In Defense Of Home: The Politics Of Ecological Belonging

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In Defense Of Home: The Politics Of Ecological Belonging

Abstract
This dissertation offers an original approach to environmental political theory that avoids the democratic deficits of prevalent strands of environmental social criticism while confronting the norms and institutions that prize unrestrained economic development and threaten ecological health and human flourishing. My theory focuses on a phenomenon I call “ecological belonging” in which everyday people come to feel at home in their environs through experiences of value and attachment. The Introduction identifies problems with prevailing perspectives in environmental thought and outlines my alternative approach that addresses the range of values and attachments to the land that everyday people actually experience. The next three chapters analyze the resonant human values in the environment defended by the politics of ecological belonging. Chapter 1 focuses on property in habitations, or the physical homes that people inhabit on the land, and argues that environmentalists might frame their economic efforts as a defense of property in habitations against a tendency in economic thought and policy, which I call “developmentalism,” to ignore and destroy property in habitations in pursuit of monetary wealth. Chapter 2 turns to the eminent conservationist Aldo Leopold for a vision of environmental stewardship that offers a sense of human purpose in nature while demanding a robust commitment to protecting natural habitats for their own sake. Chapter 3 discusses emotional attachments to environmental homeplaces and offers an approach to place that incorporates both the rootedness and mobility inherent in the human relationship to home, speaking to the experiences of both the ecological refugee and the rooted resident. Chapter 4 draws on the legacy of the 19th-century American Populists to describe an ecological populism in which everyday people act to curb developmentalist policies and institutions in defense of the places they call home. The Conclusion reflects on the contributions my theory makes to our understanding of the environment and its relationship to democracy, the economy, and humanity.

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IN DEFENSE OF HOME: THE POLITICS OF ECOLOGICAL BELONGING

Gregory V. Koutnik

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in

Political Science

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

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Loren Goldman, Assistant Professor of Political Science
To my parents, Michael and Anne Koutnik
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Writing a dissertation is an intellectual and emotional marathon, and I would not have been able to complete it without the support and encouragement of advisers, friends, and family. My journey in political theory began with Richard Avramenko’s seminars at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that I would not have even considered pursuing a PhD without having taken his seminars. I owe much to his excellent pedagogy, his encouragement of my research interests, and especially his supportive advising of my undergraduate senior thesis. He also introduced me to Martin Heidegger, whose writings on dwelling were instrumental in bringing me to the dissertation topic of home, and to Wendell Berry, whose writings and ideas deeply influenced my own thinking on political thought, economics, and the relationship between the land and human flourishing. One could not ask for a better undergraduate mentor, and I owe him an immense debt of gratitude.

My dissertation committee has been immensely supportive of my research from the very beginning, and I am especially grateful for the freedom they gave me to follow my research interests wherever they might lead and to shape the dissertation as I chose. As my dissertation chair, Jeff Green remained unwavering in his encouragement while always pushing me to clarify my thinking and especially the main argument of the dissertation. My work has benefited immensely from his questions and suggestions, and especially his insistence that political theory scholarship should have something to say not just to the specialist but also to the everyday reader. Jeff was always willing to have long conversations about my work and about the dissertation process—I remember in particular a conversation in the past year, after an especially difficult practice job talk, for which I am especially thankful. I could not have asked for a more attentive and supportive dissertation chair. Anne Norton’s enthusiasm for my research was unwavering throughout, and I cannot imagine having written this dissertation without our conversations over Left Burkeanism, property, populism, and the promise of democracy and equality. Her approach to political theory, and especially to free inquiry beyond methodological,
ideological, and disciplinary barriers, has deeply influenced my scholarship and my political thinking. Loren Goldman joined the committee relatively late—I still remember meeting him over a beer at Smokey Joe’s shortly after he arrived at Penn in 2016—and I could not have asked for a better third reader. My writing is better because of his detailed and attentive feedback on my chapter drafts, and I cannot count the number of conversations, in person and over the phone, that we had about the dissertation, the job market, and the dissertation defense. I was his first dissertation advisee, but it is clear that mentorship comes naturally to Loren, and I benefited immeasurably from his feedback and support. Finally, though he was not on my committee, Rogers Smith was an outstanding teacher and a model of excellent scholarship, and it was truly a privilege to take his course in American political development and to teach constitutional law with him. Any scholar with interests in American politics and political theory is lucky to learn from him, as I did. The academy is a much better place because of Rogers.

I have heard it said that one learns just as much, if not more, from one’s graduate student colleagues than from faculty, and that has been my experience. I found at Penn Political Science a group of bright and thoughtful graduate students, and these seven years of graduate school would have been far more difficult without them. Jo Wuest and I met on visitation day back in the spring of 2013, and I cannot imagine my time at Penn without her, from the Warthogs hat to conversations about the state of the Left and of the discipline of political science. Graduate seminars and working at the department would not have been the same without her, and she is an exemplar of scholarly integrity, diligence, and originality. I also learned a great deal from graduate students in the cohorts above me who were so generous with their time and their friendship, especially Sid Rothstein, Juman Kim, Osman Balkan, Isabel Perera, Anthony Grasso, Max Margulies, James Morone, Ashley Gorham, Carly Regina, Robinson Woodward-Burns (Go Team Venture!), and—above all—Danielle Hanley. Danielle might as well have been my fourth committee member. I cannot count the number of rich and instructive conversations we had about political theory, graduate school, and our work, and she was there for all the moments during this process when I was overwhelmed by graduate school and in need of guidance and
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ABSTRACT

IN DEFENSE OF HOME: THE POLITICS OF ECOLOGICAL BELONGING

Gregory V. Koutnik
Jeffrey Green

This dissertation offers an original approach to environmental political theory that avoids the democratic deficits of prevalent strands of environmental social criticism while confronting the norms and institutions that prize unrestrained economic development and threaten ecological health and human flourishing. My theory focuses on a phenomenon I call “ecological belonging” in which everyday people come to feel at home in their environs through experiences of value and attachment. The Introduction identifies problems with prevailing perspectives in environmental thought and outlines my alternative approach that addresses the range of values and attachments to the land that everyday people actually experience. The next three chapters analyze the resonant human values in the environment defended by the politics of ecological belonging. Chapter 1 focuses on property in habitations, or the physical homes that people inhabit on the land, and argues that environmentalists might frame their economic efforts as a defense of property in habitations against a tendency in economic thought and policy, which I call “developmentalism,” to ignore and destroy property in habitations in pursuit of monetary wealth. Chapter 2 turns to the eminent conservationist Aldo Leopold for a vision of environmental stewardship that offers a sense of human purpose in nature while demanding a robust commitment to protecting natural habitats for their own sake. Chapter 3 discusses emotional attachments to environmental homeplaces and offers an approach to place that incorporates both the rootedness and mobility inherent in the human relationship to home, speaking to the experiences of both the ecological refugee and the rooted resident. Chapter 4 draws on the legacy of the 19th-century American Populists to describe an ecological populism in which everyday people act to curb developmentalist policies and institutions in defense of the places they call home. The Conclusion reflects on the contributions my theory makes to our understanding of the environment and its relationship to democracy, the economy, and humanity.
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Introduction—Ecological Belonging: Beyond Ecocentric Purism and Anthropocentric Reformism

All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home.

—Gaston Bachelard

Calling a place home inevitably means that we will use the nature we find in it, for there can be no escape from manipulating and working and even killing some parts of nature to make our home. But if we acknowledge the autonomy and other-ness of the things and creatures around us—an autonomy our culture has taught us to label with the word "wild"—then we will at least think carefully about the uses to which we put them, and even ask if we should use them at all. [...] If wildness can stop being (just) out there and start being (also) in here, if it can start being as humane as it is natural, then perhaps we can get on with the unending task of struggling to live rightly in the world—not just in the garden, not just in the wilderness, but in the home that encompasses them both.

—William Cronon

Whether or not humility before nature can be integrated with a commitment to democratic life is the question that remains to be answered, and we cannot avoid it any longer.

—Bob Pepperman Taylor

Environmental thought has long been torn between two competing views. According to the first, enlightened anthropocentrism, nonhuman beings and their habitats are a precious part of human life and should be conserved for the long-term well-being of human societies. According to the second, it is not enough to attend to the interests of human beings, however enlightened our understanding of those interests might be. Instead, according to this ecocentric perspective, any environmentalism worthy of the name must seek to preserve nonhuman nature for its own sake. On my interpretation of environmental political thought, it is the creative tension between

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these two views, and the human experience of that tension in the places we call home, that can inspire a democratic environmental politics.\(^6\)

This dissertation elaborates a political vision of co-flourishing for human and nonhuman beings in a manner befitting a democratic society. Against ecocentric purists who view human use of the land as an evil to be minimized and against developers who view homes and habitats only as means to produce monetary wealth, the democratic environmentalism I advance in these pages focuses on protecting the people and the land from the threat posed to both by unrestrained and exploitative economic development. Rather than simply saving nature from ourselves or saving ourselves from and with nature, I argue that a democratic environmental politics should seek to do both by protecting the human homes and natural habitats that our species shares with our nonhuman neighbors. By attending to the connections between human homes and natural habitats, between human flourishing and environmental stewardship, and between the exploitation of local communities and local landscapes, environmentalism can tap into a deeply-resonant source of motivation and inspiration for a democratic people to defend the places they call home and the nonhuman neighbors who reside with them on the land.

The eminent conservationist Aldo Leopold, himself a major focus of this study, described conservation as “harmony between men and land” and insisted that conservation succeeds “when both end up better by reason of their partnership.”\(^7\) Leopold knew very well that, especially in modern industrialized societies like his own, human relations to the land are often woefully antagonistic. Indeed, his lifework was in many respects framed by that fact and by the resulting

\(^6\) Environmental pragmatists like Ben Minteer, Andrew Light, and Eric Katz argue that the ecocentrism-anthropocentrism debate is largely a distraction from concrete policy considerations and the task of developing a civic vision for environmentalism. While I am sympathetic to their critique, my view is that attending to the creative tension between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism is a better route to developing an inspiring democratic environmentalism than ignoring them altogether. See Andrew Light and Eric Katz, \textit{Environmental Pragmatism}, New York: Routledge, 1996; Ben Minteer, \textit{The Landscape of Reform: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America}, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006.

need to change society’s relationship to the land. Yet his central insight was that human beings and the land can do more than simply coexist—they can also flourish together, although this is not a guarantee, but rather a cultural and political achievement. As Leopold famously argued, this co-flourishing requires that, rather than being the “conqueror of the land-community,” humanity must become a “plain member and citizen of it.”

Leopold’s vision of an intimate and cooperative relationship between a democratic people and the land points the way to a broader tradition of environmental political thought that Kimberly Smith calls *ecological agrarianism*. The recent pioneer of this way of thinking is Wendell Berry, a Kentucky farmer and writer whose essays, poems, and novels center on his vision of sustainable agriculture, and who is another recurring figure in this dissertation. Smith argues that Berry’s thought undertakes a “greening of agrarianism” by integrating the ecological insights of Thoreau and Leopold with the democratic agrarianism of Jefferson and the U.S. Populists, forming a distinctive vision of environmental stewardship rooted in sustainable land-use. I see ecological agrarianism as an especially promising terrain for developing a vision of human inhabitance of the land that provides for the mutual flourishing of humans and nonhumans. The approach to environmental political thought that I elaborate in this study draws from what I take to be key themes of ecological agrarianism and considers their implications for a democratic environmentalism. Those themes are:

1. Human use of the land is not only inevitable but is itself intrinsically good when practiced with care. It is neither to be minimized, as some environmental purists advocate, nor is it to be maximized, as unrestrained development attempts to do. Instead, good land use preserves the productive capacities of the land while stewarding it for both its human and nonhuman inhabitants.

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8 I follow Leopold in my use of the term “land” to refer collectively to “soils, waters, plants, and animals”—that is, to the broader ecological community that encompasses both landscapes and their many inhabitants, including human beings (Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: With Essays On Conservation From Round River*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1949/1966, p. 239).
9 Ibid, 240.
11 Ibid, 37.
2. Human flourishing is deeply tied to our species’ connections to the land. A good human life is lived in intimate attachment to the land and to our fellow creatures.

3. Human connections to the land are strongest in our attachments to particular places, homes, and landscapes.12

Inspired by these themes, this dissertation explores the implications of the idea that the environment is above all the home of both human beings and their nonhuman neighbors, and that environmentalism is about making, inhabiting, and protecting homes and habitats in the land. I will argue that this theme of the environment as home opens the way for a democratic environmentalism that threads the needle between pursuing human goods in the land while also respecting the land for its own sake. I also argue that it can inspire the populist political action necessary to protect homes and habitats from destruction by unrestrained development.

My approach recognizes and builds upon a widely-noted resonance of the idea of home in environmental thought. Indeed, environmental writing is replete with reference to the notion of home. In Pope Francis’ encyclical on climate change and the environment, subtitled On Care For Our Common Home, the pontiff endorses “a growing conviction that our planet is a homeland and that humanity is one people living in a common home.”13 Likewise, the environmental writer and activist Bill McKibben describes coming to be “at home in nature” and the earth as “this home of ours.”14 In his study of the human place in nature, Robert Pogue Harrison writes of “the human abode on the earth” and humans as “dwellers on the earth.”15 This sentiment is also present

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among environmental activists, with Cora Tucker writing of her fight against toxic chemicals that “[w]e become fighters when something threatens our home.” Indeed, the notion is so widely resonant that Paul Shepard, a primitivist who favors a return to hunter-gatherer living, can speak of “this planet we call home” just as legal scholar Jedediah Purdy, reflecting on an earthrise photo taken from the lunar surface, writes that the earth is “the only possible home of everything we can love.” Finally, to return to the second epigraph of this dissertation, the eminent environmental historian William Cronon writes of an environmentalism that addresses living rightly “not just in the garden, not just in the wilderness, but in the home that encompasses them both.” Taken together, these insights suggest that humans and nonhuman beings share a common abode on the earth to which many environmentalists feel a deep sense of belonging.

Taking a cue from Berry’s ecological agrarianism, however, I focus less on the general sense that the earth is our common home and more on the particular homes and habitats that any given person or community inhabits. In doing so, I am able to focus on the immense worth of this house, this field, this woodland, and this farm for those who inhabit them. By attending to the particularizing nature of the idea of home, I can explore the significance of the fact that what matters is not simply having a home but also the protection of this particular one. Doing so also allows me to emphasize the role of personal attachments that people already have to the landscape that might be politicized by a democratic movement to protect human homes and natural habitats. Edward Abbey speaks to the particularizing aspect of home, while highlighting its broad appeal, as he reflects on his time as a ranger at Arches National Park in Utah:

This is the most beautiful place on earth. There are many such places. Every man, every woman, carries in heart and mind the image of the ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary. A houseboat in Kashmir, a view down Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, a gray gothic farmhouse two stories high at the end of a red dog road in the Allegheny Mountains, a cabin on the shore of a blue lake in spruce and fir country, a greasy alley near the Hoboken waterfront, or even, possibly, for those of a less demanding sensibility, the world to be seen from a comfortable apartment high in the

tender, velvety smog of Manhattan, Chicago, Paris, Tokyo, or Rome—there’s no limit to the human capacity for the homing sentiment. Theologians, sky pilots, astronauts have even felt the appeal of home calling to them from up above, in the cold black outback of interstellar [sic] space. For myself, I’ll take Moab, Utah. I don’t mean the town itself, of course, but the country which surrounds it—the Canyonlands. The slickrock desert. The red dust and the burnt cliffs and the lonely sky—all that which lies beyond the end of the roads.20

What Abbey calls the “homing sentiment”—the human capacity for a sense of belonging in particular places, including and especially “natural” ones—points the way to a broader phenomenon that I call ecological belonging. This refers to experiences of value and attachment that lead human beings to view particular places in the landscape as their home and to see their own homes as bound up with the broader landscapes on which they are built. In this way, ecological belonging cultivates attachment not only to our homes but to the land itself.

Placing ecological belonging at the center of environmental political thought makes it possible to do justice to both of the impulses with which I began—enlightened anthropocentrism and ecocentrism—while helping environmentalists speak directly to the existing values and attachments that people have to their homes and the broader landscape. As I will show in the following chapters, this opens the way to a democratic environmentalism that opposes unrestrained economic development in defense of homes and habitats alike. But first, I describe two influential strands of environmental politics, ecocentric purism and anthropocentric reformism, both of which reinforce tendencies in environmentalism that leave it ill-equipped to resonate with the public and thus unable to fully address the momentous environmental challenges of our time.

Ecocentric Purism and Anthropocentric Reformism

One of the key instincts behind environmental thought is that of species-doubt—a chastening, self-critical awareness that our species’ collective footprint on the land is a problem that demands social criticism and political reform. In his bestselling book The World Without Us, journalist Alan Weisman engages in a thought experiment that points the way toward the

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chastening self-reflection that species-doubt enables. He asks his reader to “picture a world from which we all suddenly vanished,” leaving behind the cities we have built, the animals we have domesticated, the products we have made, the habitats we have altered, and the pollutants we have emitted. This allows Weisman to ask questions probing the human footprint on the land: “How would the rest of nature respond if it were suddenly relieved of the relentless pressure we heap on it and our fellow organisms? … Could nature ever obliterate all our traces? … Or are some so unnatural that they’re indestructible?” Most of all, the thought experiment invites Weisman and his reader “to wonder how nature might flourish if granted the chance.” It raises the possibility that we might doubt whether our role in the land community is, on balance, positive. It allows us to engage in self-doubt—as individuals, as political communities, and as a species—about the rightfulness of our impacts on the rest of nature. Are those impacts worth the damage? Can they be attenuated? I suspect that many environmentalists have engaged in this line of thinking and that something like it motivates many of them to support policies of environmental protection and sustainability. In my view, this sense of species-doubt is immensely valuable. But, as we will see next, it also can inspire a form of ecocentric purism, especially prevalent in radical environmental thought but by no means limited to it, that undermines its own appeal to democratic publics through tendencies toward anti-economism, misanthropy, and elitism, making it ill-equipped to inspire a truly democratic environmentalism.

In many ways, what makes contemporary environmentalism distinctive from earlier conservationism and land management is this very sense of species-doubt, which has inspired a

22 Ibid, 5.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid, 6.
25 Tellingly, other environmental scholars have pointed to a similar thought experiment about what the end of humanity would mean for the earth. As environmental philosopher Paul Taylor puts it: “Our demise would be no loss to other species, nor would it adversely affect the natural environment. On the contrary, other living things would be much benefited. … It seems quite clear that in the contemporary world the extinction of the species *Homo sapiens* would be beneficial to the Earth’s Community of Life as a whole …. the ending of the human epoch on Earth would most likely be greeted with a hearty ‘Good riddance!’” (Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 114-115, quoted in Bob Pepperman Taylor, *Our Limits Transgressed*, 124). For another thought experiment in this vein, see Lester W. Milbrath, “Envisioning a Sustainable Society,” in *Explorations in Environmental Political Theory: Thinking About What We Value*, ed. Joel Jay Kassiola, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003, pp. 37-51, at 38.
broad critique of anthropocentrism—that is, “human-centeredness,” or the view that human interests are paramount above those of nonhuman beings and the earth’s ecosystem. As Cannavò and Lane observe, a number of thinkers criticized what they saw as “the dominant paradigm of crude, unrestrained anthropocentrism,” which many blamed for the widespread environmental problems of pollution, habitat destruction, species extinctions, and resource depletion that the post-war environmental movement sought to combat.²⁶ Environmental philosophers and ethicists like Richard Sylvan, Peter Singer, Paul Taylor, J. Baird Callicott, and Val Plumwood insisted that morality required attention to interests beyond those of human beings, and environmental political theorists like Robyn Eckersley, Andrew Dobson, and Jane Bennett followed suit over the coming decades.²⁷ For Callicott, this means that “nonhuman species are valuable in and for themselves, quite apart from their usefulness to us,” while others saw it as an imperative to respect the rights or welfare of individual animals or even, as Bennett advocates, the agency of all matter.²⁸ What all of these views have in common is a sense that the reasons to protect the nonhuman world outstrip our own interest in its preservation. As Dobson writes: “It’s not just that the non-human world constitutes a set of resources for human use and that if we run them down we threaten the very basis of human life itself: it is that even if resources were infinite, there might still be good reason not to treat the non-human world in a purely instrumental fashion.”²⁹ For ecocentrists, then, environmental problems are driven in no small part

²⁹ Dobson, Green Political Thought, 29.
by anthropocentric unwillingness to transcend human-centered disregard for nonhuman life, making anthropocentrism something for moral and political theory to strenuously avoid.

One of the most important strands of ecocentric thought is that of “deep ecology.” This eco-philosophy of harmony with nature was pioneered by Gary Snyder, Arne Naess, Fritjof Capra, Bill Devall, and George Sessions, and has had a formative influence on the green parties that formed throughout the Western world in the 1970s and 1980s as well as the broader stream of environmental thought. Deep ecology emerged as a critique of what its adherents called “shallow” or “reformist” environmentalism that critics saw as committed only to incremental reforms within the paradigm of anthropocentrism. Deep ecologists insist that it is necessary to go “beyond a limited piecemeal shallow approach to environmental problems” and instead embrace “a comprehensive religious and philosophical worldview” of human harmony with nature. That comprehensive worldview centers on two core principles: self-realization and biocentric egalitarianism. Taken together, they suggest that all beings, of all species, have an equal right to self-realization and flourishing, and that human beings have a strict obligation to respect the equal intrinsic value of all living things. Not surprisingly, then, deep ecologists are left wholly unsatisfied with what they see as today’s thoroughly anthropocentric norms and institutions, leading them to take “an uncompromising stand against the main thrust of modern, technocratic culture.”

Deep ecologists place especially strong emphasis on the preservation of pristine, untouched wilderness, with Devall and Sessions pointing to “large wilderness proposals” as


31 Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, 65. For Devall and Sessions, environmental reformism has been stuck “in the liberal democratic assumption that if enough citizens have accurate information on environmental problems, they will assert themselves through voluntary organizations to demand better policies and practices from legislators and regulatory agencies” (60). See also Bill Devall, “Reform Environmentalism,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 6.2, 1979.


33 Ibid, 48.
central to the “interim protection of the biosphere.” Moreover, to minimize the impacts of human activity on the biosphere, deep ecologists insist that humans must distinguish between “vital needs” and mere wants, arguing that humans “have no right to reduce this richness and diversity [of the biosphere] except to satisfy vital needs.” This also leads deep ecologists to advocate steep reductions to global human population to limit environmental destruction. Deep ecologists, then, tend to view the goal of environmentalism as saving nature from ourselves by minimizing our impacts on the biosphere and embracing spiritual harmony with nature.

The deep ecologist’s radical stand against anthropocentric society has come under considerable attack over the past few decades, and three criticisms are especially germane to my argument in this dissertation. The first is that deep ecology implicitly casts all land use as abuse, reinforcing its lesson that human impact is something to be minimized wherever possible while making ecocentric purists unable to address actual land use. As Cronon argued in his influential critique of the ecocentrist’s wilderness ideal, “an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living,” which means that “the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land.” For Roger King, this results in ecocentrists being unable to address issues of agricultural and urban land use in a manner that provides any real practical guidance. But we can extend this criticism even further. By focusing on “vital needs” rather than everyday needs and wants, ecocentric purists risk doing more than failing to speak to human land-use across broad swaths of the actual landscape. As I will discuss further in Chapter 1, it also leaves environmentalists vulnerable to the charge that they are anti-economic, able only to apply restraints to the economy and to people’s livelihoods without offering an alternative

35 Ibid, 70, emphasis in original.
36 Ibid.
economic model. This also reinforces the perception that environmentalism is a politics of asceticism and self-sacrifice.\textsuperscript{39}

Second, the tendency of ecocentric purism to lapse into treating humanity or modern society as a plague on nature leads some environmentalists to neglect questions of justice and domination between human beings and even encourages outright misanthropy. As Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier argue, deep ecology is ill-equipped to address a globalized world of immense inequalities, and others have pointed out that the ecocentric tendency to treat “humanity” as the problem risks ignoring imbalances of power across geography, class, race and gender—and thus the inequalities of responsibility for ecological destruction between the rich and the poor and between the Global North and the Global South.\textsuperscript{40} More generally, Val Plumwood observes that deep ecology “makes notably poor connections with human ecological issues,” and Cronon agrees, warning that a fixation on pristine wilderness ignores “problems of occupational health and safety in industrial settings, problems of toxic waste exposure on ‘unnatural’ urban and agricultural sites, famine and poverty and human suffering in the ‘overpopulated’ places of the earth—problems, in short, of environmental justice.”\textsuperscript{41} Moreover, the fixation of many ecocentrists on what they call the “population problem” is sometimes racially coded and tinged with xenophobia, amounting to a fear of foreign hordes overrunning pristine nature.\textsuperscript{42} When misanthropy is at its ugliest, it almost always punches down. In one of the most noxious and


notorious examples of outright misanthropy, a 1987 piece written in the radical journal *Earth First!* under the moniker of “Miss Ann Thropy” looked to the AIDS epidemic as an example of how to bring the human population into check, writing that “just as the Plague contributed to the demise of feudalism, AIDS has the potential to end industrialism,” adding that “the possible benefits of this to the environment are staggering.” Much less egregious, but still revealing, was Callicott’s suggestion that “[t]he extent of misanthropy in modern environmentalism thus may be taken as a measure of the degree to which it is biocentric.” That Callicott, a pioneer of ecocentric environmental ethics, later felt compelled to retract his endorsement of misanthropy speaks to how inflammatory and controversial misanthropy is, and especially in the context of environmentalism. To be sure, even the most radical purists usually do not indulge in this level of misanthropy, but, as Timothy Luke points out, the deep ecologist nonetheless teaches that “the flourishing of nonhuman life necessarily requires a decrease in human life.” The logic of minimization in ecocentric purism, then, applies not just to land-use and the economy. It applies also to humanity itself, and with deeply problematic consequences.

Third, the very purism of deep ecology leaves it ill-suited to persuade the democratic publics whose support is necessary to realize the ecocentrist’s vision for a society in harmony with nature. The logic of minimization of human impact on the land and its tendency toward misanthropy are bound to alienate the public, and the asceticism implied by using nature only to meet “vital needs” is also unlikely to catch on—as Bryan Norton writes, “one doubts that they will find many followers in their ascetic lifestyle.” Moreover, ecocentric purism features a tendency toward quietism and even social separatism. As they fail to convert the public to their “comprehensive religious and philosophical worldview,” purists are liable to disengage from the

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corrupt societies around them, amounting to a sort of “Benedict Option” for the disillusioned ecologist.\footnote{For religious conservatives like Rod Dreher, the “Benedict Option” refers to the possibility that beleaguered conservatives, inspired by the Medieval monastic tradition, might withdraw from what they see as an increasingly hostile secular society to pursue countercultural modes of living. See Rod Dreher, \textit{The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation}, New York: Sentinel, 2017.} While this may allay the conscience of the purist—amounting to “the ecological equivalent of ‘clean hands,’” as Robert Goodin says of green consumerism—it does not speak well to the deep ecologist’s ability to persuade the public.\footnote{Robert E. Goodin, \textit{Green Political Theory}, London: Polity Press, 1992, p. 123.} This should not be entirely surprising because, while the public may be sympathetic to animal welfare or environmental protection in principle, it may not be so receptive to the view, motivated by the purist’s “bio-egalitarianism,” that moral preference for one’s fellow human beings makes one guilty of “speciesism” or “human chauvinism.”\footnote{See Richard Routley [subsequently Sylvan] and Val Routley [subsequently Plumwood], “Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism,” in \textit{Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century}, ed. K.E. Goodpaster and K.M. Sayre, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979, pp. 36-59; Peter Singer, “Not For Humans Only: The Place of Nonhumans in Environmental Issues,” in \textit{Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century}, pp. 191-206, esp. 194-196. While Singer makes it clear that “[g]iving equal consideration to the interests of two different beings does not mean treating them alike or holding their lives to be of equal value,” he also makes the startling claim that, according to his neo-Benthamite moral calculus of suffering, the interests of a dog might outweigh the interests of a “grossly mentally defective” human being (195-196).} “This way of thinking,” Mary Midgley quips, “is hard to apply convincingly to locusts, hookworms and spirochaetes, and was invented without much attention to them.”\footnote{Mary Midgley, \textit{Animals and Why They Matter}, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, p. 26, quoted in Dobson, \textit{Green Political Thought}, 35.} All of this feeds into a broader message to the public that Bob Pepperman Taylor rightly identifies: “we are selfish, and the society we live in reflects and institutionalizes this selfishness.”\footnote{Taylor, \textit{Our Limits Transgressed}, 96} It is no wonder, then, that ecocentric purists find themselves “in much the same position as Rousseau: the raw material [men as they are] is inadequate to the task at hand.”\footnote{Andrew Dobson, \textit{Green Political Thought}, 102.}

Overall, then, ecocentrism harnesses the moral fervor and chastening insights of species-doubt and the desire to be at home in nature, but its purism leaves it without an alternative model of land-use and economics, aloof to questions of environmental justice for humans, vulnerable to spates of misanthropy, and deeply out of touch with the public it desires to convert. Thus, Devall and Sessions themselves are right to worry that their fellow deep ecologists risk becoming “ecological saints among the masses of those we might classify as ‘sinners’ who
continue to pollute." Given its tendencies toward anti-economism, anti-humanism, and elitism, then, ecocentric purism is likely not up to the task of confronting the vast environmental challenges of our time.

However, neither is the anthropocentric reformism that the deep ecologists rightly criticize. Perhaps the most widely-visible form of anthropocentric reformism today is "ecological modernization," or the view that environmental reform should be made compatible with market imperatives toward growth and development because, on this view, environmentalism is most successful when it can convince policymakers and the public that it pays. Though this perspective has surely gained more traction in policy circles and in elite opinion than ecocentric purism, it is not without its shortcomings. First, as many critics of capitalism have argued, it is not clear that a reformist environmentalism working to accommodate the current economic order can succeed in turning growth and development green. Second, even if one does not reject capitalism outright, environmentalists who speak only the language of conventional economics may be unable to express the full range of their own values and goals. Leopold criticized this tendency decades ago when he singled out "the semi-honest doctrine that conservation is only

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54 Devall and Sessions, Deep Ecology, 14.
good economics.\textsuperscript{57} He argued that this forces conservationists to “invent subterfuges” and employ “distinctly shaky evidence” to make their goals intelligible to both the public and the elites who are assumed to be focused only on the bottom line.\textsuperscript{58} If environmentalists speak the language of reform only in economic terms, they may find it impossible to find standing for arguments and goals that cannot be justified in monetary terms alone. Thus, Bryan Norton is right to conclude that while the language of the ecologist risks saying too much, the language of the economist risks saying too little.\textsuperscript{59} Third, anthropocentric reformism amounts to an overcorrection from ecocentric purism. The problem with ecocentric purism is not that it fundamentally questions the values of the modern economic system, but rather that its purism takes the critique too far at the risk of implying anti-economism. By forsaking the species-doubt of the ecocentrist, the anthropocentric reformist risks becoming the very “shallow” environmentalist that deep ecologists rightly criticize. Finally, just as ecocentric purism suffers from elitism, anthropocentric reformism harbors its own form of elitism in its technocratic methods and its suspicions toward popular democracy. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, a paternalistic tendency among some mainstream environmentalists leads them to view the people, and especially those who oppose “common-sense” reform, as ignorant masses in need of saving by unelected bureaucrats and enlightened environmentalists.

This last point is especially important—both ecocentric purism and anthropocentric reformism suffer from something of a democratic deficit, as their elitism alienates them from the very democratic publics that they so desperately need to reach and persuade. Both ecocentric purists and anthropocentric reformists desire to address the environmental problems of our time but have trouble doing so effectively because they fail to speak directly to the full range of environmental values and attachments that everyday people actually have.

\textsuperscript{58} Leopold, \textit{A Sand County Almanac}, 247.
For John Meyer, this sort of problem suggests a failure of environmental social criticism to resonate with the public.\(^6^0\) Meyer offers a useful framework with which to evaluate the shortcomings and possibilities of environmental social criticism, and it helps set the stage for my own argument for a democratic politics of ecological belonging. He begins by noting the gap between broad public recognition of environmental problems and the lack of enthusiastic support for fundamental reform, and he attributes this in part to a failure of environmental social criticism to resonate with the public and to motivate political action.\(^6^1\) Meyer describes two types of environmental social criticism that reinforce this problem. The first is that of the “outside critic” whose critical distance and even outright alienation from society make him or her “an uncompromised—and uncompromising—outsider.” The second is the “inside player” who works within existing institutions with existing power brokers.\(^6^2\) Both types face significant obstacles to resonant social criticism. “Those who position themselves as outsiders will be hard-pressed to connect their criticism with citizen concerns” while “inside players are poorly situated to question the rules of the game they are playing.”\(^6^3\) To avoid the liabilities of both the outside critic and the inside player, Meyer proposes a third model, the “inside critic,”\(^6^4\) who is able to offer “critical distance from the status quo and a reinterpretation or reimagining of existing practices and ideas” while also maintaining “pragmatic engagement with present realities.”\(^6^5\) He argues that this type of social criticism is most in keeping with the aspirations of democratic change because it is most likely to resonate with the daily lives and lived experiences of the public.\(^6^6\) The resonant social critic understands that “the likely success of critics depends crucially upon their ability to speak in a manner that resonates with citizens while simultaneously arguing for extensive, meaningful change from the status quo.”\(^6^7\) By beginning with “respect for the complexity and sincerity of people’s views and everyday experiences,” environmental social criticism can resonate with

\(^{61}\) Ibid, 1.
\(^{62}\) Ibid, 7.
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
\(^{64}\) Meyer also refers to this as “the immanent or engaged social critic” (7).
\(^{65}\) Ibid, 7-8.
\(^{66}\) Ibid, 7-10.
\(^{67}\) Ibid, 7.
people’s existing values rather than demanding that they be abandoned. If ecocentric purism fits the role of the outside critic in Meyer’s framework, anthropocentric reformists are consummate inside players, left largely unable to question or change the basic imperatives of the global market economy or address ecological issues that outstrip conventional economic values and elite interests. But where Meyer’s approach seeks to make environmentalism more resonant with the public by focusing on everyday material practices, this dissertation seeks to do so by addressing the everyday attachments and senses of belonging that people experience in their homeplaces and the landscapes they inhabit. Where Meyer seeks resonant social criticism for democratic change in the realm of everyday practice, I seek it in the attachments to home that imbue the human experience of nature.

Outline of the Argument

Against both the ecocentric purist and the anthropocentric reformist, I will argue that environmentalism is at its best when it speaks to the full range of connections that people have to the land and their particular homeplaces in it. These connections are often economic and instrumental, and such engagements with nature should not be decried as unnecessary infringements on the purity of nature. But human connections to the land are also more than economic—surely Abbey’s homing sentiment and Leopold’s vision of human membership in the land community cannot be accounted for in purely economic terms. My approach to environmental political thought focuses on senses of ecological belonging that people already have and that do not require conversion en masse to the “philosophical and religious worldview” of deep ecology. At the same time, to speak to the richness and diversity of popular experiences of ecological belonging, my approach will need to address a wider scope of values in the land than can be apprehended by anthropocentric reformism and the monetary language of conventional economics alone.

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68 Ibid., 4, 171.
To understand the wider range of values at stake in people’s actual attachments to the land, then, it will be necessary to differentiate between multiple modes of ecological belonging, different dimensions of our attachments to the land. I have found over the course of my research three modes of being at home in nature—the economic, the epistemic, and the emotional, which I discuss respectively in Chapters 1-3. These three modes of ecological belonging very roughly correspond to the three elements of environmental history glossed by William Cronon: “the political economy of people as social beings reshaping nature and one another to produce their collective life,” “the ecology of people as organisms sharing the universe with many other organisms,” and “the cultural values of people as storytelling creatures struggling to find the meaning of their place in the world.” As a heuristic for the three modes, we might say that in the first mode we make homes from nature, in the second we preserve homes for nature, and in the third we experience home in nature; nature’s value is primarily instrumental in the first, intrinsic in the second, and experiential in the third. In the early stages of my research, the discovery and elaboration of these modes of ecological belonging was the cornerstone of my argument. Yet, as I continued my investigation of ecological belonging, I found the distinctions between them less important than the fact that all three point toward an intimate relationship of the human being to the land that can speak more directly to the lived experiences of everyday people than ecocentric purism or anthropocentric reformism—and, as we will see, better opposes unrestrained economic development and the expropriation and destruction of human homes and natural habitats alike. Taken as a whole, a political theory of ecological belonging stresses that human beings make homes from nature, preserve homes for nature, and cherish places in nature, and that a democratic politics of ecological belonging should be understood as a popular defense of human homes, natural habitats, and dearly-held homeplaces in the land. The following chapters will flesh out and elaborate this vision of a democratic politics of ecological belonging in defense of home.

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In Chapter 1, I show that the politics of ecological belonging includes the protection of dearly-held property, and specifically property in *habitations*—our homes and their distinctive use-value as dwellings. Here I identify and criticize an economic mindset that devalues, expropriates, and destroys human homes and natural habitats for the sake of unrestrained development, a mindset that I call *developmentalism*. In it, human homes and the lands they are built upon are vulnerable to being treated, against the will of their inhabitants, as deficient and in need of upgrading to maximize social welfare and private profit. As Berry argues, “[t]he inevitable result of such an economy is no … usable property can safely be regarded by anyone as a home.”

I show that foundational to developmentalism is its unwillingness to distinguish between the fungible monetary wealth it seeks to produce and the status of human homes as inhabited property. I point to the history of enclosures in England as well as the contemporary legal doctrine of private development takings in the United States as illustrative examples of the developmentalist tendency to use the promise of jobs and prosperity to legitimize the expropriation of homes for private profit. I also argue that framing their economic interventions as a defense of property in habitations can help environmentalists escape the perception, sometimes well-earned, that their goals are anti-economic and hostile to property rights. To avoid lapsing into a conservative defense of private property rights as such, however, environmentalists should forcefully distinguish between property rights in habitations from those in fungible monetary wealth. Here I build on the work of legal theorist Margaret Radin as well as environmental political theorists John Meyer, Piers Stephens, and Zev Trachtenberg. I also discuss Aristotle, Locke, and Marx’s understandings of use- and exchange-value and Karl Polanyi’s account of the “great transformation” of the global political economy fueled by the developmentalist tendency to sacrifice human homes for unrestrained development. Moreover, I build on existing critiques of neoliberalism while cautioning against the conflation of the economic with the monetary, a mistake repeated by many environmentalists and that plays into the hands of developmentalists. Finally, I note in conclusion that the developmentalist inability to recognize

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and respect the distinctive economic value of habitations in its quest for monetary wealth facilitates the destruction of human homes by another, albeit more indirect route—namely, through the destructive effects of anthropogenic climate change. Insofar as climate change and other negative environmental externalities are caused by the same developmentalist quest for fungible wealth, the fate of a home destroyed by a superstorm may be understood as a form of theft that differs from the bulldozing of a house for economic development only in the directness of the means.

Chapter 2 addresses the epistemic side of ecological belonging and its capacity to inspire a species vocation of environmental stewardship. Here I argue that Aldo Leopold’s environmental thought points the way to a form of ecological humanism that stresses the apparently unique capacity of the human species to recognize the broader ecological community as such and to protect it for its own sake. Perhaps counterintuitively, then, Leopold effectively grounds the intrinsic value of nonhuman beings in a form of human exceptionalism. I also find in Leopold’s thought a vision for a civic education in ecological perception that focuses on popular activities of outdoor recreation and helps everyday people recognize the nonhuman homes around them. This allows us to feel epistemically at home in the land—that is, to encounter the land and its nonhuman inhabitants as intelligible to us and worthy of understanding and respect, rather than as irrelevant perceptual white noise or as resources only. I argue that, contrary to prevailing interpretations of him as either a pioneering ecocentrist or a pragmatic enlightened anthropocentrist, Leopold’s ecological humanism should be understood as bridging the two perspectives while militating against the excesses of both. By helping democratic publics come to recognize nonhuman homes, Leopold’s ecological humanism can inspire a stewardship mission that recasts the role of humans as stewards rather than conquerors of the land community.\footnote{Not unlike William Connolly’s “entangled humanism,” the ecological humanism I derive from Leopold might be understood as a “transfiguration of humanism” in a more ecological direction (Connolly, \textit{Facing the Planetary}, 168). While Connolly’s entangled humanism emphasizes the material and perceptual entanglements of humans with nonhumans, it does not highlight a stewardship mission or a form of human exceptionalism as I argue Leopold does (see generally Connolly, \textit{Facing the Planetary}, pp. 168-174).}
allows environmentalists to protect nonhuman beings for their own sake without indulging in the sort of purist anti-humanism and misanthropy that is likely to alienate the public.

Chapter 3 turns to the emotional dimension of ecological belonging in which people develop affections for formative homeplaces and feel nostalgia for those places when they are separated from them or when those places suffer severe environmental damage. I stress that these human attachments are wrapped up in what we would conventionally think of as both the “human” and “nonhuman” aspects of place—personal histories and formative life-stages, but also landscapes and familiar species. To remedy understandings of place that are overly closed and emphasize rootedness and nativity at the expense of mobility and migration, I argue for an understanding of human attachment to environmental homeplaces that incorporates both the rootedness and mobility inherent in the human experience of place. Here I adopt Peter Cannavò’s strategy of understanding place as a practice rather than simply as a location. This is especially important given the likely increase in the number of ecological refugees whose experience of environmental homeplaces will be through dislocation. I also build on the useful but, I argue, one-sided approaches to nostalgia for homeplaces offered by Svetlana Boym, Barbara Cassin, and Glenn Albrecht. By attending to the ways that people develop attachments to homeplaces in the first place and the reasons people have for leaving them, I seek to show the ways that landscapes and homeplaces are interwoven into human identity. In our nostalgias for homeplaces, we find another expression of ecological belonging that ties human beings to the land and their human abode in it.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I turn explicitly to the democratic politics of ecological belonging. I argue for an ecological populism in which everyday people stand in defense of their homes, broadly conceived, against the threat of developmentalist expropriation and destruction. While some political theorists, like Jan-Werner Müller and Nadia Urbinati, reject the politics of populism because they view populism as primarily or exclusively the politics of anti-pluralism, I insist that populism is more complicated and more diverse than this, and that an eco-populism should be understood as anti-elitist rather than anti-pluralist. Moreover, I suggest that it is the very anti-
elitism of populist democracy that allows environmentalists to avoid not only the alienating influence of ecocentric purism but also the technocratic paternalism of more mainstream environmental politics—though I caution environmentalists not to reject environmental expertise outright. Here I build on the work of environmental political theorists like Meyer, Timothy Luke, and DeWitt John. Next, to resist the common understanding of environmentalism as a politics of austerity and self-sacrifice, I discuss Steve Lerner and Naomi Klein’s notion of "sacrifice zones" to highlight the immense sacrifices that developmentalism demands of local communities, including of things they cannot bear to lose, and especially their homes. Finally, I stress that an eco-populism cannot settle for the reactive defense of homes but must also offer economic reforms that give local economies a way to resist the developmentalist’s promises of jobs and prosperity, however disingenuous or tenuous those promises may often be. Here I argue that the policy legacies of both the U.S. Populists and the New Deal, as well as Berry’s economic localism, are available for eco-populists to use for fundamental reform. Whatever the means, I suggest that the goal should be the adoption of what I term a new protectionism that shields homes and local communities from developmentalist exploitation and destruction.

Cumulatively, these chapters seek a democratic environmentalism that avoids the excesses of ecocentric purism and the exploitations of developmentalism by appealing to the environmental values that everyday people can realistically be expected to have already, that will not require a potentially alienating call by ecocentrists for an entirely new eco-ontology or social consciousness. In each chapter, my goal is to show that various concerns that might at first appear to be primarily human (nostalgia, the defense of property in the home, even human exceptionalism) actually have a direct bearing on ecological issues and on our relationship to the nonhuman world; and, by the same token, how things that at first appear to be primarily ecological (habitat and species preservation, environmental protection and stewardship) are deeply tied up with what it means to be human and with human flourishing. This is what attending to ecological belonging allows me to do as a political theorist—it allows me to speak to the human elements of ecology and the ecological elements of humanity, incorporating what is valuable from
ecocentrism and enlightened anthropocentrism without importing their excesses and defects, all the while pointing the way to a democratic environmentalism that does not ask the people to transcend their own interests and desires, nor to give up the various goods that make modern life attractive to billions of people, but instead invites them to defend their own homes and habitats and to seek human flourishing on the land in their own way.

Aldo Leopold’s most famous book, and the one he wrote most consciously for a popular audience, was called *A Sand County Almanac*. This collection of nature essays and philosophical reflections on the human place in nature is easily one of the most famous and influential books in the history of environmentalism, and I will have much more to say about it in Chapter 2. Here I will simply note, as a point of transition to the following chapters, that Leopold’s initial title for the book was “Great Possessions.” This remained the title of one of the essays in the book—his biographer Curt Meine relates that it was one of Leopold’s “personal favorites”—that explores how Leopold shares his property in the sand counties of southeastern Wisconsin with his ecological neighbors. In having adopted this as his chosen title for the book, what I take Leopold to be saying, in essence, is that the lands that are our common habitation with our nonhuman neighbors are a great possession, perhaps our greatest, worth protecting for its own sake and for our own sake, too. For environmentalists attuned to the role of ecological belonging in human life, this might just be the key to a popular democratic environmentalism that integrates the human with the nonhuman in a vision of the good life lived in connection with nature. For Leopold, for Berry, and for the eco-populist perspective I defend in the following chapters, environmentalism should be about more than saving nature from ourselves or saving ourselves from nature. It should be about saving our connections *with* nature, and thereby defending both the homes and the habitats that are our greatest possessions.

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Chapter 1—Developmentalism Against Habitations: Property and Expropriation in Environmental Political Thought

If the industrial economy is not correctable within or by its own terms, then obviously what is required for correction is a countervailing economic idea. And the most significant weakness of the conservation movement is its failure to produce or espouse an economic idea capable of correcting the economic idea of the industrialists. Somewhere near the heart of the conservation effort as we have known it is the romantic assumption that, if we have been alienated from nature, we can become unalienated by making nature the subject of contemplation or art, ignoring the fact that we live necessarily in and from nature—ignoring, in other words, all the economic issues that are involved.

—Wendell Berry

Our economic relationship to the land is vital to our well-being. It has also become our greatest adversary. Environmentalists recognize the need to change it, but they risk being dismissed as enemies of economic growth and prosperity as they attempt to regulate markets and conserve natural resources. To be sure, reformers often reply that they are not enemies of prosperity and simply seek economic sustainability by safeguarding the ecological foundations of our economic well-being. Yet the economic entreaties of environmentalists often fall on deaf ears, especially when the slogan of then-candidate Bill Clinton's campaign that “it’s the economy, stupid” holds such sway in public affairs. If environmentalists hope to advance an agenda in defense of economic and environmental sustainability, it seems that the burden is currently on them to prove that their proposals do not interfere with market efficiency and economic growth and development—and, more than this, that they are in fact pro-growth. If they fail to do this, environmentalists are all too familiar with the standard response: “you greenies are out to kill jobs and the economy.” The moment they enter the arena of modern democratic politics, environmentalists face a political paradox—the economic activities that ail the planet must also be the cure. What are environmentalists to do?

As I noted in the introductory chapter, many environmental thinkers argue that this paradox must be overcome by attending to nature’s value beyond human self-interest. For them,

it is wrong to justify environmental policies based on human interests alone, which amounts to an unethical anthropocentrism that ignores the broader well-being of the land community. And to the extent that humanity’s economic activities are the primary driver of environmental destruction, this view insists that the case must be made for counterbalancing economic considerations with ecological, aesthetic, and other non-economic values. Indeed, this call to environmental stewardship in pursuit of non-economic values is a worthy one, and I will have more to say about it in the next chapter. Yet the environmentalist’s response cannot end here, for, as Wendell Berry argues in the epigraph to this chapter, doing so would risk ignoring all the economic issues that are involved. A viable democratic environmentalism cannot avoid addressing human use of the land, and it does itself no favors politically when it implies—often unintentionally—that all human use of the land is ultimately abuse. It is an easy road from ecocentric purism to the conflation of environmentalism with anti-economism.

More than this, however, such an environmentalism cannot speak to one of its most compelling reasons for being—namely, to protect human homes from destruction. In keeping with my focus on ecological belonging and taking a cue from Berry’s contention that environmentalists need a “countervailing economic idea,” I argue here that environmentalists would do well to frame their efforts not simply as limiting or regulating the economy for the sake of environmental protection and economic sustainability. They should also frame a democratic environmental politics around the protection of property, and specifically a distinctive kind of property—the human home.

This argument may seem counterintuitive—after all, aren’t environmentalists generally suspicious of property rights? And don’t they have good reason to be? To be sure, the trope of property-as-problem is certainly prevalent in environmental political theory. In his assessment of the ecological promise and limitations of liberalism, for example, Marcel Wissenburg identifies as

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a key problem liberalism's "insistence on the importance of property rights."\textsuperscript{77} Andrew Linklater similarly points to "a belief in the sanctity of property rights" as a contributor to environmental abuse, and Andrew Valls nods to the conventional wisdom that "property rights have been a major obstacle to environmental regulation."\textsuperscript{78} Especially telling is Richard Dagger's argument for "the contraction or reinterpretation of property rights" that would be "offset or outweighed by the expansion of ... environmental rights," suggesting that the relationship between property and environmental rights is a tradeoff, with a loss in one offset by a gain in the other.\textsuperscript{79} This framing of property rights and the environment as a tradeoff sets the stage for what Theodore Steinberg calls "the often intense opposition to environmental regulations limiting landowners' property rights."\textsuperscript{80} The presumption shared by many environmentalists, then, is that property rights, while necessary or at least inevitable, are generally a problem to be solved and a set of rights to be limited. The idea of a defense of property rights is likely to conjure up images of Cliven Bundy or ExxonMobile—hardly paragons of environmental protection. Having so often found themselves in the position of advocating for the regulation and limitation of environmentally destructive practices by land-owners and industry, it is hardly surprising that environmentalists have come to view property rights and their defenders with suspicion.

My argument in this chapter is that this conventional wisdom, while not entirely misplaced, is incomplete and inadequate, and not just because it aids in typecasting environmentalists as anti-economic. It also misses one of the most important reasons why a democratic people should embrace environmentalism—namely, the protection of human homes, as well as natural habitats. While longstanding discourses of conservation and sustainability rightly focus on the need to maintain and manage aggregate quantities of natural resources to

meet the needs and wants of society over the long term, a democratic environmentalism should also address the need to defend people's property in the home, and the land where those homes are built. In accordance with ecological agrarianism's attention to the particularity of human attachment to the land, the approach I am advocating focuses on how (in)valuable this farm, this field, this forest, this garden, this apartment, and this house are to those who inhabit them. Moreover, ecological agrarianism emphasizes that human houses and natural habitats, economy and ecology, are intertwined. As sites of subsistence and shelter, our property in housing naturally extends beyond our doors, so to speak, to include the raw materials used to build and maintain our houses, the necessary flows of food, water, and energy in and out, and the health and stability of the land on which we build them. In this way, our economic housings are interwoven with what we often call “nature.” To reinforce this commonality between our economic housings and the ecological habitats on which they depend, I will refer to our economic housings and our property in them as *habitations*.

Yet a commitment to defending property in habitations does not entail a broader commitment to treating all property rights as equal. Quite the contrary. I argue instead that the greatest threat to habitations is in fact a different kind of property that many apologists for the global market economy conflate with property as such, even making it the sole measure of economic progress and success—namely, *fungible monetary wealth*. To express the difference between habitations and fungibles as ideal types, a habitation is a house that is perfectly serviceable as a dwelling but has negligible value on the real estate market, whereas purely fungible monetary wealth can be found in a bank account whose value is not directly backed by any real property or physical assets. Habitation property is pure use-value; fungible wealth is pure exchange-value. While these kinds of value are not necessarily and always at odds, I argue that, especially in environmental politics, they often are. I draw attention especially to a

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81 Karl Polanyi uses the term “habitations” in a somewhat similar way, though he does not develop the term theoretically in the manner I do here. My use of the term is inspired by his account of the English enclosure movement in *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1944], pp. 35-44), which I discuss below.

82 The distinction between use- and exchange-value will bring to mind the famous discussions by Aristotle and Marx. I will discuss both later in this chapter.
tendency—which I call developmentism—to ignore the qualitative difference between these two kinds of property, treating habitations either as entirely valueless and irrelevant or, more perniciously still, as untapped opportunities for lucrative development. That is, developmentism treats habitations as if they were or ought to be perfectly convertible into fungible monetary wealth, and as if not doing so is a form of economic waste. And, as we will see, developmentalists often deploy the power of the state to force unwilling sellers to part with their habitations, making the conflation of habitations with fungible wealth into a means of legitimizing the expropriation, dispossession, and involuntary commodification of habitations to make way for development. As we will also see, this is often justified through a tenuous, if not disingenuous, appeal to public benefits that happen to conveniently coincide with private profit.

Focusing on the clash between habitation property and fungible property allows us to frame environmentalism in a way that avoids the caricature of environmentalists as anti-economistic radicals opposed to all forms of land use by stressing that it is not economic development itself that is the problem, but rather its tendency, when freed from democratic restraint, to destroy a particular kind of property that is of special value and significance—the home. Importantly, then, the problem of environmental destruction is not best understood, as some critics of neoliberalism imply, as one of “economism,” as if the problem were one of viewing everything through an ‘economic’ lens and the solution was simply to reassert non-economic values like popular sovereignty and solidarity. Rather, developmentism obscures the difference between distinct kinds of economic value—namely, the exchange-value of fungible monetary wealth and the distinctive use-value of human habitations. In defending the use-value of habitations, environmentalists are protecting something that is every bit as “economic” as fungible monetary wealth and the market economy that revolves around it.

The rest of the chapter will proceed as follows. First, I turn to the politics of eminent domain in the United States, and especially to the controversial ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court

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83 See Wendy Brown, Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution, Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015. I will return to prevailing critiques of neoliberalism in this chapter’s conclusion.
in *Kelo v. New London* (2005), for a concrete example of how developmentalism targets property in human homes for involuntary commodification, and how this requires the collusion of state and corporate actors. My analysis will emphasize the inability or unwillingness of developmentalists, and often their critics as well, to distinguish between fungible and habitation property. Second, to address the developmentalist devaluation of undeveloped land and human homes, I turn to the insights of legal and environmental political theorists Margaret Radin, John Meyer, Piers Stephens, and Zev Trachtenberg, who recognize the need to distinguish between different kinds of property in order to better sort what Meyer calls “the undeniable attraction of private property” from the “equally undeniable and to-be-anticipated sources of resistance to absolute ownership.” However, I also show that their approaches, while promising, neglect the economic use-value of habitation property and its relevance to environmental politics. Third, to address this gap, I turn first to Aristotle, Marx, and Locke and then to Berry, Karl Polanyi, and E.P. Thompson to illuminate the largely non-monetary but nonetheless economic value of homes, common lands, subsistence farms, and indigenous property regimes. I show that these economic habitations and the lands they occupy have a long history of being targeted for expropriation and destruction by developmentalists who see their use as mere habitations as wasted opportunities for lucrative development. I conclude with a discussion of what my approach to property in habitations adds to prevailing critiques of neoliberalism and to our understanding of the relationship between the economy and the environment. The goal of a property-defending environmentalism is not simply to protect nature from human activity but to protect ourselves from the same developmentalist pathologies that threaten nature.

**Eminent Domain and the Threat to Human Homes**

By viewing environmental politics as in part an effort to defend property in habitations against destruction by unrestrained development of fungible monetary wealth, we can see hitherto neglected environmental resonances of classic controversies in property law. Foremost

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among these is the state’s power of eminent domain, also known as the takings power, and the U.S. Constitution’s limitation of that power as laid out in the Takings Clause of the 5th Amendment—“nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.” I will examine eminent domain with an eye to the threat it poses to property in habitations, especially in light of the Court’s interpretation of that power in *Kelo* to include takings for private economic development.

While scholars of property law like Bruce Ackerman and Jeremy Waldron have long noticed the relevance of the takings issue to environmentalism, they have focused their attention almost exclusively on the issue of regulatory takings. Here a regulation, such as an environmental regulation restricting land use, reduces the value of a property owner’s asset such that the reduction in value is deemed an exercise of eminent domain, entitling the property owner to just compensation—with the possible consequence, as environmental political theorists have noted, of making needful environmental regulations prohibitively expensive for the state if it is required to pay out compensation for all diminutions in economic value. This is much in keeping with the tendency I mentioned earlier for scholars to see property rights and environmental protection as adversarial. And it is telling that, in many cases involving the issue of environmental regulatory takings, the aggrieved land-owner was seeking to develop their property in a way that an environmental regulation complicated or thwarted.

Yet some of the most famous cases in takings law involve homeowners seeking to protect their homes from being taken by the state, often for the purpose of redevelopment. In *Berman v. Parker* (1954), the Warren Court ruled unanimously that Congress had not violated the

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86 See p. 43 below for a discussion.

87 For just two especially famous examples, see *Just v. Marinette County*, 56 Wis. 2d 7, 201 N.W.2d 761 (1972); *Lucas v. South Carolina Coastal Council*, 505 U.S. 1003 (1992). I will discuss *Lucas* below.
Takings Clause when it granted the District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency the power of eminent domain to take homes and other real property in order to demolish them to combat blight and encourage urban renewal.\textsuperscript{88} In \textit{Poletown Neighborhood Council v. Detroit} (1981), the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that the City of Detroit had not violated the state constitution when it used the power of eminent domain to facilitate the clearing of over 1,300 households (as well as churches, businesses, schools, and a hospital) to make room for a new General Motors manufacturing plant.\textsuperscript{89} Already in these earlier cases, we see several important patterns that point toward some key characteristics of developmentalism, or the tendency to treat habitations as obstacles or opportunities for development. In both cases the pressure toward development results in communities sacrificing the homes of some of their residents; in both cases, the “public use” for which eminent domain is exercised is conveniently profitable to private developers; and in \textit{Berman} the public use of eminent domain by the state is aided by a quasi-public unelected redevelopment agency. These and other characteristics of developmentalism, and especially the threat it poses to human habitations, will come into clearer focus upon examining the more recent and especially controversial ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in \textit{Kelo v. New London} that the Takings Clause allows the state to take private property for private development. \textit{Kelo} serves as a case study for what is at stake today in the politics of developmentalism.

The circumstances leading up to \textit{Kelo} are telling. The City of New London, Connecticut, like many cities of the post-industrial Northeast, had fallen into a protracted economic and demographic decline, which was exacerbated by the closing of the U.S. Naval Underwater Sound Laboratory in 1996.\textsuperscript{90} In pursuit of economic revitalization, in 1997 the City resuscitated a dormant quasi-public nonprofit called the New London Development Corporation (NLDC) to be headed by Claire Gaudiani, then-president of Connecticut College, whose husband, Dr. David Burnett,

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\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Berman v. Parker}, 348 US 26 (1954).
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happened to be a high-level employee at the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. \(^91\) The NLDC brought Pfizer executive George Milne onto their board and it was not long before talks began to secure a Pfizer facility in New London. However, Pfizer insisted that it would need more land than was currently available for private development to accommodate the company's needs, including “upscale housing, office space, a conference center, a five-star hotel, and other facilities that would be useful to the corporation and its employees who would work in the area.” \(^92\) Ilya Somin adds in his study of the case that “[w]hile Pfizer would not be the new owner of the properties in question, it expected to benefit from their redevelopment.” \(^93\) Eager to secure Pfizer's investment in New London, the City Council granted NLDC the power of eminent domain to secure the requisite properties from unwilling sellers, including over one hundred privately owned properties. \(^94\) With the help of the Institute for Justice, a libertarian legal advocacy group, nine unwilling sellers who owned fifteen properties took the City to court, partially winning their case in Connecticut Superior Court in 2002 but losing in close decisions at both the Supreme Court of Connecticut in 2004 and the U.S. Supreme Court in 2005.

At issue in all three court decisions were two related questions. First, is eminent domain permitted by the Takings Clause when property is being taken from one private owner and given to another for the sake of private economic development? That is, does private economic development qualify as a “public use” under the Takings Clause? \(^95\) Second, are the takings executed by NLDC necessary for that public use, that is, for New London to encourage private economic development? The Connecticut Superior Court ruled that economic development is a permissible “public use” under the 5th Amendment, but invalidated the taking of eleven of the


\(^92\) Ibid., 16.

\(^93\) Ibid.

\(^94\) See Justice Steven’s majority opinion (p. 3). Indeed, Somin (Grasping Hand, 19-23) shows that, even before the power of eminent domain was granted to NLDC, the City undertook persistent efforts to pressure and even harass residents into selling their land and moving out to make way for the development project. Even absent harassment, one might question the extent to which ostensibly “voluntary” sales were in fact voluntary in the face of the threat of eminent domain.

\(^95\) Again, the Takings Clause reads as follows: “nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.”
fifteen properties because the court deemed them unnecessary for the public use. On appeal, both the Supreme Court of Connecticut and the U.S. Supreme Court agreed that private economic development counts as a “public use” but further ruled that all fifteen of the property takings were reasonably necessary for achieving that goal. While these decisions were arguably in line with precedent going back to Berman that read the “public use” requirement quite broadly, and while the principle of deference to democratically-elected legislatures (in this case, the New London City Council) was central to both decisions, the specific constitutional reasoning of the judicial majorities is less important for my purposes here than the question of how demolishing human habitations for private economic development comes to be viewed as legitimate, both by the City of New London and the higher courts that allowed its plan to proceed. To that end, I will focus on the City’s justifications for the takings as well as the justices’ views regarding the legitimacy of private economic development as a justification for state condemnation of private property, and especially residential homes.

First, we need to call the NLDC’s plan what it was—a land grab. This act of dispossession was facilitated by a non-elected quasi-public legal body to further the financial interests of a private corporation (Pfizer) and its promises of economic growth and revitalization, all at the expense of the homes of city residents. What is more, these were not just anyone’s homes. As Somin reports:

David Burnett, a high-ranking Pfizer employee and husband of Claire Gaudiani [the head of NLDC], told a reporter that the houses had to be destroyed because ‘Pfizer wants a nice place to operate,’ and ‘we don’t want to be surrounded by tenements.’ Gaudiani herself stated that the houses had to be knocked down because otherwise they would have looked ‘ugly and dumb.’ In 2005, NLDC lawyer Ed O’Connell told the New York Times that the homes owned by the preexisting owners had to be torn down in order to make way for ‘housing at the upper end, for people like the Pfizer employees … They are the professionals, they are the ones with the expertise and the leadership qualities to remake the city—the young urban professionals who will invest in New London.’

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98 Somin, Grasping Hand, 17.
It is difficult to overstate the importance of the class politics behind all this. The straightforward effect of NLDC’s policy is that homes occupied by predominantly poorer and older residents are replaced by “upper end” housing for “young urban professionals” who will not abide the eyesore of “tenements.” It is essentially upward economic redistribution by means of eminent domain, and it points to the fact that developmentalism generally targets not just anyone’s homes for demolition, but specifically those who lack political and economic power and whose homes are of relatively low market value. Moreover, it suggests that the promised benefits will likely accrue to those who are already in a better position to reap them—the wealthy, the well-connected, the well-educated, and those who are generally seen as more “valuable” for spurring economic development.

Thus, when Justice Stevens points in his majority opinion to NLDC’s goal of “mak[ing] the City more attractive and [creating] leisure and recreational opportunities,” we have to ask the question: for whom? The answer seems to be: for young professionals valuable to Pfizer, so valuable that the homes of poorer and predominantly elderly residents are a fair price for the promised development. This points to a broader danger of private development takings becoming a method of upward redistribution of wealth. As Justice O’Connor wrote in her dissent:

Any property may now be taken for the benefit of another private party, but the fallout from this decision will not be random. The beneficiaries are likely to be those citizens with disproportionate influence and power in the political process, including large corporations and development firms. As for the victims, the government now has license to transfer property from those with fewer resources to those with more.99

Pfizer’s role in lobbying the City of New London to use eminent domain to make space for its facility is telling enough, but Somin also points out that not all property owners in the redevelopment zone were forced out—a private civic organization called the Italian Dramatic Club

was spared condemnation, perhaps in part because it happened to be a “hot spot for politicians seeking votes and financial support.” Evidently, those who have the means to resist the union of state and corporate power will do so, and those who cannot are out of luck. In this way, the properties that are exempted from developmentalist expropriation are just as telling as those that are targeted.

Importantly, the vulnerability of habitations to developmentalism comes not just from the lack of political and economic power of the inhabitants, but also from the amorphous and all-encompassing benefits promised by development. As Justice Thomas rightly argues, this raises obvious questions of conflict of interest that the judicial majority is remarkably unwilling to acknowledge. Yet even beyond these issues of corruption and procedural fairness, the problem is that developmentalism succeeds by defining the public interest in economic development so broadly and so amorphously that nearly any use of eminent domain can be justified by appealing to the promise of putting the property in question to “higher” or “better” use—that is, one more lucrative for the developer and, perhaps, to the public. The result is that the “public use” requirement of the Takings Clause can be used to clear ground for more than the provision of straightforwardly public goods like roads, bridges, and parks. It can now be used to justify eminent domain in any case in which the resulting development might increase tax revenue, economic growth, and job creation. As a result, Justice O’Connor concludes:

Under the banner of economic development, all private property is now vulnerable to being taken and transferred to another private owner, so long as it might be upgraded—i.e., given to an owner who will use it in a way that the legislature deems more beneficial to the public—in the process.

Here O’Connor puts her finger on the essence of developmentalism. She is right to be troubled by the prospect of economic development becoming a license for developers to expropriate property

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100 Somin, Grasping Hand, 23.
101 Justice Thomas castigates the majority opinion for concluding, “against all common sense, that a costly urban-renewal project whose stated purpose is a vague promise of new jobs and increased tax revenue, but which is also suspiciously agreeable to the Pfizer Corporation, is for a ‘public use’” (Kelo, Thomas dissent, 1). Justice O’Connor reinforces this point by arguing that “[t]he trouble with economic development takings is that private benefit and incidental public benefit are, by definition, merged and mutually reinforcing. In this case, for example, any boon for Pfizer or the plan’s developer is difficult to disaggregate from the promised public gains in taxes and jobs” (Kelo, O’Connor dissent, 10).
102 Kelo, O’Connor dissent, 1.
via the state's power of eminent domain. After all, "nearly any lawful use of real private property can be said to generate some incidental benefit to the public," and, she asks, who among us "can say she already makes the most productive or attractive possible use of her property?" 103 This leaves nearly all property vulnerable to involuntary "upgrading." Thus she concludes:

The specter of condemnation hangs over all property. Nothing is to prevent the State from replacing any Motel 6 with a Ritz-Carlton, any home with a shopping mall, or any farm with a factory. 104 Economic development becomes a trump card allowing developers to use the power of the state to clear away less (monetarily) valuable property to make way for lucrative development that benefits them directly while promising to benefit the public incidentally.

Moreover, all of this assumes that the proposed development will actually occur. As the dissenting opinion from the Supreme Court of Connecticut in 2004 warned: "in the absence of statutory safeguards to ensure that the public purpose will be accomplished, there are too many unknown factors, such as a weak economy, that may derail such a project in the early and intermediate stages of its implementation." 105 Unfortunately, this warning proved prescient. Just a few years after the Supreme Court vindicated the private development project it had demanded, Pfizer left town in a cost-cutting effort and the promised development never came. 106 To this day, most of the condemned properties remain vacant lots. This reveals another tendency of developmentalism—it encourages the sacrifice of actual, presently-existing homes to make way for hypothetical development that is by no means guaranteed to happen. The promised development may produce far less of an economic boon than developers promised, or it may never come at all. Either way, the homes have been demolished, and their former inhabitants can never get them back. Such is the threat to human habitations when economic development

103 Ibid., 8, 10.
104 Ibid., 10-11.
becomes the gold standard in debates over the public good in constitutional law and public policy, opening the floodgates for public takings for private gain.

The Need for Distinctions in Legal and Environmental Theories of Property

As I alluded to earlier, there is a danger in framing the *Kelo* case, and developmentalism more broadly, as an issue of "property rights" and those who violate them. For one thing, such a framing misses the obvious fact that, as is so often the case in disputes over property law, there are property interests on both sides. Indeed, the *Kelo* case, and the issue of eminent domain more generally, is an especially useful means of diagnosing the problems with developmentalism precisely because this is a matter of property interests clashing with one another—and especially in *Kelo*, of property rights in human habitations clashing with the property interests of developers. Moreover, the environmentalist's skepticism toward "property rights" and their defenders is hardly unearned. We need only to remember who the dissenting justices were in *Kelo*—O'Connor, Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas, the very same conservative block that, along with its heirs in Roberts, Alito, Gorsuch, and Kavanaugh, have supported the rollback of environmental regulations in the name of "property rights" for decades.  

Thus, while Justices O'Connor and Thomas aptly identify some of the problems with the NLDC's takings and the conflation of commercial development with "public use," an environmental theory of developmentalism must go beyond their analysis. The problem with the conservative defense of "property rights" as such is that it treats property as a monolith, as if one's property right in a house, a Motel 6, a factory, and the billionth dollar in a hedge fund all amount to the same sort of entitlement and differ only in relative market value.

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108 In her dissent, Justice O'Connor repeatedly touches on the threat posed by economic development takings against the home, but always alongside the threat posed to other real property, such as stores, churches, farms, malls, and factories, largely passing over the distinctiveness of home in her effort to defend property rights from government intrusion (*Kelo*, O'Connor's Dissent, esp. pp. 8, 10-12). Justice Thomas also falls into the conservative "property rights" trope, but, to his credit, he considers the condemnation of homes to be an especially egregious assault on property rights, writing that "no compensation is possible for
In fact, the nature of the significant and widespread outcry following the Supreme Court’s *Kelo* decision suggests that the public may recognize a distinction between different kinds of property that the conservative dissenters obscure. As Somin notes, the backlash against *Kelo* was quite broad and resulted in a bevy of state legislation aimed at eminent domain reform.\(^{109}\)

Polls showed that over 80% of the public disapproved of the ruling, and that overwhelming opposition persisted even in surveys taken several years after the ruling came down. The opposition cut across conventional partisan, ideological, racial, and gender divisions. This was a rare issue on which Rush Limbaugh, Ralph Nader, libertarians, and the NAACP were all on the same side.\(^{110}\)

To be sure, the public controversy was driven in large part by a basic sense of the unfairness of private economic interests using public power for private profit. But it is telling that critics of the ruling have deliberately focused their attention on and framed the issue around a particular kind of property—the home.

Consider a televised advertisement by the conservative political action group Club for Growth attacking then-primary candidate Donald Trump for his vocal support for eminent domain for private development.\(^{111}\) Below is my transcription of the ad’s audio narration track. I have bolded the text where the narrator references property rights.

> The Supreme Court's *Kelo* decision gave government massive new power to take private property and give it to corporations. Conservatives have fought this disaster. What’s Donald Trump’s say about the decision? [Recording of Fox News interview of Trump:] “I happen to agree with it one hundred percent.” Trump supports eminent domain abuse because he can make millions while we lose our property rights. Trump. The worst kind of politician.

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the subjective value of these lands to the individuals displaced and the indignity inflicted by uprooting them from their homes,” also noting the cruel irony that “citizens are safe from the government in their homes, [yet] the homes themselves are not” (*Kelo*, Thomas’ dissent, pp. 14, 17).\(^{109}\) Somin concludes that most of these legislative efforts failed to impose real limits on the taking power. See *Grasping Hand*, pp. 135-180.


During both references to property, the ad shows images of residential homes being demolished by shovel trucks. The ad's producers seek to draw attention not to just any kind of property, but to a specific kind of private property that is held especially dearly by its owners because its value is fundamentally different from other kinds of property. Yet here again it bears noticing that what the conservative Club for Growth is effectively doing, much like the conservative dissenters in *Kelo*, is putting the distinctive and evocative value of the home in service of a broader, reductive defense of property rights as such. The potency of the Club for Growth ad lies in its images of houses being destroyed, but the message of the ad, and the goal of Club for Growth, is a defense of all property rights from government intrusion.

Indeed, we can see much the same going on in the goals of the Institute for Justice, the libertarian legal advocacy organization that represented the petitioners in *Kelo*. In their broader efforts to bolster "judicial protection for individual freedom, with a special focus on property rights and economic liberties," the lawyers at IJ saw the plight of Suzette Kel and the other longtime homeowners resisting state takings as "an ideal public interest case."\(^{112}\) Conservative and libertarian advocates of property rights freed from government interference seem to recognize that the home is especially valuable to those who live in them and that the public widely recognizes and sympathizes with this distinctive valuation of the home. They know that the public will react more viscerally to the destruction of *homes* than other kinds of property. But their widely shared unwillingness to distinguish between different kinds of property makes their approach untenable for environmentalists—at least not without significant reworking. For that, we must look elsewhere.

One promising resource is the personhood theory of property advanced by the legal theorist Margaret Radin, who finds the lack of distinctions between different kinds of property claims in mainstream legal thought unsatisfactory. Radin grounds her theory of property in

\(^{112}\) Somin, *Grasping Hand*, 24-25. I should note that Somin's book on the *Kelo* case is itself an argument for greater protection of property rights and economic liberties. Though his treatment of the takings issue does at times highlight the especially high subjective value that houses have for their owners (see *ibid*, e.g. 95, 110), he largely treats economic development takings of homes as an especially egregious example of the failure to respect a general right to private property.
personal self-development, arguing that “[m]ost people possess certain objects they feel are almost part of themselves” and that “these objects are closely bound up with personhood because they are a part of the way we constitute ourselves as continuing personal entities in the world.” These objects are difficult, if not impossible, to replace, which means the loss of a personal object is uniquely painful. Other objects, however, are not held so dearly, or at least not in the same way, and might even be replaced by a similar object or compensated with money without any enduring sense of loss. With this in mind, Radin sets up a spectrum with two “theoretical opposites: property that is bound up with a person and property that is held purely instrumentally—personal property and fungible property respectively.” Examples of personal property include “a wedding ring, a portrait, an heirloom, or a house,” whereas the paradigmatic example of fungible property is money. Importantly, Radin observes that the same object can be either personal or fungible depending on the owner. Radin illustrates this with the example of a wedding ring:

For instance, if a wedding ring is stolen from a jeweler, insurance proceeds can reimburse the jeweler, but if a wedding ring is stolen from a loving wearer, the price of a replacement will not restore the status quo—perhaps no amount of money can do so.

The same can be said for a house. A real estate agent—or the NLDC, or Pfizer—might see a particular house as perfectly substitutable with another house or any other commodity of equivalent (or greater) market value, whereas the homeowner likely has a deeply personal relationship to the house, as many of the petitioners in Kelo apparently did. And as Radin points out, a similar distinction applies to the differing attitudes that tenants and landlords will have to the very same apartment unit. For Radin, the landlord will largely treat the property as a fungible asset, while the tenant—and especially a long-term resident—will likely view the apartment as personal property in a way that is hardly attenuated by the fact that the tenant does

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114 Radin, Reinterpreting Property, 41.
115 Ibid. 37.
116 Ibid, 37.
117 Ibid, 57-59.
not “own” the unit. For Radin, then, the salient point for one’s entitlement to personal property is
not one’s legal title to it or the monetary value of one’s plans to develop it, but rather one’s personal connection to it.

The market economy’s tendency to treat personal property as if it were fully fungible, or perfectly substitutable for goods or money of like value, can be pathological. For Radin, this reflects a failure to distinguish between personal and fungible property that is especially prevalent in neo-classical economics and legal theories built on it.

All entitlements are treated alike in the [economist’s] model. Economists typically rely on efficiency criteria and not on the perspective of autonomy or personhood in seeking to determine whether certain entitlements should be accorded greater protection than others. In a neo-Lockean natural rights scheme, property rights might swallow up other concerns.118

There is an especially dangerous kind of reductionism involved in treating all property rights as the same because doing so in a market economy risks having personal property treated as if it were fungible. Radin even goes so far as to identify a prevalent worldview born of treating all property as fungible, calling it “universal commodification.”119 On this view, all values are fully commensurable and all losses are capable of perfect compensation, thereby reducing “all values to sums of money” and evaluating all kinds of property by the standards appropriate to fungible monetary wealth.120

In spite of the worldview of universal commodification, though, “the thought persists, for whatever reasons, that some kinds of entitlements are more worthy of protection than others.”121

Again, this is why the Institute for Justice saw the New London homeowners as the right litigants for “an ideal public interest case” against eminent domain abuse and why the Club for Growth chose the images of homes being demolished as the best way to appeal to the fears and

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118 Ibid, note 81 at 216.
119 Margaret Radin, *Contested Commodities*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 2. She traces this worldview back to the Chicago School of neoclassical economics, which seeks to analyze all human behavior through analogy with market transactions and monetary costs and benefits.
120 Ibid, p. 8.
121 Radin, *Reinterpreting Property*, 52.
sympathies of ad viewers. As a distinctively valuable kind of property, the home resonates with many, as do perceived threats to it. People rightly fear the involuntary commodification of their personal property, and especially their homes. And this is precisely what happens in the case of economic development takings. The Takings Clause requires "just compensation," and just compensation is usually determined in reference to "fair market value," or the monetary value the property would fetch on the market if it had been sold voluntarily. State takings for private development, then, amounts to the state forcing a property owner to make a market transaction they do not want to make—that is, state takings for private development means involuntary commodification. Thus, the worldview of universal commodification is especially dangerous to personal property, including the home, when wedded with the state's power of eminent domain. Indeed, Radin explicitly suggests that her theory might warrant "limitation on the eminent domain power" because "there might be a prima facie case against taking personal property."

Overall, Radin's personhood theory of property offers immensely helpful materials with which to remedy the defects of developmentalist accounts of property. She distinguishes between personal property and fungible property, which allows environmentalists to distinguish between property that deserves greater protection because of its distinctive connection to human flourishing (personal property) and property that is more in need of regulation to protect both human homes and natural habitats (fungible property). As Radin herself points out, her theory generates a "hierarchy of entitlements" in which "the more closely connected with personhood, the stronger the entitlement," justifying greater protections for personal than for fungible property. Radin's theory, then, offers environmentalists a vocabulary with which to defend property that is especially precious to its possessors while at the same time advocating the sort of limitations and regulations on fungible property that environmental preservation and human well-being require. However, Radin's theory alone does not take us all the way to a robust

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123 Radin, Reinterpreting Property, 66.
124 Radin, Reinterpreting Property, 53.
environmentalist defense of property in habitations. To see why, let me return to the issue of regulatory takings.

Recall that the doctrine of regulatory taking refers to instances in which the state does not confiscate property—land, a house, a factory—but rather imposes a regulation that restricts the use of the property, and thus its value, to such an extent that the regulation constitutes a taking under the 5th Amendment and requires compensation for the property owner.\textsuperscript{125} This is an especially thorny issue for environmentalists because many environmental regulations, including those seeking to encourage sustainable land use, would be prohibitively expensive if the state were required to compensate every owner for diminution of property value. Indeed, John Meyer points to a telling example in which property rights advocates in Oregon helped pass a state ballot initiative in 2004 (Measure 37) that imposed an expansive definition of what constitutes a regulatory taking in the hopes of thwarting environmental land-use laws.\textsuperscript{126} However, just three years later, Oregon voters approved another ballot initiative (Measure 49) to reverse parts of the 2004 law that applied to commercial and large residential development projects—and, curiously, both ballot initiatives passed by similar margins.\textsuperscript{127} For Meyer, this poses something of a paradox, because while strict protection of property rights generate popular support, so too do environmental regulations that limit those property rights.\textsuperscript{128}

On the one hand, Radin’s distinction between personal and fungible property is still useful here. In fact, the hierarchy of entitlements that her theory implies offers a possible explanation for the paradox Meyer identifies. It may well be that behind the paradox is a difference in valuation by the public between personal and fungible property. With the widespread outcry against the \textit{Kelo} ruling also in mind, we might conclude that the public wants laws that protect their personal property—especially their habitations—from expropriation and undue interference. At the same

\textsuperscript{125} Regulatory takings doctrine goes back at least to \textit{Pennsylvania Coal Company v. Mahon}, 260 U.S. 393 (1922).
\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{128} As Meyer puts it, "while [an absolutist] conception of property generates popular support, citizens also routinely endorse policies to protect themselves from environmental harms" (\textit{Ibid}).
time, the very same public might also support regulations that target uses of fungible property that pose a threat to themselves, their homes, and the public good. Of course, whether or not the public actually feels this way is an empirical question, but at the very least a theoretically and normatively compelling case can be made for this perspective, and it would at least be consistent with the public’s seesawing on the issue of environmental regulatory takings in Oregon that Meyer identifies.

On the other hand, the limits of Radin’s theory become apparent when applied to other cases of environmental regulatory takings. Consider the landmark ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Lucas v. South Carolina Coastal Council* (1992).\(^{129}\) There, petitioner David Lucas had purchased coastal beach property in 1986 with the intention of building homes for later sale on the burgeoning beachfront real estate market but found his plans thwarted when the South Carolina legislature passed a law in 1988 that extended prior regulations requiring developers to obtain permits from the South Carolina Coastal Council before building in “critical areas” along the coast, especially in fragile dune systems.\(^{130}\) Having purchased his land before the law was passed, Lucas now faced new regulations that prevented him from realizing the full developmental value of his landed property. Lucas argued that the state’s regulation amounted to a taking because it deprived him of the “economically viable uses” of his land and that he was therefore entitled to full compensation by the state. While the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled against Lucas and argued that the regulation was within the state’s police power and thus did not amount to an exercise of eminent domain, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in his favor, arguing that the regulation deprived Lucas of the full developmental value of his property and that he was entitled to compensation by the state per the 5th Amendment.

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\(^{130}\) According to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, the Beachfront Management Act sought to address “the importance of the beach and dune system in protecting life and property from storms, providing significant economic revenue through tourism, providing habitat for important plants and animals, and providing a healthy environment for recreation and improved quality of life of all citizens” and noted that “unwise development has been sited too close to and has jeopardized the stability of the beach/dune system.” Website of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, “Beachfront Management,” retrieved January 16, 2017. (<http://www.scdhec.gov/beach/BeachfrontManagement/>).
Houses figure prominently in the facts of the case in both *Kelo* and *Lucas*. What is the difference between them? First, the houses in *Kelo* were actual and inhabited; the houses in *Lucas* merely hypothetical. Second, per Radin’s theory, Suzette Kelo’s house was a habitation for her, and David Lucas’ future houses were fungible property to him. In this regard, *Lucas*’ property interest had much more in common with those of the private developers in *Kelo* than with the actual homeowners in that case. Here, Radin’s theory remains illuminating.

Yet this difference between houses that are inhabited and houses that are to be developed also reveals a blind spot in Radin’s personhood account of property. Radin’s theory hinges on the emotional attachment one has to a thing in the world, such as a wedding ring or a house, things that become integral to one’s personality, memories, and life-plans. Yet might not Lucas’ property also be something he has a measure of attachment to because of their role in future plans that are integral to his personhood? In general, might it not be the case that development is integral to the personality of the developer, and thus that environmental regulations that limit or eliminate opportunities to develop land and accumulate wealth deprive the developer of the ability to enact his personality? To be sure, Radin might respond that land for development is far more fungible than an already-inhabited home—any other piece of developmentally valuable land would do. It might also be the case that, in the sense relevant to her theory of personhood, someone who uses the beachfront property for recreation or amateur naturalism has more of a personal connection to the property than Lucas does.131 This is undoubtedly important, yet the difficulty runs deeper than this. There is a danger in prefacing personal property claims, as Radin does, solely on the basis of emotional attachment and development of personality. The question of property claims must rest not solely on the intensity of desire, but also on the intensity of need. As Wendell Berry might argue, to treat home solely as

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131 Radin hints that this might be the case when she addresses the issue that not all personal attachments to property are equally healthy or praiseworthy. Tellingly, one of the examples she examines is the “fetishism of commodities” in which “property itself is anti-personhood” in the hands of the “caricature capitalist” whom “most people might consider … lacking in some essential attribute of personhood, such as the capacity to respect other people or the environment.” (Radin, *Reinterpreting Property*, 44). Whether or not this theoretical move is viable, it does suggest that Radin would be reluctant to afford Lucas’ plans for development the privileged status of personal property.
an emotional attachment ignores “the fact that we live necessarily in and from nature—ignoring, in other words, all the economic issues that are involved.” Radin’s distinction between fungible and personal property illuminates much about the especially intense value of the home, but it hardly exhausts its worth. Habitations are of immense value not simply because we (might) feel most ourselves there or because they play an exemplary role in shaping our personalities and identities. They also protect the body, sheltering it from the elements and housing uncompensated labors and household activities that developmentalist valuations of property fail to register. While the home is often understood as a locus for emotional belonging, and for good reason, it also should be thought of in economic—but not exclusively developmentalist—terms. Otherwise, its relevance to property theory may not be fully recognized. Radin’s theory is not enough to make full sense of the issues at play here because its emphasis on emotional connection does not capture a compelling reason for environmentalists would seek to protect landed property from unrestrained development—namely, the non-fungible human interests in property that are nonetheless instrumental and economic rather than primarily emotional.

Indeed, Justice Harry Blackmun’s dissenting opinion in Lucas points in this direction. For Blackmun, the ruling by the majority that David Lucas had been deprived of “all economic value” of his property is “almost certainly erroneous” because he can “still enjoy other attributes of ownership.” Not only can the owner exclude others from his property, but he can also “picnic, swim, camp in a tent, or live on the property in a moveable trailer”—and he can even alienate the land to those “prepared to enjoy proximity to the ocean without a house.” Indeed, Blackman notes that “[s]tate courts frequently have recognized that land has economic value where the only residual economic uses are recreation or camping”—in other words, there are modes of land use that are recognizably economic without involving and requiring much development. But the Court entirely ignores this, opting instead to accept a lower court’s finding that the “highest and best use of these lots … is] luxury single family detached dwellings” and that “the property could be

132 Berry, “The Whole Horse,” 114.
134 Ibid.
considered ‘valueless’ if it was not available for its most profitable use.”¹³⁵ That is, the Court accepts a thoroughly developmentalist standard of what constitutes economic value, conflating its value for future development of fungible monetary wealth with economic value as such. Radin’s theory of personal property, while helpful in foregrounding the emotional attachment residents have to their dwelling places, does not speak to the economic but non-fungible use-value of property in land and homes alike—that is, in human habitations.

This gap is also apparent in otherwise highly fruitful efforts by environmental political theorists who have taken up Radin’s distinction between fungible and personal property to help make sense of the complicated role of property in environmental politics. Despite the common skepticism toward property among environmentalists, some environmental political theorists have seen with John Meyer the need to recognize both the importance and the problems of private property for environmental politics.¹³⁶ Accordingly, Piers Stephens adopts Radin’s distinction between fungible and personal property, developing it further into a distinction between property as mere “having” and property as “belonging” that he hopes will enable “an ecologically sensitive property theory” based on viewing land as a site of mutual belonging in which, as Val Plumwood puts it, “you belong to the land as much as the land belongs to you.”¹³⁷ Zev Trachtenberg also takes up Radin’s theory, pointing to both the fungible and personal interests of owners in landed property while drawing from Aldo Leopold’s land ethic to identify a third, “communal” meaning of property that treats landed property as “the substrate of human community” and an essential “medium of human connection.”¹³⁸ Importantly, this communal conception of property recognizes that land use by private owners affects other owners and the public more broadly, so it is this conception of property that justifies environmental regulations of land-use that “guard against

¹³⁵ Ibid.
unwanted externalities” and prevent harm to the public interest.\textsuperscript{139} Both approaches are highly illuminating—Stephens’ emphasis on land as a site of mutual belonging generatively extends Radin’s theory to the issue of property in land itself and Trachtenberg’s addition of the third category of communal property speaks more directly to the \textit{Lucas} case and other controversies of environmental regulations that are better understood as conflicts between communal and fungible property, rather than personal and fungible.\textsuperscript{140}

However, both Stephens and Trachtenberg largely inherit Radin’s neglect of the economic yet non-fungible value of property in land and the home. Radin and Stephens’ emphasis on emotional attachments to property and Trachtenberg’s emphasis on limiting property use that threatens the public interest are both well-taken, but they also fail to speak directly to the need for human use and inhabitance of the land, thereby doing little to counteract the anti-economic strand of environmentalism while failing to answer the ravages of developmentalist thinking with a countervailing economic idea. To be sure, attending to the use-value of habitations doesn’t so much cut against the grain of the accounts offered by Radin, Stephens, Trachtenberg so much as it addresses a lacuna in their theories. But the lacuna is an important one for a democratic defense of property in habitations against the developmentalist conflation of all ecological, emotional, \textit{and} economic values with fungible monetary wealth.

\textbf{Use versus Exchange, Habitation versus Development}

To address that gap requires attention to the distinction within economic valuations of property between the economic use-value of habitations and the economic exchange-value of fungible wealth. This distinction builds on the approaches offered by Radin, Stephens, and Trachtenberg while stressing that, in addition to addressing the intrinsic value of nature, the communal meanings of land, and personal attachments to property, a viable environmental

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{139} \textit{Ibid}, 76. See generally pp. 75-80.
\item \textsuperscript{140} In \textit{Lucas}, the conflict is between the public interest in preventing damage to fragile dune ecosystems that include but stretch well beyond Lucas’ property (communal property) and Lucas’ financial interest as a developer (fungible property).
\end{itemize}
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politics should also embrace the economic and instrumental value of land and the homes we build on them.

The canon of Western political thought offers precedents for such a distinction. In his famous discussion of household management (οἰκονομία), Aristotle defines the household as “the community constituted by nature for the needs of daily life” and takes great pains to distinguish household management—the source of “genuine wealth”—from the practice of moneymaking (or χρηματιστικά). For Aristotle, whereas the fruits of household management are intrinsically limited by sufficiency, the acquisitive art of moneymaking knows no limits. Moreover, he observes that one and the same object has a “double use” depending on whether it is used for household management or for moneymaking. Noticing this, Aristotle makes his deeply influential distinction between use and exchange value. To use Aristotle’s example, a shoe might be used for its primary purpose, to be worn, or it may be exchanged for the sake of making money. Even in his time, Aristotle recognizes the totalizing impulse that drives moneymaking to overtake other ends and convert them into means of moneymaking.

This danger, along with Aristotle’s distinction between use and exchange value, was of course taken up by Marx in his critique of capitalism, with Marx tracing capitalism to the pursuit of ever more “mere exchange-value”—that is, money made in pursuit of more money. Notably, Marx made very clear in his discussion of use and exchange at the beginning of Capital that a
thing “can be a use-value, without having [exchange] value” if it is a product of nature such as “air, virgin soil, [and] natural meadows,” or if it is a useful product of human labor but not intended for sale.\textsuperscript{147} Thus, for Aristotle and Marx, the distinction between use and exchange value within economics is of vital importance, and they both recognize the potential for exchange-value to subsume and overtake use-value in economic affairs.

This distinction even appears in Locke’s influential theory of property. Many environmental political theorists criticize Locke’s theory for legitimizing the exploitation of the land,\textsuperscript{148} but Locke also distinguishes between “the truly useful, but perishable Supports of Life” that have “intrinsic value” and things like “Gold, Silver, and Diamonds … that Fancy or Agreement hath put the Value on, more than real Use … being little useful to the Life of Man in proportion to Food, Rayment, and Carriage…”\textsuperscript{149} Though Locke does not use Aristotle’s term of “genuine wealth,” nor does he seem to share the latter’s suspicion toward moneymaking, Locke’s language here still carries over the classical sense that it is the value of things “truly useful, but perishable” that is most important. Indeed, Locke begins his famous account of property with language that seems to accord with the basic insights of agrarianism, arguing that “Men … have a right to their preservation, and consequently to Meat and Drink, and such other things, as Nature affords for their Subsistence” and that therefore “[t]he Earth, and all that is therein, is given

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 1, p. 307.


\textsuperscript{149} Locke, 2nd Treatise, §§37, 46, 50, pp. 294, 300-301.
to Men for the Support and Comfort of their being." Indeed, Locke’s language even appears to echo a key theme of ecological agrarianism when he introduces his famous spoilage limit:

God has given us all things richly ... But how far has he given it us? To Enjoy. As much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils; so much he may by his labour fix a property in. Whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others. Nothing was made by God for Man to spoil or destroy.  

Yet Locke famously overcomes this spoilage limitation through the introduction of money. For Locke, though the value of money is purely conventional, it has the advantage of being an effective store of value because it does not spoil or decay. As Strauss and Macpherson both influentially argued, this appears to license limitless capitalist accumulation. To the extent that this interpretation is correct, Locke’s theory of property marks the very thing Aristotle feared—the overtaking of use-value and genuine wealth by exchange-value and moneymaking in economic thought.

Indeed, Locke can be read as the first theorist of developmentalism, especially because his theory traces the connection between subsuming all use-values in the quest for exchange-values and the resulting dispossession and destruction of habitations. For Locke goes on to equate waste not so much with the failure to reap the use-value of the land but rather with the failure to put the land to its highest use by improving and developing it to achieve ever-greater commercial value. This has led some scholars to interpret Locke’s theory of property as a justification for dispossession of those who are failing to put their land to the highest use, and especially the indigenous inhabitants of lands that supposedly “lie waste” in parts of the world that have not yet been integrated into the commercial economy of money accumulation. On this

151 Ibid, §31, p. 290, emphasis in original.
interpretation, Locke’s ideas helped European settlers and colonial officials conceive of indigenous lands, and indigenous habitations on those lands, as *terra nullius*—that is, as land belonging to no one. Taken to its logical conclusion, then, Lockean theory turns into developmentalism par excellence by treating the use-value of habitations as negligible with respect to both economic valuation and natural right and resulting in the dispossession and destruction of indigenous habitations to make way for colonial settlement and commercial development. Much as Suzette Kelo’s house and South Carolina’s dune ecosystems were deemed as obstacles to, or opportunities for, commercial development under a developmentalist reading of the Takings Clause, so too were the habitations of indigenous peoples under a developmentalist interpretation of property rights and economic value partly inspired by Lockean property theory. Whether or not this was what Locke intended, there is no doubt that Lockean ideas regarding property and its highest use have been used to justify developmentalist dispossession of habitations.\(^{155}\)

Yet this part of Locke’s legacy does not exhaust all the possible uses and meanings of his theory of property. After all, as Richard Ashcraft has shown, Locke’s ideas have been appropriated by radical egalitarians and opponents of unrestrained capitalism to justify limits to the very economy of monetary exchange-values that Locke himself arguably helped bring into being.\(^{156}\) As Ashcraft insists, Locke’s thought is “a good deal more Janus-faced” than is often appreciated. Similarly, Paul Passavant argues that “Lockean liberalism can be made to extend

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beyond Locke himself.”157 After all, economic egalitarians like Thomas Paine and Henry George are also heirs of Locke.158 And so too, in an important sense, is Wendell Berry. As we saw in the introductory chapter, Berry’s ecological agrarianism is an attempt to wed agrarian justice with ecological responsibility, and to reconcile Thoreau with Jefferson—and, by extension, Locke. One does not have to exaggerate the through-line from Locke to Jefferson to Berry to notice that Berry’s ecological agrarianism amounts to a greening of Lockean property theory by reasserting the importance of the use-value of the land and human habitations against the tendency of developmentalism to devalue it.

For Berry, using and changing the land is inevitable—after all, that is how we build our habitations in the first place—so the proper question is how to use the land well while preserving the homes and habitats that together make up our abode on the earth. For Berry, the greatest threat to the use-value of the land and the homes we build on it is the economy itself, or rather a particular part of it. He makes a forceful distinction throughout his essays between the “real economy … by which we build and maintain … our household” and the “symbolic economy of money.”159 He also distinguishes accordingly between the “real wealth” of land, homes, and communities that the real economy represents and the “artificial wealth” of money and commercial exchange that the moneymaking economy treats as the only form of wealth. In the language provided by Aristotle and Marx, the present economic order treats exchange-value—that is, fungible monetary wealth—as if it were the only form of truly economic value. But whereas Aristotle saw this as a threat to a life of virtue and Marx saw it as the source of exploitation of labor under capitalism, Berry sees it as a threat to physical property in land and homes. Thus Berry laments the triumph of “the money interest … over the property interest” which results in

159 Berry, “The Total Economy,” in Citizenship Papers, 66.
“the destruction and degradation of property.” After all, as Berry observes, “the loss of forest, topsoil, and human homes on a Kentucky mountainside does not reduce the profit on a ton of coal.” This disconnect between the use-value of habitations and the profit-opportunities of developers allows political and economic elites to willfully blind themselves to the existence of economic values beyond fungible monetary wealth, making the money economy blind to the existence of economic values beyond itself.

The result for Berry is an economic system perversely willing to sacrifice the homes and habitats of everyday people against their will. His conclusion is reminiscent of Justice O’Connor’s warning in *Kelo* that “all private property is now vulnerable to being taken … so long as it might be upgraded.” In the same vein, Berry writes that “[n]othing … can then exist that is not theoretically replaceable by something … more valuable,” adding that “[t]he inevitable result of such an economy is that no farm or any other usable property can safely be regarded by anyone as a home.” Where the property-owner sees a dwelling, the money economy sees a commodity waiting to be pried from its intransigent owner, an opportunity for moneymaking rather than a habitation. For Berry, then, the greatest danger of fungible monetary wealth and the “selective bookkeeping” of the moneymaking economy is that it will ignore and thus destroy the distinctive use-value of habitations and the ecosystems on which those habitations depend. Moreover, those use-values are not only economic values in their own right—they are the ultimate basis of all exchange-value and fungible monetary wealth. But because the moneymaking economy does not and cannot value things that are high in use-value but low in exchange-value, the present economic system encourages “symbolic or artificial wealth to ‘grow’ by means of the destruction of the real wealth of all the world,” giving us “the spectacle of

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162 Thus, when political and economic elites refer to ‘the economy,’ they do not mean local households, livelihoods, and landscapes; they mean the corporate economy” (Berry, “Going to Work,” in *Citizenship Papers*, 35).  
163 *Kelo*, O’Connor dissent, 1.  
unprecedented ‘prosperity’ and ‘economic growth’ in a land of degraded farms, forests, ecosystems, and watersheds, polluted air, failing families, and perishing communities.” For Berry, then, there is some irony in the fact that the discipline of economics that began with Aristotle’s discussion of “genuine wealth” and household management has been subsumed by the very moneymaking enterprise from which Aristotle was at such pains to distinguish them. “What passes now for economics,” Berry writes, “has strayed far from any idea of home” in both “the world’s natural ecosystems and human households.” The result is the developmentalist imperative to sacrifice the economic use-value of land and homes to the limitless production of economic exchange-values.

Thus, Berry’s critique reaches the heart of the developmentalist tendency to sacrifice human homes and natural habitats on the way to producing fungible monetary wealth. Moreover, his ecological agrarianism tempers both the environmental purist’s antipathy toward private property and the typical property advocate’s reductionist treatment of property rights. He does this by distinguishing between the distinctive use-value of human habitations and the exchange-value of fungible monetary wealth. In its failure to recognize any form of economic value beyond monetary exchange-value, developmentalism obscures the use-value of those things that are not readily commodified, or that their owners do not desire to treat as commodities. What remains to be shown is that Berry was not exaggerating when he said that developmentalism “licenses symbolic or artificial wealth to ‘grow’ by means of the destruction of the real wealth of all the world.” That task takes me to Karl Polanyi and E.P. Thompson’s account of the “great transformation” in the global economy that began with the English enclosure movement and resulted in vast devastation to human habitations.

166 Berry, “The Total Economy,” in Citizenship Papers, 66, 72.
167 Berry, Home Economics, x.
168 Berry, “The Total Economy,” 72.
The Great Transformation and the Destruction of Habitations

Where Aristotle saw a moneymaking enterprise that threatens to colonize the “genuine wealth” of homemaking, and where Wendell Berry saw the money economy’s penchant for treating homes and habitats only as raw material for new market value, Polanyi saw the central dynamic driving the English enclosure movement and the worldwide economic revolution it helped inaugurate. Beginning in the 15th century and lasting well into the 19th, agricultural lands that had once been farmed in common by peasants according to longstanding customs were privatized and fenced—that is, “enclosed”—by private acts of landlords as well as public acts of Parliament, setting the stage for the dislocations and transformations of the Industrial Revolution.\(^{169}\) For E.P. Thompson, the English enclosures were “a plain enough case of class robbery” in which poor peasants and laborers were cast away from home and subsistence into a vulnerable position in the emerging labor market.\(^{170}\) Indeed, the human costs of the enclosures invited criticism as early as the 16th century by none other than Thomas More, who in his \textit{Utopia} lamented that England’s sheep had come to devour men and their habitations as the rich and powerful enclosed common lands to increase wool production:

Your sheep … that used to be so meek and eat so little … [n]ow they have become so greedy and fierce that they devour human beings themselves, as I hear. They devastate and depopulate fields, houses, and towns. For in whatever parts of the land the sheep yield the softest and most expensive wool, there the nobility and gentry, yes, and even some abbots—holy men—are not content with the old rents … For they leave no land free for the plow: they enclose every acre for pasture; they destroy houses and abolish towns, keeping only the churches, and those for sheepbarns. […] By hook or by crook these miserable people—men, women, husbands, wives, orphans, widows, parents with little children, whole families … are forced to move out. They leave the only homes familiar to them, and they can find no place to go. Since they cannot afford to wait for a buyer, they sell for a pittance all their household goods, which would not bring much in any case.\(^{171}\)

Here the money economy’s penchant for treating human habitations as disposable on the way to monetary gains and commercial production becomes a full-fledged movement of dispossession,

as commons lands and tenant cottages are deemed less valuable as places of dwelling and more valuable as places of privatized agricultural production.

For Polanyi, the English enclosures inaugurated the conflict between “habitation” and economic “improvement” that would transform an entire nation and in time the far reaches of the globe by way of the Industrial Revolution and European colonialism. Polanyi took his names for these clashing economic goals from “[a]n official document of 1607” written in the midst of the enclosure movement which read in part: “The poor man shall be satisfied in his end: Habitation; and the gentleman not hindered in his desire: Improvement.” With this revealing statement in mind, Polanyi identifies two phenomena that go hand in hand throughout the great transformation—“destruction of habitations” and “economic progress.” To help justify the latter, the former had to be legitimized by some stratagem, a way of thinking that would make the loss of human habitations appear to be compensated by the gains in economic improvement, “a mystical readiness to accept the social consequences of economic improvement, whatever they might be.” Otherwise, the costs of improvement would be unbearable:

The fabric of society was being disrupted; desolate villages and the ruins of human dwellings testified to the fierceness with which the revolution raged, endangering the defences of the country, wasting its towns, decimating its population, turning its overburdened soil into dust…

To be sure, Polanyi does not deny that the widespread social and environmental degradation experienced by many Englishmen through this period coincided with unprecedented economic development and commercial prosperity. But we might follow Polanyi in asking how such widespread destruction of dwellings could be accepted as an inevitable cost of economic progress, especially when the deprivations for the dispossessed inhabitants were so great.

The necessary legitimating ideas proved more than up to the task. Polanyi recounts the process by which “household truths of traditional statesmanship … were in the nineteenth century

\[173\] Ibid. 36, 39.
\[174\] Ibid. 35.
\[175\] Ibid. 37.
\[176\] Ibid, 35.
erased from the thoughts of the educated by the corrosive of a crude utilitarianism combined with an uncritical reliance on the alleged self-healing virtues of unconscious growth.\footnote{Ibid.} Thus, even when developmentalists acknowledged its immense social and environmental costs, they could reply that these were more than made up for by material gains to society in the form of technological advances, new commodities, and aggregate wealth.\footnote{As Polanyi argues, “the new creed was utterly materialistic and believed that all human problems could be resolved given an unlimited amount of material commodities” (42). One is reminded of the Southern Agrarians’ suggestion that, tough “[e]ven the apologists of industrialism have been obliged to admit that some economic evils follow” from economic progress, “the remedies proposed by the apologists are always homeopathic”—their solution is always “more industrialism.” (Twelve Southerners, I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977 [1930], p. xii).} Destruction of habitations is not only justified but desirable because homes and other dearly-held things can be replaced by other goods which can be produced in astonishing quantities—even here there is improvement. Developmentalism, with its tendency to view growth, improvement, and development as social panaceas offering such boons to society that any costs are easily offset, allows the developer to justify the dispossession of English peasants and all the others whose property in habitations is the inevitable cost of doing business.

Moreover, the developmentalist ideology of enclosure and growth made the peasant cottages and common lands it was destroying seem insignificant in themselves. According to historian J.M. Neeson, the partisans of enclosure “deplored the insubordination of commoners, the unimprovability of their pastures, and the brake on production represented by shared property.”\footnote{J.M. Neeson, Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 7.} And because their “excuse was the national interest,” developers and improvers viewed the commons as a pesky impediment to progress.\footnote{Ibid.} For them, the commoners’ dwellings and their rights to cultivate and use common lands were a mere pittance. Progress and the general welfare required that they be done away with. The homemaking economy of the peasants must make way for the moneymaking economy of the improvers. Indeed, it will not come as a surprise that Polanyi praises Aristotle’s distinction between household management and moneymaking as “probably the most prophetic pointer ever made in the realm of the social
"sciences" and "still the best analysis of the subject we possess."\textsuperscript{181} For the subordination of householding to moneymaking is precisely what the enclosure movement entailed.

Both Polanyi and Thompson criticize efforts by apologists to justify the dispossession of peasant habitations by the resulting increases in standards of living and social welfare. For Thompson, the question of harms incurred by the enclosures "turn[s] on issues which are not encompassed by cost-of-living series."\textsuperscript{182} Statistical measures of income and consumption are not wholly commensurable with indicators of quality of life—"those satisfactions which are sometimes described by statisticians as 'imponderables'."\textsuperscript{183} And the value of human homes are wrapped up in those imponderables to such an extent that aggregate economic indices cannot recognize them:

> From food we are led to homes, from homes to health, from health to family life, and thence to leisure, work-discipline, education and play, intensity of labour, and so on. From standard-of-life we pass to way-of-life. But the two are not the same. The first is a measurement of quantities: the second a description (and sometimes an evaluation) of qualities. [...] It is quite possible for statistical averages and human experiences to run in opposite directions. A per capita increase in quantitative factors may take place at the same time as a great qualitative disturbance in people's way of life, traditional relationships, and sanctions. People may consume more goods and become less happy or less free at the same time.\textsuperscript{184}

For this reason, both the apologists for the enclosures and their critics are right—there was indeed a stupendous increase in aggregate material welfare, but that increase was accompanied by "intensified exploitation, greater insecurity, and increasing human misery."\textsuperscript{185} But it does not follow that the growth in aggregate material welfare can make up for the dispossessions and deprivations it required. Thus Thompson concludes: "By 1840 most people were 'better off' than their forerunners had been fifty years before, but they had suffered and continued to suffer this slight improvement as a catastrophic experience."\textsuperscript{186}

This divergence arises in no small part from the blindness of economic indicators to the value of the homemaking economy of the rural commons—"payments in kind or at cheap rates:

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{181} Polanyi, \textit{The Great Transformation}, 56.
\item\textsuperscript{182} Thompson, \textit{The English Working Class}, 203.
\item\textsuperscript{183} Ibid, 211.
\item\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, emphasis in original.
\item\textsuperscript{185} Ibid, 212.
\item\textsuperscript{186} Ibid, emphasis my own.
\end{footnotes}
gardens and potato patches”—on which peasants depended for their livelihood and security.\(^{187}\)

Diffuse and informal as they were, the property rights enjoyed by the peasant commoners were rendered invisible by a mode of economic thought premised on a refusal to recognize such use-values if they were not also generative of exchange-value. Thus, “[i]n village after village, enclosure destroyed the scratch-as-scratch can subsistence economy of the poor—the cow or the geese, fuel from the common, gleanings, and all the rest.”\(^{188}\) That developmentalism failed to recognize their worth made these habitations no less valuable to the peasants. These are use-values of the highest order, yet they were not commodities and thus could not be sold on the market to yield profit. This is why Berry writes that “[w]hatever the market may say, the worth of the land is what it always was: It is worth what food, clothing, shelter, and freedom are worth; it is worth what life is worth.”\(^{189}\) To the developers, the homemaking economy was disorderly, inefficient, and unprofitable. To the inhabitants, it was everything—even when that was not very much in market terms.

Moreover, Polanyi recognized that the damage to human habitations and damage to the land itself were impossible to fully disentangle. The process of transformation led to “the devastation of neighborhoods, the denudation of forests, the pollution of rivers … and the general degradation of existence including housing … [and] other interests as vital to a good life as the furtherance of production.”\(^{190}\) Thus damage done to human property in land and home was at the same time damage done to natural habitats. In an important sense, they are one and the same. As Polanyi wrote:

> What we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man’s institutions. To isolate it and form a market for it was perhaps the weirdest of all the undertakings of our ancestors. Traditionally, land and labor are not separated; labor forms a part of life, land remains part of nature, life and nature form an articulate whole. […] It invests man’s life with stability; it is the site of his habitation; it is the condition of his physical safety; it is the landscape and the seasons. We might as well imagine his being born without hands and feet as carrying on his life without land.\(^{191}\)

\(^{187}\) Ibid, 216.

\(^{188}\) Ibid, 217.


\(^{190}\) Ibid, 139.

\(^{191}\) Ibid, 187.
As Polanyi readily admits, “[t]he economic function is but one of many vital functions of land.”

But its economic function is a vital one indeed, and Polanyi and E.P. Thompson’s understanding of that function, much like Berry’s ecological agrarianism, help foreground those economic uses of the land that cannot be perfectly commodified without violence both to the land and to its human inhabitants. These uses make property in habitations more than simply a market commodity or housing investment—they are also sites of subsistence, shelter, comfort, and belonging. And this means that the dispossession or destruction of habitations is among the most profound losses a human being can experience.

Thus, Polanyi concludes that the immense value of habitations, and the clear deprivation that comes with their dispossession, requires us to take the promises made by developers with a grain of salt, especially because the economic boon they promise can only accrue in the ‘long-run’ and is thus uncertain:

If the immediate effects of a change are deleterious, then, until proof to the contrary, the final effect is deleterious. If conversion of arable land to pasture involves the destruction of a definite number of houses, the scrapping of a definite amount of employment, and the diminution of the supplies of locally available food provisions, then these effects must be regarded as final, until evidence to the contrary is produced.

For Polanyi, the sacrifices of land, habitat, and homes are definite and final, whereas the offsetting benefits may never arrive or may be far less than promised. Just as Suzette Kelo and her neighbors were asked to sacrifice their homes for a development project that never came, Polanyi cautions that developmentalist interests often make promises they cannot or will not keep, making it a risky proposition to trade habitations for economic development to be enjoyed by indefinite people in an indefinite future. Thompson adds that we should be skeptical of the motives behind the developer’s turn to social welfare to justify policies that clearly advance his own interest—“the spirit of agricultural improvement in the 18th century was impelled less by altruistic desires to banish ugly wastes or ... to ‘feed a growing population’ than by the desire for

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192 Ibid.
fatter rent-rolls and larger profits.” Of course, much the same can be said of Pfizer’s promise to stimulate the local economy of New London through economic development.

Overall, then, Polanyi and Thompson’s historical account of the English enclosures shows that the developmentalist logic we found in Kelo and eminent domain law is not an isolated occurrence. Rather, it is a general tendency of the global market economy that, left unchecked, will continue to dispossess and destroy the homes and subsistence economies of the poor, the peasant, indigenous communities, and homeowners whose property is of middling market value. Moreover, that destruction is not limited to the human homes themselves but also encompasses the land on which those homes were built and on which their inhabitants rely for their subsistence and material well-being. That these deprivations are environmental is only counterintuitive to the environmental purist who views all human use of the land as a problem to be minimized; that they are economic is only counterintuitive to the developmentalist who views all economic value as exchange-value. In Berry’s ecological agrarianism and Polanyi’s critique of the market economy, we have found an appreciation for the economic and instrumental value of property in the home that Radin’s personhood theory neglects. The distinctive use-value of habitations ties together the value of the home with the value of habitats for human material well-being. And because both homes and habitats share a common enemy in developmentalism, this suggests the possibility for a democratic environmentalism that stands in defense of both human homes and natural habitats against dispossession.

Conclusion—The Environment and the Economy

I began this chapter with the observation that environmentalists face a seemingly impossible task. They know that it is the economy that poses the greatest threat to both human well-being and the health of the land. Yet they also know that they risk consigning themselves to political irrelevance if their pleas for economic reform are taken as anti-economic, or even as requiring any appreciable economic sacrifice. This danger is especially live when

194 Thompson, The English Working Class, 217.
environmentalists frame their goals as imposing limits to growth, moderation of consumption, and the prioritization of needs rather than wants—that is, when the cure to environmental problems is made out to be some form of austerity.

Indeed, it may seem that what I am calling the “ecological agrarian” approach can tend in that direction. After all, the through-line from Aristotle through Polanyi to Berry is a narrative of putting the household economy of use-values before the moneymaking economy of exchange-values. Yet it cannot be denied the moneymaking economy and its exchange-values are indispensable to the production and distribution of most of the goods and services we need and enjoy, including our homes. More than this, our homes are themselves some of our most important sources of monetary wealth—especially for many of the least well-off, whose homes represent the vast majority of their financial assets and whose financial wealth is hit hardest by housing market crises. After all, even Aristotle recognized well before the rise of the modern market economy that moneymaking and household management are difficult to disentangle because the very same items can be objects of both household management and moneymaking, just as Radin recognizes the same of personal and fungible property. Closer to our day, wasn’t Hobbes right, if a bit crude, when he described money as the life-blood of the commonwealth? Indeed, isn’t that observation right now more than ever? Unless we want to go back to the peasant commons or the yeoman farm, is an environmentalism devoted to habitations simply environmental austerity by another road?

This concern mistakes the central contention of my argument, which is not that moneymaking is entirely evil and to be overthrown, but rather that moneymaking becomes economically absurd, and highly perverse, when it destroys human habitations, which are

196 Aristotle, Pol. 1257a1-5. “This [moneymaking] is considered by many to be one and the same as the sort mentioned [household management] because of the resemblance between them; and while it is not the same as the one spoken of, it is not far from it either” (trans. Lord, p. 15)
perhaps the most integral and dearly-held parts of the complex whole that we have grown accustomed to calling ‘the economy.’ I have argued that we cannot make satisfactory sense of economic life, or the economic values inhering in property, without making analytical distinctions within it. But once those distinctions are made and fully appreciated, and once we put the analytical pieces back together, we might conclude with ecological economist Herman Daly that much of what we now call ‘economic growth’ is actually “antieconomic growth masquerading as economic growth.”¹⁹⁸ When fungible monetary wealth comes to consume habitations, as the sheep in More’s *Utopia* consume humans, we can conclude that two parts of the economy are at war with one another. Or, put another way, the economy is experiencing a sort of auto-immune disorder, destroying its own substance because it treats parts of itself as foreign and disposable. That autoimmune disorder is developmentalism. It registers the economy of use and habitation that exists beyond commercial transactions—shelter, subsistence, household labor, comfort, and enjoyment—as if these things were not economic at all, and, in doing so, treats its own vital organs as raw materials for economic development. The solution is not to abolish or even minimize the money economy. It is simply to prevent it from destroying the property that is of greatest value to us, especially human homes. This amounts to ensuring that the money economy is an “accessory” to the householding economy, to use Polanyi’s phrase, rather than the other way around.¹⁹⁹ Production and commerce should flourish and prosperity should be widely-shared, but it should not wander back to our homes to destroy them. The moment this happens, something has gone horribly wrong—we have in effect created a developmentalist Frankenstein’s monster that returns to destroy our homes after we ourselves have created it with our own market transactions.

It is vitally important to recognize that the dangers of antieconomic growth are not limited to explicit and direct expropriation of habitations. The destruction of homes by greenhouse gas emissions and anthropogenic climate change are also a part of the developmentalist problem.

The homes in New London and the peasant cottages in England were destroyed directly by developers, but the developmentalist quest for fungible monetary wealth is also a primary driver of climate change. Pfizer’s plan to redevelop New London destroyed dozens of homes. The greenhouse gas emissions of energy-intensive industries will destroy countless more in floods, superstorms, and other weather events exacerbated by climate change. The difference between homes demolished for development in New London and the homes destroyed by hurricanes exacerbated by greenhouse gas emissions is that the former were directly expropriated while the latter are destroyed indirectly. This suggests that environmentalists might be able to make a powerful case that the monetary wealth gained by corporations that extract and burn fossil fuels is just as much a form of developmentalist expropriation of homes as are private development takings. Both are forms of moneymaking premised on the destruction of human homes and the health of the land. In this way, like developmentalist expropriation, climate change is theft.

All of this suggests that the defense of property in habitations cannot be entrusted to the price mechanism or to market-conforming public policies. For one thing, we have seen that developmentalist forms of valuation based solely on monetary metrics fail to register the use-value as well the emotional value of homes, and assigning these things a price would entirely miss the point—the point is that not all economic assets are commodities to be traded on the market. Market mechanisms will inevitably fail to value these things appropriately. This means that habitations must be defended not by way of a technical adjustment to economic metrics such as GDP, monetary damages, or cost-benefit analysis, but rather through democratic political action and legal protections.

In this way, my approach achieves common ground with recent critiques of neoliberalism, though with some important caveats. I have emphasized throughout this chapter the importance of avoiding the common trap of framing critiques of economic abuses in anti-economic terms, of suggesting that the problem is “the economy” or “economic values” rather than staking out a countervailing economic idea. Yet critics of neoliberalism often fall into this trap themselves. For example, Wendy Brown focuses her critique on “neoliberalism’s ‘economization’ of … heretofore
noneconomic spheres and activities” and even defines neoliberalism as a form of reason that “configures all aspects of existence in economic terms.” This framing of the issue is no more helpful for critics of neoliberalism than it is for environmental purists, as it implicitly cedes the terrain of economics to one’s opponents, whether they be apologists for neoliberal capitalism or human domination of nature. More in line with my critique of developmentalism, though, Brown and other critics of neoliberalism highlight the entanglement of public and private power enshrined by contemporary neoliberal practices and institutions. The cooperation of a city government, a quasi-public redevelopment agency, and a private corporation that we saw in *Kelo*, and the broader legal doctrine of private development takings, is consistent with neoliberal collusion between public and private power. Finally, critics of neoliberalism like David Harvey and Bonnie Honig point to the tendency of the global market economy to dispossess—that is, rob—indigenous peoples, peasants, farmers, and urban dwellers of their homes and lands. This is of course consistent with my critique of developmentalism, though, perhaps not surprisingly, most critics of neoliberalism are less sanguine about the language of property rights than I am.

Yet environmentalists and other critics of neoliberal markets might be missing an opportunity by neglecting the language and importance of property. This is partly because, as Meyer suggests, we do better justice to the complexities of property by keeping its attractions in view while critiquing its abuses. But more than this, ceding the language of property to one’s opponents may give the false impression that developmentalists and anti-environmentalists are the better protectors of property, and property rights. My analysis has shown that they are not. Instead, environmentalists have good reason to argue that they are the better guardians and custodians of the kind of property that matters most, and it is the neoliberal developmentalist who poses the greater threat to the property rights of the majority, and especially of the worst-off and

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marginalized. This is a potentially powerful argument, and the critics of market neoliberalism and environmental abuse neglect it at their peril.

To be sure, environmentalists should not overcorrect. Property is not solely a problem, but that does not make it a panacea, either. Self-styled “free market environmentalists” like Terry Anderson and Donald Leal suggest as much when they recommend the assignment of tradeable private property rights as the solution to most environmental problems, but this lapses into precisely the same monolithic treatment of property rights that I critiqued in the conservative dissent in *Kelo* while going one step further to explicitly subject the land to total commodification. Moreover, a defense of habitations entails a defense of inhabitant’s possession and rights across various conceptions and regimes of property, including private property, the peasant commons, indigenous property regimes, and public lands. The key factor for the ecological agrarian is not legal title or tradeable property rights but rather inhabitance.

With these cautions in mind, environmentalists have much to gain from framing their economic goal as the defense of property in human habitations. Doing so allows them to target fungible property with needful regulations and even redistribution while at the same time carrying the mantle of defending property, and especially the type of property that matters most, the physical housings that shelter us and allow us to meet the full range of our material needs and wants. By offering a countervailing economic idea in the form of habitation property, environmentalists can eschew the purist’s reputation for treating all human use of the land as abuse to be minimized. The goal of environmentalism should not be limiting economic activity per se—a political dead end—but rather protecting one kind of property from being consumed by another. The goal is not simply to protect nature from ourselves but to protect ourselves from the same developmentalist pathologies that threaten nature. In doing so, we also protect things of economic and instrumental value that we need to survive and live well. The protection of property in habitations is not simply an issue of right, but also of environmental economics rightly

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practiced. The problem is not anthropocentrism but rather developmentalism—for it poses a threat not only to natural habitats but to human habitations, which are in an important sense one and the same.
Chapter 2—The Stewardship Vocation: Aldo Leopold’s Ecological Humanism

…was the earth made for man’s use, or has man merely the privilege of temporarily possessing an earth made for other and inscrutable purposes? The question of what he can properly do with it must necessarily be affected by this question.

—Aldo Leopold

Among the most distinctive ideas of environmentalism, and especially environmentalism in America, is that of the wilderness ideal and the notion of “the wild” underlying it. Thoreau’s famous dictum that “[i]n wildness is the preservation of the world” echoes through the intellectual history of environmentalism, from its beginnings in transcendentalist and romanticist meditations on the capacity of nature to inspire the human spirit to its more utilitarian moment in the progressive conservation movement and its mirror in the preservationist followers of John Muir to the contemporary environmental movement. In all these moments, a sense has prevailed that our destiny as a species is tied to how we comport ourselves with the nonhuman world—the world beyond us. In the wake of the environmental movement’s height in the 1970s, this way of thinking has even inspired an ethical critique of anthropocentrism, with philosophers and activists insisting that humans should evaluate actions and policies not on the basis of human interests alone, but also those of our nonhuman neighbors.

Yet, as we saw in the introductory chapter, much recent environmental thought has been devoted to demonstrating the shortcomings of the wilderness ideal and the ecocentric ethic it helped inspire. Whereas historians like Roderick Frasier Nash and philosophers like Richard Sylvan and J. Baird Callicott insist that ecosystems and their nonhuman inhabitants are intrinsically valuable, a subsequent wave of scholarship—including William Cronon’s influential diagnosis of the “trouble with wilderness”—critiques the dualism between humanity and nature that the wilderness ideal seems to reinforce, and Bryan Norton argues that enlightened

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anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric ethics really converge on the same policy outcomes, making radical ecocentrism an unnecessary distraction from effective environmental policymaking. While more recent arguments about the “End of Nature” and the “Anthropocene” have perhaps made the debate seem outmoded, it raises a fundamental question that might at first glance appear to be only philosophical but has profound political implications: what is the rightful place of the human species in the ecological community? This question is related to the one at stake in the debate about anthropocentrism and the intrinsic value of nature: why should we respect and protect nonhuman beings in the first place? The key to seeing the connection between these two questions is to notice that they have in common the dilemma of how we fit into the broader ecological world of which we are always a part. In what ways do we belong in this world in which we find ourselves? To be sure, this question of ecological belonging might strike the ecocentrist as a symptom of human vanity, betraying our stubborn collective sense that we are somehow cosmically special, that our self-image and our interests are paramount, but it is a question of immense importance for a democratic environmentalism that must appeal to the public while at the same time confronting unprecedented crises of mass extinction, habitat loss, and climate change.

At the center of the old argument over anthropocentrism is the thought and legacy of one of history’s most famous environmentalists, the wildlife ecologist and nature writer Aldo Leopold. As an early advocate of wilderness preservation and the famous originator of the “land ethic,” which urges changing the role of the human being “from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it,” Leopold’s legacy has been taken up by ecocentrists like J. Baird

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Callicott. Yet his pioneering work in forestry and game management, as well as his pragmatic approach to policy, has also been leveraged by critics of ecocentrism like Bryan Norton. Above all, though, scholars largely agree that Leopold envisioned an intimate partnership between humans and the ecological community. He argued explicitly that “[c]onservation means harmony between men and land” and that conservation succeeds “when both end up better by reason of their partnership.” For Leopold, the central moral and political insight of ecology is that humans and nonhumans belong together, that they are part of one community to which we have obligations of respect and protection. This has been confirmed in the work of environmental political theorists like Lewis Hinchman, Bob Pepperman Taylor, and Peter Cannavò, as well as environmental pragmatists like Ben Minteer, who have found in his writings a civic vision of the good life lived in harmony with the land.

However, the scholarship on Leopold passes over a long-neglected element of his thought that points the way to a broader synthesis between the ecocentric concern for the world beyond us and the enlightened anthropocentric focus on the status and well-being of humans.

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While Leopold is often remembered either as an ecocentric ethicist or a civic-minded pragmatist, what both readings miss is the vocational dimension of his thought. Specifically, I argue that Leopold gestures toward an inspiring ecological mission for our species, a vocation of environmental stewardship in which we serve as guardians and caretakers of a broader ecological community of which we are both an integral part and partly separate—that is, a community in which we are both at home and mere guests. What is remarkable about Leopold’s vision is that it recognizes both the intrinsic value of nonhuman beings and the distinctiveness of the human species—because he sees the two as intimately related. For Leopold, if there is a “special nobility inherent in the human race,” as he puts it, that nobility comes from the fact that we (might) recognize nonhuman beings as part of a broader community of which we are a part but whose interests and purposes exceed our own.\(^{210}\) And with that recognition comes a responsibility, and also a higher calling, to be stewards of the earth. For Leopold, we should do this not only in pursuit of our own enlightened self-interest, but also because it is the appropriate way to comport ourselves in an ecological community that, apparently, only our species can recognize as such and thus consciously seek to protect. Thus, I argue that Leopold’s environmental vision amounts to a form of ecological humanism that defines the human enterprise by our ongoing efforts to come to know and care for the nonhuman home—the habitats that Leopold insists are not entirely ours to use, possess, or understand. They are at once our own and beyond us, and it is in recognition of this fact that an ecological humanism begins. As many commentators have noted, Leopold hopes his readers will develop an “ecological conscience” and see their co-inhabitants on the earth as worthy of respect. But he also hopes this insight will inform our sense of political purpose by redefining what makes us distinctive as a species. Leopold himself echoed, and amended, Thoreau when he said that “[i]n wildness is the salvation of the world.”\(^{211}\) He might well have added that “in stewardship is the vocation of humankind.”


\(^{211}\) Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 141.
Moreover, Leopold recognizes that, for the public to experience and value a sense of ecological belonging in the land community, people need some measure of knowledge of the land and the nonhumans that inhabit it. That is, there is an epistemic dimension to ecological belonging that Leopold’s vision helps illuminate, and I will argue that it is of the utmost importance to understanding the role of ecological belonging in a democratic society. Whereas I stressed in the previous chapter the importance of the use-value of human habitations and the need to protect them from developmentalist expropriation, I argue here that being at home on the land is also a matter of knowing, understanding, and caring for the land on its own terms and for its own sake. Ecological belonging is cultivated through use and habitation of the land; it is also cultivated through knowing and understanding it on its own terms.

To this end, Leopold offers some hints as to how a new kind of democratic education might inculcate knowledge of the land community, helping cultivate ecological belonging in the public while making environmental stewardship a defining political goal. While scholars have drawn attention to the educative dimension of Leopold’s thought, largely neglected in their accounts is Leopold’s attention to the pedagogical value of popular activities of outdoor recreation like hunting and amateur naturalism as the means by which a democratic society might develop ecological belonging to the land community, and thereby recognize and take up the stewardship vocation.\(^{212}\) Although Leopold was an environmental educator himself, he did not believe that seminars in ecological science or guided nature walks were sufficient for moral and civic reform in a democratic society. Rather, popular participation in outdoor recreational activities, and especially those that require one to learn the needs and habits of one’s nonhuman neighbors, are the key to Leopold’s popular ecological education. For Leopold, democratic citizens who spend their leisure time—or even their work hours—in the outdoors and who develop their capacity for ecological perception might learn to see the broader ecological community as such, making the stewardship mission possible.

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In what follows I first trace the transitions in Leopold’s philosophical and scientific understanding of nature during his lifetime that led him to his ecological humanism, and specifically to his embrace of the idea that human exceptionalism should be rooted in our species’ capacity to serve as stewards of the broader ecological community. Second, I discuss Leopold’s ideas for a civic education in ecological perception, driven in large part by popular activities of outdoor recreation, by which the stewardship vocation might be discovered and a sense of ecological belonging might be cultivated. Third, I argue that Leopold’s vision of an ecological humanism offers a new and inspiring sense of mission for the human species by addressing both religious and scientific ideas about humanity’s place in the world, contributing to the appeal of stewardship as both a political and species vocation. I conclude by highlighting the ways in which his ecological humanism helps correct for the excesses of both ecocentric purism and anthropocentric reformism.

Aldo Leopold’s Transformation and the Stewardship Vocation

Leopold is best known as the celebrated author of *A Sand County Almanac*, a collection of nature essays and philosophical reflections that belongs in the ranks of Thoreau’s *Walden* and Carson’s *Silent Spring* as a classic in American environmental writing. But decades of prior writings and a wealth of practical experience as a forester, game manager, and wildlife ecologist prepared the way for his magnum opus, and, importantly for my purposes here, give us a sense of the journey that led a hunter and timber manager to write one of the most eloquent and influential defenses of what he would call in the last years of his life “the ecological conscience.”

Leopold’s interest in the natural world may have been lifelong, but his views on matters ranging from predator control and wildfire suppression to soil erosion and biodiversity changed considerably. These changes in Leopold’s thought are a common theme in scholarly studies of his life, with Leopold himself alluding to a transformation in his own views in a letter to

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none other than the father of American forestry, Gifford Pinchot. Leopold wrote: “the year 1920 marks a turning point from (what shall I call it? a certain viewpoint, as yet unnamed) to an ecological mode of thinking.”

Meine and Knight go so far as to argue that “[t]he essence of Leopold lay not just in the conclusions he reached but the process by which he reached them.” Building on this insight, I argue that Leopold’s own intellectual odyssey provides something of a roadmap for the transformation he envisions in the public writ large.

The broader evolution of Leopold’s thought can be captured fairly well by three related transitions in his thinking: from predator control to species preservation, game management to wildlife ecology, and resource conservation to land health. In a 1915 essay on “The Varmint Question,” the young forester referred to “wolves, [mountain] lions, coyotes, bob-cats, foxes, [and] skunks” as “varmints”—that is, as pests unworthy of protection through game laws. Federal policy toward varmints was one of outright extermination, an effort spearheaded by the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey (today’s Fish and Wildlife Service) through bounties, trapping, shooting, and poisoning—efforts that Leopold praised in his essay. “The advisability of controlling vermin is plain common sense,” he insisted in 1919, “which nobody will seriously question.”

Yet, slowly but surely, his thinking about predators changed. By 1934, in an article describing a farmer-conservationist hunting co-op he helped found and operate, Leopold could write that “we will molest no predators until they molest us. If and when we take measures against them, it will be with genuine regret.” A year later he would reflect on a research visit to Germany’s

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managed forests, decrying “the near-extirpation of birds and animals of prey” from the German landscape. Leopold’s evolving assessment of predatory species was slow and halting, but its effect on his thinking was by no means limited to predator conservation. By 1938, now-professor Leopold began referring to his profession as “wildlife management” rather than “game management,” and it wasn’t long before he was referring to his field as “wildlife ecology.” What began as a method of increasing stocks of game for hunting had become a science of understanding and preserving wildlife. By the end of his life, the principle guiding his conservation efforts had changed from “putting land to its highest use,” as he wrote in 1918, to ensuring that “the land … retain as much of its original membership as is compatible with human land-use.”

Whereas land had been a natural resource to be conserved, it became a community whose health was valuable in its own right.

The smaller transitions from varmints to game to wildlife and from conservation to management to ecology were signs of a more fundamental shift in Leopold’s environmental thought. Whereas Leopold began his career thinking of land as a part of human society, albeit an important one, he came to see the relationship as reversed—it was human society, rather, that was a small part of the broader ecological community Leopold called ‘land.’ By 1944 Leopold would lament that land, “to the average citizen, is still something to be tamed, rather than something to be understood, loved, and lived with. Resources are still regarded as separate entities, indeed, as commodities, rather than as cohabitants in the land-community.” From the beginning of his career, Leopold had viewed nature as an indispensable resource—and not just an economic resource, but also a recreational, aesthetic, and even spiritual one. But it was a slow, decades-long process for him to arrive at the view, for which A Sand County Almanac made

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224 Leopold, “Conservation: In Whole or in Part?”, 311.
him famous, that the land is itself a community, and that human society is only a subset of that community.

These developments in his thinking make Leopold a prime representative of two related transitions in environmental thought, one historical and the other philosophical. It was during Leopold’s lifetime, and in no small part because of his own work and writings, that the historical transition took place from the progressive conservationism of the early 20th century to the post-World War II environmental movement motivated by issues like pollution, population growth, biodiversity, and wilderness preservation. Similarly, Leopold’s own embrace of an “ecological conscience” and the biotic right of nonhuman species to exist serves as a crucial marker of the philosophical transition in Western thought regarding environmental ethics, with a movement from a more anthropocentric view centered on enlightened human self-interest toward a more ecocentric view that locates some form of intrinsic value in nonhuman beings. Leopold himself summarizes the clash between the view he left behind and the view he came to adopt in this way: “In all of these cleavages [within the conservation movement], we see repeated the same basic paradoxes: man the conqueror versus man the biotic citizen; science the sharpener of his sword versus science the searchlight on his universe; land the slave and servant versus land the collective organism.”

All of this culminates in Leopold’s land ethic, which he proposes and defends in the closing pages of *A Sand County Almanac*. It is at bottom an ethic of co-existence in the ecological community. Ethics rests on the premise, Leopold argues, that individuals are members of communities and that community life requires limiting competition to enable cooperation. Up to now, he claims, only our relationships with other human beings fell under the purview of ethics because our ethical thinking only dealt with the human community. “The land ethic,” he writes, “simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or

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226 Here we might well disagree with Leopold’s historical assessment. Human ethics has long implicated the relationship between humans and nonhumans, both terrestrial and divine. Only in secular modernity is it plausible to argue that ethics deals solely with relations between humans.
collectively: the land. We are members of a broader ecological community, Leopold insists, and we are obliged to think and act accordingly.

Where does that obligation come from? To be sure, Leopold is not an academically-trained ethicist or political theorist. To treat him as such would be to treat his texts and his thought as something they are not. But he does provide, scattered throughout his writings, some reasons. One of them, enlightened self-interest, dates back to Leopold’s early years as a resource manager, and he never abandoned it. He was well aware of the extent to which human productivity and recreation depended on sustaining both the quantity and quality of natural resources. But as his thinking matured, Leopold came to see such anthropocentric justifications as necessary but not sufficient. Under an economistic-anthropocentric mindset, the primary justification of conservation is that it pays, a line of reasoning that Leopold calls “the semi-honest doctrine that conservation is only good economics.” It is semi-honest because it ignores the fact that “most members of the land community have no economic value” and, above all, because their having or not having economic value should not always be the deciding factor. That is, the question of economic value misses the point because at least some of the values at stake are only tangentially related, if at all, to economic interests. Thus Leopold cites examples in which naturalists, in their attempts to preserve members of the ecological community, “invent subterfuges to give [them] economic importance” when the more honest argument would be to admit that our ecological neighbors “should continue as a matter of biotic right, regardless of the presence or absence of economic advantage to us.” Whereas economic thinking tends to divide the ecological community into parts that are more or less useful for turning a profit, ecological thinking recognizes the land community as such and encourages us to see each member as a valuable part of the whole. “By value,” Leopold adds, “I of course [mean]

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227 Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 239.
229 Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 246.
230 Ibid, 247.
231 When Leopold discusses “economic” motives for land use as he does here, he seems primarily to have the profit motive in mind. While the distinction between economic use- and exchange-values in the land that
something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.”

But where does this “philosophical” value—that is, intrinsic value—come from? How does one, and the public at large, come to see it?

For Leopold, our ability to perceive this intrinsic value comes from our capacity—imperfect but worth perfecting—to see beyond our own species’ needs and purposes and to recognize the needs and purposes of the ecological community and its various members. In one of his most striking passages, Leopold gestures toward a higher version of human exceptionalism rooted in our capacity to recognize and value the ecological community and its members as such. Reflecting on a monument in Wisconsin observing the extinction of the passenger pigeon, Leopold points out how remarkable it is that (at least some) humans might mourn the death of another species:

For one species to mourn the death of another is a new thing under the sun. The Cro-Magnon who slew the last mammoth thought only of steaks. The sportsman who shot the last pigeon thought only of his prowess. The sailor who clubbed the last auk thought of nothing at all. But we, who have lost our pigeons, mourn the loss. Had the funeral been ours, the pigeons would hardly have mourned us. In this fact, rather than in Mr. Du Pont’s nylons or Mr. Vannevar Bush’s bombs, lies objective evidence of our superiority over the beasts.

Not only is the capacity of our species to mourn the passing of another (apparently) exceptional, but it marks the potential for a higher calling for our species. While the language of “superiority” may be jarring for environmentalists today, Leopold explicitly contrasts his model of human exceptionalism with other, more conventional sources of our superiority—nylons and bombs, i.e., technology and power. Leopold is arguing that, if there is a higher potential in our species, it is revealed not in our mass production of weapons or clothing, but rather by our ability to respect and protect our ecological neighbors. This is especially clear given the use of the passenger pigeon’s extinction as the focal point of the argument. Leopold is contrasting the grounding of

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I discuss in the previous chapter is not a theme in his writings, his thought does have affinities with what is now called ecological agrarianism, as I will point out in the concluding section of this chapter.

Ibid, 261.

Ibid, 117.
human exceptionalism in human-as-steward-of-nature with the usual grounding of it in human-as-conqueror-of-nature. As Leopold wrote earlier in his transformation:

And if there be, indeed, a special nobility inherent in the human race—a special cosmic value, distinctive from and superior to all other life—by what token shall it be manifest? By a society decently respectful of its own and all other life, capable of inhabiting the earth without defiling it? Or by a society like that of John Burroughs’ potato bug, which exterminated the potato, and thereby exterminated itself? As one or the other shall we be judged in ‘the derisive silence of eternity.’

We can aim for better than being lords over the earth, Leopold insists. We can aim to be stewards of that earth, and thereby achieve a more becoming role in the ecological community. Human exceptionalism, at least of the nobler variety, arises from our capacity to look beyond ourselves. We can recognize the ecological community as such. We can recognize its value. And we can consciously attend to its preservation. So far as we know, ours is the only species that can do these things. It is at once what makes us most exceptional as a species and what binds us most strongly to all other life. One might even say, ethically speaking, that it is our ecological niche.

That this capacity to care for our ecological neighbors is neither inevitable nor universally recognized makes the inculcation of the land ethic, which Leopold describes as “a kind of community instinct-in-the-making,” such an important task. And this task is a political one, especially in a democracy, because it requires the education and persuasion of the people. It requires popular understanding “that men are only fellow-voyagers with other creatures in the odyssey of evolution” as well as a “sense of kinship with fellow-creatures; a wish to live and let live; a sense of wonder over the magnitude and duration of the biotic enterprise.” And it requires widespread recognition that “man, while now captain of the adventuring ship [of the biotic enterprise], is hardly the sole object of its quest, and that his prior assumptions to this effect arose from the simple necessity of whistling in the dark.” The core of conservation resides in the fact

234 Leopold, “Some Fundamentals of Conservation in the Southwest,” 97. This remarkable essay, unpublished until after his death, appears to be the first time Leopold alludes to a nobler human exceptionalism, an idea to which he would return several time in his writings before A Sand County Almanac (see Leopold, “The River of the Mother of God,” in The River of the Mother of God, pp. 123-127, at 126; Leopold, “Game Methods: The American Way,” in The River of the Mother of God, pp. 156-163, at 159.

235 Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 239.

236 Ibid. 117.

237 Ibid.
that "[a] species for the first time in history foresees and fears the consequences of its own success." Above all, Leopold wants us to fear the consequences of our own success not only for ourselves but also for our neighbors in the land community. Therein lies our noblest calling as a species. It is what we might do best as a species, argues Leopold, if only we embrace that calling and make it our conscious cultural and political aspiration.

As he himself recognized, Leopold's vision for a civic and species vocation of stewardship is a demanding one. He is asking the public to recognize that we are part of a broader ecological community that we share with many nonhuman co-inhabitants, that the other members of that community have purposes and interests beyond our own, and that it is nobler for us to care for that community than to conquer it. Leopold concludes: "These things, I say, should have come to us. I fear they have not come to many." The question then, both for Leopold and for us, is: how might the broader public come to see what Leopold saw? How might the public develop an "ecological conscience" and consciously embrace the stewardship vocation? These questions bring us to Leopold's vision for a popular education in ecological belonging.

“The Laborer in Repose”—Education through Recreation

Scholars have long recognized that Leopold aimed to instill a moral transformation in the public. Thus there is, in the language of political theory, an educative dimension of Leopold’s thought, and especially in A Sand County Almanac, the book he wrote most consciously for a popular audience. Bob Pepperman Taylor argues that Leopold was “engaged in an act of civic persuasion” and that his “ambition was to educate and shape the very structure of American political culture.” But whereas Taylor sees Leopold’s writings as a recuperative effort to bring the nation back to the virtues of its frontier past, I read them as an attempt to convince the public, and our species, to adopt a wholly new vocation of ecological stewardship.

238 Quoted in Meine, Aldo Leopold, 297.
239 Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 117.
240 See Flader, Thinking Like a Mountain, op. cit.; Callicott, Thinking Like a Planet, op. cit.
241 Taylor, Citizenship and Democratic Doubt, 117.
Though the adoption of an entirely new civic and species-purpose is Leopold’s goal, he understandably does not usually couch it in those terms. As Callicott points out, “Leopold was keenly aware” that people generally “react defiantly to self-righteous preaching” and that “ethical education, generally speaking, must be indirect to be successful and lasting.”


Thus, Leopold must begin his appeal somewhere less sweeping. Rather than making the stewardship vocation the primary focus of his argument, he sets for himself the less ambitious task of aiding the everyday reader in seeing what he sees in the land community. But Leopold is also aware of the limits of the written word, and even of classroom education, as agents of moral and political transformation. Underappreciated in his work is his emphasis on the educative function of outdoor recreation, and especially the importance of hunting and amateur naturalism. Rather than focusing solely on the philosophical question of why nonhuman beings are morally considerable, Leopold devotes much of his attention to the question of how we as humans and citizens come through our own activities and lived experiences to care about nonhuman beings and to develop a sense of ecological belonging in the broader land community of which we are at once a part and partly separate.

For Leopold, this requires public familiarity with the ecological community and a basic understanding of its features. After all, to value that community in and of itself, one must recognize that it exists. “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in,” he argues, which means that a land ethic requires some sort of “mental image of land.”

The object of our ethical commitments must be made at least somewhat intelligible to us. While the public is not likely to achieve a detailed scientific understanding of ecosystems, it might cultivate the next best thing—an aptitude for ecological perception. Leopold turns to the iconic frontiersman Daniel Boone as a foil for the nascent ecological consciousness he hopes the public might develop. When Boone ventured into the


frontier wilderness and claimed it as his own, Leopold argues, he could not have fully understood what he saw.

Daniel Boone’s reaction depended not only on the quality of what he saw, but on the quality of the mental eye with which he saw it. Ecological science has wrought a change in the mental eye. [...] We have no yardstick to measure this change, but we may safely say that, as compared with the competent ecologist of the present day, Boone saw only the surface of things. The incredible intricacies of the plant and animal community ... were as invisible and incomprehensible to Daniel Boone as they are today to Babbitt.245

By pairing him with Babbitt, the titular character from Sinclair Lewis’ interwar novel skewering the conformist materialism of the middle class, Leopold makes Boone into a stand-in for the contemporary citizen whose capacity for ecological perception might yet be honed. But, at first glance, this does not appear to offer much hope for a popular ecological education. If the superficial perception of both Boone and Babbitt is a result of their not being ecological scientists, how can ecological perception be cultivated in the general public? To emphasize the democratic potential of ecological perception, and perhaps to counteract the elitism of his quip about Babbitt, Leopold adds: “Let no man jump to the conclusion that Babbitt must take his Ph.D. in ecology before he can ‘see’ his country.”246 While it is surely the case that “[o]ne of the requisites for an ecological comprehension of land is an understanding of ecology,” Leopold maintains that “this is by no means co-extensive with ‘education’; in fact, much higher education seems deliberately to avoid ecological concepts.”247 More ecological understanding may come to a deer hunter who opens his eyes to the wider context of his hunting than to a student who earns a degree in zoology. More important, for a democracy to experience the sort of perceptual and moral sea-change that Leopold seeks, it must reach beyond the few who conduct coursework and research in the natural sciences. Ecological perceptivity requires some measure of ecological knowledge in the public mind. For the public to grasp and adopt the stewardship mission, ecological education must be civic, not just academic.

245 Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 291.
247 Ibid, 262.
This poses a distinct challenge for Leopold in his own country because the average American experiences the ecological community as something alien, if he or she experiences it at all. Conservation education amounts to teaching the public about something with which it has increasingly little everyday contact as a result of accelerating urbanization and industrialization. Moreover, despite talk of America’s natural wonders, the great outdoors, and “love of country,” the average American doesn’t actually see the country at all, or only obscurely. Curt Meine points out that Leopold’s writings are devoid of terms like “homeland” and “heartland.” There is a reason for this. His goal is to help his readers actually see the land for what it is in itself—not homeland, not heartland, not property, but land. In a public in which many are landless and even more see land as a metaphor for national greatness or as productive property only, ecological knowledge is sorely lacking and sorely needed.

Given that every Babbitt cannot in fact obtain a Ph.D. in ecology, a popular education in ecological perception must begin elsewhere. Fortunately, during Leopold’s lifetime, even as fewer people were living on the land, more were spending their leisure in outdoor recreation. With his own formative experiences as an outdoorsman in mind, Leopold suggests that a popular ecological education might begin with the simple but tangible engagements with the nonhuman world that were becoming increasingly popular among a broad swath of the public. He argues that these engagements begin not with economic motives and certainly not ethical ones—to argue otherwise would be to mistake the effect for the cause. Rather, “[w]e seek contacts with nature because we derive pleasure from them.” Hikers hike and campers camp not because it stimulates the economy or cultivates environmental virtues. They do it primarily because it is fun. This by itself makes outdoor recreation worthwhile. But, to be a venue for ecological education, outdoor recreation must do more than yield enjoyment. It must also help the recreationist to see the land community, and ideally on its own terms. Outdoor recreation, then, might help the public

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249 Meine, Aldo Leopold, 371.
250 Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 282-283.
251 Ibid, 283.
develop ecological perceptivity. And it is this potential that gives recreation, and recreation policy, its higher purpose. “To promote perception,” argues Leopold, “is the only truly creative part of recreational engineering.” It might just pave the way for the public, and even for humanity at large, to adopt the mission of ecological stewardship.

To be sure, not every form of recreation hones ecological perceptivity equally well. Even in light of his enduring interest in game management, it is perhaps surprising that one of Leopold’s favorite examples of recreational engagement with the land is hunting. It may strike us as a curious choice for an opening lesson in perceiving the ecological community to go out and kill members of it—and not for subsistence or even economic gain, but for sport. Yet Leopold goes so far as to argue that “hunting takes rank with agriculture and nature study as one of three fundamentally valuable human contacts with the soil.” How can this be? The reason is that all three of these activities require more than simply an aesthetic appreciation of nature. They also require the practitioner to understand nonhuman beings in a detailed and practical manner that inevitably leads one to ask: what do these nonhuman beings want and need? To be a good deer hunter, the hunter must know the habits of deer. To be a good gardener, the gardener must know under what conditions and with what kinds of care plants grow best. And the naturalist might arguably be best prepared to see the land as land, for her very goal is to understand nonhuman beings on their own terms. Perhaps counterintuitively, this means that the educative power of outdoor recreation lies precisely in its instrumentality—its use of the things of nature as means to a practical end. Leopold writes that what the recreational hunter, gardener, and naturalist have in common is that they are all hunting for some sort of trophy, a prize that attests to their knowledge and skill. He hopes that, over time, the most prized trophy won’t be the maximum legal catch but rather new insight into the ecological neighborhood. It will thus be no surprise that

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252 Ibid, 291.
254 For many environmental thinkers, the “instrumentalization” of nature is one of the primary culprits of the contemporary environmental crisis and of human abuse of nature more generally. What Leopold is suggesting here is that instrumental engagements with nature offer the most promising lessons in ecological perception. I will return to this point in the conclusion to this chapter.
Leopold, himself a naturalist and ecologist, saw amateur naturalism as the highest form of popular outdoor recreation. “That thing called ‘nature study,’ despite the shiver it brings to the spines of the elect, constitutes the first embryonic groping of the mass-mind toward perception.”256 It may not be rigorous ecological science, Leopold admits to his fellow-experts, but popular naturalism might do more for civic stewardship than even the best academic study in ecology.257

Ecological perceptivity helps disaggregate for everyday citizens what would otherwise be a dizzying or indifferent mess of nonhuman interactions. Regarding his affection for various plants that grow near the Wisconsin River, Leopold writes: “I find my biases more numerous than those of my neighbors because I have individual likings for many species that they lump under one aspersive category: brush.”258 Where others might see only “nature” or “weeds,” the perceptive and knowledgeable recreationist sees particular co-inhabitants of a shared ecological community. At the same time, ecological perceptivity helps aggregate what would otherwise be a selective perception of the parts of nature that appear most useful for any given human activity. Whereas those with ecological perception see in the western prairies a “diversity of … plants and animals, all of which were useful because the sum of their co-operations and competitions achieved continuity,” the settler-farmer saw “only wheat and oxen,” both of which were immediately useful to him.259 Ecological perception disaggregates ecosystems by allowing us to see our individual co-inhabitants; it re-aggregates again by allowing us to see all of them, and us too, as members of the same community.

Of course, it does not automatically follow from learning how one’s prey or product behaves that one will care ethically about it. A shift in attitude or comportment is also necessary. Here too Leopold sees a prime role for outdoor recreation. But he also points to the role those who still make their living on the land might play. He writes:

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256 Ibid, 290.
257 Ibid, 202-210
258 Ibid, 76.
259 Ibid, 114.
To the laborer in the sweat of his labor, the raw stuff on his anvil is an adversary to be conquered. ... But to the laborer in repose, able for the moment to cast a philosophical eye on his world, that same raw stuff is something to be loved and cherished, because it gives definition and meaning to his life. 

Whether searching for trophies or one’s daily bread, ecological perception seems to come easier to the “laborer in repose”—whether that means a farmer who pauses mid-work to survey her land or the worker who spends his leisure in the outdoors. For Leopold, the hunter who only seeks to reach the bag limit and the farmer who labors without care for the health of the land lack not just ecological insight but also, in a sense, maturity. Indeed, Leopold sees ecological perception as the marker for higher development of one’s ecological citizenship, regarding as “disquieting” the trophy-hunter “who never grows up,” whose capacity for perception remains “undeveloped, or perhaps lost.” This does not make trophy-hunting pathological or even entirely regrettable—for Leopold, it is both a cherished national tradition and a potential route for future ecological understanding and stewardship. But for it to serve its higher moral purpose, it needs to excite in the hunter a curiosity about the broader setting in which he or she hunts. Leopold knows that this will not happen to every hunter who picks up a rifle. But he sees its encouragement as one of the most important tasks of conservationist thought and policy. And he sees it as a viable route to ecological perceptivity because he has experienced a similar awakening in his own life. He nods to the naturalist who seeks out “rare ferns or new warblers” rather than fresh kills, and writes that “because his kind of hunting seldom calls for theft or pillage, he disdains the killer. Yet, like as not, in his youth he was one.” Hunting may strike the naturalist as unseemly, but it serves for many as the beginning of an ecological education. This is why he insists that “there are cultural values in the sports, customs, and experiences that renew contacts with wild things.” They can serve as first steps toward recognition and understanding of the ecological community and as the linchpin of a popular education in ecological perception.

261 Ibid, 294.
262 Ibid, 282.
263 Ibid, 211.
Religion and Science, Inspiring Stewardship

As an environmental writer and conservation educator, Leopold devotes much attention to the task of developing ecological perception in the public. Yet, as I suggested earlier, that task is in the service of the much more ambitious goal of reshaping our sense of species-purpose in the land community. Leopold hopes that the people might come to recognize the ecological community as such and to value it for its own sake. But he also aims to reorient our species' sense of what is distinctive about itself, and thus its sense of mission and purpose, toward stewardship of the broader ecological community.

Central to Leopold’s ecological humanism are two related ideas: that human possession of the land is temporary and that the broader purposes of the land outstrip our limited understanding as well as our own interests. As he put it in the passage that serves as the epigraph to this chapter, our species enjoys “merely the privilege of temporarily possessing an earth made for … inscrutable purposes.” The temporariness of our possession of the land and the inscrutability of its purposes highlight the limits of human power as well as the breadth of human responsibility in the land community. But Leopold also sees this as deeply inspiring because our distinctive, if unperfected, capacity to recognize these ideas is the key to a higher sense of purpose as a species. And because the idea of environmental stewardship draws from both religious and scientific conceptions of humanity’s place in nature, he hopes it will enable a widely resonant sense of mission in a public that so often draws inspiration from both.

The sense of human belonging Leopold locates in the ecological community is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is imperative to understand the human being as “a plain member and citizen” of the land community.264 On the other hand, it is equally important to recognize the otherness and the ultimate unknowability of our ecological fellow-travelers because only in this way do we recognize that the ecological community and its membership have interests and purposes beyond our own. We are at once co-inhabitants and guests in the ecosystems we share with nonhumans. We are members of the land community, but our ability to know and value our

264 Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 240.
nonhuman neighbors is fundamentally limited, even as it is morally crucial. Ecological perception allows us to see both our belonging and our guesthood, but the latter is especially paramount because stewardship requires that we recognize and respect something beyond ourselves with interests and value that are irreducible to our own.

The limits of human knowledge of the ecological community and its inhabitants is a recurring theme in *A Sand County Almanac*. Perhaps most obvious at a phenomenological level, Leopold reminds his readers that some ways of knowing the nonhuman world are inaccessible to us but accessible to other species. He offers as an example the perceptivity of his hunting dog:

My dog … thinks I have much to learn about partridges, and, being a professional naturalist, I agree. He persists in tutoring me, with the calm patience of a professor of logic, in the art of drawing deductions from an educated nose. I delight in seeing him deduce a conclusion … from data that are obvious to him, but speculative to my unaided eye. Perhaps he hopes his dull pupil will one day learn to smell.265

There is obvious humor in this passage, but Leopold is also making a serious point. Humans have powerful tools, both perceptual and cognitive, to come to know the world around them. But other species have tools that ours does not. The hunting dog can know the world in a way that the hunting human cannot, even when the latter is a renowned scientist and expert outdoorsman. This insight extends to wild animals, such as the marsh-dwelling grebe whose call Leopold is "helpless to translate … or to understand."266 And, in the case of the hawk, we are not even able to "understand the instinct of predation that we share with our raptorial servant."267 We are even unable fully to comprehend our common ground. For Leopold, all of this suggests that ours is a small territory in the broader ecological community, the common home we share with other species. Indeed, "our" territory isn't even solely ours—we live in the midst of a nonhuman home that exists beyond our own power, goals, and even everyday awareness. In a section titled "Home Range," he writes:

The wild things that live on my farm are reluctant to tell me, in so many words, how much of my township is included within their daily or nightly beat. I am curious about this, for it gives me the ratio between the size of their universe and the size of mine, and it

265 Ibid, 67.
266 Ibid, 170.
267 Ibid, 184, emphasis added.
conveniently begs the much more important question, who is the more acquainted with the world in which he lives?\textsuperscript{268} It is in asking these sorts of questions that the ecologically perceptive citizen comes to recognize the common home we share with our nonhuman neighbors as a common home, and thus as not only, and also more than, our home.

The limits of human knowledge extend beyond any given ecological neighbor and its home range. The land community as a whole is similarly mysterious. This is partly because of the inexhaustibility of each part of the community. As Leopold puts it, “no matter how intently one studies the hundred little dramas of the woods and meadows, one can never learn all of the salient facts about any one of them.”\textsuperscript{269} But it is also because of the sheer complexity of how the many parts of the land community fit together, the very substance of ecology as a science. And it is the limits of our ecological knowledge that should instill humility and restraint in every ecological citizen.”\textsuperscript{270} Leopold writes: “The ordinary citizen today assumes that science knows what makes the community clock tick; the scientist is equally sure he does not. He knows that the biotic mechanism is so complex that its workings may never be fully understood.”\textsuperscript{271} In confronting the complexity of the land community, and thus the limits of scientific knowledge, amateur and expert naturalists alike come to realize that ecosystems and their inhabitants exceed our full understanding. This does not mean that management and intervention are impossible—after all, Leopold made his name as a forester and game manager—but it does mean that we live embedded in a community of interests well beyond our ken and control.

Importantly for Leopold, this humility extends beyond the claims to knowledge that scientists and other experts can make. It also has an ethical upshot. In the realization that we do not fully understand what makes the “community clock tick,” we also come to realize the limits of our comprehension of the ecological community’s value:

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid. 83.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid. 35.
\textsuperscript{270} Ibid. 190.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid. 241.
The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: ‘What good is it?’ If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts?272

Humility toward the ecological community ought to extend to questions of the value of its parts. For Leopold, purporting to guess the full value of our nonhuman co-inhabitants in the ecological community is the height of human arrogance. Our ignorance requires us to assume that they are more valuable than we can ever know.

By arguing that we have a limited understanding of the ecological community, Leopold is not simply guarding against hubristic ecological mismanagement. He is making a broader point about the place of our species in that community—we are guests in the ecological community, not just citizens. And it is this guesthood that provides the key to understanding the limits of human use and possession of the land, and thus Leopold’s vision of a nobler role for the human species in the earth’s ecosystems. Leopold rejected the idea that the earth was made solely for human use. He quoted approvingly Jeannette Marks’ rejection of that idea as “the greatest human impertinence” as well as John Muir’s observation that such an attitude proceeds “as if nothing that does not obviously make for the benefit of man had any right to exist; as if our ways were God’s ways.”273 Yet he did so in the very same essay from 1923 in which he first put forward his (unorthodox) human exceptionalism, a “special nobility inherent in the human race” that rests on our ability to become “a society decently respectful of its own and all other life, capable of inhabiting the earth without defiling it.”274 Writing early on in his own transformation, the importance of ecological perception and the scientific study of ecology was not yet entirely clear to Leopold, nor were the intricacies of the ecological community and the diverse functions and values of its inhabitants. But what began as an unpublished set of reflections would, by the time

272 Ibid, 190
he wrote *A Sand County Almanac*, become a sophisticated and deeply influential vision of ecological stewardship, securing his place in the annals of environmental thought.

I have elected to call this vision of higher ecological purpose the *stewardship* vocation, but this does not reflect Leopold’s own use of that term—in fact, he seems to have used the word “stewardship” rarely, if at all. I do so instead for two reasons. The first and most obvious is that, since Leopold’s time, “environmental stewardship” has come to refer broadly to a human responsibility to care for the environment, making stewardship an apt name for what Leopold is after. Moreover, it is central to the concept of stewardship that what is being cared for is not the sole possession of the steward.275 This means that the concept of stewardship speaks to Leopold’s contention that the broader ecological community to which we belong is not entirely ours—that we are, in some measure, guests in the realm we are charged with protecting, that we inhabit lands that do not belong entirely to us.

The second reason I use the term “stewardship” goes a step further. Both within and beyond environmentalism, the term has unmistakably religious associations. With a long history of use in the Christian tradition, and especially in the Calvinist Protestantism that was so formative in the development of modern environmental thought, it is increasingly used today to refer to religious imperatives to care for God’s creation.276 Here the argument is that the natural order and its divine origin require respectful treatment of all of God’s creatures, human and nonhuman. This strain of eco-religious thought is especially intriguing in light of the long-standing debate about religion and the environment dating back at least to Lynn White, Jr.’s influential argument that the anthropocentrism of Western Christianity legitimizes the wholesale

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instrumentalization of nature. Indeed, Leopold himself viewed as anthropocentric all the major religious traditions with which he was acquainted. But he also saw the need for religion to take notice of ecology, lamenting that “philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it.”

Though Leopold was uneasy about organized religion and was never a church-going man, he had a clear spiritual streak in his thought. He confided to his daughter Estella late in his life that, as she reported it, “he believed there was a mystical supreme power that guided the Universe … But to him this power was not a personalized God. It was more akin to the laws of nature… His religion came from nature….” While his skepticism toward religion and his commitments to modern science have made scholars of religion and American environmentalism reluctant to treat Leopold as a religious or even especially spiritual thinker, especially compared to Muir, others have noted that Leopold read the Bible closely and was fond of biblical allusions, though Callicott concludes that “the lasting influence of the Bible on Leopold appears to be literary, not doctrinal.” More broadly, it has become something of a cliché to describe Leopold as a “prophet” for the environmental movement and A Sand County Almanac as its “scripture” or “Gospel.” While Meine is right to point out the irony that a man so devoted to critical scientific inquiry and so suspicious of organized religion would come to be canonized as a kind of environmental saint, it seems hardly a coincidence that readers have been so often tempted to at least analogize Leopold’s texts to scripture and his legacy to that of a prophet, for, like all religious visions, his stewardship vision had something fundamental to say about the fitting relationship between humanity and the universe. Leopold may not be a religious thinker, and he

279 Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 246.
282 See Flader, Thinking Like a Mountain, 217; Dunlap, Faith in Nature, 36, 65-66, 140; Meine, Aldo Leopold, 525-526; Callicott, Thinking Like a Planet, 13 and 316n42.
was certainly no theologian, but it may fairly be said that his thought has religious implications. 283

In his 1923 essay, Leopold followed his approving quotation of Muir (“as if our ways were God’s ways”) with this passage:

> It just occurs to me … that God started his show a good many million years before he had any men for audience—a sad waste of both actors and music—and … it is just barely possible that God himself likes to hear birds sing and see flowers grow. But here again we encounter the insufficiency of words as symbols of reality. 284

Leopold writes as if he knows he is wandering outside of his depths, and possibly pushing the credulity of his largely secular audience (the draft was written for his colleagues in the Forest Service), but the theistic language should not be dismissed as merely rhetorical. It allows Leopold to speak to a spiritual truth about the human place in the land community in view of which, especially this early in his career, he found himself facing the limits of language. This might be why, in the most mystical of his *A Sand County Almanac* essays, “The Song of the Galivan,” he refers to the “song of songs” that one might hear in the midst of the ecological community, writing: “that the good life on any river may likewise depend on the perception of its music, and the preservation of some music to perceive, is a form of doubt not yet entertained by science.” 285 And it might be why he wrote this:

> I heard of a boy once who was brought up an atheist. He changed his mind when he saw that there were a hundred-odd species of warblers, each bedecked like to the rainbow, and each performing yearly sundry thousands of miles of migration about which scientists wrote wisely but did not understand. No ‘fortuitous concourse of elements’ working blindly through any number of millions of years could quite account for why warblers are so beautiful. … I dare say this boy’s convictions would be harder to shake than those of many inductive theologians. There are yet many boys to be born who, like Isaiah, may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this. 286

As Meine writes of this passage, “Leopold did not identify himself as ‘this boy’; he did not have to.” 287 While not a Christian or even a conventional theist, Leopold himself seems to have recognized the spiritual implications of his thought. 288

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287 Meine, “Aldo Leopold,” 1006.
What makes Leopold’s ecological humanism and his vision for a mission in environmental stewardship so promising is that they resonate with both religious and scientific ways of thinking in a public whose sensibilities are so thoroughly shaped by both. That is: returning once more to this chapter’s epigraph, the public and its experts alike can remain agnostic, so to speak, about the “other and inscrutable purposes” for which the earth and the ecological community were made. As Callicott has pointed out, not just modern ecological science but also Darwin’s evolutionary theory shaped Leopold’s thought and certainly contributed to his mature understanding of the land community and humanity’s plain membership and guesthood in it.289 The “other and inscrutable purposes” beyond our own might be evolutionary. They might be theological. Indeed, they might be both—or neither. To be sure, Leopold places greater emphasis on the indispensable role of science, but he does so in large part because he believes in the virtues of knowing what one is looking at—again, the purpose is to recognize the ecological community as such and to have some appreciation for its complexity and its irreducibility to our own values and goals. And he recognizes that the land ethic and the stewardship vocation that arises from it must have more than intellectual foundations. They also must have emotional and even spiritual ones. To the extent that Western traditions of scientific and religious thought are predominantly anthropocentric, as Leopold claims in his 1923 essay, both must be reformed to draw the public eye to the importance of the broader ecological community as well as our unique and potentially nobler place in it. And to the extent that modern publics are divided over and yet enamored with both religious and scientific ideas, it is fitting that Leopold takes what Bryan Norton calls an “ecumenical” approach to “political consensus-building.”290 Leopold is seeking a new and renewed sense of civic and species-purpose built not on a foundation of self-righteous moralizing or elite authority but rather on viable elements of

290 Norton, Toward Unity Among Environmentalists, 42.
modern political culture rooted in popular religious and scientific conceptions of the human being and its place in the universe.

The specific role of science in Leopold’s civic project—to help hone and inform ecological perception in the public and inspire commitment to environmental stewardship—may address a concern with Leopold’s thought that has vexed scholars of environmental political theory. John Meyer and Bob Pepperman Taylor have expressed reservations about Leopold’s tendency to depoliticize environmentalism by either reducing it to a change in worldview or defaulting to the authority of scientific expertise.²⁹¹ Peter Cannavò also points to “Leopold’s anti-political tendencies” and puts the problem this way: “If ecology actually dictates politics and history, then governance becomes the province of environmental experts, including foresters and game managers like Leopold.”²⁹² However, Cannavò concludes that Leopold largely overcomes the environmentalist temptation to resort to “scientific fiat.”²⁹³ I agree, and my reading of Leopold’s popular ecological education helps us see why. For the purposes of civic education, Leopold draws on science primarily to bring to the public’s attention the existence and value of something they had not seen before, the land community. On its own, ecological science cannot persuade the public to take up the stewardship vocation. And Leopold appears to have little desire to use the authority of scientific experts to force that vocation on the public, nor does he seem to think it possible. Ecological science can help Babbitt see his country. It can also inspire him to see his place in the land community anew. But it cannot force him and his fellow citizens to legislate much of anything. Thus, the ecological conscience that Leopold seeks to spread, and the collective vocation of stewardship that is meant to inspire, is not derived from ecological science but rather inspired by it. Ecology, as Callicott points out, “is not just one science among many; it is a habit of mind and a way of experiencing.”²⁹⁴ Though ecological science is immensely important to Leopold in its own right and should influence policymaking, it is ecology as a mode of

²⁹³ Ibid, 879.
perceiving and interpreting the land community that is of interest in Leopold’s civic education. It helps show the public something it did not see. In this regard, Leopold’s civic environmental vision is fundamentally democratic. Rather than advocating for religious and scientific authority or the uncritical embrace of frontier mythology or the wilderness idyll, Leopold seeks to inspire and educate the public so that it can take up the stewardship vocation on its own terms and with reference to its own history and aspirations.

Conclusion—Aldo Leopold’s Ecological Humanism

The post-war environmental movement and the enduring popularity of Leopold’s magnum opus stand testament to the measured success of Leopold’s invitation to take up the stewardship vocation. So too does the flurry of environmental legislation passed in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, including the Wilderness Act of 1964, which defined wilderness as areas “where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” and the Endangered Species Act of 1973, which pointed to the “ecological” value of the endangered and threatened species protected by the Act. To be sure, these and the other congressional acts of the ensuing decades focused largely on the role of the environment in human well-being. And Leopold would not object to this—after all, he was insistent that both humanity and the land ought to benefit from conservation and was by no means hostile to the idea that conservation is a good idea in part because it supports the prosperity and happiness of the human community. But it is also clear that the ultimate goal of his ecological civic education required more than this. It also required a conscious and concerted commitment to stewardship of the land community for its own sake. But unlike other iconic environmental thinkers like Thoreau and Muir, Leopold also brought a public career in environmental management, policy, and education to bear on the practical and philosophical questions of conservation, making his exhortation to the stewardship vocation all the more credible as well as inspiring. Thus, Leopold’s articulation of a vision of environmental stewardship

that speaks to the norms and values of a democratic society stands as one of his most enduring and valuable achievements.

Leopold’s vision of a popular education in ecological perception also provides an important contribution to our understanding of ecological belonging, and specifically to its epistemic dimension. In keeping with his own professional vocation as a scientist and naturalist, Leopold’s conception of ecological belonging highlights the indispensable role of coming to know and understand the land community on its own terms. For the public to achieve a sense of belonging to the land itself—again, not simply homeland, heartland, or property, but *land* in and of itself—it is simply not enough for people to see land only as natural resources or scenic vistas. Caring for the land community requires coming to know and understand that community on its own terms. Without some measure of knowledge of the land itself, the land community and its nonhuman residents can appear to us as little more than perceptual white noise, and thus as either bewildering or irrelevant. Ecological perception allows for the sort of epistemic belonging experienced by the stargazer who comes to see distinct stars and constellations in the night sky where there was once indiscernible chaos; the birdwatcher who comes to identify particular species of birds where there was once a flurry of life easily ignored; and the amateur botanist who comes to find many distinct species of plants where there were once only weeds and shrubs. In this way, the ecological perceiver can come to view the land not as a background of white noise or a mere resource but as a fabric of lifeforms of which we ourselves are a part. Much as Heidegger observed that “to be entirely at home in something” requires and entails that one “understand and be expert in it,” Leopold understands ecological belonging to require a knowledge and understanding of the land community and its inhabitants.296

Moreover, in keeping with Heidegger’s reference not just to knowledge but to expertise, Leopold’s emphasis on practical and even instrumental knowledge of the land community offers an important caveat to environmental social criticism that traces environmental abuse and

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destruction to the “instrumentalization of nature.” Leopold’s emphasis on popular activities of outdoor recreation serves as a helpful reminder that coming to know the land on its own terms often requires, perhaps counterintuitively, that one engage with the land in a practical, even instrumental manner. Eco-feminists and critical theorists may be right to criticize the total instrumentalization of nature, but Leopold’s theory of epistemic belonging shows that instrumental reason can also be ecologically educative. Far from being pathological or even a necessary evil, Leopold’s approach suggests that instrumental engagements with nature play an essential role in the cultivation of an ecological conscience. Much as I argued in the previous chapter that the critique of the “economization of nature” is on the right track but ultimately misses the mark, so too does the critique of the “instrumentalization of nature.” Even in our appreciation for the intrinsic value of nonhuman beings, our instrumental engagements with the land prove indispensable.

In light of his commitment to a nobler human exceptionalism rooted in environmental stewardship, I have described Leopold’s perspective as one of ecological humanism. This conveys the crucial point for Leopold that our species cannot reach its highest nobility, cannot be fully what it is, without embracing its apparently unique capacity to perceive, care about, and preserve the land community as such. This suggests that, from an ecological point of view, any humanism is incomplete unless it defines itself in part by its concern for and engagement with the world beyond us—that which is not us, that which is other from us and to which we owe ethical obligations precisely because it is not us. To be sure, if Leopold’s vision is a form of humanism, it is a chastened humanism that avoids what David Ehrenfeld once called the “arrogance of humanism,” or its tendency to tacitly assume that human power is limitless and unfailing. But in his call for a nobler human exceptionalism, Leopold does not follow Ehrenfeld in abandoning

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humanism altogether, nor does he accept the ecocentric purist’s insistence on a bio-
egalitarianism that rejects any privileging of the human species as a form of ‘human chauvinism’
or ‘speciesism.’ Instead, Leopold defines the human being in relation to its ecological situation
and special responsibilities in the land community. Much as he formulates his stewardship vision
in reference to the religious and scientific understandings that prevailed in the democratic society
in which he lived, Leopold appears to recognize that the public he is addressing is at bottom a
humanist one, and that it is not only philosophically nihilistic but politically self-defeating to reject
humanism altogether. By making environmental stewardship a centerpiece of the human
enterprise, Leopold avoids the liabilities of ecocentric misanthropy while tempering the arrogance
of humanism.

Though deep ecologists often claim Leopold as one of their own, his thought has more in
common with Berry’s ecological agrarianism than with ecocentric purism. Rather than focusing
primarily on the preservation of pristine wilderness or minimizing human impacts on the land,
Leopold draws our focus outward to the land community as a whole, whether that land is public or
private, wilderness or farm, scenic or domestic, pristine or damaged, rural or urban—because, to
an ecological steward, it is all of a piece, all part of a whole, much as human societies are. Thus
Leopold is more interested in preserving land health and human flourishing in what Bryan Norton
calls the “patchy landscape” of diverse land-uses than in reverting as much land as possible to
pristine wilderness. Moreover, because Leopold recognized that private landowners, many of

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299 See Richard Routley and Val Routley, “Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism,” in Ethics and
Problems of the 21st Century, ed. K.E. Goodpaster and K.M. Sayre, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame
Press, 1979, pp. 36-59; Bill Devall and George Sessions, Deep Ecology: Living as If Nature Mattered, Salt
Perennial, 2009 [1975].

300 For deep ecologists claiming Leopold as a pioneer in ecocentrism, see Devall and Sessions, Deep
Conservation Movement,” in Deep Ecology for the 21st Century, ed. George Sessions, Boston: Shambhala,
1995, pp. 50-56, at 52-53. Most striking in its contrast to my interpretation is this statement of purpose by a
contributor to the deep ecologist Earth First! Journal who wrote that “the central idea of Earth First! is that
humans have no divine right to subdue the Earth, that we are merely one of several million forms of life on
this planet. We reject even the notion of benevolent stewardship as that implies dominance. Instead we
believe, as did Aldo Leopold, that we should be plain citizens of the land community” (Howie Wolke, Earth
First! Journal 3.5, June 21, 1983, quoted in Alston Chase, In a Dark Wood: The Fight Over Forests and the

301 Norton, Toward Unity Among Environmentalists, pp. 151, 181, 189.
whom put their land to agricultural use, are an integral part of stewarding that patchwork landscape, Leopold devoted many of his writings to the specific challenges and opportunities of farmers practicing private land stewardship, singling out agriculture as “the most important land use” and observing that it is “the individual farmer who must weave the greater part of the rug on which America stands.” 302 Much in line with Berry’s emphasis on using the land with care, Leopold praised private landowners who could exercise “that combination of solicitude, foresight, and skill which we call husbandry” and concluded that “[h]usbandry is the heart of conservation.” 303 Indeed, it is telling that Berry cites Leopold approvingly in his essays and even wrote a “reader’s testimony” praising Leopold’s approach to conservation. 304 Like Berry, Leopold viewed ecological degradation as a symptom of the public’s cognitive and experiential distance from the land, and both see intimate engagements with the land as the key to reconnection to the ecological community. Moreover, Leopold shares Berry’s suspicion toward unrestrained economic development and land commodification. Overall, it is fair to say that Leopold’s thought is compatible with, and even constitutive of, ecological agrarianism. 305

Leopold’s ecological humanism, then, offers a third way between the two tendencies in environmental thought I identified in the introductory chapter—ecocentric purism and anthropocentric reformism. In fact, when they are placed alongside Leopold’s emphasis on “partnership” and “harmony” between humanity and the land, it turns out that the two perennial antagonists in environmental thought actually have more in common with one another than with Leopold’s stewardship vision in one important respect. Whereas Leopold holds out hope that humanity’s truly distinctive quality is its capacity to live with and for the broader ecological community, many on both sides of the ecocentrism- anthropocentrism debate seem resigned to


305 Callicott and Flader are thus on solid ground when they conclude that Leopold’s land ethic was deeply connected to his “essentially Jeffersonian reflections on political economy” (“Introduction,” The River of the Mother of God, pp. 3-31, at 22.
the idea that what makes our species exceptional is simply our technological power, with the
eccentric purist seeing it as a hubristic curse and the anthropocentric reformist embracing it as
the key to a sustainable future. Moreover, it is telling that both ecocentrists like Roderick Frazier
Nash and anthropocentrists like the self-proclaimed “eco-modernists” endorse a remarkably
similar vision of technologically-advanced islands of civilization decoupled as much as possible
from the natural environment. For ecocentrists like Nash, the goal is to save nature from
ourselves by retreating to so many “spaceships on earth” and allowing the remainder of the earth
to revert to wilderness.306 For the eco-modernists, the primary goal seems to be to save
ourselves from the environmental disasters of the Anthropocene by concentrating and intensifying
human activity.307 But for both, a “radical decoupling of humans from nature” is the only way to
avoid ecological collapse and environmental threats to society in the era of climate change.308

For Leopold, a divorce between humanity and the broader ecological community is
impossible because we truly are and will always be members and citizens of that community. It is
also undesirable, because conservation means harmony between the members of the land
community, including ourselves. We may not be total possessors of the land, but we are
permanent, or at least enduring, inhabitants in the land community. Leopold’s theory of education
even raises doubts as to whether such a divorce would be ideologically sustainable. What
happens, Leopold might ask, when the inhabitants of the closed “spaceships on Earth” are cut off
from the broader land community, and thus from the means of continued education in ecological
perception? If decoupling amounts to humanity cutting itself off from everyday experiences of
nonhuman nature, especially the practical and recreational ones that have defined the human
relation to nature for eons, then what is to prevent humanity from losing the very appreciation for
nature’s autonomy that inspired ecocentrists to withdraw in the first place?309 Whatever the

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306 Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 382.
307 Asufu-Adjaye et al, An Ecomodernist Manifesto, 2015, (<http://www.ecomodernism.org/s/An-
309 In light of this, Leopold would find the precipitous decline in the number of hunters and farmers in the
United States to be a cause for real concern. Barring a revival of mass interest in both, this suggests that
amateur naturalism—Leopold’s third and favorite mode of ecological engagement—is now more important
answer, it is clear that Leopold offers a very different model from the preservationists and eco-modernists of what a nobler ecological regime looks like. The latter are premised on ecological separatism, Leopold’s on ecological belonging.

What Leopold’s stewardship vision offers is an inspiring and workable balance between preserving natural habitat for its own sake—the lodestar of the wilderness ideal—and managing land use wisely to ensure human well-being. Like Berry, Leopold insists that conservation must address human economies and especially land use by private landowners.310 Like Thoreau and Muir, Leopold was deeply committed to the cultural and ethical value of “the wild” and was a pioneer of wilderness preservation.311 Rather than reading him in support of either ecocentrism purism or anthropocentric reformism, Leopold’s thought should be understood as militating against the excesses of both. By embracing the intrinsic value of nature while recognizing humanity’s exceptional role in it, Leopold’s stewardship vision cautions against both the latent primitivism and self-righteous moralism of the radical ecocentrist, which labels all human activity as “unnatural” intrusions on the wild and counsels only self-restraint, and the anthropocentric reformism of eco-modernism, which seeks to insulate nature from unsustainable human exploitation but is just as likely to insulate humanity from ecological perception. In the short run, at least, ecological decoupling would certainly mean less damage to the nonhuman home of Earth’s ecosystems. But for Leopold, this would not only be politically unworkable but also a profound loss for humanity, and perhaps also for the broader ecological community. Humanity would lose beauty, enjoyment, a sense of ecological belonging—and, as I have argued here, the potential to pursue our highest calling as a species. And the ecological community would lose something, too—namely, its best stewards.


Chapter 3—Nostalgia for Homeplaces: An Ecological Odyssey

Among the great struggles of man—good/evil, reason/unreason, etc.—there is also this mighty conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away, the dream of roots and the mirage of the journey.

—Salman Rushdie

Scratch under the surface of environmental thought and you will find an deep vein of loss and nostalgia. Aldo Leopold himself observed that among the “penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds” because “he must be the doctor who sees the mark of death in a community.”

With that grief comes an elegiac mood at times in A Sand County Almanac, as Leopold laments that no living person “will see again the long-grass prairie” or “the virgin pineries of the Lake States, or the flatwoods of the coastal plain, or the giant hardwoods” that once graced the landscapes of North America. That sense of permanent loss brought on by past environmental destruction is matched only by the fear of future losses, as when Rachel Carson famously imagines a silent spring devoid of all birdsong, or when Naomi Klein writes of her fear that, thanks to the ravages of climate change, her two-year-old son may live in a world without moose and many other wildlife. These testaments of both past and portended environmental loss are all the more poignant for being so personal. That is, while the ecological steward grieves over the demise of the Passenger Pigeon and the long-grass prairies for their own sakes, these testimonies and prophesies of loss point to concerns beyond ethical failure. They also bespeak deeply personal tragedies—a feeling that, deep down, a world without long-grass prairies and moose is not entirely worth living in, and that the loss registers not just as a moral tragedy but as a profoundly personal form of dispossession. Environmentalists have lost something that is their own.

This personal element of loss, and thus of ecological belonging, is especially evident when environmentalists speak of their attachments to particular places—the locations in geographic space that become nameable and precious to human beings because they are the locus of formative memories and experiences. Thus, when Edward Abbey recounts his final, bittersweet trip through Utah’s Glen Canyon before much of it was flooded by the construction of the Glen Canyon Dam, his attachment to the canyon is a function not just of his ecological principles but also of his personal relationship to it. Nonhuman beings and their habitats are important in their own right, Abbey is saying, but this particular place is mine, too—and the loss is personal. Indeed, these personal affections and attachments to particular places speak to Abbey’s account of the “homing sentiment” that we first saw in the introductory chapter:

This is the most beautiful place on earth. There are many such places. Every man, every woman, carries in heart and mind the image of the ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary. […] There’s no limit to the human capacity for the homing sentiment. This homing sentiment admits of rich diversity across individuals and cultures, but in that very diversity we find a universal attachment to places in the landscape, places with human names tied up with human memories and human affections. Ecological belonging, then, appears not just in the use-value of habitations and the stewardship of natural habitat, but also in human affections for what I call environmental homeplaces. Much like the other dimensions of ecological belonging that we have already seen, the homing sentiment bridges the gap between the human and the nonhuman, showing that humans belong to the land as much as the land belongs to human beings and that human flourishing is tied up with the cultivation and preservation of homeplaces. It should not surprise us, then, that attachment to place is so prevalent in environmental thought, for it effectively names the emotional abode of human beings in the land.

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317 Ibid., 1.
318 For discussions of the importance of place in environmental political thought and environmental ethics, see, respectively, John M. Meyer, *Political Nature: Environmentalism and the Interpretation of Western Thought*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001, esp. 121-156; Mark Sagoff, *The Economy of the Earth:*
While attachment to place is a prevalent theme in environmental political thought, so too are anxieties about its dark side and excesses. Bonnie Honig warns against “the seductions of home” and “the construction of ‘homes’ as spaces of safety and withdrawal from the tumult of politics,” arguing that attention to difference in democratic theory requires us to “give up on the dream of a place called home, a place free of power, conflict, and struggle, a place … unmarked or unriven by difference…”\textsuperscript{319} Similarly, David Harvey writes that the politics of place “appears to point solely to an exclusionary politics of a place-bound nationalism, regionalism, and communitarianism, precisely because memories built around places cannot easily be shared with outsiders. The exclusions here are troubling; the threat of exclusionary nationalisms and local fascisms looms large.”\textsuperscript{320} John Hultgren even finds in some environmentalist defenses of place a disturbing pattern of support for immigration restrictionism, especially among some eco-communitarians whose ecocentric conceptions of natural purity can reinforce commitments to cultural purity as well.\textsuperscript{321} For critics, then, there is a danger that protection of place will, against the stated intentions of most environmentalists, encourage a politics of exclusion in which cultural difference and the arrival of outsiders registers as a threat to ecological purity and the allure of home. Moreover, as Robert Goodin and Simon Hailwood have observed, ecocentric purism can turn the environmentalist’s nostalgia for lost species and landscapes into a more abstract and romanticized longing to return to a bygone era before humanity’s “alienation from nature.”\textsuperscript{322} On the extreme end of this tendency are primitivist fantasies of a return to a pre-agrarian hunter-gatherer existence, exemplified by Paul Shepard’s call to “come home to the Pleistocene” by embracing a hunter-gatherer existence in order to overcome what Shepard sees as our


“alienation from the domains of nonhuman life, primitive ancestors, tribal peoples, and the landscape itself.” As critics have pointed out, such primitivist dreams often draw on and feed into condescending and simplistic narratives of indigenous peoples and hunter-gathers as “noble savages.” It also seems safe to assume that such dreams are a non-starter for the public, however appealing they may be to some deep ecologists. Thus, for its critics, ecological nostalgia and attachment to place risk entrenching exclusion and alienating the public, thereby reinforcing the worst tendencies of environmental purism.

Yet these dangers of nostalgic attachment to place are not inevitable. As Peter Cannavò argues in his book on the environmental politics of place, place is not only a thing that people claim as their own. It is also a practice:

We have been speaking of place as a thing. We can also speak of it as an activity or practice—the practice of creating, interpreting, and maintaining places. The practice of place enables us to make sense of, and situate ourselves in, the spatial world. The very act of inhabiting, working in, visiting, or even just describing a particular place involves us in the practice of place. This is a practice in which all of us, as spatially situated, physical beings, are involved.

While it is true that many theorists, especially on the political left, believe that “any attempt to cling to the importance of place … is at best nostalgic and at worst reactionary,” Cannavò insists that “to deny the importance of place is to indulge in absurdity” because “attachment to some place, together with some measure of stability in our spatial environment, is necessary for a fully human life.” Yet even Cannavò recognizes that “the preservationist defense of place-based stability is not without its dangers.” Foremost among these is the temptation to protect places from all changes, which Cannavò criticizes for amounting to “an exercise in geographic taxidermy; it would render places lifeless.” Thus, for Cannavò, the practice of place requires a proper

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326 Ibid. 9, 17-19.
327 Ibid. 9.
328 Ibid. 6.
balancing of the need to alter and to maintain, to use and to protect, to develop and to preserve—in Cannavò’s words, to balance “founding” and “preservation.” Without this balancing, places will be treated either as static preserves or as disposable resources, and neither does justice to the human relationship to environmental places.

By focusing on the sense of loss and nostalgia that environmentalists feel for threatened or lost homeplaces, I aim to build on Cannavò’s insight that the practice of place requires a constant balancing between competing impulses. Specifically, I argue that human attachments to cherished homeplaces—including ones we tend to think of as explicitly “environmental” like parks, forests, lakes, rivers, and mountains—are defined by a core ambivalence or tension between mobility and rootedness, departure and return, wanderlust and nostalgia. Whereas Cannavò and other environmental political theorists answer the critique of place-based attachment by stressing the need to balance preservation with change, my approach incorporates and balances the imperatives of rootedness and mobility that define emotional relationships to place. The key, I argue, is to understand the experiential origins both of attachments to what I call formative homeplaces—that is, those places that play a central role in forming the self—and of the nostalgic longings for those places once one has departed from them. Understood as a longing for homeplaces that we have left or that have been destroyed, nostalgia (literally, the longing to return home) points the way toward the ambivalence and complexities of human attachments to environmental places, making possible an environmental theory of place that does justice to the attachments and nostalgias of both the rooted resident and the ecological refugee. Properly understood, ecological nostalgia points not to autochthonous immobility and reactionary exclusion from place but rather toward a right to depart from and return to cherished environmental places freely and without fear of destruction of the places we call home.

The chapter will proceed as follows. I begin by discussing the origin and development of the idea of nostalgia, emphasizing the abstraction of the term over time that makes it vulnerable

to dismissal by progressives and abuse by reactionaries. Then I discuss two promising but, I argue, one-sided treatments of nostalgia and the human relationship to place in Svetlana Boym and Barbara Cassin’s discussions of the nostalgia of refugees and Glenn Albrecht’s coining of the term solastalgia to describe the pain felt by people whose homeplaces undergo environmental devastation from underneath their feet. To better integrate both the mobility and the rootedness of the human relationship to homeplaces, I take a cue from Homer’s Odyssey and discuss the ways that people become attached to homeplaces in the first place and the complex and varied reasons people find themselves departing from them. To this end, I offer a fourfold typology of departures from home—the conscript, the refugee, the adolescent, and the traveler—and use it to integrate the human and the ecological sides of homeplace while showing that, when properly understood, nostalgia and place-based attachments point toward self-determination and freedom-in-place rather than nativism or environmental purism.

**The Use and Abuse of Nostalgia**

A curious thing has happened in the conceptual history of nostalgia. A word originally coined to diagnose the acute homesickness of Swiss mercenaries has come to mean nearly everything except longing for one’s actual homeplace. In his medical dissertation submitted in 1688 at the University of Basel, Johannes Hofer drew from the ancient Greek words for homecoming (nostos) and pain (algia) to form the neologism “nostalgia” as the medical label for a debilitating disease afflicting Swiss soldiers in which their yearnings to return home to their alpine villages became so violent that the condition could be fatal if left untreated.\(^{330}\) Tellingly, Hofer and the physicians of his day found that the only sure cure for nostalgia was to return home. Thus, nostalgia referred specifically to the longing a person who is away from home feels to return—it was essentially a synonym for homesickness.

Since Hofer first diagnosed the ailment, however, his term has come to be generalized and abstracted beyond its concrete referent in the homeplace. In both academic debates and

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everyday language, nostalgia has come to refer generally to a wistful or melancholic longing, and often for some sort of unrecoverable past state—childhood memories, a vanished national past, or even a golden age of humanity before alienation and evil. Raymond Williams was right to quip that, if we follow the “escalator” of nostalgia long enough, it will take us all the way to the Garden of Eden. This suggests that the predominant conception of nostalgia points not primarily toward particular homeplaces but rather to a longing for a more agreeable existential or social condition.

While this abstraction of nostalgia is certainly a departure from Hofer’s original meaning, it hardly lacks antecedents in the history of Western ideas. Scholars trace the ideological preconditions of this understanding of nostalgia back to the rise of linear time in Christian theology and its objectification and secularization during the Enlightenment. Whereas the ancients typically viewed time as cyclical, making the past in some sense recoverable, modern conceptions of time were strictly linear, making the past irrevocably lost—for moderns, then, the past is truly past. Moreover, whereas ancient conceptions of time tracked the cycles of the seasons, day and night, growth and decay, and the stages of human life and social custom—making time “pregnant-with-meaning,” as Michael Shapiro puts it—the modern conception of linear time and history signified pure duration and the inevitability of change, removing any intrinsic meaning from time.

The Romantic reaction to the rationalization of time suggested that the Enlightenment’s objectified, linear, and abstract time proved difficult for many to actually inhabit. Yet that very reaction did little to cut against the abstraction of nostalgia. Rather, the Romantics found in what was then the relatively new concept of nostalgia a perfect metaphor for their worldview, and especially for the core insight of Romanticism, and later existentialism, that modern existence is itself a form of homelessness and alienation. This idea, in turn, drew on powerful tropes in classical philosophy and Christianity imbued with “Platonic themes concerning the celestial home and the terrestrial

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exile” that had framed the only true homecoming as the return to God’s kingdom, as in Christianity, or to the realm of the Forms, as in Plato.333 “The world is an exile,” Thomas à Kempis wrote, and “home is with God.”334 Once these Platonic and Christian understandings of existential homelessness were secularized, Romanticism could use the idea of longing inherent in the notion of nostalgia as an affirmation for its core values. As Svetlana Boym quips, “I long therefore I am” became the romantic motto,” making nostalgia an attractive ethos for Romanticism and, as Robert Pogue Harrison concludes, a “countercurrent of the Enlightenment drive to inherit the future.”335 What had begun as a name for homesickness for particular homeplaces had become in the hands of the Romantics and existentialists an historical and existential ailment from which all moderns suffer. “For the Romantics,” Starobinski concludes, “nostalgia was a disease which could be neither cured nor assuaged.”336 The simple return home was impossible. As a result of the abstraction of nostalgia, the term was “robbed of all its technical significance; it has become a literary term, [and] thus vague.”337

The vagueness of contemporary notions of nostalgia as an ill-defined yearning for a lost past or harmonious state of being leaves nostalgia vulnerable to dismissal by progressives and abuse by reactionaries. Indeed, for both reasons, the use of nostalgia as a pejorative has become something of a commonplace, especially in the academy.338 This too has deep roots. For Kant and Freud, nostalgia was a sign of immaturity. For Kant, a visit home cures nostalgia because it reveals to the homesick the fact that what they really pine for is bygone youth, which is irrecoverable, making nostalgia fundamentally irrational.339 For Freud, longing for youthful comfort

337 Ibid., 85.
338 Starobinski noted even in the 1960s that, “[i]n its current usage, [nostalgia’s] poetic meaning has little by little taken on a pejorative connotation” (“The Idea of Nostalgia,” 101). More recently, Boym recognizes that nostalgia is “something of a bad word, an affectionate insult at best” (*The Future of Nostalgia*, xiv).
was a sign of fixation requiring therapy to be cured—whereas Hofer recognized the return home as the cure for nostalgia, Freud equated the (desired) return to youth with psychological regression. More generally, nostalgia has come to be associated with the maladjusted, with those who cannot keep up with the pace of progress. Whereas Hofer understood nostalgia as a disease born of a form of deprivation that might be repaired, later psychiatrists treated it as a “lack of adaptation to the new society which the individual must live in.” Thus, nostalgia is for those who cannot keep up with progress, who fail to conform to the arc of history. From here it is a natural extension to treat nostalgia as a marker of reactionary politics—if nostalgia is the disease of those who cannot cope with historical progress, then it should be an especially prevalent disease for those whose politics is premised on resisting or reversing progress. Indeed, as we have already seen, critics of nostalgia in environmental political theory have recognized the prevalence of appeals to nostalgia and a lost past in both right-wing reactionary movements and in primitivist ecocentrism.

Even so, some scholars have sought to take nostalgia seriously while guarding against its political dangers. Especially instructive in this regard is the work of Svetlana Boym and Barbara Cassin, both of whom attempt to distinguish promising types of nostalgia from more problematic ones. Both write in the shadow of the political abuse of nostalgia perpetrated by the totalitarian states of the 20th century—as a scholar of Heidegger and Arendt, Cassin writes with the legacy of Nazi Germany in mind, and Boym was herself an immigrant from the former Soviet Union—which leads them to emphasize the potential for nostalgia to speak to the situation of the exile and refugee rather than the person rooted firmly in one place. While they provide a

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necessary antidote to overly-rooted conceptions of nostalgia, their approach amounts to an over-correction, largely abandoning nostalgia’s original roots in the homeplace.

For both Boym and Cassin, benign forms of nostalgia focus on longing and malignant forms focus on belonging and the return home. “Algia—longing—is what we share,” writes Boym, while “nostos—the return home—is what divides us.” This leads her to differentiate between “restorative nostalgia,” which “puts emphasis on nostos and proposes to rebuild the lost home,” and “reflective nostalgia,” which “dwells on algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance.” Boym associates restorative nostalgia with nationalist myths and paranoid conspiracy theories that fixate on external and internal threats to the nation. By contrast, reflective nostalgia avoids these exclusionary and fascistic tendencies by focusing not on the “national past and future” but rather on “individual and cultural memory … perpetually deferring homecoming itself” in the hopes of cultivating “a global diasporic solidarity based on the experience of immigration and internal multiculturalism.” Similarly, Cassin distinguishes between Heimweh (homesickness), which is the desire for a complete return to the home that has been lost, and Sehnsucht (longing or yearning), which she describes as an “open nostalgia” that recognizes linear time and thus accepts that complete return is impossible. Cassin alludes to the dark side of nostalgia in Nazi blood and soil nationalism and hopes that a more open conception of nostalgia might enable “a much broader and more welcoming way of thinking,” even entertaining the possibility of a “world freed from all belonging.” For both Boym and Cassin, then, nostalgia can be a source of personal meaning and even solidarity, but only when it is decoupled from place-based belonging and fantasies of the return home.

I find Boym and Cassin’s outright rejection of place-based belonging to be an unpersuasive and unnecessary overcorrection, and Cassin’s suggestion of a world without (presumably place-based) belonging is especially startling. But the excesses of their approach

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342 Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, xv-xvi, emphasis in original.
343 Ibid, 41, emphasis in original.
344 Ibid, 41-45.
345 Ibid, 49, 342.
346 Cassin, Nostalgia, 26.
347 Ibid, 8.
should not lead us to lose sight of its advantages. Both focus their studies of nostalgia on the same central figures of our time—the exile and the refugee. The 20th century’s disastrous experiments in totalitarian nationalism—especially in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia—proved especially disastrous to those who were deemed not to belong, creating millions of refugees and making immigrants a central focus in discussions of nostalgia. For Boym and Cassin, the refugee reveals the dilemmas posed by place-based belonging when it is at its most exclusionary and oppressive, when remaining at home is fraught with peril and, once one has fled, returning home is altogether impossible. Once the outcast has become a refugee, one must learn to live with something of a split self, yearning for a lost homeland while uneasily inhabiting a new and unfamiliar place. An environmental theory of nostalgia that fails to account for the refugee is surely inadequate, especially when climate change and environmental destruction promise to force more and more people from their homes and homelands. Yet it also cannot follow Boym and Cassin in rejecting place-based attachment outright. We can begin to address this problem by turning to an account of belonging and homesickness that deals directly with environmental attachments to place.

In 2005, Glenn Albrecht proposed the new concept “solastalgia” to describe the distress people feel as a result of ecological upheaval in their homeplaces. Inspired by nostalgia’s associations “with the melancholia of homesickness for people who were distant from their homes,” Albrecht coined a new term that plays off the root of the words solace and desolation, highlighting the sense of loss that people experience when their environmental homeplaces are desolated beneath their feet. “I was dealing with people who were not distant from their home,” Albrecht wrote, so the specific kind of psychological pain brought on by ecological degradation required a new label.

The places that I was interested in were not being completely ‘lost’, they were places being transformed. The people I was concerned about were not being forcibly removed from their homes/places, however, their place-based distress was also connected to powerlessness and a sense that environmental injustice had been perpetrated on them.

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348 Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, esp. 337-343; Cassin, Nostalgia, esp. 29-63.
what these people lacked was solace or comfort derived from their present relationship to ‘home.’\(^{350}\)

For Albrecht, whereas nostalgia connotes spatial or temporal separation from home, solastalgia ails people who “were still ‘at home’” but nonetheless experience a “breakdown of the normal relationship between their psychic identity and their home.”\(^{351}\) Albrecht’s concept proves especially powerful in focusing on the tragic, and increasingly common, experience of witnessing the collapse of one’s homeplace all around oneself without ever having left it. Albrecht offers evidence from interviews of residents of the Hunter Valley in New South Wales, Australia, who speak to their profound psychological distress in the face of extensive resource extraction and pollution in their homeplace.\(^{352}\)

Albrecht’s concept of solastalgia has the advantage of making affection for place, and the sense of loss experienced when that place undergoes environmental degradation, the primary focus. In contrast to Boym and Cassin, who subsume nostalgia into a placeless longing out of fear of exclusionary nativism, Albrecht recognizes that environmental attachments are fundamentally place-based, and that damage to one’s home environment is especially damaging to one’s emotional well-being.

Yet, like Boym and Cassin’s emphasis on the dispersed nostalgia of the exile, Albrecht’s solastalgia is notably one-sided. While Albrecht is right to stress that many people experience environmental degradation without being forced to leave their homes, there are nonetheless many others who are forced to leave home and become ecological refugees—and many more as climate change continues to intensify. Albrecht does touch briefly on the importance of ecological refugees, but he admits that the concept of solastalgia does not address their plight and that the original term “nostalgia” is more apt for describing the homesickness from afar experienced by

\(^{350}\) Ibid, 44.
\(^{351}\) Ibid.
\(^{352}\) Ibid, 50-54.
those ripped from their homeplaces by political violence, economic dislocation, and environmental devastation. 

So far, we have seen that contemporary scholarship on nostalgia often does two things. First, it abstracts nostalgia away from attachments to and losses of actual homeplaces. Second, even the most helpful treatments of nostalgia focus primarily on special cases to the neglect of the broader phenomenon. Albrecht’s solastalgia speaks to those who stay in one place and experience the desolation of their homes around them but not to the refugee separated from the homeplace; Boym and Cassin’s reflective nostalgia speaks to the dilemmas of refugees who realize that their homeplaces are unrecoverable but sidesteps the issues of those who remain in place or who hold out hope for a tangible homecoming. Like the romantics who abstracted nostalgia and made it into an existential condition impossible to escape, Boym and Cassin risk removing the nostos from nostalgia entirely and leaving only a residue of longing, even when many hope to save or return to their homeplaces. And like the eco-communitarian who privileges rooted attachment to place at the expense of mobility and freedom, Albrecht’s focus on solastalgia risks downplaying the very aspect of ecological nostalgia that will become more pressing in the coming century—the plight of the ecological refugee. What both approaches miss is that each of these is a static image capturing only one side of the human relation to environmental homeplaces. To get a better handle on the broader phenomenon, these static images need to be integrated and set in motion. To this end, I will consider the broader spectrum of the human experience of attachment to environmental homeplace, integrating both the mobility and the rootedness that we all experience to varying degrees over the course of our lives in our human relationship to place. This will be accomplished by asking two questions. First, how do people come to form attachments to homeplaces in the first place? Second, for what reasons do people leave their homeplaces, voluntarily or involuntarily? The remainder of this chapter will take up each question in turn.

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Formative Homeplaces and the Ambivalence of Home

How do people come to form affectionate attachments to homeplaces? Here social scientific treatments of nostalgia are illuminating. Psychologists have noticed, especially in the elderly, that nostalgic recollections tend to focus on childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Douwe Draaisma calls this the “reminiscence effect,” noting that there seems to be a “memory peak” for the elderly in their recollections of their lives from early adolescence to sometime in early adulthood, usually in one’s twenties.354 Similarly, Gary Cross finds that nostalgia for commodities tends to concentrate on objects we associate with childhood and early adulthood.355 At first glance, this appears to confirm the romantic view that nostalgia is for a lost past or idealized memories of youth, but further evidence suggests something more is at work. Draaisma cites an illuminating study involving immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries in which researchers tried to determine the location of their memory peaks—that is, the portion of their lives about which they had the strongest and most numerous memories. They found that the location of a subject’s memory peaks varied depending on the age at which they emigrated. If a subject left his or her homeland earlier in life, the peak would be in their early to mid-twenties, but, if the departure took place later, the memory peak could be pushed into their thirties.356 Draaisma also points to studies in which researchers asked people to name their “most decisive book” in making them who they are today and at what age they read them. The answers revealed a similar memory peak, with the bulk of responses clustered around adolescence and early adulthood. One researcher concludes: “when are books decisive? Around the age of twenty. You read them differently then, looking for a voice that fits you.”357 This suggests that nostalgic memories of the past have less to do with youth per se, but rather with the fact that formative events, the turning

355 Gary Cross, Consumed Nostalgia, 18.
356 Draaisma, Nostalgia Factory, 64-65.
357 Ibid, 66. I suspect most scholars can name such formative books in their own intellectual coming-of-age.
points that prove pivotal in shaping the adult self, typically occur during those years. Nostalgia dwells on those times and places in life that are most formative in making us who we are today, on formative experiences that mark the origins of one's self. Thus, personal nostalgia draws us not so much to "the past" as to our origins. Nostalgia is for the formative.

Those formative experiences take place in formative places. As anthropologist Michael Jackson observes, "[h]omeplaces are the spatial correlatives of the moments that have changed our lives." Home is the place where life-changing events are concentrated, where birth, childhood, adolescence, coming of age, marriage, family, and death take place. This, of course, suggests that home is also made up of the people with whom one shares it. The human cohabitants of home even extend beyond the grave. As John Berger observes, home is not only the center of the world of the living but also the threshold between this world and the next. Home is where we are in closest proximity to the departed ancestors as well as the new arrivals of infancy. Thus home is both a womb and a tomb, and the life-events that span the two. "Home," Jackson concludes, "is a word for where these things happen, where birth and initiation take place, where life is upheld in the work of human hands." Home is the spatial center of one's life-events. Yet ecological nostalgia and affection for homeplaces extend far beyond the confines of the home as a residence or even as a native place. In fact, this is one of ecological nostalgia's distinctive features, one confirmed by the fact that so many environmentalists value nature as a means of escaping the confines and routines of home-life and work, and even society and civilization itself. After all, many Americans experience nature and the outdoors primarily as tourists visiting far-flung parks and preserves—Yellowstone, Yosemite, Acadia, the Everglades, the Grand Canyon, and so on. Above all, what makes ecological nostalgia so distinctive, and so prevalent, is that many lovers of ecological homeplaces spend more time away from their

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cherished places than they do returning to them. The proverbial home-away-from-home is a common experience for environmentalists. Cassin poignantly recounts such an experience of the home-away-from-home. Despite hailing from Paris, Cassin feels immense nostalgia for Corsica and the Mediterranean:

> It is with this experience that I wish to begin: the feeling I inwardly qualify as an irrepressible nostalgia and that I experience every time I'm 'back' in Corsica. A strange feeling, since my ancestors are not from this island; I wasn't born there, and I didn't spend either my childhood or my youth there. I'm not Corsican. [...] Why, then, do I feel so strongly that I am returning home? How is it that I can miss it to this extent whenever I am away for a long time, always for too long? [...] I am attached to Corsica, to the horizon of a house, a village, a cape on another island, one that is not mine, at least insofar as I wasn't born there. Yet 'nostalgia' is the word that naturally comes to mind when I think about it.\(^{362}\)

I suspect that this is how many environmentalists think about their most cherished places. Indeed, it is difficult while reading Cassin’s description of her nostalgia for Corsica not to lapse into thinking about one’s own favorite place.\(^{363}\) Robert Pogue Harrison, then, is surely right when he says that “[m]emory inhabits external things as much as the internal regions of the human psyche.”\(^{364}\) In ecological nostalgia, we long to return to our most formative environmental places. Ecological nostalgia often involves counting the days until the next time one can return to the beloved place, the place that is most one's own.

How does one come to be attached to such a place away from home? Presumably, there must have been a first encounter, an initial visit that proved to be a turning point in the development of one’s ecological self. There at the threshold of a new place and a new self, the lover of places begins to develop affections for the homeplace that will engender ecological nostalgia upon departure. Leaving the ecological homeplace means leaving a part of oneself behind. In nostalgia one longs to go home to oneself in the formative homeplace. That is why returning to the homeplace is so sweet—tellingly, the modern Greek word *nostimos* meant

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\(^{362}\) Cassin, *Nostalgia*, 2.

\(^{363}\) Bachelard observes that descriptions of home are often read in this way. As soon as one begins to describe a homeplace “the reader … leaves off reading and starts to think of some place in his own past. [...] The values of intimacy are so absorbing that the reader has ceased to read your room: he sees his own again” (Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958], p. 14).

\(^{364}\) Harrison, *Forests*, 186.
The desire for the sweet return also reminds us that nostalgia is not really, or at least not only, about the past. “Origins,” Harrison writes, “do not merely belong to the past; they do not merely pass away like an event in time; rather, they endure as the ongoing fatum of life.” In longing for the home-away-from-home, the ecological nostalgic anticipates the future return.

Needless to say, not all eco-nostalgics experience homeplaces as tourists or occasional visitors. The ecological homeplace often coincides with one’s native place or current place of residence. When one is away from one’s hometown or the region in which one grew up or came of age, one might miss the mountain range outside of town, the river running through it, the ocean coast alongside it, or the forest that borders it—in a way not unlike the way one might have fond memories of the restaurant or ballpark frequented with family or friends. Ecological belonging, then, inevitably blurs with nostalgia for human places, for both are directed at formative homeplaces.

With the psychological studies of formative memories in mind, one suspects that most people, though by no means all, find their formative ecological places sometime between early childhood and middle adulthood. If that homeplace is a home away from home, one might discover it with one’s family as a child, as a young adult when one first strikes out to explore the world on one’s one terms, or later with a partner or family of one’s own. If that homeplace has been a long-term place of residence, it might be the city where one was born or where one spent formative childhood years, or a place where one lived early in adulthood, maybe to attend college or work a first job, or even a place where one settles down later in life. What is important is that the homeplace figures prominently in one’s life, memories, plans, hopes and desires.

Yet all of this should not distract from the fact that the human relation to home is deeply complex, even ambivalent. Familiarity is not always pleasant, and at-homeness is not a permanent state of perfect belonging. The place one calls home can just as easily be a prison as a refuge. What was once a comforting nest can become a site of oppression, or at least of

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365 Cassin, Nostalgia, 6.
366 Harrison, Forests, 45.
confinement. Home is trickier and more ambivalent than any other kind of place because our relationship with it is so intimate, for, as Freud’s reflections on the uncanny remind us, the uncanny always lurks beneath homeness. Freud finds in the German word for homeness and familiarity (*heimlich*) a fundamental ambivalence in which “[w]hat is *heimlich* … comes to be *unheimlich*.” 367 Rather than reflecting the human reaction to the strictly unknown (as the English word ‘uncanny’ suggests), the uncanny (*das Unheimlich*) arises from what Freud calls the “involuntary return,” the sudden and unwelcome shift of something familiar into the unfamiliar, strange, terrifying—the sudden feeling that what was once home has become terrifyingly un-home-like. Where we were once at home, we are suddenly and decidedly not at home—what was once a refuge has become a trap. This ambivalence that Freud observes in the *Unheimlich* marks the core ambivalence of home and belonging. We feel at home in a place, we fill as if we belong—until we don’t. And when a place is truly a home, that uncanny shift from being at home to being not at home is all the more disorienting and disturbing. The home ceases to be a haven or refuge and becomes a prison, a parasite, a place that one must escape but in many cases cannot—or at least not without severe sanction. The unsafe home of an abused child or spouse and the hostile homeland of an asylum-seeker are all-too-common examples of uncanny places from which departure is necessary and return is unwanted. Even if one’s home has not turned on them so aggressively, home can still be a prison, boring and routine, as when the home is experienced as a space of patriarchal domination and forced labor by women, servants, and slaves. 368

More than this, even a completely safe and comfortable home, inhabited in complete freedom and equality, is not without its ambivalences. As Salman Rushdie observes in the epigraph for this chapter, the fantasy of Home is matched only by the fantasy of Away, the dream

of roots by the allure of the journey. The attraction of mobility, travel, and trade pull people away from even the best homeplaces. Even for someone blessed with a stable, secure, and free homeplace, the desire to leave home can be irresistible.

The moment we confront the ambivalences of home, then, we find all sorts of reasons for people to leave it. Yet this is not a reason to reject the value of home as such. Far from it. Instead, it is an invitation to integrate the reasons for leaving into our understanding of human attachments to places. If homeplaces are the locations that are formative of the self and constitutive of who we are, then our comings and goings from them are just as important as the places themselves. To understand the ambivalences and attractions of homeplaces, then, it is just as important to consider the reasons why people leave them as it is to consider why they long to return to them.

This brings me to the second question I raised at the outset of this chapter: what reasons do people have for leaving home? To answer this question requires attention to the interconnections between places and the journeys people make between them. Indeed, ecological thinkers make much of interconnections, so much so that Timothy Morton identifies interconnectedness as “the ecological thought.” Just as ecologists conceive of the ecosystems they study in terms of material interrelationships (food webs, water cycles), ecologically-minded social scientists and political theorists often point to the interconnections between humans and other humans as well as between humans and nonhumans in the land. In this vein, Cannavò uses the insight of interconnection to open up the idea of place. “All places interact with and in some way blend into the places around them through social and ecological relations,” making the boundaries between places “porous, ambiguous, and fluid” and dispensing of the illusion that places can be “fully self-contained and isolated from [their] environment.”

This insight is a powerful one, especially when the implications for human mobility within and between places is made explicit by tracing the routes to and from those places that human beings take in departure.

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and return. Here I also take a cue from William Cronon, who argues that “[a]ny geographic description, no matter how static, can be set in motion” by following what he calls the “paths out of town”—that is, the routes in and out of a place that make the place what it is for its inhabitants.371 By following the paths in and out of town, so to speak, we can come to a fuller understanding of the attachments that people have to their homeplaces, and we can integrate the one-sided approaches to nostalgia and place-attachments offered by Albrecht and by Boym and Cassin. Doing so will amount to something of an ecological odyssey, a narrative journey to and from environmental homeplaces.

An Ecological Odyssey—Environmental Homeplaces in Departure and Return

In tracing the paths in and out of homeplaces, and especially the reasons people have for departing from their homeplaces, I will use Homer’s Odyssey, and especially the experiences of Odysseus, the consummate wayfarer, as a recurring reference point. At first glance, it might seem odd for a study of environmentalism to turn to the Odyssey. After all, Horkheimer and Adorno famously identify Odysseus’ legendary craftiness as an instance of the very instrumental rationality and quest for mastery over nature that many environmentalists decry, and Leopold uses Odysseus’ execution of his servants upon his return to Ithaca as a negative example of ethical conduct toward living things.372 Even so, Jason Bell argues that the epic can be fruitfully read with an eye to environmental themes.373 Moreover, Homer’s Odyssey is also the text that gives us the word nostos (homecoming), the root of the word nostalgia. It should not surprise us, then, that Cassin identifies it as “the poem of nostalgia par excellence.”374 It is especially useful

373 Jason M. Bell, “To the Tenth Generation: Homer’s Odyssey as Environmental Ethics,” Environmental Ethics, 32.1:51-66, 2010.
374 Cassin, Nostalgia, 5.
for my argument because of the ambivalence of Odysseus and his famous journey home. The epic is as much a tale of wanderlust as it is of nostalgia, of mobility as much as rootedness, of departure as well as return home. The epic tale of Odysseus shows that “nostalgia has two sides: rootedness and wandering,” as Cassin rightly points out, and Deneen argues that the epic explores the “profound tension … between the attractions of homecoming and the mysteries of the unknown.” Homer’s epic thus reveals nostalgia to be just as polutropos—many-sided, ambivalent, tricky—as Odysseus is himself. Above all, the narrative places nostalgia and homecoming in sharp relief by drawing attention to the personal attractions and dilemmas they entail. We need only to extend the narrative to include the human experience of natural environs to find in Odysseus and his homeward journey a guide for ecological nostalgia and affections for environmental homeplaces.

For Odysseus and the many others who have gone on similar quests of homecoming, the relationship to the homeplace experienced in the departure, the journey, and the return are all constitutive of meaning and identity. This should not come as a surprise, as myths and legends are stories of origin, whether of a culture or of the self. They are the stories of, as Nietzsche puts it, how one becomes what one is. As Cassin writes, “every odyssey amounts to putting into narrative form the assignation of identity.” Shapiro agrees, arguing that Odysseus’ “various adventures represent the difficulty involved in molding a self.” From its beginning in departure to its ending in return, an odyssey is a journey of transformation, in which the self that departed is not the same as the self that returns. It should not surprise us, then, that Penelope says to her

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376 The poet declares Odysseus to be polutropos at the very outset of the epic: “Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways [polutropon], who was driven far journeys, after he had sacked Troy’s sacred citadel. Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of, many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea…” (*The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Lattimore, Book 1, lines 1-4, p. 27).
378 Cassin, *Nostalgia*, 42.
379 Michael Shapiro, “Politicizing Ulysses,” 19.
husband upon his return: “You are so strange.” Odysseus is not the same after his journey. The journey is an activity of self-realization in which the self surpasses its origins, for the self is not something given but rather something achieved through action and activity, and especially through our comings and goings, our departures and returns. Thus, for Joseph Campbell, the narrative arc of the departure, the journey, and the return home that the *Odyssey* shares with many of the world’s epics and myths tells the story of self-transfiguration. Put another way, physical motion in geographic space shapes the inner territory of the self—journeys through the outer landscape shape the landscape within. Thus, the journey away from home is as formative to the self as the return. While John Berger rightly observes that home is “the starting point and, hopefully, the returning point of all terrestrial journeys,” we must add that the terrestrial journeys are just as important to a proper understanding of place as the home itself.

Without specific examples, however, all of this risks being rather abstract. Fortunately, the conceptual history of nostalgia furnishes some recurring examples of departures from home that I have sorted into four ideal types given in Table 1. This typology of departures captures some of the primary reasons why people leave home while placing those reasons in the context of their attachments to place.

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<td>Voluntary Traveler</td>
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382 Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, p. 56.
383 Naqvi identifies three historical figures in the discursive history of critiques of nostalgia: “the nostalgic immigrant,” the “nostalgic peasant-soldier” and “nostalgic college and university students” (Naqvi, “Critique of Nostalgia,” 7, 43). By adding the environmental tourist, a familiar figure in environmental thought, we have four types of nostalgics to fit the four categories in my typology.
I have constructed this typology out of two related distinctions. The first, between “push” and “pull” factors, is a common one in studies of migration and simply refers to the difference between factors in the country of origin that “push” migrants away from home and factors in the destination country that “pull” migrants toward a new home. For my purposes, the emphasis is on the notion that people may leave their homeplaces because they are pushed out by forces in the homeplace or pulled away by forces outside the homeplace. The second distinction, between involuntary and voluntary departures from home, is somewhat fuzzier but nonetheless important. It is of course a notorious challenge in political theory to distinguish between free and unfree actions. Indeed, if we follow Hobbes, even the deliberate choice between death and something else is still a choice. Yet Starobinski is surely right that “one must recognize the relevance of the conditions under which the individual left his native land. It is one thing to leave willingly, having freely chosen one’s itinerary and the length of one’s stay, and another to be forced to leave, faced with the prospects of a subordinate and monotonous life.” For the unwavering Hobbesian, refugees and conscripts with a gun to their heads face a “choice,” but it is not in any normal sense a free one.

Let me summarize the four ideal types of departure before developing each in turn. First, recall that Johannes Hofer coined the term ‘nostalgia’ to describe the homesickness felt by Swiss conscripts. Soldiers, and especially draftees, are pulled away by obligations to political powers and world events beyond their control. Thus, like the conscript, we can be pulled involuntarily away by duties beyond the homeplace. Second, the refugee is exiled by oppression, natural disaster, and other forces beyond their control. The refugee is involuntarily pushed out of the homeplace because it is made unlivable. Third, the adolescent and young adult—college students, young workers, and so on—are susceptible to nostalgia, yet they also leave home for good reason—home is a prison to adolescents who have not yet had the opportunity to find their

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own way in the world. The adolescent is pushed voluntarily, as it were, from the home in search of freedom, self-realization, and adulthood. Fourth and finally, there is the departure of the traveler, suggested by the environmental tourist who yearns to return to far-off locales and the home-away-from-home. The traveler or tourist is voluntarily pulled away from even a perfectly good home by the allure of new experiences in new and distant places. All in all, these distinctions serve to widen the scope of our understanding of nostalgia and place-based attachment by focusing our attention on different ways of experiencing the departure from home. It will also allow me to emphasize the specifically environmental resonances of the nostalgia people experience when they are far from home. With this in mind, let us consider in more detail each of these ideal types of departure with an eye to their resonances with human affections for environmental homeplaces.

The Conscript—Ecological Belonging in Absentia

The trope of the returning warrior appears again and again in the annals of nostalgia. Perhaps more than any of the other types of departure, the conscript’s is represented most literally by Odysseus’ journey, as his departure from Ithaca comes with the call to war at Troy alongside his fellow Achaeans. Just as Odysseus’ storied journey began with a call to arms, the intellectual history of nostalgia begins with Swiss soldiers answering the call to duty. It seems that Boym is right to see war as the origin of nostalgia. Moreover, as Nauman Naqvi observes, it is hardly a coincidence that Hofer made the first diagnosis of nostalgia just a few generations after the Thirty Year’s War and the beginnings of the modern nation-state and its standing armies. Given that the bulk of the population of Europe still lived in the rural provinces rather than the cities, early modern mass mobilization meant recruiting peasants en masse into wars on behalf of newly-emerging nation-states with which they identified only loosely, if at all. Here it is

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388 It is also worth noting that the Odyssey is only one of a number of mythic stories chronicling the journeys home of the Achaeans after the Trojan War that classics scholars refer to as the nostoi. See Lattimore’s introduction to his *The Odyssey of Homer* (HarperPerennial, 2007 [1965]), pp. 4, 23.
389 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 28. She writes that “the birth of the nostalgic ailment was linked to war.”
important to remember the original understanding of nostalgia—homesickness for a local homeplace—because it reveals how subversive nostalgia could be to the early nation-state. Whereas contemporary studies of political nostalgia tend to associate it with nationalism and thus the nation-state, the kind of nostalgia early-modern militaries faced in their ranks was a peasant’s nostalgia, a nostalgia that “signaled a certain concreteness in the peasantry’s relationship to place that was subversive of the abstractions of the nation”—of the abstractions for which they were drafted to make the ultimate sacrifice. Thus military commanders of the period had to confront what Naqvi calls the problem of “the nostalgic peasant-soldier” whose loyalties lied not with the abstract nation-state but with their own concrete, local homeplace. This meant that commanders of early national armies had to ensure, as a French military ordinance from 1764 put it, that “one has ‘got rid of the peasant’ and given him ‘the air of a soldier.’” This suggests, against the conflation of place-based nostalgia with fascism or xenophobic patriotism, that attachment to homeplace can function as a countervailing force against nationalism.

In a short story called “A Homecoming,” Wendell Berry describes the return of an American soldier, whom he calls Arthur Rowanberry, from the European theater of World War II. In the story, Berry highlights the ecological resonances of the conscript’s homecoming while offering an implicit criticism of the destruction of habitats and habitations wrought by war. Arthur “had crossed the wide ocean and many a river,” but now that he was walking the final stretch of road to his family’s homestead in Kentucky, “not another river lay between him and home, but only a few creeks that he knew by name.” And then he experiences a moment of profound ecological belonging, in which the sweeteness of his homecoming merges with his love of the local landscape: “The quiet around him seemed wide as the whole country and deep as the sky, and the morning songs of the creatures and his own footsteps occurred distinctly and separately in

391 Ibid. 17.
393 Wendell Berry, “A Homecoming,” The Sewanee Review, 100.1, 1992, pp. 1-17. The parallels of Berry’s story with Homer’s Odyssey are abundant and, one assumes, intentional.
394 Ibid, 1.
it...”\footnote{Ibid., 11.} In returning home from the front, then, Arthur is not simply leaving behind the horrors of war—he is also returning to a familiar and beloved homeplace defined both by the landscape and the home he and his loved ones have built on it.

Yet for all of the sweetness of Arthur's return, the war has hardly left him unscathed. “I am not a stranger,” he says to himself, “but I am changed.”\footnote{Ibid., 13.} Perhaps the most enduring change of all is his understanding of the profound destructiveness of war:

There had been a time when those houses had seemed as permanent to him as the land they stood on. But where he had been they had the answer to such houses. We wouldn’t let one of them stand long in our way, he thought. [...] Farms, houses, whole towns—things that people had made well and cared for a long time—you made nothing of.\footnote{Ibid., 2-3.}

“There was nothing you could look at that was whole—man or beast or house or tree—that had the right to stay whole very long,” Arthur adds.\footnote{Ibid., 5.} Having seen houses, towns, and landscapes pounded to dust, he arrives at the realization that “[t]here are people, where I have been, that won’t know their places when they get back to them.”\footnote{Ibid., 13.} Fortunately for Arthur, the houses and trees of his homeplace do remain intact—not unchanged, to be sure, but intact—and still his home.

For Arthur, returning home means returning to a familiar landscape—to creeks with names he knows, hills he has climbed, forests he has explored, rivers he has crossed and will cross again. It is not difficult to imagine Hofer's Swiss soldiers feeling the same way upon finally returning to their Alpine villages after war. Perhaps even Odysseus himself, polutropos as always, longed not just for Penelope, for his household, and for his kingdom, but also for the shores of Ithaca, for its woods and mountains and beaches. Odysseus speaks glowingly of his homeplace when asked of his identity in Book 9:

I am Odysseus son of Laertes, known before all men for the study of crafty designs, and my fame goes up to the heavens. I am at home in sunny Ithaka. There is a mountain there that stands tall, leaf-trembling Neritos, and there are islands
settled around it, lying one very close to another. There is Doulichion and Same, wooded Zakynthos, but my island lies low and away, last of all on the water toward the dark, with the rest below facing east and sunshine, a rugged place, but a good nurse of men; for my part I cannot think of any place sweeter on earth to look at.400

“I am at home in sunny Ithaka,” Odysseus proclaims. “I cannot think of any place sweeter on earth to look at.” It seems that the great warrior and wanderer was fond of his homeplace, including its landscapes. For Odysseus, for the Swiss soldiers, and for Arthur Rowanberry, an attachment to a homeplace means an attachment to a landscape left behind—and their nostalgia is for that landscape, too.

It should be noted that the conscript’s separation from home is only the most extreme instance of a broader experience shared by many who, for one reason or another, leave a beloved homeplace out of obligation to others. For the public servant who would rather live at home but who is called to serve elsewhere; the immigrant who loves her home but realizes that her children would be better off if raised elsewhere; for these and others who are pulled away from home not by wanderlust but by duty, the analysis of Boym and Cassin focused on the refugee does not capture their relationship to the homeplace they left behind. For them, there is a possibility and a desire for homecoming. Until then, they will experience their ecological belonging in absentia, with nostalgia.

The Refugee—The Ambivalence of Nostalgia

Like the conscript, the refugee leaves home involuntarily. But whereas the conscript is pulled toward war by duty and obligation, the refugee flees away from a home that is no longer livable. As Boym stresses, the refugee “flees from a place, not toward a new destination.”401 Here the desire to escape home is very strong and yet entirely unwelcome, an imposition born of political oppression, economic deprivation, or natural disaster—or some combination thereof. Exile is not always permanent, though sometimes it does come without any real hope of return,

400 Odyssey, ix.19-29, trans. Lattimore.
401 Boym, Future of Nostalgia, 341, emphasis in original.
especially when one’s home is entirely destroyed. Here we see that Boym’s definition of nostalgia as “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed” serves especially well for those refugees, exiles, asylum-seekers, and migrants whose homes have become permanently unlivable for them and whose home exists only in memory. This form of departure is especially tragic because the homes they left behind were supposed to be refuges from harm, places of safety and peace. The plight of the refugee is borne of injustice and profound deprivation.

Even in the starkest of circumstances, in which the refugee’s flight from home is a matter of life and death, there must be a moment of decision. Through a fascinating reading of the Crito, Jennet Kirkpatrick considers “the sometimes excruciating tension between exit and obligation.” While we of course know that Socrates follows the voice of loyalty in the end, Kirkpatrick urges us not to neglect the real appeal of the voice of exit, represented in the dialogue by Crito. Her analysis points to the dilemma facing the potential refugee on the threshold of departure. “One way of thinking about the tension in the Crito between exiting and remaining,” she argues, “is that it describes the mindset or feelings of one who is on the cusp of exiting from his or her homeland.” Here the refugee-to-be confronts the momentous and tragic choice between remaining in an oppressive home, where one’s heart and loyalties nonetheless lie, and departing on what will likely be a perilous journey to a new and unfamiliar home, but which may offer some hope for survival and even freedom. The choice is momentous because the shape of one’s future and of one’s very identity are at stake—the choice between different places to live is a choice between different selves. It is tragic because, whichever decision is made, something dear must be given up. Departure means a loss of self as one leaves behind dearly beloved people and places, possibly forever. Remaining may mean death and suffering for oneself or one’s loved ones. The refugee’s choice is especially tragic because it does not allow for distinctions of degree. The choice between staying and leaving forever is a radically either/or proposition, and

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402 Ibid. xiii.
404 Kirkpatrick suggests that the dialogue can also be read as the battle between the voice of the rebellious son and the authority of the father, which, as we will see below, points to the departure of the adolescent.
either choice entails immense loss. To be at the cusp of departure as a refugee means to be torn apart from within by the conflict between attachment to home and hope for a safe place abroad.

Once the tragic decision to depart is made, one must cope with it as best one can. Coping with the trauma of departure is made all the more difficult by the fact that some refugees may in time be faced with a choice with which many migrants struggle in their host countries—“do we settle or go back home?” That perennial question leaves migrants caught in an endless flood of nostalgia. Draaisma finds that migrants “are more astonished by that than by anything else: they left because of poverty, housing shortages and unemployment yet were eaten up by homesickness,” leading some to return home and the rest “to deal with their homesickness as best they could.” As Boym points out, this is why nostalgia is often something of a taboo among migrants. When returning home is prohibitively difficult or outright impossible, nostalgia may doom the migrant to the fate of Lot’s wife, one of the Hebrew Bible’s iconic refugees. In spite of a command from God’s messengers not to turn back as Lot’s family flees the burning city of Sodom, Lot’s wife did look back, and was turned into a pillar of salt. Why salt? The tears of Odysseus may point to a possible answer. Any reader of Homer’s Odyssey knows that Odysseus spends much of his journey in tears, weeping out of longing for his homecoming. Tears leave a salt residue on the body. It would seem, then, that to turn into a pillar of salt is to be consumed by one’s tearful grief and longing for the departed home. It is the fate that awaits the refugee who cannot move on from the lost home.

Thus a “healthy forgetfulness” can be a form of self-protection for the nostalgic refugee. Yet total forgetfulness is not necessarily desirable either, which is why migrants develop a hybrid form of “dual belonging” in which they belong to both their new country and their country of origin, cherishing their memories of the homeplace while putting down roots in the new

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408 Boym, Future of Nostalgia, xv, 252.
410 For just two examples, see The Odyssey of Homer (trans. Lattimore), v.81-84, viii.521-532.
one.412 Just as commentators have noted that Odysseus is not just a refugee but also a founder insofar as he reconquers his homeland and creates order there anew, refugees must make a new home for themselves while cherishing or managing that part of themselves that looks back to the old home.413 And even if total forgetting were desirable, it is hardly possible. As Draaisma notes, nostalgic memories tend to return—“homesickness can strike twice”—and they are not always welcome.414 Speaking of an elderly Dutch emigrant he interviewed, Draaisma recounts how nostalgic recollections sometimes come without warning: “They pounce on him and he is defenseless; he feels besieged by his own memory.”415 Unwelcome memories of the estranged homeplace are uncanny, in Freud’s sense of the word, amounting to a kind of “involuntary return.”416 Worse yet, the involuntary return is too often made literal in the form of forced repatriation or deportation, the most terrifying form of involuntary return.

The refugee’s relation to homeplace will become increasingly common in the 21st century as climate change, along with political and economic dislocation, produces more and more refugees. Like Odysseus, who floated across the Mediterranean as he was buffeted by storms from island to island and often near drowning, the economic and environmental refugees of today find themselves floating and drowning in inhospitable waters in desperate search of a new home. In the case of many migrants from North Africa and the Middle East seeking refuge in Europe, the parallel with Odysseus’ seaborne wanderings on the Mediterranean is quite literal. Kirkpatrick even alerts us to the possibility that the Odyssey is at bottom a primer in hospitality for ailing wanderers—the epic is littered with references to the imperative to treat beleaguered guests with hospitality.417 Whereas Albrecht focuses his attention on the solastalgic mourner of the desolation of places in which one is still rooted, the new century portends ever more ecological refugees following the winding path of Odysseus, uprooted from homes that are no longer livable—though,

412 Ibid, 337.
413 For a discussion of Odysseus as a founder, see Deneen, Odyssey of Political Theory, 66-67.
414 Draaisma, Nostalgia Factory, xiv.
415 Ibid, 56.
416 Recall that, for Freud, the uncanny (Das Unheimliche) is “that class of the terrifying which leads us back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (Freud, “The Uncanny,” 76).
unlike Odysseus, they will not be so fortunate as to enjoy the hospitality of goddesses and kings. Moreover, as climate change destroys ever more ecological homeplaces—coastal cities, river deltas, farmlands—more and more ecological refugees will never have their ecological homecoming. They will have to begin their homemaking anew, all the while dealing with the memories of the people and landscapes they left behind. The reflective nostalgia offered by Boym and Cassin may well prove to be the best way to live with their loss.

The Adolescent—Ecological Coming of Age

Now we turn from the figures of unwilling to those of willing departures—the adolescent and the traveler. Both ultimately depart from home in pursuit of the wonders that lie elsewhere. What makes the adolescent distinctive is the fact that the departure is both predetermined—in the sense that age, social convention, and one’s family all demand it—and welcomed as a willful act by the adolescent who yearns to escape the confines of the family and childhood life, striking out in pursuit of the freedom and self-determination promised by adulthood. This is why I categorize the adolescent somewhat paradoxically as being pushed out of home willfully.

A common practice across cultures is the rite of passage in which adolescents earn the freedoms and responsibilities of adulthood. These rites of passage entail both a literal and figurative home-leaving, a departure into the wider world, “that arduous journey away from home without which no one ever proves his worth or comes into his own.” As Jackson argues,

the existential theme is always the same. We are told that everyone must sooner or later leave the secure confines of his homeplace and strike out into the world, make his own way, assume control of his own destiny. Only when one has proven oneself able to withstand the vicissitudes of the world can one return home and create a world.

This suggests that the formation of the adult self requires departure, at least in some fashion. Perhaps Odysseus could not have founded a renewed political order in Ithaca without his journey to Troy and back again, and perhaps his son, Telemachus, could not have truly come of age without leaving Ithaca in search of his father. As Boym observes, the experiences one has in the

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418 Jackson, At Home in the World, 92.
419 Ibid, 91-92.
first years of independence away from home can be just as formative as those in one’s childhood home. “After all,” she writes, “every teenager dreams of leaving home, and often the first escape determines the map of one’s dreams as much as the architectures of home.”\(^{420}\) As we have seen, nostalgia is felt above all for the formative, for the moments and places that make us who we are today. This helps explain the consistent findings in psychology that nostalgic memories for the past concentrate not just on childhood or early adulthood but more generally on the many “firsts” that comprise those life stages. This is nostalgia for the moment of liberation from childhood and the given home, when one is charged with forging one’s own identity, with choosing one’s own homeplace.

We need only to extend this analysis of formative adolescence to discover a corresponding ecological coming of age. Just as memorable events and moments of adolescence represent a coming of age and a formation of the adult self, landscapes and locales present themselves as potential homeplaces waiting to be found and made one’s own. The encounter with a newly-discovered environmental homeplace is a deeply formative experience, even an ecstatic one—here environmentalists can relate to John Muir’s revelatory first visit to Yosemite Valley and the role it played in setting the course for the rest of his life.\(^{421}\) Just as the young adult reads texts in a particular way, looking for a voice of one’s own, the young adult in search of homeplaces reads the landscape for a place that unites one’s inner and outer landscapes, for a place that fits.\(^{422}\)

Yet experiencing a homecoming to a place in which one has never been requires leaving another formative place, the place(s) one has dwelt in during childhood. This presents a tension between the newly discovered home of one’s own and the departed homeplace(s) one shared with family and community in childhood. Indeed, we might note the parallel with the identity crisis facing the refugee torn apart by different places and different loyalties. In her interpretation of the

\(^{420}\) Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 255-256.


\(^{422}\) To be sure, a formative environmental homeplace can also be encountered well after young adulthood. As the study discussed earlier about the memory peaks of immigrants suggests, formative memories can extend well into adulthood. Formative places may often, though not only, be encountered early in adulthood.
Crito, Kirkpatrick suggests that the voice of loyalty (Socrates) can be read as the voice of obligations to the father and the voice of exit (Crito) as that of the rebellious son.\textsuperscript{423} In being torn between the childhood homeplace and the new homeplace of one’s own, the adolescent is caught between a formative past and an equally formative future.

This suggests that the allure of new places needs to be balanced with care for original homeplaces. As Berry observes, rural communities know all too well the danger of permanent departure in which young adults leave for the cities and universities, many never to return. Berry does not lament the departures themselves—“all of us who have gone to [the cities] have benefited”—but he does think that more young people should complete the ancient cycle by returning home to take responsibility for their original homeplaces.\textsuperscript{424} For him, the necessary departure of adolescence should culminate in the reconciliation of return. He argues that, for most of human history, “the longing for this result seems to have been universal” and points as an example to Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} “in which Odysseus’ desire to return home is certainly regarded as normal.”\textsuperscript{425} To be sure, Berry risks neglecting the prevalence of permanent migration in human history—after all, widespread human mobility is hardly a novelty of modern society. He even risks inadvertently reinforcing the fantasy of autochthonous belonging sometimes indulged by primitivists and reactionaries.

Yet Berry’s primary concern here is not so much mobility in itself but rather the depopulation of rural communities and the resulting neglect and decay of rural homeplaces. “[T]he children go to the cities,” he writes, “for reasons imposed by the external economy, and they do not return.”\textsuperscript{426} Berry does not mention other reasons young people might leave for the cities—employment, yes, but also the excitement and liberation that cities offer, including liberation from oppression at home on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality—but he is surely right to stress that the depopulation of rural landscapes is a matter not just of the allure of the city

\textsuperscript{423} Kirkpatrick, “Exit Out of Athens,” 365-366.
\textsuperscript{425} Berry, “The Work of Local Culture,” in \textit{What Are People For?}, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{426} \textit{Ibid}, 162.
but also the collapse of rural economies. The result is the disintegration of countless rural communities, with troubling consequences not just for the human inhabitants who are left behind but also the neglected and easily exploited rural ecosystems left with ever fewer active stewards. “Our children are educated … to leave home, not to stay home,” Berry laments, “and the costs of this education … [are] at once cultural and ecological.”

Worse yet, the neglect of rural homeplaces spurred on by depopulation often shades into an even darker threat of “retribution against one’s origins,” in which people come to view their old homeplaces as antiquated relics not worth saving. Berry warns that when the well-educated and successful leave their rural homeplaces behind, and when “one’s old home begins to look like a ‘little raw provincial world,’” it becomes easy to consign dying communities and their landscapes to economic and environmental exploitation.

In this way, the numerous rural homeplaces that comprise much of the world’s landscapes are condemned to social and ecological neglect. The humbler landscapes of rural towns and farms may not be as exciting as urban centers or as picturesque as national parks, but they are no less deserving of affection and stewardship. Taking a cue from Berry, then, we can conclude that an ecological coming of age involves both the formative discovery of new environmental places and the equally rewarding stewardship of one’s primary homeplace—whether that place is native or chosen.

The Traveler—Freedom in Place

Finally, we come to the mode of departure most familiar to environmental thought—the voluntary departure of the traveler drawn away from home by the allure of new places to explore. Here the home-leaver departs not so much because there is anything really wrong with home—at worst it has simply become dull—but because the call of the unknown place, the other place, the prospect of the open road, is so alluring. Here nostalgia’s opposite is strongest, conveyed by the German word Fernweh (literally “far-sickness,” longing for far-off places). Cassin calls this “the

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428 Berry, “Writer and Region,” 80.
429 Ibid.
love of elsewhere" and Margaret Ann Doody calls it “love for the farther shore.”\textsuperscript{430} The closest word in English for this desire is wanderlust.\textsuperscript{431} Whereas nostalgia (\textit{Heimweh}) keeps us homeward-bound, wanderlust (\textit{Fernweh}) urges us to depart. Those who experience the environment as tourists know this feeling well. Ecological wanderlust spurs environmental tourists to explore far-away places and regions, parks and preserves, hiking trails and river routes.

While wanderlust has come to refer to the longing to travel, its literal meaning is the lust for \textit{walking}.\textsuperscript{432} As Geoff Nicholson writes, walking can be a way of coming to be at home in a place, especially a newly-discovered one.

Walking has certainly always been a pleasure, but it was more than that. For me walking has to do with exploration, a way of accommodating myself, of feeling at home. When I find myself in a new place I explore it on foot. It’s the way I get to know the place. Maybe it’s a way of marking territory, of beating the bounds. Setting foot in a street makes it yours in a way that driving down it never does.\textsuperscript{433}

This is the primordial mode of traveling, and it is one near and dear to many environmentalists. Thoreau points to walking as the exemplary way to encounter “the Wild”—untouched nature, yes, but more fundamentally the New, the unexplored and uncharted. “An absolutely new prospect is a great happiness,” he writes.\textsuperscript{434} Yet one need not walk far to find the Wild, as “[t]wo or three hours’ walking will carry me to as strange a country as I expect ever to see.”\textsuperscript{435} Even walking on the paths one frequents near home can lead to encounters with that which is new and strange—“[i]t will never become quite familiar to you.”\textsuperscript{436} The newness of the sights, smells, and sounds one encounters on a walk is inexhaustible, and Thoreau’s wanderlust is insatiable: “my desire to


\textsuperscript{432} In German, the verb \textit{wandern} means to walk or to hike as well as to wander or to roam.


\textsuperscript{435} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{436} Nicholson, \textit{The Lost Art of Walking}, 230.
bathe my head in atmospheres unknown to my feet is perennial and constant.”437 For Thoreau, to be a true adventurer is to love walking.

Many walkers, and especially environmentalists, can relate to Thoreau’s insistence that a good walk promises a welcome escape from the noise and din of society. “We go to the woods in part to escape,” writes Bill McKibben, because “to wander in the outdoors … we venture into a sphere larger than ourselves.”438 To go walking in nature, then, is a way to get away from other people, the confines of everyday life and the drudgery of routine. It is also a common trope that nature is where one goes to feel most oneself. For many environmentalists, then, the Wild—the untrodden path, the newly-visited park, the unknown campsite—is the scene of self-discovery. For the environmental traveler, access to public parks to explore and new paths to walk means the ability to find oneself and to lose oneself. Edward Abbey describes such an experience in this way: “I am twenty miles or more from the nearest fellow human being, but instead of loneliness I feel loveliness.”439 Many environmental adventurers follow in the footsteps of Thoreau and Abbey into the Wild in search of solitude and self-discovery.

The ability to voluntarily depart from home is a most precious kind of freedom. “When you walk you’re your own boss,” as Nicholson observes.440 Having paths out of town to travel freely is necessary for human flourishing, and closing those paths stultifies the current homeplace while restricting free access to places beyond, both of which are significant losses of liberty. Indeed, it is part of the plights of the conscript and refugee to miss the time when departure from home was a joyful, liberating, and temporary affair rather than forced and potentially permanent. Tellingly, ever since Hofer’s first encounter with nostalgic Swiss soldiers, commentators have pointed to the possibility that nostalgia is especially strong in “freedom-loving peoples” who jealously guard their freedom to move about as they please, not as they are told. This possibility was even raised by Hofer himself, who pointed to the loss of “native liberty” as one possible reason why the

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439 Abbey, Desert Solitaire, 16.
“Helvetian” was prone to suffering from nostalgia. The freedom to move about as one pleases, the freedom to wander, is a difficult freedom to lose. Freedom-in-place requires the freedom to indulge one’s wanderlust. Freedom is experienced in motion.

This suggests that restricting movement means a loss of freedom, and even the loss of a way of life, especially for the homeless, for nomadic cultures, and for others who lack a fixed domicile and wander from day to day. The same is true for the environmental wanderer, for whom fences and walls become restrictions of free movement on the land. For this reason, Thoreau viewed fences and enclosures with contempt:

At present, in this vicinity, the best part of the land is not private property; the landscape is not owned, and the walker enjoys comparative freedom. But possibly the day will come when it will be partitioned off into so-called pleasure-grounds, in which a few will take a narrow and exclusive pleasure only,—when fences shall be multiplied, and man-traps and other engines invented to confine men to the public road, and walking over the surface of God’s earth shall be construed to mean trespassing on some gentleman’s grounds. To enjoy a thing exclusively is commonly to exclude yourself from the true enjoyment of it.

Thoreau’s fears were well-founded. Recall my discussion in Chapter 1 of the English enclosure movement, in which common lands cultivated and shared by peasants were privatized and fenced. Much of the deprivation experienced by peasants and rural laborers fell under the category of material loss—landlessness, hunger, economic exploitation—but, as historian J.M. Neeson points out, they were also deprived of something more, a “possession without ownership” in which the land and its fruits belonged to the commoner “because he could see them and touch them and walk through them.” Neeson vividly describes this sort of free mobility and the role it played in the human flourishing and attachment to land experienced by the peasant commoners:

You could walk across the parish from one end to the other along common tracks and balks without fear of trespass. Your children could seek out bits of lane grass and river bank for the geese or the pigs; they could get furze or turf, go berrying or nutting in the woods or on the common.

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444 Ibid.
“Enclosure—rightly named—meant the closing of the countryside.”

To be unable to traverse freely within one’s homeplace is a loss of freedom just as much as being unable to travel freely beyond it. Both Neeson and Robert Pogue Harrison point to the English poet John Clare and his poem “The Mores” about the loss of freedom wrought by the enclosures, which includes these lines: “Each little tyrant with his little sign / Shows where man claims earth glows no more divine. / But paths to freedom and to childhood dear / A board sticks up to notice ‘no road here’.”

In much the same spirit, Thoreau calls for “[a] people who would begin by burning the fences and let the forest stand!”

To the extent that walls and fences, whether physical or legal, subject wanderers and residents alike to immobility, these things inhibit a special kind of freedom that defenders of environmental homeplaces have good reason to protect. A democratic and pluralistic environmental politics of place requires that mobility be as free as possible.

All of this raises a question: if traveling and wandering are so wondrous, why return at all? Nicholson points out that a truly endless walk is dystopic, citing the myth of Sisyphus as an example. “We do want our walking to take us somewhere: we want it to have an end.”

As is the case with the other three types of departure, however, we do not return unchanged. By deciding where we want to indulge our wanderlust, we are also deciding, in a sense, who we want to be. Whether we are enjoying the paths through our homeplace or the open road out of it, such routes promise endless possibilities for formative encounters, and thus endless possibilities of selfhood.

While the traveler’s cycle of departure and return is more mundane than that of the conscript, the refugee, or the adolescent, it resonates strongly with the quotidian experiences of many environmentalists who devote much of their leisure time, and even their careers, to indulging their wanderlust. Indeed, most “environmental” recreational activities involve getting somewhere, and in particular ways that heighten the experience. With the preceding discussion

445 Ibid, 5.
446 Harrison, Forests, 214, and generally pp. 211-220; Neeson, p. 3.
448 Nicholson, The Lost Art of Walking, 188.
of walking in mind, the outdoor recreational activity of backpacking is especially noteworthy for being perhaps the purest land-based form of wandering because the backpacker carries the supplies required to set up camp for the night, allowing an expert backpacker to defer the return home almost indefinitely. In their study of backpacking, Greg Richards and Julie Wilson argue that “[t]he sense of freedom offered by backpacking may well be one of its major attractions.”\footnote{Greg Richards and Julie Wilson, “Drifting Towards the Global Nomad,” in \textit{The Global Nomad: Backpacker Travel in Theory and Practice}, ed. Greg Richards and Julie Wilson, Buffalo: Channel View Publications, 2004, pp. 3-13, at 5.} The backpacker carries the bare necessities and can decide to change course at will.\footnote{Yet, like any nomad, the wanderings of the backpacker reveal patterns of movement. “Patterns of movement are also cyclical; well-trodden routes emerge between ‘enclaves’” (5).} With that freedom of motion comes another, peculiar kind of freedom, one especially prized by many outdoorsmen—the freedom from modern comfort and convenience. Here backpacking serves as a means of escaping the weight of materialism and mass-produced commodities—an experience that, for some, serves as something of an ecological rite of passage. Jana Binder observes:

In this way, materialism is stripped down or cast aside in the process of self-discovery… [This] produces a situation where things normally ‘taken for granted’ back home such as water, electricity, bathrooms or clean sheets are not available. These experiences are new to most of the backpackers and are therefore starting points for thinking about the ‘normal’ patterns of life.\footnote{Jana Binder, “The Whole Point of Backpacking: Anthropological Perspectives on the Characteristics of Backpacking,” in \textit{The Global Nomad}, 92-108, at 104.}

None of this should distract us from the fact that many outdoor adventurers traverse the landscape by more modern modes of transportation than this—by car, mountain bike, motorcycle, RV, pop-up camper, and so on. The great American tradition of the road trip figures prominently here and is likely the most common means of environmental adventure for most Americans.\footnote{For the road trip’s place in American ideas of freedom, mobility, and community, see Susan McWilliams Barndt, \textit{The American Road Trip and American Political Thought}, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018.} For many, the automobile is the ultimate freedom.\footnote{For a discussion of the association of automobiles and freedom and its relevance to environmental politics, see John Meyer’s chapter “Automobility and Freedom” in John M. Meyer, \textit{Engaging the Everyday: Environmental Social Criticism and the Resonance Dilemma}, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015, pp. 121-139.}

Finally, none of this should give the impression that all environmental wanderings are land-bound. After all, Odysseus’ famous wanderings were seaborne. His and other tales of
seafaring have made the sea into a symbol of freedom. In light of this, Foucault argues that the ship is the “heterotopia par excellence,” “a place without a place” traveling “from port to port, from tack to tack.”

Foucault concludes his essay with this warning: “In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.”

Today’s recreational paddlers and sailors know something of this radical freedom in which the boatman is able to explore with even greater freedom of motion than the backpacker or road-tripper. These and other adventurers travel the world, or the places just beyond their doors, in search of environmental homeplaces in which to dwell, or to return to ones from which they have been away for far too long. Cassin suggests that Odysseus is most at home on the Mediterranean, and that he returns to Ithaca only to find himself longing for the sea.

Today’s nostalgic traveler, longing for homeplaces away from home, can surely sympathize.

**Conclusion—Nostalgia as Ecological Belonging**

A widely-discussed 2015 report by *The New York Times* found that “the median distance Americans live from their mothers is 18 miles, and only 20 percent live more than a couple of hours’ drive from their parents.” Yet Americans remain more mobile than residents of other developed countries. Moreover, the United Nations 2020 World Migration Report indicates that the global numbers of international migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons have all

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456 Cassin, *Nostalgia*, 25. Deneen also highlights this possibility (*The Odyssey of Political Theory*, pp. 10-12).


nearly doubled since 2000.\textsuperscript{459} For Cannavò, as we saw, “attachment to some place, together with some measure of stability in our spatial environment, is necessary for a fully human life.”\textsuperscript{460} At the same time, as Soniah Shah has recently argued, rather than being an aberration in the human experience, migration and mobility are in an important sense the norm, and this is true for both humans and nonhuman beings.\textsuperscript{461}

I have argued that an environmental theory of place-based attachment and ecological belonging must take both the rootedness and mobility of the human experience of place into account. By examining both how human beings develop attachments to environmental homeplaces and what leads them to take leave from even the best homes, I have sought to integrate the human impulses toward rootedness and mobility, the dream of home and the allure of away. Formative homeplaces play a central role in the making of the self, amounting to the spatial origins of one’s personhood. Yet people leave home for a variety of reasons—to answer the call of duty (the conscript), to escape oppression (the refugee), to come of age (the adolescent), and to follow one’s wanderlust (the traveler). While I have made no claim to the exhaustiveness of my typology of departures, I argue that it provides a fuller account of the complexities of place-based attachments while doing justice to both the undeniable ambivalence and the equally undeniable value of homeplaces.

I also have sought throughout to highlight the environmental resonances of our attachments to homeplaces, showing the role that home landscapes play in the emotional lives and personal identities of human beings. To be sure, not every soldier, refugee, adolescent, or traveler has felt nostalgia for the homes they have left behind, nor has their nostalgia always focused consciously or primarily on the landscapes of their homeplaces. But my argument does not require this to be so. Rather, the point is that, because human lives are lived in places—cities, towns, villages, parks, and other parts of the landscape with human names and human


\textsuperscript{460} Cannavò, \textit{The Working Landscape}, 9.

histories—the landscape is wrapped up in our nostalgias and our affections for place, whether we consciously think about it or not. The need to protect homeplaces from environmental destruction speaks to a broader human need that can resonate beyond those who consciously identify as environmentalists. One does not need to self-identify as an environmentalist to see the flooding of Manhattan or Miami or the Mississippi Delta due to climate change as a devastating loss for their inhabitants, or to understand that the flooding of New Orleans in 2005 entailed not just economic devastation or ecological destruction but also emotional suffering for the thousands who lost not only homes, loved ones, and livelihoods, but also, at least temporarily, a beloved place.\textsuperscript{462}

In this way, my argument in this chapter fits into the broader narrative of the dissertation by showing that, even when we don’t consciously make the connection, human values and concerns are environmental—we just have to know where and how to look for the resonances between human flourishing and stewardship of landscapes. The environmental destruction wrought by climate change, already underway and sure to accelerate, means not only destruction of homes and of habitats, but also of human homeplaces. It seems, then, that our new century will bring a deluge not just of floodwaters but also of ecological nostalgia as climate change decimates countless homeplaces, leaving more solastalgic dwellers and nostalgic refugees in its wake.

By highlighting both the rootedness and mobility of the human experience of place, I also seek a middle ground between the uncritical embrace of place and rootedness, as evinced by nativists and primitivists who view people on the move as threats to natural and social purity, and the overcorrection by many theorists on the left who view place-based attachments with deep suspicion or even imply an outright rejection of them. As John Hultgren found in his study of nativist and immigration restrictionist elements in American environmental politics, there are those whose “sense of place underscores the connections between blood and soil” and for whom

\textsuperscript{462} For a discussion of Hurricane Katrina as a crisis of displacement and personal loss, see Cannavò, \textit{The Working Landscape}, pp. 301-305.
“‘simpler times’ is a thinly veiled code for ‘whiter times’.”

463 But Hultgren is also right to conclude that an environmental political theory that attends to mobility and migration should not “reify movement or dismiss attachment to place,” but instead requires “critical scrutiny of how one place connects to others” in order to arrive at “a view of place in relation.”

464 On the other hand, I agree with Alexandra Kogl’s criticism that “[t]he frequency of the accusation of ‘nostalgia’ by critics of a place-based politics … [posits] the global as powerful … and the local as weak … and forbidden as an object of desire.”

465 An egalitarian and democratic environmentalism must understand place in social and ecological context and should incorporate the experiences of human beings on the move, and especially the refugees whose numbers and suffering will only increase over the coming decades. At the same time, though, a democratic environmentalism should not lose sight of the important role of affection for homeplaces in cultivating ecological belonging, inspiring environmental stewardship, and grounding freedom in place. Relationships with environmental homeplaces may be quite dispersed, tracking patterns of migration, tourism, and nomadic movement. The key is not being native to a place, but rather coming to care about it in such a way that its stewardship becomes a matter of great personal importance—for the place and its landscapes are part of oneself. Mobility and rootedness are both central to human flourishing, and an environmental political theory of place should incorporate both.

Conceiving of homeplaces with reference to their “paths out of town” and with a focus on the reasons that people have to depart from them as well as to return to them allows an environmental conception of place to recognize the belonging of those whose lives are defined by mobility, either by choice or necessity. In addition to refugees and migrants, this includes nomadic peoples whose relationship to place and sense of home do not conform to rigid conceptions of property and territory. In his study of the Walpiri hunter-nomads of Australia’s Northern Territory, Jackson finds that the Walpiri feel a strong sense of home that, while more geographically

463 Hultgren, Border Walls Gone Green, 5. See also pp. 107-111, 165-169.
464 ibid, 166-167.
dispersed than it is for most sedentary Westerners, is deeply precious to them and intimately bound up with the landscapes they inhabit. This should come as no surprise because, like most nomadic peoples, the movements of the Walpiri are not without patterns, and of course they too stop for the night to camp. Even so, Jackson finds enduring prejudice in Australia against indigenous nomads, with many concluding that the native peoples are “congenitally incapable of settling down or living in a house.” Setting place in motion reminds us that the exclusionary tendencies some fear in the politics of place are not intrinsic to place but rather come as a result of understanding it as closed or closable. It also allows for what Doreen Massey calls an “extroverted” sense of place “which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local.”

In Chapter 1, I discussed Margaret Radin’s personhood theory of property. There I argued that, to understand the distinctive economic value of property in the home, her theory fell short. But where her theory excels is in highlighting the emotional value of human homes, because the home is deeply intertwined with one’s sense of personhood—or, to use the language developed in this chapter, human homes are deeply formative for their inhabitants. This chapter has extended that insight to include the personal value of homeplaces, showing that emotional attachments to homes are wrapped up in attachments to the broader communities, locales, regions, and landscapes those homes occupy. A legal property claim is not operable here, of course, but that’s not the point. Instead, what we have here is a mode of appropriation, of making something one’s own, that is not tied to legal domicile or land ownership—and, as Thoreau suggests, is all the more free and open as a result. It is something to be shared—it is a public good. At the same time, environmentalists like Berry and Cannavò are right to insist that the protection of particular homeplaces is crucial because home is a particularizing idea—while

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human beings can find new places if their old ones become unlivable, the loss of a dearly-held
homeplace is not compensated or offset by a new place, or by money. Just as Radin argues that
the personhood theory of property points not just to “a right to shelter in general, but a right to a
particular house or apartment,” we can say that an environmental political theory of place points
to a right to move freely to and from homeplaces, but also to have one’s homeplaces protected
from economic and ecological exploitation and destruction.\footnote{Radin, \textit{Reinterpreting Property}, note 86, p. 216.} Indeed, the environmentalist’s
efforts to steward the landscape and protect homeplaces are of profound importance both to the
inhabitant’s right to this place and the migrant’s right to a place.

Finally, a last word on nostalgia. I adopt the term in my argument for several reasons. It is
an apt name for the human capacity for affection toward dearly-held places—Abbey’s “homing
sentiment”—especially because it highlights the sense of loss and desire that results from being
separated from such places. The term is also useful as a description of the sense of grief that
environmentalists feel when they reflect on the immense ecological losses of the past few
centuries—the species and habitats gone forever—as well as the many more portended by the
ongoing climate crisis. But the term is also often used as an epithet against environmentalists for
being too sentimental about the supposedly inevitable costs of progress, for being stubbornly
unwilling to let go of an attachment to the land that, while perhaps appropriate in the past, has no
place in the contemporary world. The charge of nostalgia stings in large part because it is so
often used to describe reactionaries and bigots. But the problem with reactionaries and bigots is
not that they are nostalgic. It is that they are reactionaries and bigots—that is, the problem is what
they are nostalgic for: hierarchy, patriarchy, white supremacy, colonial mastery, and so on.
“Nostalgia for the past,” Witold Rybzynski writes, “is often a sign of dissatisfaction with the
surprising, and indeed a welcome development—one could only wish that they had more reason
to be dissatisfied. But for environmentalists like Aldo Leopold, who looks back with sorrow on the

\footnotetext[469]{Radin, \textit{Reinterpreting Property}, note 86, p. 216.}
extinction of the Passenger Pigeon, or Naomi Klein, who fears a future for her children without moose and other wildlife, nostalgia points toward a dissatisfaction with the destruction that the modern economy—and specifically developmentalism, as I argued in Chapter 1—has wrought on the land community. And as climate change destroys more homes, both human and nonhuman—casting out ever more refugees, destroying ever more habitats and species—are we really meant to view the sense of loss, and the nostalgia that follows, as mere sentimentality? Or should we see these losses as a call—indeed, a demand—for action to save as many homes as we can? This seems to be the very least that can be done. As Nauman Naqvi writes: “Who would deny the nostalgic that and in the name of what?”

Naqvi, “Critique of Nostalgia,” 48.
Chapter 4—Ecological Populism: Politics in Defense of Home

For if the market economy was a threat to the human and natural components of the social fabric … what else would one expect than an urge on the part of a great variety of people to press for some sort of protection?

—Karl Polanyi\textsuperscript{472}

All of these people, who are fighting sometimes lonely battles to preserve things of value that they cannot bear to lose, are the conservation movement’s natural allies.

—Wendell Berry\textsuperscript{473}

We become fighters when something threatens our home.

—Cora Tucker, environmental activist\textsuperscript{474}

In the preceding chapters, I have argued for an alternative to both ecocentric purism and anthropocentric reformism that focuses on the importance of the ways people feel a sense of belonging in the settings that form the environmental foundations of human flourishing. First, I argued that, to avoid the anti-economism of environmental purism and the developmentalism of the current economic system, environmentalists might frame their economic intervention as one of protecting property in habitations from destruction by fungible wealth. Next, I argued that a stewardship mission rooted in ecological humanism can avoid the excesses of both ecocentrism and anthropocentrism by redefining the species-purpose of humanity with reference to its unique capacity to recognize and care for the broader ecological community for its own sake. Then, I developed an account of emotional attachments to environmental homeplaces that avoids romantic fantasies of transcending our alienation from nature via autochthonous relations to place, as well as the outright rejection of place-based attachments by critics on the political left, by integrating both the rootedness and mobility of human relationships to formative homeplaces. Throughout, my goal has been to show that human attachment to the land is already a widely-experienced part of life and at the same time an important and contingent achievement. The ties


of belonging between human beings and the land community that we find in the places we call home are vulnerable to exploitation and thus require a deliberate and concerted political defense.

This chapter explores the nature and prospects of that political defense. I argue that it must be democratic and popular in order to succeed, and it must avoid the elitist paternalism of both ecocentric purism and technocratic reformism while at the same time offering a sufficiently forceful, and even radical, answer to the developmentalist imperatives of the global market economy. As we will see, many environmentalists are ambivalent about democracy because, in their view, the public and their democratic institutions are the source of environmental destruction and cannot be trusted to address the pressing environmental problems of our time. Moreover, for developmentalists who view human habitations and natural habitats alike as means of creating fungible monetary value, democratic assertions in defense of home are an irritating obstacle to their profits and a regressive roadblock to economic progress. Against both environmentalist and developmentalist suspicions toward democracy, I argue that the defense of ecological belonging points toward a grassroots democratic politics receptive to the particulars of place and the multiple human values that tie human beings to the ecological settings they call home. I propose the name ecological populism to describe this popular democratic environmentalism. In it, everyday people take up grassroots political action in defense of the places they call home against developmentalist elites who would treat those homes as appropriate sacrifices for the sake of profit and progress. It is a popular politics of resistance against a model of development that forces everyday people to sacrifice things they cannot bear to lose.

As I showed in Chapter 1, the hallmark of developmentalism is its drive to constantly develop and redevelop land in pursuit of monetary wealth, and I argued that this mindset legitimizes the dispossession of homes and habitats, both through direct expropriation and through environmental externalities. It is this threat that ecological populism seeks to resist. Especially in an economic system devoted to growth and development, then, ecological populists cannot place their trust solely in prevailing institutions or the benevolence of elites to protect the countless singular places that make up the natural and human environment. A democratic
environmentalism must, therefore, be a form of what Raymond Williams called ‘militant particularism,’ in which threats to one’s own home inspire a broader political resistance to the destruction of homes as such.⁴⁷⁵ In this way, ecological populism is a politics in defense of home.

It has become cliché for commentators on populism to point out that the term is both contested and ambiguous. My goal is not to identify the ‘true’ essence of populism, nor even to supply an analytically useful definition of populist politics as such—many political theorists, including Ernesto Laclau, Jan-Werner Müller, and Cas Mudde have already covered that ground.⁴⁷⁶ Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to alert the reader to why I use the term and what I mean by it. Contrary to recent influential accounts of populism according to which it is understood to be primarily anti-pluralist and only secondarily anti-elitist, I use the term to leverage its connotations of anti-elitism and grassroots democratic assertion. Rather than authoritarian left-wing populism in Latin America or the European right-wing ethno-nationalist populism on which many contemporary political theorists focus when they study and criticize populism, I have in mind the 19th-century American populists and more recent incarnations such as the grassroots environmental movement of the early 1970s and the contemporary environmental justice movement. Thus, the populism I have in mind has more in common with Williams’ militant particularism or Christopher Lasch’s and Harry Boyte’s visions of grassroots populism than with the anti-pluralist authoritarianism of Trump or Chavez.⁴⁷⁷ In light of my use of the term, Jan-Werner Müller’s claim that populism is “a degraded form of democracy” need not apply.⁴⁷⁸ Instead, it would be better to say that the populist demagogues and fringe parties that attract

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⁴⁷⁸ Müller, What is Populism?, p. 6.
much of the attention of political theorists represent degraded, anti-pluralist forms of populism. Like other political movements or ideologies that we label, we can discuss good and bad, better and worse, forms of populism. There is a difference between the politics of ethno-nationalist resentment and that of defending one’s physical home, regional habitats, and cherished homeplaces from destruction and degradation by economic doctrines supported primarily by economic elites. The former is among the worst possible forms of politics. The latter is sorely needed today, both for the populations who are suffering and for the states that are ill-equipped to remedy the ecological problems of the day, and in no small part because their hands are tied by developmentalist elites. That is, states need populist social movements to push them to pursue environmental protection and to grant democratic legitimacy to potentially controversial environmental policies. They also need populist movements to make visible the distinctive values of ecological homeplaces that are otherwise sacrificed by developmentalist for monetary gain. My argument, then, is that ecological populism is especially well-suited to making the particularities of human attachments to the land the centerpiece of a democratic environmental politics capable of advancing ecological stewardship, protecting human habitations, and generally confronting the environmental challenges of our time.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. First, against political theorists who conflate populism with anti-pluralism, I argue that anti-pluralism is not a necessary condition of populism and that ecological populism should be understood as anti-elitist rather than as anti-pluralist. Second, I turn to the relevance of populism to environmentalism, building on the work of environmental political theorists like John Meyer, Timothy Luke, and DeWitt John. Here I reject paternalistic and elitist forms of environmentalism that hold popular democracy in suspicion while at the same time cautioning ecological populists not to reject environmental experts outright even as they hold elites accountable through democratic oversight. Third, against the common framing

\[479\] For the role of social movements in pushing states to pursue environmental protection, see John Dryzek, David Downs, Christian Hunold, and David Schlosberg, with Hans-Kristian Hernandez, Green States and Social Movements: Environmentalism in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Norway, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
of environmentalism as a politics of austerity and sacrifice, I draw on Steve Lerner and Naomi Klein’s notion of “sacrifice zones” to argue that the primary mission of ecological populism is not to tell people to give up things they value for the sake of the environment, but rather to resist the sacrifice of their own habitations, habitats, and homeplaces by developmentalist elites who view their homes as disposable. Fourth, I return once more to Wendell Berry for an argument in favor of a “new protectionism” that makes shielding homes from dispossession and destruction a primary goal of economic policy while also seeking to protect working people and local economies from exploitation by the very corporations that promise prosperity but just as often bring destruction and false hope. Here, eco-populists face a choice between economic localism and more large-scale economic reforms like a Green New Deal. I conclude by addressing the need for ecological populism to transcend NIMBYism by uniting in defense of ecological homes as such, something the idea of ecological belonging itself helps promote.

**Populism—Anti-Elitist, Not Always Anti-Pluralist**

To be sure, populism is often associated with modes of politics that are antithetical to pluralist democracy, and readers who are conscious of the threats posed by the ascendancy of ethno-nationalist politics of right-wing populism may be skeptical of my adoption of the populist label. Even so, and especially in light of the inadequacy of alternative labels that are too vague by themselves (popular, democratic, egalitarian, radical) or too laden with distracting ideological baggage (socialist, communitarian, libertarian), the term is the best available to convey the grassroots contestation of elite economic power that an ecological populism requires, and it has the advantage of connecting up with a venerable tradition of farmer-labor populism in America that, despite its neglect by political theorists, has much to offer for a popular democratic environmentalism.

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Political scientists have long been anxious about populism as an analytic category because of the term’s ambiguity. Theorists and commentators, the argument goes, label such a wide variety of political actors as populists that the term lacks theoretical purchase. Thus Müller bemoans our lack of “anything like a theory of populism,” implying that we need such a theory to use the term meaningfully as scholars of politics. Unlike Müller, I am satisfied to treat the label of populism as a broad tendency in political life, one that does not need a rigorous and concrete definition across all of its uses. We fruitfully use words like democracy, liberalism, and socialism in this way all the time, and it is telling that we can easily augment their specificity by attaching qualifiers to convey more theoretically and contextually specific meanings—e.g. liberal democracy, classical liberalism, agrarian socialism. I propose doing something similar with ecological populism. To qualify as an ecological populist, a candidate or movement would need to make broad appeals to everyday people to assert themselves against developmentalist elite actors, institutions, and norms that threaten their environs with destruction. This is by no means the only kind of populism we might recognize as political theorists, nor is it even an exemplar of populism as an analytic category. It is simply the sort of populism that is best suited to addressing the environmental grievances of everyday people.

In light of historian Michael Kazin’s argument that populism is best understood as a political “persuasion,” the ambiguity of the term should not surprise us. For Kazin, populism is a political language “whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter.” This political persuasion has been taken up by political actors across the ideological spectrum, making it “more an impulse than an ideology.” While the populist persuasion has served right-wing and left-wing radicals alike, Kazin argues that “[i]t is only when leftists and liberals talked in populist ways—hopeful, expansive, even romantic—

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481 This worry goes as at least as far back as the influential volume on populism edited by Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics, New York: Macmillan, 1969.
482 Müller, What Is Populism?, 2, emphasis in original.
484 Ibid, 3.
that they were able to lend their politics a majoritarian cast and help markedly to improve the common welfare.\textsuperscript{485} Indeed, before the Cold War, the vocabularies of populism were employed almost exclusively by advocates of social justice—farmers seeking debt relief and regulation of railroads, workers demanding fair wages, and Prohibitionists combating political corruption. In fact, the association of populism with the political right is largely a post-war phenomenon. As Kazin observes, “[f]or the first time in United States history, large numbers of activists and politicians were employing a populist vocabulary to oppose social reform instead of support it.”\textsuperscript{486} As many commentators have pointed out, the negative appraisal of populism by liberal intellectuals shortly after World War II—including scholars like David Bell, Edward Shils, and especially Richard Hofstadter—stemmed in large part from their conflating populism in general with Joseph McCarthy and the Red Scare. While their dismay at the rise of right-wing populism was hardly unjustified, their social analysis often went beyond critiquing anti-communist hysteria and became a general distrust of popular democracy, which led them to conflate left-wing with right-wing populism.\textsuperscript{487} A swift and sustained correction by historians such as Norman Pollack, Lawrence Goodwyn, and Kazin has recognized the 19th-century populists as a grassroots movement of democratic empowerment of indebted farmers and urban laborers with legitimate political and economic grievances against corporate and partisan elites of the day, and Charles Postel has more recently added that populism was even animated by attention to notions of progress and rational expertise, further dismantling the post-war caricature of the U.S. Populists as an anti-modern, xenophobic and anti-Semitic rural revolt against liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{488}

\textsuperscript{485} Ibid, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{486} Ibid, 167, emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{488} Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962; Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in
Yet, in the wake of the historiographic dismantling of the liberal pluralist critique of the U.S. Populists, contemporary political theorists studying populism often focus their attention on more recent movements in Europe and Latin America that seem to confirm what Hofstadter and Bell feared about grassroots democratic assertion. In their fixation with the parties of Hugo Chavez, Geert Wilders, and Donald Trump, contemporary political theorists have made populism synonymous with democratic threats to liberal pluralism. Müller’s treatment of populism is a case in point. On the one hand, Müller helpfully illustrates the anti-pluralism of many contemporary populist parties by contrasting their claim that “We, and only we, are the people” with the pluralist democratic claim that “We are also the people.” For Müller, then, anti-pluralists claim a monopoly on legitimate representation, whereas pluralists claim a right to also be represented. His critique of anti-pluralist parties is well-taken and much-needed, but it does not follow that the term ‘populism’ ought to refer exclusively, or even primarily, to parties that are anti-elitist and anti-pluralist, as he insists. It is especially telling that Müller’s narrow definition of populism leads him to the curious and awkward conclusion that the U.S. People’s Party of the late-19th century was not truly populist according to his theory, despite the fact that the term first emerged to describe them. While Müller’s theory of populism is useful for understanding the anti-pluralist parties that are troublingly prevalent in contemporary politics, it should not exhaust the meaning of populism as a term in political theory. For the purposes of theorizing a popular democratic environmentalism, Kazin’s broader understanding of populism—as a particular mode


Sometimes, and especially in the media, this is extended to include an inherent link with fascism. The ethno-nationalism and xenophobia of such right-wing populist parties as Trump’s GOP, the United Kingdom’s UKIP, France’s FN, Holland’s PVV, Germany’s AFD, and Hungary’s Fidesz make this association between populism and fascism understandable, though no less conceptually reductive. For an interesting argument against conflating even ethno-centric right-wing populism with fascism, see John Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*, New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016, pp. 154-157.

Müller, *What is Populism?*, 98, emphasis added.

For Müller’s discussion of the U.S. People’s Party, see *What is Populism?*, pp. 85-91. Notably, Müller does recognize that the People’s Party “formulated their demands in political language that clearly set ‘the people’ against self-serving elites” (87). In accordance with Kazin’s broader understanding of populism, this is more than enough to call them populists. Especially given their willingness to contest economic norms and institutions that threatened their communities and livelihoods, this is also enough to recognize them as forerunners of the ecological populism I am advocating here.
of democratic politics that mobilizes widely-shared grievances against an entrenched elite—proves more useful because, as I will show next, there is a long-standing tension in environmental politics between democracy and elite expertise.

**Populism and Environmentalism—Against Environmental Paternalism**

One of the advantages of identifying an *ecological* populism is that it allows us to distinguish between different dearly-held things that populists might seek to defend. Much is made today of the question of whether populist grievance in the United States and Europe is primarily motivated by economic or ethnic anxieties. Using ecological populism as an analytic category allows us to single out *ecological* grievances for populist politics—namely, the threat posed to habitations, habitats, and homeplaces—for analysis and, at least in my assessment, normative praise. The ecological populist can appeal to an Appalachian coal miner on the basis of grievances related to ecological degradation without validating any racial anxieties. At its worst, the broader politics of populism certainly *can* devolve into ethno-nationalist fear-mongering—but, at its best, *ecological* populism stands in defense everyone’s homes. Anti-pluralist populists might say: protect our homeland from immigrants. Ecological populists say instead: protect our homes from developmentalism. A “we” defined by ethnonationalism is inherently exclusionary, a “we” defined by shared attachment to ecological home is not. The only enemy of the ecological populist is the defenders of laws and institutions that threaten lives and livelihoods through environmental destruction.

When discussing populist politics, much depends on how one defines “the elite.”492 Indeed, one can imagine a plethora of populisms based on how the elite is defined and what sort

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492 As commentators from Müller to Margaret Canovan have argued, much also depends on how one defines the people (see Canovan, *The People*, London: Polity, 2005). With regard to the ecological populism I describe here, however, that question has a fairly simple answer, at least conceptually—the people are simply the *inhabitants* of a place—those who call the place home. To be sure, as in any place-based politics, who is an inhabitant (and who is not) can and will be contested. Yet ecological populism is defined less by a substantive vision of a unified and pure national demos or local community and more by a simple normative commitment to the principle that the inhabitants of a place ought to keep their homes, retain healthy habitats, and enjoy their ecological homeplaces in freedom. This means that the question of how the elite is defined is the more central question in ecological populism. Who counts as a “rightful” inhabitant of a place is both politically and historically fraught, and this chapter cannot attend to that thorny question. Yet, no
of grievances everyday people have against it. In the politics of ecological populism, the elite in question is made up of the experts and power-brokers that theorize developmentalist doctrines and support and enact developmentalist laws and policies—academic social scientists, government bureaucrats, politicians, political advisors, party operatives, corporate managers, stockholders, business-owners, and so on. While it would be absurd to suppose that elites are consciously loyal to an analytic neologism like developmentalism, it is fair to say that many people in positions of power act on the basis of theoretical assumptions, normative commitments, and economic interests that are more or less developmentalist. This is the primary issue for ecological populists. The threat that developmentalism poses to ecological homes is the grievance that animates ecological populism and is the political enemy against which it is defined.

Ecological populism performs two functions in relation to developmentalist elites. The first is more plainly political, and it is the more familiar function of anti-elitist populism. In it, populists seek to check the power of elites by bringing popular power to bear to enforce, reform and unmake laws and norms as the moment requires. This function, then, is about acquiring and using political power. While absolutely necessary for a democratic environmental populism, this is not its only function. The second is a more epistemic function, which makes known to elites something that was unknown to them, making values and grievances visible to elites who had not been able to see them. Populist agitation makes elites aware that the people value some things more than legal doctrines, elite opinion, and the price mechanism would suggest. Thus, ecological populism is at once a political and an epistemic corrective. It forces the hands of elite players while also revealing values, places, and homes to them that were hitherto invisible. This makes ecological populism an intervention into what Rancière calls the political “distribution of the sensible,” or the regime of visibility that makes some things invisible and unworthy of consideration in politics and public life.493 If we suspect that elite perception of the land and its matter who dwells in a place, the place remains, and it remains as a home to humans and nonhumans alike. Indeed, that is what makes it an ecological home and its defense an ecological populism.

inhabitants might be clouded by developmentalism and other myopias that make elites blind to
the attachments and losses experienced by inhabitants of the lands they rule, then ecological
populism is the democratic means of making those things visible to the broader political system
so they are not treated as disposable means of economic development.

Yet it is not only anti-environmentalists who may be guilty of elitism. On the contrary, one
of the most important obstacles to a popular democratic environmentalism is elitism among
environmentalists themselves. John Meyer identifies a longstanding divide between “paternalist”
and “populist” approaches to environmental politics.494 For the environmental paternalist,
enlightened advocates of environmental policies face a paradox: their proposals are in the
interest of the people, and yet the people are—at least on their telling—the primary cause of the
problem and the greatest obstacle to solutions. On this view, the masses are responsible for the
very environmental problems that all them, but they are too addicted to convenience and
consumption to alter course, at least not without a benevolent guiding hand. The paternalist, then,
views the people not as the necessary source of democratic change but as the beneficiaries of
the environmentalist’s higher vision and expertise. Enlightened environmentalists can value
nature properly and act rationally. The masses cannot, at least not on their own. Meyer pithily
summarizes the paternalist view in this way:

We—the informed, engaged, public spirited—wish to protect you—the uninformed,
apathetic, or egoistic—from the consequences of your environmentally destructive ways.495

discussion of the politics of legibility in James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to
Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. For Scott, “legibility is
a central problem in statecraft” because the state needs to achieve a “synoptic view” of its territory and
subjects in order to control them, making “the terrain, its products, and its workforce more legible—and
hence manipulable—from above and from the center” (2). Like Rancière’s distribution of the sensible, Scott’s
regime of legibility emphasizes that which is left illegible, and especially the complexities of local conditions
that the state’s efforts to make its territory and subjects legible inevitably leaves out. For a different use of
the distribution of the sensible in environmental political theory that deals with the human relationship to the
nonhuman, see Jane Bennett, Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things, Durham: Duke University Press,
2010 (esp. vii, 105-107).
494 John M. Meyer, “Populism, Paternalism, and the State of Environmentalism in the US,” Environmental
495 Ibid, 221, emphasis in original.
Meyer observes that, while “[t]hose who exhibit this sort of paternalistic tendency do not necessarily do so self-consciously,” the public receives the paternalistic message that it is the will of the enlightened environmentalist that matters. Against the paternalist impulse, Meyer identifies a populist alternative in which the problem to be solved is not popular apathy or deficient values but rather the power of “remote decision-makers unable or unwilling to account for local knowledge and everyday experience.” What is at stake in the paternalist-populist divide “is whether, on balance, people’s everyday lives and experiences are the foundation for the requisite movement for change or conversely, popular ignorance, apathy, or egoism are the obstacles to be overcome.” The ecological populist tends decidedly toward the former; the ecocentric or technocratic elitist tends toward the latter.

The clash between the populist and paternalist persuasions in environmental politics points to a class cleavage that has become increasingly salient in America since the late 19th century between the information class and the working class, with the information class controlling the levers of power while the working class obeys or resists the will of the informed elite. Timothy Luke emphasizes this divide as the primary political cleavage defining what he too calls “ecological populism.” Recognizing populism to be a “very problematic” term, Luke nonetheless adopts it to highlight what he views as the necessary resistance by the victims of “rationalization without representation” propagated by the ruling class of elite experts who direct the modern political economy to ends they deem worthwhile—especially irresponsible economic growth. For Luke, the primary political conflicts of our time revolve around the divide “between those who know and those who do not, those who can and do participate in elitist managerial decision taking and those who cannot, or those who intervene in the personal spheres of others

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496 Ibid.
497 Ibid, 224.
498 Ibid, 224-5.
and those who cannot. In the face of global multinational corporations and the state policies that enable them, Luke argues, ecological activists “ranging from NIMBY site-defense groups to multicultural environmental justice fronts […] are now asking the same questions raised by the populists a century ago.” While Luke recognizes that the ruling class of expert managers is of course internally diverse and full of many people who would consider themselves environmentally-conscious, he insists that their near-monopoly on effective political power has largely proven to be an impediment to protecting the ecologies occupied by those out of power—namely, the non-experts who have only their own testimonies with which to make visible their claims to ecological belonging and the various threats to their homes.

Even so, it is worth remembering that not all experts are paternalists, nor do they all favor rationalization without representation. Indeed, rooting ecological populism in a critique of developmentalism helps us differentiate between, on the one hand, experts who legitimize and execute developmentalist projects that produce pollution, habitat destruction, and climate change, and, on the other, the of experts who give citizens the knowledge about ecology and environmental protection necessary to understand threats to their ecological homes. Rachel Carson serves as a famous and poignant example of how someone with scientific insight and expertise—and who was even a government bureaucrat—can nonetheless be something of an ecological populist. *Silent Spring* is a thorough and eloquent indictment of the careless use of pesticides by governments and corporations despite mounting evidence of the dangers they posed not just to wildlife but also to human health. Carson’s credentials as an accomplished educated elite were not insignificant—she earned a masters from Johns Hopkins University, served as Editor-in-Chief for the Fish and Wildlife Service, was a government scientist in her own

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500 Luke, 10. Meyer also recognizes the role of class and expertise in his assessment of populism and paternalism: “What the populist impulse indicates, then, is the conceptual difference in ‘environmentalism’ as it moves across a divide between a well-educated class of knowledge workers and others in American society” (Meyer, “Populism,” 227).

501 Luke, 235. NIMBYism (short for “Not In My Backyard”) has been criticized for displacing environmental harms onto those lacking the political power to resist them. As a result, some use the alternative acronym NIABY (“Not in Anyone’s Backyard”) to describe opposition to development that does not simply displace it to less privileged sites. See Hilary Chaffer Boudet, “From NIMBY to NIABY: Regional Mobilization Against Liquefied Natural Gas in the United States,” *Environmental Politics*, 20.5: 786-806, 2011.

right, and became an acclaimed author years before the publication of *Silent Spring*. Yet Carson also remained an outsider from the male-dominated scientific establishment on account of her gender. Her findings in *Silent Spring* were challenged from the beginning by (predominantly male) corporate scientists who sought to discredit her and her findings in no small part because they posed a direct challenge to corporate impunity in pursuit of profit. Like many environmental scientists, Carson was at once an educated elite and a passionate critic of ecologically destructive practices. Carson’s writings serve as but one example of a long tradition of scientific experts and government officials who have used their knowledge and authority to call attention to the need for environmental protection.

This suggests that ecological populists ought to be more suspicious of economic developers and private extractive corporations than of scientists at the EPA or officials in the various state-level departments of natural resources and environmental quality. Indeed, those experts who make an effort to be responsive to popular goals and concerns should be lauded for minimizing the paternalism of their positions in favor of responsiveness to the needs of the citizens they serve. To be sure, government agencies like the EPA are hardly immune to elitism. Worse still, the state agencies tasked with protecting public health and well-being have a troubling record of neglecting vulnerable populations, with the EPA’s abysmal performance leading up to the water crisis in Flint, Michigan serving as only one especially infamous example. Ecological populists should rebuke elites only insofar as those elites condone or pursue developmentalist destruction of habitations, habitats, and homeplaces. In and of itself,

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expertise is not the problem. Instead, the problem is when expertise transcends democratic accountability and inflicts environmental damage. With this in mind, the reflective ecological populist will resist conflating expertise with authoritarianism even while remaining on guard for abuses.

Recognizing the importance of both grassroots populist pressure and top-down expert management in environmental policy, DeWitt John proposes a third model of environmental governance he calls “civic environmentalism.” In contrast to the “top-down, comprehensive approach” to environmental policy practiced by the environmental regulatory state and the “bottom-up, fragmented orientation” of the “populist environmentalism” practiced by the Earth Day mass movement of the early 1970s and in NIMBY protests, John praises the “bottom-up, comprehensive approach” of civic environmentalism. This way of making environmental policy, which favors “dealing with problems at state and local levels and involves a political process in which divergent values are recognized and many individuals and organizations work collaboratively to forge balanced, comprehensive solutions,” is especially useful because new environmental challenges, such as non-point pollution from dispersed emission sources, require comprehensive cooperation and the coordination of divergent interests. For John, the decay of bipartisan support for the EPA and other agencies also makes civic environmentalism more viable in the long run. In a world of complex and diffuse environmental problems involving equally complex and diffuse interests, civic environmentalism has much to offer.

Yet even as he recognizes that ecological populism “provides the conscience or emotional heart of environmentalism,” John downplays its importance by insisting that “populist protests are inherently antigovernmental” and that “their major impact on policy is usually to stimulate the creation of new interest groups and new top-down, fragmented legislation.” Yet John undersells the role a grassroots populist base might play in supporting a robust civic stewardship.

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505 See also Chapter 2 above, where I emphasize the role of science and expertise in environmental stewardship.
508 Ibid, 30.
environmentalism by helping to force the hands of intransigent political and economic elites and make democratic policy outcomes possible. For civic environmentalism to be truly democratic, it needs to have an engaged, vocal, and assertive popular base. For it to be truly anti-developmentalist, it needs to register the values of ecological belonging that cost-benefit analysis and market prices fail to make visible. Without ecological populism, civic environmentalism risks being little more than the devolution of policy-making power from federal to state and local elites whose interests in developmentalism may be just as strong, if not stronger, as we saw in the *Kelo* case regarding private development takings in Chapter 1.

John is also wrong to argue that ecological populism is inherently hostile to government. On the contrary, populists often demand robust enforcement of existing policies as well as the creation of new agencies and government authority. Indeed, the U.S. People’s Party proved remarkably willing to call for robust state intervention in the economy to protect farmers and laborers from exploitation, and it is no accident that some of the most important achievements in environmental legislation and state-building came in the backdrop of the cross-partisan mass mobilization of the 1970s environmental movement. This key ingredient is arguably what was missing in the succeeding decades of environmental politics as the Sagebrush Rebellion against Federal land management in the American West and repeated Republican attempts to curb the EPA have often put environmental policymakers on the defensive. The foundational role played by citizen groups and mass mobilization in the making of the environmental regulatory state suggests that an effective civic environmentalism requires a robust populist environmentalism to give it popular support and democratic legitimacy. Environmental elites seeking environmental protection cannot do their work without ecological populism—environmental experts need the people. Indeed, things could hardly be otherwise in a truly democratic regime.

To be sure, there is a danger of populist theory and rhetoric to oversimplify the motivations and interests of elites. The populist imaginary supposes that there is a single, monolithic elite (“the” elite) that is unequivocally opposed to the will of the people. Of course, this is descriptively wrong. But it might also be a self-inflicted wound and strategic mistake for ecological populism. By eliding the divisions between various elites, populists risk neglecting potential allies as well as institutions—often bureaucracies—that might afford them with a powerful vehicle for effecting their vision. A populist politics too wedded to a divide between ‘the’ elites and ‘the’ people might ignore bureaucratic agencies and civic institutions, or specific actors therein, that may be on their side and might afford their ecological homes with protection and greater visibility. Taken too far, anti-elitism can undermine the very goals espoused by ecological populists.

What, then, does an ecological populism have to offer to environmentalists and to a world in need of decisive shifts in policy to address climate change and the other environmental crises of the present century? First, a populist persuasion allows people at the grassroots to contest elite pronouncements about science, economics, and the good life when and if they threaten their homes with degradation, destruction, and dispossession—and it puts elites and experts on notice that they should and will be challenged when their power is used toward ecologically destructive ends.511 Second, it emphasizes the plight of the most ecologically vulnerable, from indigenous communities, inner-city neighborhoods, and rust belt towns in the Global North to poor farmers, ocean islanders, and ecological refugees in the Global South. This is why, as Meyer and Luke both recognize, the diverse array of activists in the environmental justice movement display strong tendencies toward ecological populism in their willingness to challenge elites in defense of those who suffer the full brunt of pollution, habitat destruction, and environmental

511 This is why science and technology scholars emphasize the need for “citizen scientists” who can bring grassroots scientific data and interpretation to bear when elite scientists do not take grassroots concerns about local pollution and toxic contamination seriously. For example, see Gwen Ottinger, “Making Sense of Citizen Science: Stories as a Hermeneutic Resource,” Energy Research & Social Science, 31: 41-49, 2017.
Third, and perhaps most important for my argument, ecological populism serves not just as a corrective with regard to who is being defended but also what is being defended against developmentalism. As a grassroots expression of local places under assault, ecological populism makes habitations, habitats, and homeplaces visible to experts and elites who may fail to see them or take their value as homes into account. Whereas top-down managers and elite experts often have a distant, abstract, and technical perspective on environmental problems and local controversies, the inhabitants of a place have experiential knowledge of value and attachment that distant elites can discover only if they bother to ask—or, barring that, if they are told, loudly. As Steve Lerner argues, while scientific expertise is indispensable, it is the inhabitants of a place “who [are] the real experts and [are] best positioned to describe the conditions near their homes.” This attention to local knowledge and to the nonhuman elements of justice for humans is perhaps the distinctive characteristic of ecological populism compared to other social justice movements. It makes visible not just people but also the things in the world that they care about, the environs that belong to them and in which they experience ecological belonging. And, as we will see next, this opens the way to a more appealing democratic agenda for environmentalism that avoids the politics of environmental austerity and sacrifice.

**Beyond Environmental Austerity**

As I noted in Chapter 1, environmentalists face a dilemma—the reforms they advocate are often framed by opponents as threats to prosperity, job creation, and economic growth. This is especially problematic because, as I discussed in the introductory chapter, the sort of environmentalism that I call “ecocentric purism” in many respects conforms to and confirms the caricature offered by anti-environmentalists, especially when its adherents oppose any and all development projects on principle because their goal is to minimize the environmental impacts of

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human activity. This purist stance on human use and development risks alienating the very public whose support environmentalists need. If ecological populists are to avoid lapsing into ecocentric purism and environmental paternalism, they will need an answer to the strongest argument that developmentalists offer in support of their aims—namely, that not just the developers themselves but also the local community stands to benefit from the promised development.

After all, the development that environmentalists often seek to limit in defense of human and nonhuman homes can appear to be of great value to local communities desperate for jobs and prosperity. We saw this in Chapter 1 with the City of New London’s support of dispossessing the homes of some of its own citizens to make way for development. This is also true of rural communities that often view resource extraction as the only viable route to well-paying, dignified jobs.\footnote{514} For communities that understandably view job growth and communal prosperity as pressing and scarce public goods, environmental protection can appear to require selfless sacrifice for the sake of “the environment” when everyday people are barely getting by. This is a difficult problem for environmentalists. It suggests, at the very least, that a viable ecological populism cannot succeed solely by countering elites. It must also make a broader democratic appeal to local communities, especially those whose livelihoods are most directly affected by environmental policies.

One way this can be done is by reversing the charge of sacrifice. As Maniates and Meyer argue, simply drawing attention to hitherto-unrecognized sacrifices made by people caught up in environmentally destructive practices and institutions can be an important step forward for a democratic environmentalism. After all, they argue, if environmentalists accept the premise that their vision for society requires sacrifice, they risk feeding into a sentiment that is as familiar as it is cynical and deflating: “Addressing climate change will require citizens of wealthy consumer
societies to sacrifice. But that’s never going to happen.”⁵¹⁵ Accepting this statement as fact implies that there are only two routes to a solution: either widespread environmental disaster will force the public out of its complacency, or informed elites will have to impose the necessary sacrifices in advance.⁵¹⁶ Neither solution is appealing, especially because both sit uneasily with any robust understanding of popular democracy, bringing us right back in the environmental paternalism that populists rightly reject. What is more, the ecological populist would insist, the cynical premise overlooks the real problem—namely, that governments and corporations fail to adequately steward and protect the environment in spite of broad public support for environmental protection. Furthermore, the current state of affairs already forces many, including poor homeowners and renters, agricultural workers, indigenous communities, and coastline cities, to sacrifice themselves and their interests for the benefit of others, including land developers, corporate and political elites, polluting industries, and financiers. Above all, a properly ecological populism highlights the extent to which the developmentalist political economy already forces the sacrifice of ecological homes. The ecological populist insists that our habitations, habitats, and homeplaces are the true cost of developmentalism and of unrestrained economic growth.

Today’s environmentalism tends to focus on the problem of how to persuade the world’s most insatiable consumers to reduce their consumption. This frames the choice as one between our present world of more goods, more growth, and more wealth and a more sustainable world with fewer goods, less growth, and less wealth. This argument for conservation and sustainability trades on values such as austerity and simplicity, insisting that we can and ought to live better with less. The political weaknesses of this argument should be obvious. It asks the wealthy to sacrifice precisely that which they are least interested in sacrificing and the poor to sacrifice future improvement of their standard of living, offering a fraught political frame for both the Global North and Global South. It also makes environmentalism sound like a doctrine preaching self-denial for

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.
the sake of something beyond us—nature, the environment, the nonhuman—for which we might be willing to sacrifice if only we cared enough.

Against this doctrine of environmental austerity, ecological populism asks not how to convince people to consume less or care more, but rather how to prevent and resist the sacrifice of those things we already have that are already most dear to us—our homes. Ecological populism recasts the debate by emphasizing the extent to which the extraction, production, exchange, and consumption of fungible wealth forces people to sacrifice their homes at the altar of development. By correcting for this error, ecological populists reorient our gaze away from abstract metrics of growth and development and toward the actual things in the world that people are asked to sacrifice and the compensatory promises of fungible wealth that so often fail to be realized. This is a more favorable framing of the issue for environmental advocates. It is also the more honest framing because it prevents the developmentalist from ignoring the often devastating costs of their plans, including for the very inhabitants they claim will benefit.

Focusing on the sacrifice of habitations and homeplaces also helps make environmentalism more immediately relevant and accessible to everyday people than an environmentalism centered on preserving a nonhuman nature “out there” or making the economy more “sustainable” according to abstract metrics of extraction, production, and consumption. Taking up the political defense of home helps make environmentalism into something far larger and more compelling than simply pollution control and species protection—though of course these should still be championed. As John Meyer says of the populist approach to environmentalism: “If we move down this path, we might also interrogate the role of the label ‘environmentalist’ itself within American discourse. For it would seem that environmental concerns are too big and too important to be addressed only by self-identified environmentalists.”

Couching the stakes of that larger politics in place-based attachments and the ecological homes that serve as the inescapable backdrop of human existence might help bring those larger stakes home to the general public. Armed with a multidimensional approach to

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ecological belonging and environmental value, ecological populism can also help integrate otherwise disparate and often competing sides of the broader struggle to limit the reach of developmentalism, ranging from preservation of habitat in remote wilderness areas to protests in minority neighborhoods against industrial pollution, and from conserving ocean fishery stocks to protecting National Parks from development projects. And as we saw in Chapter 1, the ecological populist’s insistence on treating the environment as home reveals the parallels between the home destroyed by climate change-induced superstorms and the home demolished to make way for urban development. However different in appearances, all of these entail the sacrifice of home for the sake of development, of habitation property for fungible property, and of ecological belonging for monetary wealth. The clash between home and development lies at the heart of environmental politics, and the ecological populist insists that those in power must answer for the sacrifices of home that developmentalism so often entails.

In pursuit of the political defense of home, ecological populists might seek to make visible what Steve Lerner calls the “sacrifice zones” that development leaves in its wake. The term was first used by U.S. officials as a label for territory contaminated by the extraction and processing of radioactive material, and Lerner adapts it to describe neighborhoods of poor and predominantly minority residents condemned to endure disproportionate toxic exposure in the shadows of industrial plants and chemical facilities located near their homes.518 He notices that this sort of environmental injustice and racism stems in large part from “unwise (or biased) land use decisions dictated by local or state officials intent on attracting big industries to their town, county, or state in an effort to create jobs and raise tax revenues.”519 Just as gentrification sacrifices the interests of low-income residents to make way for economic development, residents in the shadow of polluting manufacturers find their health traded for promises of growth and prosperity. Yet these sacrifice zones are “essentially hidden from the view of most Americans” because

519 Ibid, 6.
these places are rarely “destinations of choice” for tourists and journalists. These environmental injustices testify to the true costs of development. “Within these sacrifice zones,” Lerner concludes, “the human cost of our rough-and-tumble, winner-take-all economic system is brutally visible.”

To be sure, as Lerner himself recognizes, it is grassroots activists—with the help of sympathetic experts, including journalists like himself—who make sacrifice zones visible. Ecological populism simply recognizes that these efforts by sympathetic experts and journalists to make sacrifice zones visible are often necessary but wholly insufficient. Similarly, as Naomi Klein points out, the radical ecological ideas of Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson were not enough to effect substantial change of the economic order—or, rather, not by themselves. “These ideas were hugely influential in the evolution of ecological thought,” Klein writes, “but unattached to populist movements, they posed little threat to galloping industrialization.” Experts can help make ecological sacrifice zones visible, but these efforts accomplish little without populist agitation and resistance.

Klein herself takes up the notion of sacrifice zones, but in a more expansive sense. While Lerner uses the term exclusively to describe the habitations of predominantly poor and minority residents condemned to disproportionate toxic exposure, Klein defines sacrifice zones as “places that, to their extractors, somehow don’t count and therefore can be poisoned, drained, or otherwise destroyed, for the supposed greater good of economic progress.” She also builds on Lerner’s recognition of environmental racism while expanding its scope to include colonial relegation of natives to a lesser status that legitimizes violent resource extraction and pollution in their homeplaces. Tellingly, Klein notes that extractivism thrived in colonial settings because

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520 Ibid, 15.
523 Ibid, 169. Well before Lerner and Klein adopted the term “sacrifice zones,” Luke discussed the same problem under the heading of “externalization zones.” He writes: “The occupants of externalization zones—ordinary people—have rarely shared equally in the economic profits or working benefits of these arrangements. Instead they suffer; they are poisoned; they pay” (Capitalism, Democracy, and Ecology, 239).
empires conceive of their land "as a frontier of conquest … rather than a home." Ecological populism proceeds from Klein’s broadened understanding of sacrifice zones and emphasizes that these sacrifice zones are, above all, homes. Thus, the primary objective is to prevent ecological homes from being turned into sacrifice zones in pursuit of growth and development.

In fact, the ecological populist can adopt a conception of sacrifice zones even broader than Klein’s. In keeping with my understanding of developmentalism as the set of norms and practices that treat ecological homes of middling monetary value as prime sites for development, sacrifice zones encompass any and all habitations, habitats, and homeplaces that are destroyed, degraded and dispossessed in the wake of development. The ecological populist sees that sacrifice zones include but extend beyond the minority neighborhoods and indigenous communities documented by Lerner and Klein to include habitations damaged and destroyed by climate change, nonhuman habitats demolished by development, and homeplaces degraded beyond recognition by pollution and resource extraction. Even so, Klein is right as a matter of environmental justice to focus especially on marginalized places and the people who inhabit them. As she observes, sacrifice zones are often "[o]ut-of-the-way places … where residents [lack] political power, usually having to do with some combination of race, language, and class." Notably, the prospects for resistance by such marginalized communities are improved by both of the functions of ecological populism that I discussed earlier in this chapter—mobilizing counter-power and making neglected places visible. By mobilizing grassroots democratic political power, such communities will not be left to fight expropriation alone. And by drawing attention to these places, so often absent from news and public discourse, activists, journalists, and others can help alter the existing regime of visibility, making the rights and habitations of marginalized populations visible to a public that is otherwise blind to them. In this way, ecological populism is at bottom a movement for environmental justice.

524 Ibid, 170.
526 Ibid, 310.
Overall, by framing the issue around the immense, even all-encompassing sacrifices that developmentalism requires of the inhabitants of especially the most vulnerable places, ecological populists can frame their arguments around ecological self-defense rather than a politics of self-denial and austerity. The accusation that environmentalists do nothing but ask people to sacrifice jobs and prosperity not only overlooks the tenuousness of the benefits developmentalists promise. It also overlooks the fact that reckless growth, development, and resource extraction require countless sacrifices of their own that, while often hidden and taken for granted, can be immensely damaging to the very communities in which extraction and development take place. Rather than accepting the premise that environmentalism is a politics of austerity, ecological populists have good reason to argue that it is instead the developmentalist who force local communities, and the broader public, to make immense sacrifices, including of the very things they are least interested in losing—their own homes.

**The Political Economy of Ecological Populism and the New Protectionism**

Ecological populists are on solid ground in seeking to bring attention to sacrifice zones and the full cost of developmentalist exploitation of local communities. Yet eco-populism cannot limit itself to the reactive defense of homes and habitats only. This brings us back to Berry’s insistence, which I discussed in Chapter 1, that environmentalists must offer a “countervailing economic idea” to answer that of the developmentalist. Berry recognizes that environmental destruction is in no small part a result of failing local economies whose people, in their desperation for jobs and prosperity, often see no viable option but to allow corporations to exploit their local land and labor. “Without prosperous local economies,” Berry insists, “the people have no power and the land no voice.”

Even if ecological populists succeed in emphasizing the injustices and suffering caused by making entire communities and landscapes into sacrifice zones, the benefits of development still can make for a compelling argument for communities desperate for employment and prosperity.

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527 Berry, “The Total Economy,” in *Citizenship Papers*, 76.
To be sure, environmentalists are right to point out that this is often a false choice, and we have already seen in the *Kelo* case from Chapter 1 that the promised benefits of development are often exaggerated or do not come at all. As we have also seen, even if the benefits of development are fully realized, they are not enjoyed by everyone and tend to reinforce an upward redistribution of economic power and welfare. Even so, developmentalist entreaties will still look attractive, and even impossible to pass up, for many more New Londons and other localities unless ecological populists offer an alternative economic model or some other source of wealth and economic security for struggling local communities. Otherwise, localities will continue to be strong-armed by developers into sacrificing their people’s homes and ecosystems.

This suggests that eco-populists should embrace a kind of protectionism. Political scientists and economists typically use the word to describe policies designed to shield (some) domestic firms from foreign competition and price pressures. With this conventional understanding of protectionism in mind, economists in favor of free trade criticize it for hindering growth and providing economic rents to inefficient firms, while others point to the benefits of restricting imports to allow nascent domestic manufacturing to grow or declining domestic agriculture to survive. Regardless of one’s stance on conventional protectionism, though, it is not sufficient to the needs of an ecological populism, for conventional protectionism merely shields national industries and sectors from foreign competition. By contrast, the eco-populist recasts protectionism as a means of self-defense by everyday people in which habitations and habitats are protected from being made into sacrifice zones for development. But this new protectionism can do more than safeguard property in habitations. It can also protect local communities from the corporations that exploit their desperation for jobs and prosperity only to leave when the local economy is no longer useful to them. Rather than insulating national industries from foreign competition, then, this new protectionism would shield local economies from corporate exploitation of their land and labor.528

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528 This understanding of protectionism owes much to Karl Polanyi’s theory of the “double movement” in which the destructive effects of market liberalization and the false commodification of land, labor, and money
Ecological populists will likely see multiple avenues available for achieving this kind of protectionism. One option, currently being pursued by proponents of a Green New Deal, would be to increase federal subsidies and jobs programs—perhaps even a job guarantee—so that local communities have a ready source of employment that does not depend on the extent to which they are willing to bulldoze the homes of their own people or subject their local ecosystems to pollution and habitat loss. This is especially important because it offers the final part of the ecological populist’s answer to the developmentalist’s strongest argument—that, when all is said and done, the local community simply needs jobs and prosperity. By using the power of the state to provide a safety net for local economies, eco-populists can defang the most formidable argument for developmentalism. Moreover, populists can draw not only on the FDR’s New Deal for a blueprint but also the legacy of the far-reaching economic reforms advocated by their own forebears in the late 19th-century Populist movement. The Populist’s economic vision went well beyond the free silver bimetallism for which they are remembered today and included an ambitious system of farmer cooperatives and other means of securing independent economic power for local producers with the specific purpose of ending economic exploitation by corporations that had little regard for the survival and livelihood of any individual farmer or local economy.

Other eco-populists, and especially localists like Berry, would place greater emphasis on rebuilding the independent productive capacity of local communities from the ground up. Like other economic localists, Berry views “a good economy” as one that “depends on itself for many

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were countered by widespread but spontaneous efforts to regulate and limit markets to protect society (Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, esp. pp. 74-80, 145-157). See also the first epigraph to this chapter.


of its essential needs and is thus shaped, so to speak, from the inside—unlike most [that] depend on distant purchases for almost everything and are thus shaped from the outside by the purposes and influence of salesmen."531 To be sure, Berry is under no illusions that any local economy can or should be totally independent. Rather than advocating autarky, he favors local economic sufficiency. “Of course, everything needed locally cannot be produced locally,” but, where possible, local economies would do well to replace “distant dependencies” with “direct practical ties” to “protect [their] own productive capacities.”532 This localist approach has a significant history in environmental political thought, especially among eco-communitarians and bioregionalists who value self-sufficiency and local autonomy, though critics argue that it faces significant problems in a world of global economic ties and competitive pressures that no form of economic protectionism can fully overcome.533 For his part, Berry admits that protectionism ought to include state policies, but, for him, they cannot be the only route to the protection of local economies, especially while government support is still lacking. “If government does not propose to protect the lives, the livelihoods, and the freedoms of its people,” Berry writes, “then the people must think about protecting themselves.”534 Whether self-protection comes in the form of local subsistence and food sovereignty or government policies of economic regulation and fair trade, however, Berry warns that it “will be disparaged by the globalists as protectionism—and that is exactly what it is.”535

532 Berry, “The Total Economy,” p. 75; Berry, “The Whole Horse,” p. 117.  
534 Wendell Berry, “The Total Economy,” 73.  
535 Ibid, 75.
Whether eco-populist protectionism comes in the form of national policies, independent efforts by localities and producers to achieve greater self-sufficiency, or some combination of both, the danger of neglecting the economic exploitation of local economies is the same. If localities like New London find themselves with no viable source of local employment, they must attract outside employers however they can. For many rural communities, this means inviting extractive industries to exploit the land in a desperate attempt to maintain some form of a local economic base. For many cities, this means dispossessing homeowners or granting massive tax breaks to entice potential corporate investment. As Alex Gourevitch observes, this makes localities vulnerable not only to economic exploitation but also to a form of political domination.

“Since all communities need some source of employment, they are dependent upon the decision of some employer or set of employers for their survival,” Gourevitch argues, leaving localities desperate to attract and retain the corporations that hold the keys to local employment. This is bound to influence the behavior of local governments:

Consider, for example, the decision about where to locate a car factory. [...] Whether a plant decides to locate in downtown Detroit or the suburbs of Atlanta has a lot to do with state labor, tax, and environmental law, as well as local union practices and wage demands. Simply that a plant might vacate—or leave—puts pressure on the local population to alter its political and economic behavior. Race-to-the-bottom decisions regarding tax codes and environmental laws … are now familiar moves that cities, counties, and states—even countries—make in order to attract investment.536

For Gourevitch, this state of affairs points to a form of “structural domination,” in which a city (such as New London) is not simply at the mercy of one particular corporate employer (such as Pfizer) but rather corporate employers as such, who have a common interest in maintaining that structural domination.537 This leaves local governments under great pressure to relax

537 Gourevitch is drawing on the neo-republican conception of freedom as non-domination, or the absence of arbitrary power. In his conception of “structural domination,” Gourevitch seeks to radicalize the neo-republican theory of non-domination by applying it not just to relations between individuals and with institutions, but also to classes of people with common interests, such as employers or investors. For the neo-republican conception of liberty, see Philip Pettit, Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; Quentin Skinner, Liberty Before Liberalism, New York: Cambridge University Press, [1998] 2012; Skinner, “A Third Concept of Liberty,” Proceedings of the British Academy, 117: 2001, pp. 237–68. For the radicalization of republican liberty, see Alex Gourevitch, From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century, New
environmental regulations and make land available for developmentalist exploitation, including through private development takings. More broadly, it leaves local economies at the mercy of the whims and interests of outside corporations. Berry also recognizes this problem. "By encouraging this dependence," he writes, "corporations have increased their ability to rob the people of their property and their labor."538 This leaves communities like his own in rural Kentucky at the mercy of outside developers who have no interest in the long-term well-being, or even survival, of the community or its land.539 So long as local economies are dependent on corporate investment, their land and their labor are bound to be exploited. This suggests that eco-populists have good reason to prioritize economic independence, whether by means of national economic reform or local self-sufficiency. Both are ambitious goals, to be sure, but ecological populists will likely see them as important options for preventing local communities from being forced to sacrifice their homes and habitats to developers.

In their efforts to appeal to local communities who might otherwise be suspicious of environmental efforts to limit development, eco-populists can also draw on another fixture of the Populist legacy—it’s ethic of producerism. In their effort to inspire a coalition between farmers and laborers, the Populists drew on a longstanding tradition of 19th-century American political thought according to which the many who create tangible wealth (food and other goods and services) should hold political power rather than the few who enrich themselves with artificial wealth (money) and who enjoy comfort and leisure on the backs of the many.540 While a majority coalition between urban laborers and farmers was already difficult in the late-19th century and all but impossible today, eco-populists might tap into the Populist insight that democracy and economic freedom depend on the protection of the many whose wealth is primarily bound up in tangible assets—especially their homes—from those whose wealth is primarily fungible monetary

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539 "Port Royal ... now exists for ‘the economy’—that abstract accumulation of monetary power that aggrandizes corporations and governments and that does not concern itself at all for the existence of Port Royal." Berry, “Does Community Have a Value?” in Home Economics, Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1987, p. 185.
wealth. Doing so might also help environmentalists counter right-wing populist appeals to people who make their living on the land through manual labor—especially miners, loggers, ranchers, and farmers.541 By recapturing the Populist ethos of producerism, an ecological populism might escape the paternalist theme of white-collar environmentalists telling rural blue-collar workers what they can and cannot do with their local land. It can also help environmentalists further their efforts to build coalitions with labor, an especially important goal for those in favor of a Green New Deal.

By embracing the ethos of producerism as well as policies to free local economies from economic domination, eco-populists might succeed in preventing the consignment of ever more landscapes and human communities to the status of sacrifice zones. Armed with various means to pursue a new economic protectionism in defense not just of homes and habitats but the local economies built around them, ecological populists can make appeals to constituencies who might otherwise view them as hostile to their livelihoods and interests. Whether eco-populists choose the route of local self-sufficiency or a Green New Deal, the goal should be to prevent local communities from having to choose between homes and employment, land health and prosperity, environmental stewardship and economic viability. Environmentalists know that, in the long run, these are all false choices—but for a popular democratic environmentalism to succeed, environmentalists cannot afford to wait for the long run. The long-run imperative of sustainability will not save the countless homes, habitats, and homeplaces that will be degraded and destroyed by climate change and other forms of developmentalist dispossession. Only a populist environmentalism willing to embrace grassroots attachments to place and the restoration of local economic viability can do that.

541 Though, as John Hultgren points out, right-wing populists do not lionize all laborers who make their living on the land—white male coal miners fare better in right-wing mythology than migrant farm workers, for example (Hultgren, “Those Who Bring From the Earth,” 24). For an account of conservation efforts by ranchers and other workers normally associated with anti-environmentalism, see Miriam Horn, *Rancher, Farmer, Fisherman: Conservation Heroes of the American Heartland*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2016.
Conclusion: United in Defense of Home

With its grounding in traditions of economic reform and environmental justice, and with an appreciation for the role of landscapes and ecosystems in a fully human life, ecological populism promises to broaden the appeal of environmental protection beyond those who readily identify as environmentalists. While many environmental thinkers single out anthropocentrism as the primary problem and advocate for a reformed consciousness or ontological shift in the way we conceive of the nonhuman, a focus on ecological belonging demonstrates that one of the greatest assets available to a truly democratic environmentalism is the attachments to nature and landscapes that everyday people already have. Against the environmental paternalist’s implicit assumption that the masses do not care about nature and that only an enlightened vanguard of scientists and purists can save nature from ourselves, an ecological populism understands that everyday people are not as alienated from nature, or as unmoved by the environmental degradation of their own homeplaces, as the ecocentric purist believes. Moreover, against the developmentalist, ecological populists also understand that the immense sacrifices of human and nonhuman homes implied by the present economic system are not simply an injustice but also unacceptable to many everyday people. The distinctive strength of populist politics comes from its capacity to tap into the energies of tangible grievances and attachments and to channel them into concerted efforts at reform against intransigent elites; an ecological populism directs those efforts toward stewardship of the land, protection of human homes, and care for local communities. This is what it means to suggest that eco-populism is a form of militant particularism. Populism is the politics of the grassroots made into a broader democratic movement.

Thus, it is surely not enough for isolated individuals and groups to stand up in defense of their homes. After all, my diagnosis of developmentalism shares with longstanding critiques of neoliberalism, capitalism, and globalization an emphasis on the structural links connecting one sacrifice zone to another—saving one particular place from destruction, while an important victory, does not directly entail the liberation of other places. Mindful of the global (and uneven) reach of problems like climate change and unaccountable economic development, critics of
militant particularism will argue that it is not enough. At best, the critic might say, it amounts to little more than reactive resistance in isolation—the defense of one’s own does not make a movement. Yet this overlooks the core of my argument across these chapters in favor of attending to ecological belonging, that is, to the experiences of value and attachment shared by many and that form the foundation of the human experience of nature. Our ecological homes may be particular, but the appeal of ecological belonging and the need for a home on the land is not. The issue for an ecological populism in defense of home is not simply one of defending any particular habitation, habitat, or homeplace, but of defending ecological homes as such, for everyone—not simply to defend my home or even our homes (however the “our” happens to be defined), but rather homes as such—the collection of places that, in all their exquisite diversity, make up our common home on the earth.

At its core, then, the politics of ecological belonging is a politics of human flourishing. Rather than rejecting economic development out of a misplaced commitment to anti-economism, ecocentric purism, or elitist paternalism, ecological populists favor a rich understanding of human flourishing linked to our environs and our attachments to them. The eco-populist maintains that human flourishing depends on the stewardship of the landscapes in which we live with our nonhuman neighbors; that in stewardship lies the vocation of humankind; that our property in habitations is of immense economic and emotional value; that a good economy produces wealth and prosperity without destroying habitations and ecosystems; that our lives are enriched by the freedom to visit and to remain in environmental homeplaces; and that a world deprived of the species and habitats we now know is a world impoverished.

Thinking of human flourishing in this way—as tied up with dwelling on and with the land—makes us open to our nonhuman neighbors and the places we inhabit together, but it also reminds us that the fate of our nonhuman neighbors is an inescapably human issue at the heart of which is the weightiest question of all—of who we are and what we want to be, both as communities and as a species. That question can only be answered by those communities and by the individuals who comprise them. It is arguably a question that takes us beyond the
competence of political theory. Even so, if my argument in this dissertation is right, our answers to that question must attend to our homes and our experiences as dwellers on the land. For in doing so, and in striving to steward the landscapes on which we make our homes, we might yet protect our greatest inheritance and our most important legacy.
Conclusion—Political Theory, Humanity, and the Environment

In his seminal essay “Political Theory as a Vocation,” Sheldon Wolin observed that, like all disciplines of inquiry, political theory is driven by “problems-in-a-theory,” but the vocation of the political theorist is to choose theoretical problems that address “problems-in-the-world.” Many of the most important works of political theory, he points out, “were a response to crisis,” and not primarily “crises in techniques of inquiry, but from crises in the world.” This led Wolin to an understanding of “epic” political theory, or theory that attempts to address the largest and most momentous political problems and events of the day.\(^\text{542}\) Yet, roughly thirty years later, Wolin also wrote this:

> In a culture that measures life by notions such as progress, development, innovation, and modernization, loss tends to be an experience we are advised to “get past.” Loss belongs to history, while politics and life are about what is still to be done. But maybe loss is related to power and powerlessness and hence has a claim upon [political] theory…\(^\text{543}\)

At its best, then, political theory should address both the epic and the intimate, the crises that assail the real world and the senses of loss that give those crises meaning for everyday people.

While this dissertation itself has no pretense toward epicness, it does attempt to respond to what can only be described as an epic crisis for humanity and for the landscapes it inhabits. Indeed, in light of the ongoing environmental crises of climate change, habitat loss, mass extinctions, and the destruction of human homes by environmental degradation and unrestrained development, it seems that environmental political theory itself and as a whole is both epic and intimate. It is inescapably an investigation of a world-historical crisis that demands drastic social and political change, and it inevitably involves intimate senses of loss that do indeed relate to power and powerlessness, giving those losses a claim on political theory. If political theory is the normative and theoretical investigation into the proper ordering of human societies, then it would be bizarre


malpractice for political theory not to address what will be the defining issue of the 21st century. Fortunately, a group of talented political theorists has been devoting their careers to addressing political theory and environmentalism for several decades, and this dissertation builds upon and extends their efforts.

With an eye especially to the intimate and deeply human losses entailed by the environmental crisis, this dissertation has investigated the dimensions of ecological belonging that everyday people experience in the landscape and in the homes they make there. I began by arguing that, due especially to their democratic deficits and alienating elitism, neither ecocentric purism nor anthropocentric reformism is up to the task of combating developmentalist destruction of human homes and natural habitats. To address this, I explored the possibilities of an eco-populist environmentalism that focuses not on saving nature from ourselves and minimizing our impacts on the land nor on saving ourselves from nature through development or green growth, but rather on protecting the intimate connections to the land that people experience in their homes and the landscapes they inhabit. I stressed that, to thread the needle between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism while offering a democratic answer to the expropriations of developmentalism, it is important not to conflate the economy with moneymaking, environmental stewardship with anti-humanism, attachment to place with nativism, and saving the planet with saving the people from themselves. Chapter 1 offered a distinction between property in habitations and property in fungible wealth that allows environmentalists to champion the defense of the kind of property that matters most while also resisting developmentalist expropriation and destruction. Chapter 2 elaborated on Aldo Leopold's ecological humanism, which locates the ecocentrists commitment to preserving nonhuman habitats for their own sake in an inspiring stewardship vocation for the human species. Chapter 3 incorporated human experiences of both mobility and rootedness into our understanding of place-based attachments to environmental homeplaces in order to account for the experiences of the solastalgia of the rooted resident and the nostalgia of the ecological refugee. Finally, Chapter 4 proposed an ecological populism that overcomes the paternalism and of both purism and technocratic reformism while offering a
defense of local communities from being turned into sacrifice zones exploited by unrestrained development. My goal throughout has been to highlight the human elements of the ecological, and the ecological elements of the human, in order to show that environmental politics can resonate with everyday people if appeals are made to their sense of belonging in the landscape.

Before bringing this dissertation to a close, I will briefly discuss some of the implications of my work for perennial questions of democracy, economy, and the human in political theory while raising questions for further research and acknowledging some of the limits of my approach to environmental politics.

**Democracy and the Environment**

The historian Lynn White Jr. famously asked in 1967 whether our "democratized world can survive its own implications"—namely, the environmental crisis and the threat it poses to human well-being and nonhuman life. One can reasonably question the underlying assumption that democracy is to blame for the crisis, though Terrance Ball is also surely right when he notes that democracy by no means guarantees green outcomes. Bob Pepperman Taylor concluded in his 1992 study of environmental political thought in America that its responses to White’s question "are not as completely developed or satisfactory as we might desire." Fortunately, since then, environmental political theorists have devoted considerable attention to questions of citizenship, republicanism, environmental justice, and the democratic state, going a long way toward addressing the gap that Taylor identified. This dissertation joins this effort, and it does

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so with special attention to the popular motivations that might inspire democratic environmental engagement.

My approach to the politics of ecological belonging suggests that environmental political theory and a democratic environmental politics have much to gain from focusing on the motivations necessary to inspire the sort of democratic assertion required for decisive environmental and economic reform. This helps address John Meyer’s concern about a “resonance dilemma” in which the public appears to recognize many of the environmental challenges of our time, but does not place these issues toward the top of its list of political priorities. Taking a cue from Meyer’s suggestion that environmentalists should seek not to trump people’s everyday concerns but rather to resonate with them, my approach points toward the potential of environmentalists to do just that by focusing their appeals on the human homes and local landscapes that people already care about, allowing a democratic environmentalism to be about defending people’s actual sense of ecological belonging rather than demanding the people to convert to a new set of values or accept the benevolent guidance of unelected elites. My intervention also implies that environmentalists—and, by extension, other social critics—should avoid the paternalistic and patronizing assumption that the many are unenlightened philistines lacking in a rich conception of the good and doomed only to feed the growth machine through reckless and unrestrained consumption. Indeed, as Rancière points out, critics of democracy have long resorted to equating the democratic man with the mindless individual consumer in this way, a stereotype that, while surely familiar and even resonant with many environmentalists of both purist and technocratic stripes, makes for a deeply self-limiting democratic politics. One of the most important aspects of a politics of ecological belonging is that it assumes instead that everyday people are already, or at least potentially, receptive to appeals made on the basis of attachments to the land, to the nonhuman, and to a sense of belonging in the places they call home. Moreover, in emphasizing the importance of protecting human homes as well as natural


habitats, my work follows that of Robert Gottlieb and Steven Vogel in emphasizing the built environment as much as the “natural” environment. In this way, I integrate the ecological belonging that urban dwellers feel in their homes and city parks with those environmental attachments that are more conventionally understood as environmental, such as those that tourists experience in National Parks or that ecocentrists experience in nature preserves. In its very capaciousness, ecological belonging points toward the attachments everyday people have to all of “the places where they live, work, and play.”

To be sure, democratic politics is about more than motivation and engagement. My theory does not address important issues of democratic deliberation, contestation, and representation, nor the thorny question of territorial rights. Crucial questions I have had to bracket include: Who defines membership in a home? Who can legitimately claim to represent a place and its interests? Can nonhuman interests be represented? What does a theory of ecological belonging have to say about national borders and other such boundaries? If ecological belonging points to inhabitancy as a key value, how are the rights of indigenous peoples to be balanced with relative newcomers—that is, how does one reconcile the right of the first occupier with the right of the newcomer? These are important questions that represent avenues for further research in environmental political theory. While I could not touch on them in this study, I have endeavored to stress the openness of home and of place, especially with my emphasis on the role of common property as well as private property in Chapter 1 and on the fundamental importance of human mobility and freedom-in-place in Chapter 3. Moreover, the fact that attachments to place and conceptions of home have and will be contested does not make them any less important as motivators for democratic politics. The politics of ecological belonging does not point to the resolution of disputes over place and belonging, but rather to their importance.


Finally, perhaps the most likely response to my argument for a democratic environmentalism is skepticism that enough people value ecological belonging to the extent required to motivate action. There is no denying that this is a potential limitation of my approach, which does assume, or at least hope, that environmental attachments are more prevalent and more intense than many suppose. However, it is not necessary for an eco-populist to assume that everyone is already primed to stand up in defense of the environment. It is only necessary to suppose that environmentalists will be more successful in their democratic appeals if they speak to existing values like property in the home and affection for places that are a part of one’s life rather than ceding authority to technocrats or demanding all-out conversion to an ecocentric consciousness. Indeed, it is my view that environmentalists have their work cut out for them, even if they make ecological belonging their central focus. Nonetheless, my argument is that environmentalism is more resonant when it appeals to the attachments and values that are available to everyday people. It is no guarantee, but it has the benefit of avoiding the anti-economism, anti-humanism, and elitism of other approaches, and that is a step forward.

**Economy and the Environment**

Environmentalists have long had an uneasy relationship with economics, with development, and with property rights. This is understandable. I have tried to show that environmentalists should forcefully resist developmentalist exploitation of local economies and expropriation of human homes while also offering an alternative economic idea rooted in the protection of local economies and their property in habitations. To be sure, this should not replace but rather supplement environmental effort at achieving environmentally sustainable production and wealth creation. After all, as I stressed at the end of Chapter 1, fungible monetary wealth is indispensable for modern life and is not, in itself, a bad thing. The danger instead is that, in the absence of democratic restraints, developers will destroy human habitations in their pursuit of that wealth. Wealth-creation should not come at the cost of human homes.
Even so, critics may detect a danger that my anti-developmentalist critique might contain the seeds of its own form of environmental purism, leading eco-populists to oppose any development whenever politically feasible and thereby lapsing into an attenuated but still problematic form of the very anti-economism I have sought to overcome. Moreover, one may worry that the politics of ecological belonging, while seeking to protect admittedly valuable things, cannot provide criteria for choosing between competing goods, like the preservation of natural habitats and the production of much-needed goods and services for a local community and the broader global economy. This must be recognized as a live danger, though it is also not the inevitable course of ecological populism. First, recall that my primary focus in Chapter 1 was on deliberate and direct expropriation of homes from their inhabitants. While eliminating such cases of private development takings and enclosure will surely eliminate some opportunities for development in some places some of the time, it hardly entails a dogmatic anti-development stance. Second, one of the purposes of my discussion in Chapter 4 of a new protectionism was to suggest that the choice between sacrificing local homes and giving up jobs and prosperity is often a forced choice that is itself the product of the kind of structural economic domination that Alex Gourevitch identifies. The task of eco-populist political economy, then, is to pursue economic reforms that give local communities a truly free choice as to whether or not the property rights of their local inhabitants are worth sacrificing to attract corporate employment.

Indeed, this suggests a promising avenue for further research. Building on the neo-republican conception of freedom as non-domination, environmental political theorists might develop a theory of economic freedom that addresses not the right to produce, exchange, and use goods and services without any interference from the state, but rather freedom from domination by unaccountable corporations enabled by government neglect of local communities. This is work that I am interested in pursuing myself, and it points toward a broader potential for progressive environmentalists to reclaim the language of liberty from their conservative critics. When we think of economic liberty, we tend to think of the right to use and dispose of property as one likes. But, on an environmental understanding, economic liberty may also require some level
of economic sufficiency for local economies, much as it might for individuals. Just as some theories of freedom recognize that the choice made by a starving man to work for a wage is not entirely free, so too might they recognize that the choice made by a struggling local community to expropriate homes and destroy ecosystems is not entirely free, either. Such work can also build on the recent efforts of scholars like Sharon Krause to theorize an environmental politics of non-domination on behalf of both humans and nonhumans. Attention to economic non-domination can help political theorists flesh out the sorts of economic reforms necessary to pursue environmental non-domination in practice, and this can be done by pursuing the line of investigation at which I could only hint in Chapter 4—namely, a perusal of past economic policies and reforms in and beyond the United States, including the Populist reforms and the New Deal, with an eye to developing a theory of the economic conditions of local economic non-domination. Wendell Berry’s economic localism, as well as his populist support for farmer cooperatives, also is worth further investigation, as is Aldo Leopold’s critical appraisal of the New Deal’s conservation efforts. Importantly, care needs to be taken to ensure that environmental localism does not become another purist form of withdrawal. While pursuing a greater degree of economic sufficiency at the local level may be conducive to good land-use and even economic liberty, it should not be taken as a means of withdrawing from the global market economy. If it does, then it risks incurring the same democratic deficits that plague ecocentric purism and anthropocentric reformism.

552 Another promising avenue for further investigation would be the existing movements of “sustainable materialism” that David Schlosberg and Luke Craven have recently documented (Sustainable Materialism: Environmental Movements and the Politics of Everyday Life, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
Finally, while my approach to the question of humanity and nature stresses the ecological elements of humanity and the human elements of ecology, it also stresses the distinctive capacities and even exceptionalism of human beings as well as the autonomy and separateness of nonhuman beings. This means that this dissertation is in part a critical response to recent trends in political theory and the environmental humanities toward post-humanism and a “hybridist” collapsing of the distinction between human and nonhuman. Here the work of Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, Timothy Morton, and Jason Moore is especially noteworthy, as are post-humanists like Rosi Braidotti. For all of these thinkers, the global environmental crisis reflects an ontological dualism between humans and nature, and the solution is often couched in terms of a new ontology—Latour’s actor-network theory, Bennett’s vibrant materialism, Morton’s object-oriented ontology, Moore’s hybridism, and so on.

While received categories of nature, society, and the human in Western thought are worth interrogating, especially when they are rooted in static essentialisms, it may not be helpful to go too far down the post-humanist and hybridist road. First, while the post-humanists are not generally ecocentric purists—indeed, Morton explicitly distances himself from that style of eco-critique—they do praise the “the great humiliation of the human” that began with Copernicus and Darwin and culminates, presumably, in the wisdom of post-humanism. As I argued in the introductory chapter and in Chapter 2, a chastening of humanism is a laudable goal, but the explicit attempt by post-humanists to decenter and destabilize the very notion of the human is at once idle and alienating. One can only wonder how such ideas would be received by the general

public. At best, they might be dismissed as bizarre; at worst, the humiliation of the human may be mistaken as an elite attempt to humiliate actual humans. Indeed, I stressed the human exceptionalism in Leopold’s stewardship vision and his call to a higher nobility for the human species precisely because of how important it is to seek to inspire the public rather than simply attacking humanism and anthropocentrism, as ecocentric purists have done for decades. Reflections by scholars in the humanities on how to understand the “human” in “humanities” certainly have their place, but they become a potential liability when wedded with environmental theory, especially given environmentalism’s fraught relationship with misanthropy and anti-humanism. In light of Leopold’s ecological humanism, I would argue that it is unnecessary, and potentially alienating, for environmental theorists to reject, or even entirely decenter, the human.

Moreover, doing away with the distinction between society and nature, and between the human and the nonhuman, leaves us unable to make full sense of the causes and consequences of environmental destruction. As Simon Hailwood argues, understanding the full scope of human relations to nonhuman nature is conceptually and phenomenologically complicated, and it requires attending to both the hybridities and the distinctions between human society and nonhuman nature.556 And, as Andreas Malm argues in opposition to the hybridism of Latour and Moore, the current ecological crisis does not negate the imperative to distinguish the human from the nonhuman, but rather makes it all the more urgent.557 Even worse, environmental scholarship that collapses the distinction between the human and the nonhuman can unwittingly reinforce discourses surrounding the Anthropocene according to which the preservation of “nature” is impossible in a world shot through with human impacts. At its best, the Anthropocene can be an invitation for human beings to attend better to their global responsibilities in light of their considerable, though still limited, power over the planet. At its worst, though, the Anthropocene idea’s rejection of nonhuman nature can make mass extinctions and habitat loss into a fait

accompli. Far from saving nature from Cartesian dualism, this would consign nonhuman nature to destruction by the very humans that post-humanists and hybridists decenter only in their own ontologies.

All of this suggests that the way forward, both theoretically and in terms of concrete politics, is not to be found in attacking the ideas of nonhuman nature and the human, both of which remain deeply resonant for the public. Instead, as I have attempted to do in this dissertation, the more promising route, both philosophically and for the sake of resonant environmental criticism, is to highlight the various interconnections between human and nonhuman life while retaining a sense that humanity is distinctive and even exceptional in the broader ecological community. As Sharon Krause argues, the post-humanism of scholars like Bennett offers “few resources for making sense of our distinctly human responsibilities.”

Leopold’s ecological humanism and the stewardship vocation are much more promising in this regard. By calling humanity to a higher and distinctive purpose all its own, Leopold’s stewardship mission is more resonant with popular values, and offers better guidance about how humans should behave in the land community, than the post-humanist effort to deconstruct the idea of the human.

**Stewardship, Species-Doubt, and Ecological Belonging**

In a revealing comment in their bibliographical review of work in environmental thought, deep ecologists Bill Devall and George Sessions praise Berry’s *The Unsettling of America* but

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559 I also agree with John Meyer’s assessment that the new materialist’s insistence on an alternative ontology poses the same risks of alienating the public as other outside critics. For Meyer, “a work that sets out to transform something characterized as a social ontology is more likely to be received by other members of the society as patronizing and paternalistic than enlightening or consciousness raising.” Moreover, “the preoccupation with ontology in many such works supposes that we must (and can) transform our way of seeing the world in order to engage its materiality. We don’t need to, and calls to do so work at cross-purposes with the promise of engaging the everyday” (172). John M. Meyer, *Engaging the Everyday: Environmental Social Criticism and the Resonance Dilemma*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015, pp. 67 and 172.

lament his adherence to what they call “the ‘stewardship’ model” of environmental thinking. In reply, the question ecological agrarianism poses to the deep ecologist is: what, precisely, is wrong with the stewardship model? The answer seems to be that it places the human being in a privileged position in relation to the rest of nature. Berry’s reply to this is instructive. “I don’t know how the human species can avoid some version of self-centeredness; I don’t know how any species can. An earthworm, I think, is living in an earthworm-centered world; the thrush who eats the earthworm is living in a thrush-centered world; the hawk who eats the thrush is living in a hawk-centered world. Each creature, that is, does what is necessary in its own behalf, and is domestic in its own domus or home.” For Berry, “we value this passing work of nature that we call ‘the natural world,’ with its graceful plenty of animals and plants, precisely because we need it and love it and want it for a home.”

Yet the chastening lessons of species-doubt and the ecocentrist’s insistence on protecting nonhuman beings for their own sake should not be rejected out of hand. On the contrary, they should be regarded as one of the greatest lessons of environmental thought for humankind. In this vein, Leopold quotes E.A. Robinson’s poem *Tristram* as an “injunction” to humanity regarding its unique place in nature:

> Whether you will or not
> You are a King, Tristram, for you are one
> Of the time-tested few that leave the world,
> When they are gone, not the same place it was.
> Mark what you leave.

“Mark what you leave.” This does not mean, against the deep ecologist, minimizing human impacts on the land or treating modern society as a disease to be eradicated. But it also does not mean that environmentalism must always pay or that economic development ought to be restrained only by considerations of economic sustainability. Rather, it means that our species has a unique capacity and responsibility to reckon with the marks it leaves, to steward rather than...

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563 Ibid. 147.
conquer the land. Moreover, as both Berry and Leopold recognize, human beings strive to
steward the land not just out of a sense of duty but as an expression of their own sense of
belonging in the land. In this sense, stewardship and human flourishing are intimately intertwined.
By practicing stewardship of the lands that we and our nonhuman neighbors inhabit together, we
might yet succeed in addressing the environmental crisis before we decimate the land community
and its nonhuman inhabitants. Better yet, we might at least be able to entertain the possibility,
however remote it may seem now, that Alan Weisman raises in the course of his thought
experiment of a world without us. Maybe, just maybe, he suggests, “instead of heaving a huge
biological sigh of relief, the world without us would miss us.”565 As I have attempted to show in
this dissertation, living up to this goal would require a popular democratic politics in defense of the
homes and habitats we share on the land with our nonhuman neighbors. By making existing
ecological attachments the centerpiece of a democratic environmental politics, environmentalists
can incorporate the species-doubt of ecocentrism with a multidimensional understanding of
human flourishing in the land, allowing us to meet the present moment of ecological crisis by
protecting both the common home we share and the particular homes we cannot bear to lose.

Bibliography


*Just v. Marinette County*, 56 Wis. 2d 7, 201 N.W. 2d 761 (1972).


