illusions in which they are historically embedded...” (p. 17). She describes how “[H]yper-separation is a form of differentiation that is used to justify domination and conquest.” (p. 102).
- ¹⁸ Classical Greek philosopher Plato has been identified as an early founder of the human/nature dualism. See Val Plumwood, “Plato and the philosophy of death”, in her *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 69–103.
- ¹⁹ As Plumwood puts it: “[A] strong ethical discontinuity is felt at the human species

boundary." *Environmental Culture*, p. 107.

²⁰ The epistemology of hyperseparation, rationalism, objectification is accountable for this failure. Plumwood argues that "[T]hese dominant rationalist forms of rationality not only doom the non-human world, they will leave humans themselves little chance of survival if they continue on their present course." *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²¹ Smith, *An Ethics of Place*, p. 70.

²² For example, oil as a world resource underlies much international conflict. In "Integrating Environmentalism and Human Rights", James W. Nickel and Eduardo Viola describe how "many killings in rural Brazil stem from conflicts over land and are driven by greed and economic desperation," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, edited by Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2003), p. 473.

²³ Captain Paul Watson, "Terrorism is as Terrorism Does", www.ecospherics.net/pages/watson2.htm (accessed 15/11/01).

²⁴ *Ibid.* Regarding the bombing of Afghanistan, Watson writes: "Those daisy cutters obliterate more life forms each time they are dropped than were killed in the World Trade Towers. These same bombs will soon be used in the jungles of the Philippines with even more devastating consequences. Tens of thousands of monkeys, parrots, snakes, insects, trees, flowers etc. will die. Will we uproot all of nature to weed out the terrorists?"

²⁵ Interestingly, the notion of ecological boundaries matching national boundaries is reflected in patriotic discourse. War-time speeches, and many other expressions of patriotic or national identity often refer to a nation's *soil*. Victim anger regarding September 11 was partly articulated by the disbelief that such terror could occur on 'American soil'. Unfortunately, the connotations of human connection to a nation's physical landscape, and the investment of cultural or national identity in the actual earth, is not generally supported by national environmental policies.

²⁶ Christian Reus-Smit states: "In short, the link that currently exists between historical grievances, contemporary political injustices, social and economic hardship, closed political opportunity structures, and politicised religion must be broken, and military actions are only likely to strengthen them." *The Day the World Changed? Terrorism and World Order* (Canberra: Department of International Relations, Australian National University, 2001), p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁸ Watson, "Terrorism is as Terrorism Does".

²⁹ Watson, "Terrorism is as Terrorism Does".

³⁰ Even human rights work that claims to prioritize the significance of human-nonhuman relationship - such as the World Summit for Sustainable Development, operates within a human-centric framework, and the purpose is not the development of rights for the environment.

³¹ The term 'earth rights' may at times be interchanged with 'nonhuman' rights to draw attention to it being inclusive of all life on earth, human and nonhumans. By putting forward the human-nonhuman relationship, human rights are not dismissed. Indeed, such an ethical move remains caring towards humans. Plumwood

states: "We are humans; we cannot avoid thinking in terms of our own interests. In fact, if somehow we could actually put our own interests aside, we would be left with a totally useless ethics. No one would find it compelling." *Environmental Culture*, p. 128.