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Living Together in Communal Ecodependence: An Animated Approach to Interspecies Politics

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LIVING TOGETHER IN COMMUNAL ECODEPENDENCE:
AN ANIMATED APPROACH TO INTERSPECIES POLITICS

by

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B.A., Hobart and William Smith Colleges, 2009

A thesis submitted to the
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This thesis entitled:
LIVING TOGETHER IN COMMUNAL ECODEPENDENCE:
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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline

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Living Together in Communal Ecodependence: An Animated Approach to Interspecies Politics

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Ajume Wingo

ABSTRACT

If politics is the study of how *we* do and should live *with* others, then community is the lived expression of politics. Within political philosophy, however, community is an oft misused and neglected tool that functions to illegitimate genuine interspecies politics by narrowly conceiving of the communal “with” and “we.” Following a critical genealogical examination of the dominant communal discourse, I offer the theory of communal “ecodependence” as a fresh, though not rootless, approach to community. I will argue that by emphasizing the irreducible and lively nature of community, the ecodependent approach not only avoids the additive, atomistic, anthroponormative, and proprietary pitfalls of the orthodox framework but seeks to repair the damage done by these ‘four threads.’ Ultimately, the goal of reframing communal entities and bonds ecodependently is to generate meaningful political response to the inter- and intra-species injustices that so often take root in community’s potentially liberatory soils.

*For Chutzpah, Patch, Cinders, Tammy, Noodlehead, Cutie, M.G.,
Milo, Squeaky, Oliver Twist, Una Nyx, Pumpkin, Tigger,
Cira, Lunabat, Phoebe, Yuri, Luka, Pip,
and all my animal family yet to come.*

*And in memory of Dorrie,
who knew how to speak with the forest.*

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PREFACE

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.

– John Donne¹

Community has always been about more to me than human company. My family will sometimes joke that my passion for interspecies justice all started with the children's song "Hey, Mr. Spider," which claimed that its protagonist, a somewhat troublesome arachnid, was "a living thing, and he's got feelings too."² Then again, perhaps that seed took root in the melodious insistence of Disney's Pocahontas that we question those who claim that "the only people who are people are the people who look and think like you."³ In the end, it is probably much more likely that my parent's liberal approach to childrearing and the extensive time I spent playing outdoors with my canine brother and feline sister helped most to put me on this path.

From my mother I learnt to talk to the plants in our garden. I was wary of the vindictive crab-apple tree and enamored with the pungent tomato plants that tried to cling to my clothes. My father imparted upon me a great love of knowing the names of my non-human friends—sycamore, cicada, lichen, fisher, birch—and a reverence for the magnificent complexity and interdependence of the natural world, our world. I found an easy, tangible intimacy with the trees whose oxygen I breathed, the ants who tried to steal my sandwiches, and the owners of the many eyes that I knew watched me from the bracken and branches during my daily woodland romps. I

¹ John Donne, "Devotions upon Emergent Occasions: Meditation XVII," in *John Donne: The Major Works*, edited by John Carey, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 199), 344.

² Linda Arnold, "Hey, Mr. Spider," *Make Believe*, 2005, compact disc, originally released in 1986.

³ Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz, "Colors of the Wind," *Disney's Pocahontas (Original Soundtrack)*, 2005, compact disc.

always felt far more at home in the recovering timber forests of western Massachusetts than I did amongst my human peers. Having taken *The Lorax* to heart, I wept at age fourteen when I discovered that my best tree-friend had been cut down by the new owners of my childhood home. I could not understand how a swimming pool warranted that kind of heartless destruction.

Somewhere along the line, I was told that my connection with non-humans was neither relevant to nor appropriate for academic philosophy. Emotions can often be unwelcome in a discipline that continues to cherish dispassionate reason above all else. The ardent animal rights activist Peter Singer himself objects vigorously to incorporating our love (imagine someone spitting out a dirty word) for non-human animals into our philosophical deliberations about their rights and wellbeing.⁴ In one sense, I agree with him that our love, disdain, indifference, etc. with regards to non-humans should not have any bearing upon whether or not they ought to be included within the political arena. In another sense, I cannot imagine determining exactly *how* non-humans fit into any political schema without examining what linkages (emotional or otherwise) they have to the human world. And so here I am, attempting to vindicate the connection I have always felt to plants and animals by integrating these beings into our understanding of community. The first line from John Donne's poem in the epigraph above has been quoted often enough to become a nearly meaningless cliché. The latter part is both considerably more obscure and insightful. I am particularly taken with the idea that (modifying the passage slightly) any being's death diminishes me, because I am involved in earthkind. Ultimately, it is this idea of 'earthkind' and how it is made possible by interspecies communal interdependence that lies at the core of my project.

⁴ Peter Singer, "Preface," in *Animal Liberation*, updated edition, (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009), ix-x.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

At its heart, politics is about how we do and should live together. Political philosophy aims to critically reflect upon the realities and possibilities of living with others. Such reflections are useful when they help us live together well. Central to this process of critical reflection are the questions “Who are *we*?” and “What brings us *together*?” These two questions also function to frame the concept of community. In fact, there is a sense in which ‘community’ is the answer to these questions, albeit a very general one. In this way, politics can be thought of as the study of community and community as the lived expression of politics.

From the Latin words *com* (meaning ‘with’ or ‘together’) and *munus* (meaning ‘gift’ or ‘duty’), community was originally framed as the obligatory gift of living together with others.¹ Both the inescapable and the collaborative qualities of community have been greatly diluted in the Western philosophical tradition, that is, the discourse of community I am primarily concerned with in this project. Indeed, the tendency of political philosophers (with notable exceptions) has been to devalue and deemphasize the relevance of community altogether. Instead, the autonomous individual, specifically Man, occupies center stage in the political arena. With the scope of communal membership (i.e., the ‘we’) severely restricted and communal bonds (i.e., the ‘together’/‘with’) watered down to simple arithmetic, the popular discourse of community can only offer an incomplete and deeply problematic understanding (with regards to both gender and interspecies justice) of how we ought to live together well. My primary objective in this project is to offer an alternative approach to community that not only avoids

¹ In this context, I understand the ‘gift of living together’ to mean the dynamic processes of reciprocal exchange (i.e., the interdependencies) that constitute communal living.

these pitfalls but actively aims to repair the damage done by the myopic and individualistic communal methodology that has long prevailed.

Before I can propose an alternative, however, I need to develop a critical analysis of the dominant philosophical discourse of community and the politics it produces. For this reason, my project begins in Chapter Two by sketching a partial genealogy of community. With this genealogy, I intend to (a) identify the four primary components, or threads, of the mainstream approach, (b) examine the ways in which these threads are historically intertwined, and (c) demonstrate how the vision of community woven by these threads is distinctly unfriendly to an interspecies communal politics. Though the quartet of components—the additive, the atomistic, the anthroponormative, and the proprietary—I discuss represents but four threads in the larger conceptual tapestry of community, together they compose the principal motif in an otherwise jumbled composition.

Building off of this critique of the dominant discourse, in Chapter Three, I present my alternative approach—communal ecodependence—with the aim of creating a meaningful (i.e., descriptively adequate and practically significant) interspecies politics. Towards this goal, I (a) acknowledge the critics of Liberal community and anthroponormativity to whom my project owes so much, (b) argue that, when pursued separately, both of these avenues of critique are incomplete, (c) put forth the theory of communal ecodependence as a way of merging these two lines of thought so as to reframe community as irreducible and inescapably alive, (d) situate my project within the field of critical theory, and, finally, (e) discuss the political uses and popular appeal of communal ecodependence.

In Chapter Four, I attempt to anticipate objections from potential allies by addressing four broad challenges with regards to understanding and implementing the theory of communal

ecodependence: (a) the impossibility and undesirability of universal resonance, (b) the difficulties of an interspecies critical theory, (c) the question of individual autonomy, and (d) the totalizing dangers of community. In this way, I hope to both sooth some of the worries that will no doubt arise in response to my project and provide a better sense of communal ecodependence's practical and theoretical boundaries and limitations.

Finally, I conclude by applying the theory of communal ecodependence to a concrete instance of communal injustice. This brief sketch offers a glimpse into the kinds of response that are possible when we take the lively, irreducible nature of community to heart. Ultimately, I hope that communal ecodependence can provide us with the appropriate tools to consciously and respectfully engage with our communal partners whether they be human or nonhuman.

CHAPTER TWO

A Genealogy of Community: Four Threads

I: Notes on Methodology

This chapter is intended as a concise genealogy of community. What is a genealogy? Foucault suggests that a genealogical project is not about origins.¹ Genealogy does not trace a single chronological lineage or produce a lengthy chain of biblically inspired begats. My genealogy will not try to pinpoint the ‘birth’ of community either as a concept or as an institution. Instead, it offers a critical analysis of the dominant philosophical discourse of community and the politics it produces. I envision community as a complex conceptual tapestry, the problematic threads of which need to be properly highlighted within the weft and warp before they can be unraveled. The quartet of conceptual threads—the additive, the atomistic, the anthroponormative, and the proprietary—that I investigate here are by no means logically independent. Rather, the various facets of community’s framing overlap and support each other in myriad ways. I have nonetheless chosen to treat these threads as distinct elements in the conceptual weave. This is done both for clarity and so as to better highlight the precise manner in which these four components depend upon each other. I would also like to acknowledge that there are surely many more threads that could be plucked from the tapestry of community. The four I discuss in this genealogy are those I consider (a) amongst the most historically prominent and (b) the most relevant to the politics of community (interspecies or otherwise). These are also those aspects of community in the Western philosophical tradition that most conflict with an ecodependent understanding of communal entities and bonds.

¹ Gary Aylesworth, “Postmodernism,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 2012–, accessed March 3, 2013, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/#3>>.

Together, these four threads sound the dominant chord in the conventional anthem of community. It is my hope that the theory of communal ecodependence will be able to provide a productive dissonance—a clarion call of sorts—in response to this well established tune. In order to situate and assess this aspiring heterodoxy, however, we must first have a firm grasp on the orthodox approach and its political implications. For the sake of arriving quickly at the heart of the matter (i.e., my proposed alternative), this genealogical project is executed in broad brushstrokes. It is not an exercise in exacting pointillism. As broad as my brushstrokes may be, it is not my intent to offer up a patchy canvas. The overall picture must be lucid and vibrant, even if up close there are details that get glossed over. I aim for water lilies. Thus, my genealogy is an incomplete, albeit strategically incomplete, and somewhat impressionistic endeavor.

II: The Additive Thread

It is vain to talk of the interest of the community, without understanding what is in the interest of the individual.

— Jeremy Bentham²

There is no such thing as society.

— Margaret Thatcher³

What can we make of this quote from Bentham’s infamous *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*? At first glance, we might interpret Bentham as claiming, rather modestly, that communal interests cannot be determined without an understanding of what is good for the constituents of any given community. In fact, it seems quite foolhardy to suppose the opposite—that we can know the interests of a community without having some idea of who

² Jeremy Bentham, “Chapter I: Of the Principle of Utility,” *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, in *The Library of Economics and Liberty*, I.6, accessed November 13, 2012, <<http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML1.html>>.

³ Margaret Thatcher Foundation, “Interview for *Woman's Own* (‘no such thing as society’),” accessed December 3, 2012, <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>>.

composes said community and how it is that they do so. This modest claim, however, is not quite what Bentham has in mind. What he would have us believe is something far more troubling, namely, that the interests of the individual can be ascertained without any reference to her community.

That he intends the latter of these two claims (i.e., the troubling rather than the modest) becomes eminently clear when we take Bentham's remark in context. Directly preceding the quote I chose for the above epigraph, Bentham writes, "The community is a fictitious *body*, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its *members*. The interest of the community then is, what?—the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it."⁴ This is not a dialectical methodology, that is, one that would have us consider individual and community in tandem as mutually constitutive entities with interdependent interests. Rather, Bentham's approach forces us to first consider the individual 'outside' of the community and then the community in a merely additive sense. By 'additive' I mean to express the notion that the rights of a community are nothing more, or less, than the sum total of the rights of the individual constituents of said community. Bentham's second quote above epitomizes this additive logic with regards to community.

Bentham's claim that communities are additive 'fictions' is not an exclusively utilitarian rallying point, though the utilitarian tendency towards reductive philosophical arithmetic makes that school of thought especially keen on additive conceptualizations of community.⁵ Bentham is echoed by Margaret Thatcher when she claims that "there is no such thing as society" only a

⁴ Bentham, "Of the Principle of Utility," I.5. The italics here are Bentham's.

⁵ Though considering the happiness of a community holistically rather than additively is perfectly consistent with the goal of maximizing utility, from an empirical standpoint, it may very well seem simpler to determine the happiness of discrete individuals. Of course, this apparent simplicity is only possible when we envision the individual in a particular light, the precise nature of which I will discuss in the next section.

“living tapestry” of individual men and women.⁶ Similarly, Robert Nozick reflects, “There is no social entity...There are only individual people, different individual people, with their own individual lives.”⁷ Somewhat more colorfully and disparagingly, Ayn Rand warns us of the ‘dangers’ of associating community with anything more than a loose collection of independent individuals, writing:

*The word "We" is as lime poured over men, which sets and hardens to stone, and crushes all beneath it, and that which is white and that which is black are lost equally in the grey of it. It is the word by which the depraved steal the virtue of the good, by which the weak steal the might of the strong, by which the fools steal the wisdom of the sages...I am done with the monster of "We," the word of serfdom, of plunder, of misery, falsehood and shame. And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, this god whom men have sought since men came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride. This god, this one word: "I."*⁸

For these theorists and others within the dominant discourse, the additive community is quite explicitly nothing more than a sum total, a tool for making quantitative or ‘macro-level’ claims about what really matters—the individual. In this way, the macro-level is just a convenient stand in for the micro-level. For example, “Massachusetts is a democratic state.” Massachusetts is a democratic state because the total number of individual democrats exceeds the total number of individual republicans, greens, etc. Community is a fully reducible entity, a series of ‘1+1+1+1’ where the ‘+’s say nothing about how individuals relate to each other. To be a democrat, a Massachusettsan, an American, or a human being, requires no mention of other individuals. To be a part of any one of these communities means something about you

⁶ Margaret Thatcher Foundation, “(‘no such thing as society’).”

⁷ Robert Nozick, *State, Anarchy and Utopia*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), 32–3.

⁸ Ayn Rand, *Anthem*, (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1946), 97.

independently. Members of additive communities may share certain characteristics (e.g., being a citizen of Boulder means that you have the feature ‘resides within city limits’), but determining whether said characteristics apply to an individual in the first place is accomplished without reference to anyone else. I am part of the Boulder community because my address locates me within city limits. Others’ addresses similarly ‘locate’ them as Boulder citizens but we do not depend upon each other for our locations within the community. As a mathematical apparatus, additive community is more like a ghost, a phantom, than a genuine part of our material existence.

That Bentham, Thatcher, Nozick, Rand, and others treat community as a (potentially dangerous) fiction and the Individual as inescapable fact is readily apparent. *Why* and *how* they do so, however, is not quite so obvious. In the next section, I intend to clear up these uncertainties by exploring the atomistic underpinnings of additive community.

III: The Atomistic Thread

I am not a number, I am a free man!

— *Number 6*⁹

Given the diversity of those who sing its praises, what does the additive treatment of community really depend upon? I maintain that at the core of the additive model of community is an atomistic understanding of human beings (or, perhaps more appropriately, huMan beings, Man for short).¹⁰ According to the atomistic line of thought, Man is an isolated being. For

⁹ The Museum of Broadcast Communications, “The Prisoner,” accessed March 15, 2013, <<http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=prisonerthe>>. *The Prisoner* is a British television show that ran from 1967–8, starring the legendary Patrick McGoochan as prisoner Number 6. A former secret agent held against his will in the mysterious and utterly bizarre community called The Village, Number 6 asserts his independence and individuality with his catchphrase, “I am not a number, I am a free man!”

¹⁰ I will discuss my decision to refer to the atomistic individual as Man in the next section. For now, suffice it to say that the atomistic individual is historically rooted in a gendered discourse that universalizes a masculinized subject. I

example, Bentham would have us believe that happiness is not a communal affair. The fact that we may depend upon each other for happiness is not irrelevant, but the conditions that make happiness possible have no direct bearing upon our assessment of an individual's wellbeing. In his essential capacity for happiness, Man is alone. His pleasures and pains are his own. Men can feel happiness together, but sharing the experience of happiness does not connect them in any substantial way. Similarly, Nozick and Thatcher believe that the lives of Men are their own. Men may live together but they are alive individually. Man is atomistic because the only ties he has to others are non-essential; relating to others does not change anything important about who he is most fundamentally.

As an atom, Man is incapable of fusion. He can accompany but not merge with other atoms, with other Men.¹¹ These social atoms are not akin to the physical entities whose name they share. They do not share electrons or fuse nuclei. Men are atoms in the traditional sense, isolated and indivisible. As such, they are much more like marbles than the atoms of modern physicists. We can pool marbles together; we can subdivide and rearrange, but the individual marbles never change and a marble community is never more than a loose assortment. Communities are additive under the orthodox view because there is no other way for such isolated, atomistic creatures to be arranged. What more can you do with two such '1's than make an even and easily divisible '2'? Reinforcing this point Donna Haraway writes, "Smoothly preconstituted entities do not ever meet in the first place. Such things cannot touch, much less attach; there is no first place."¹²

use 'Man' to keep the gendered implications of atomism front and center. I use 'huMan' to emphasize how this masculine subject is integral to our species identity.

¹¹ Unlike 'Woman,' whom we are told is incomplete without Man, family, children, etc.

¹² Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 287.

Similarly, additive communities themselves are isolated entities with regards to other communities. After all, how could communities depend upon or mingle with each other in any kind of fundamental sense when all ‘community’ signifies is ‘individual A + individual B...+ individual X’? Like two boxes of marbles, additive communities can be placed beside, above, beneath, etc. one another, so to speak, but any attempt to get them to converge will simply result in a motley mass of muddled marbles. The empty bonds of additive community do not allow for communities qua communities to interact with each other. Like drops of water, two communities can be rearranged to form one, but they do not retain any of their old ‘selves.’ Fictions can only mingle fictitiously.

When Margaret Thatcher claims that society does not exist, it is because her atomistic understanding of the individual/family does not allow for these ‘social units’ to be grouped in any way to suggest interdependence. When Bentham construes community as a mere sum, it is because he understands individual happiness as an isolated, subjective affair. When Nozick dismisses the possibility of a social entity, it is because, for him, an individual’s liberty is only achieved through stark independence. Finally, when Rand disparages ‘We’ as a crushing, corrosive force, it is because she believes the ‘I’ to be sacrosanct. In these ways, all four authors dismiss the idea of substantive (i.e., non-additive) community and privilege (at times venerate) the individual. This cannot, however, be the whole story; there are deeper philosophical currents at work. Thatcher, Bentham, Nozick, and Rand are not dismissive of community by accident. Rather, they seek to minimize, diminish, or erase community *for the sake of the individual*.

In this section’s epigraph, Number 6 asserts his freedom and individuality in one breath when he refuses to be identified by the numeral that serves to situate him within the community of The Village. Doubtless there are other dynamics that make his resistance meaningful (e.g., the

‘menace’ of communist totalitarianism to the East), but integral to the intelligibility of Number 6’s insubordination is the belief that autonomy is essential to being an individual.¹³ In the atomistic ideological context, community is additive because individuals *need to be atoms* in order to be respected, governed, free, happy, etc.

Thus, we can see the assumed ‘who’ of community dictating the terms of its arrangement, that is, the ‘how’ of community. I do not object to this general methodological strategy (i.e., the ‘who’ of community influencing the ‘how’). In fact, this is the strategy that I will eventually employ. What I do find concerning is the unyielding, atomistic framing of individuality because it encourages and in some ways requires us to contemplate the individual without considering how she is a communally situated being. To get a handle on the politically problematic foundations and implications of the atomistic individual we need to turn to the anthroponormative theme that runs both subtly and overtly throughout the philosophical literature on community.

IV: The Anthroponormative Thread

For as to reason or sense, inasmuch as it alone makes us men, and distinguishes us from the beasts, I prefer to believe that it exists whole and entire in each of us.
— Rene Descartes¹⁴

Reason...teaches all mankind...that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions: for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker;...and being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of Nature, there cannot be supposed any such

¹³ John Christman, “Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 2011–, accessed February 27, 2013, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/autonomy-moral/>>. When it comes to atomism in the Liberal philosophical tradition, I understand autonomy as the capacity for self-governance.

¹⁴ Rene Descartes, “Discourse on the Method...,” in *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on the First Philosophy*, translated and edited by Donald A. Cress, 4th ed., (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 2.

subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours.

— John Locke¹⁵

Descartes believes that reason exists in its entirety in each, individual Man. Though Men taken together form a community of rational beings, their individual rationality does not depend upon the maintenance of a rational community. One can be rational *with* others, but this ‘with’ has the same empty, quantitative underpinnings of the additive ‘+.’ The rational ‘I’/‘I’ can just as easily be rational *without* as *with* others. The quality of individuals that has most often ensured their radical independence from one another just happens to be the very same characteristic associated with huMan uniqueness and superiority—reason. Man depends upon masculinized rationality to ensure his *isolation* and his *dominance*. As Descartes suggests above, reason accomplishes both of these ends in one fell swoop. Though it is hard to separate the two, I will first attempt to show how rationality ensures the isolation of the individual and the species and then go on to illustrate how this has been and continues to be politically significant.

Before I begin, I would like to note that atomism does not necessarily rely upon rationality (anthropocentric or otherwise) to frame individual autonomy.¹⁶ For example, insofar as it grounds atomistic individuality in sentience, utilitarianism may not be rationalistic and, therefore, may not fall prey to the same anthropocentric pitfalls as Descartes and others.

Bentham’s utilitarianism, which was accused of being ‘swine morality’ for failing to elevate huMan pleasures above nonhuman pleasures, comes to mind.¹⁷ Perhaps happiness/pleasure can

¹⁵ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986), 9–10.

¹⁶ In other words, rationalism is a sufficient by not a necessary condition for atomistic individuality and thereby additive community.

¹⁷ John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism,” in *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, edited by Alan Ryan, reprinted with new further reading, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004), 278. Acknowledging the critiques leveled at Bentham in order to salvage utilitarianism, Mill writes, “To suppose that life has...no higher end than pleasure—no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit—they designate as utterly mean and groveling; as a doctrine worthy only of swine...”

be teased apart from the discourse of rational Man.¹⁸ As it stands, however, the vast majority of atomistic tendrils that flourish in Western philosophy grow from distinctly rational seeds. To illustrate this trend, I begin this section by giving a brief overview of some of the most prominent incarnations of rational individualism.

Though the valorization of reason is by no means a strictly a modern phenomenon, it was popularized by Descartes in such a way that bolstered the atomistic individual and thereby the additive conceptualization of community. In both his *Meditations on the First Philosophy* and his *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes assumes that he can raze the structures of his human bias to the ground in order to exist as an autonomous, detached rational entity. He writes of his methodology in the latter, “As regards all the opinions to which I had until now given credence, I could not do better than to try to get rid of them once and for all...I firmly believed that by this means I would succeed in conducting my life much better than if I were to build only upon old foundations and if I were to rely only on the principles of which I had allowed myself to be persuaded in my youth without ever having examined whether they were true.”¹⁹ The inevitably social nature of language—ignored. The epistemic benefits of philosophical collaboration—dismissed. Descartes believes he can start from scratch and find truth on his own. So, perhaps it should not at all be surprising that, as we well know, it is Man’s purely immaterial, rational mind that saves Descartes from floundering forever in doubt. When you embark upon an insular journey for knowledge, the answers you discover will no doubt have (at least partially) insular foundations. With ‘cogito ergo sum’ as his philosophical cornerstone, Descartes establishes that the rational mind, the essential part of Man, exists in immaterial isolation. In doing so, he

¹⁸ Then again, as Sara Ahmed argues in her book *The Promise of Happiness*, perhaps happiness can only be evaluated through value laden categories that often (though not necessarily) originate from and function to reinforce the hegemonic discourse of rational Man (Ahmed 5).

¹⁹ Descartes, *Discourse*, 8.

champions an isolated understanding of the huMan individual that has proved profoundly influential.

Though he disagrees with Descartes on many counts, another iconic and influential philosopher, Immanuel Kant, uses reason to ground moral worth and responsibility as well as an atomistic account of individuals. Like Descartes, the foundation of Kant's philosophical inquiry rests upon a priori principles contained within the rational huMan mind.²⁰ As he makes clear in both the *The Metaphysics of Morals* and in his correspondence with Maria von Herbert, Kant believes it to be the wish of every rational being to achieve a state of blissful indifference.²¹ Such perfect apathy/bliss is only truly possible for Kant's Supreme Being, after whom Man is fashioned. The dispassionate mind, however, means more to Kant than contentment. Man's rational will, though imperfect, is also what assures his autonomy and admittance into the kingdom of ends (as an end in himself).²² Without his rationality, Man could not have decisive authority over his own actions through his adherence to the categorical imperative that reason requires him to endorse.²³ In this way, it is reason that makes possible Man's ability to self-

²⁰ Lara Denis, "Kant and Hume on Morality," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 2012–, accessed January 23, 2013, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-hume-morality/#FreWil>>.

²¹ Rae Langton, "Maria von Herbert's Challenge to Kant," accessed November 9, 2012, <<http://www.homepages.ed.ac.uk/rhl/maria.html>>. A great admirer of Kant, Maria von Herbert wrote to him for advice in 1791 after her decision to put Kant's philosophical ideals into practice resulted in disaster. Engulfed by despair and considering ending her life, von Herbert turned to Kant for advice. Kant's response was to tell her that she had not lost anything of value and that the fulfillment she could now obtain unfettered by interpersonal attachments would far outweigh any enjoyment to be gained from companionship. In her next letter, to which Kant never responded, Maria von Herbert asked Kant if she could visit him because she wanted to 'know what kind of life (*his*) philosophy has led (*him*) to.' As someone who had experienced firsthand what it was like to view life with indifference, perhaps von Herbert was starting to doubt that bliss was only to be found in dispassionate existence.

²² Josephine Donovan, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, and Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 169–71.

²³ Robert Johnson, "Kant's Moral Philosophy," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 2012–, accessed January 22, 2013, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/#Aut/>>. Since it is his own rational will telling him to endorse the categorical imperative, Kant believes that being constrained by the categorical imperative is an expression of Man's autonomy.

govern. Without rationality (and thereby autonomy), nonhumans “‘are there merely as a means to an end,’ that end being man.”²⁴

Whether inspired by these two intellectual behemoths or by others in the Western canon, schools of thought that take the ‘gold standard’ of rationality to heart, such as social contractarianism (e.g., Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Rawls), Laissez-faire economics (e.g., Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill), and early liberal feminism (e.g., Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill), conceive of community (or in their words, ‘society’) as a distinctly rational, and therefore strictly huMan, affair. For example, while he accepts that animals’ capacity to feel pleasure and pain imposes “duties of compassion and humanity” upon those of us who can participate in the social contract, Rawls maintains that nonhumans are “outside the scope of the theory of justice, and it does not seem possible to extend the contract doctrine so as to include them in a natural way.”²⁵ Instead of questioning social contract theory’s reliance on huMan rationality to determine societal membership, Rawls accepts that there is no place for nonhumans within politics.

Even when the possibility of a more holistic understanding of community is allowed by psychologists (a shared sense of community) and sociologists (unity of will), the rational component of communal membership still denies access to the vast majority of nonhumans.²⁶

Beyond the fact that both a shared sense of community and unity of will are unavailable to non-

²⁴ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 2nd ed., (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 182. Here Tom Regan quotes from and comments on Kant’s *Duties to Animals and Spirits*.

²⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 512.

²⁶ Raymond Weinstein, “Tönnies, Ferdinand (1855–1936),” in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology Online*, Blackwell Publishing Inc., 2007–, accessed December 3, 2012. <http://www.sociologyencyclopedia.com/public/tocnode?query=Gesellschaft&widen=1&result_number=1&from=search&id=g9781405124331_yr2012_chunk_g978140512433126_ss1-30&type=std&fuzzy=0&slop=1>. In his classic sociological text, Tönnies differentiates between ‘gemeinschaft’ (i.e., communal society united by natural will) and ‘gesellschaft’ (i.e., associational society united by rational will). It is the former (gemeinschaft) that departs from the orthodox conceptualization of community. The latter (gesellschaft) epitomizes the additive communal bonds and atomistic constituents of the mainstream model.

sentient life forms for obvious reasons, it is unclear how far these psychological and sociological standards could be stretched to accommodate sentient nonhuman animals. Octopi, for example, demonstrate many of the same rational abilities that *Homo sapiens* do; however, it is likely that octopi communities do not possess the shared sense of social mores that generally typifies *gemeinschaft's* 'unity of natural will' in the sociological literature.

It is *our* (precisely whose I will discuss in a moment) kind of rationality that matters to theorizing community in the Western philosophical tradition. To have the ability to enter into a contract, to be economically self-interested, to share a sense of belonging, to recognize unity of will, etc. are all fairly exclusive standards from an interspecies perspective. Using any of these standards as the defining criterion for communal membership restricts community to huManity. We may be able to include the odd cetacean or primate, but these would be rare outliers. Thus, by establishing the defining characteristic of the individual as rationality, not only is the atomistic vision of community made possible but the anthropocentric one as well.

Why should this matter? Why should we care if community is available to our species alone? To begin with, there has never been anything value neutral about qualifying as a legitimate member of community. There is power in being part of community and a great deal of vulnerability in exclusion. Before we can be satisfied that our species is entitled to its monopoly on community, a story needs to be told about the divisive history of community and about the precise character of the gold standard of rationality.

One way in which community's exclusivity has been and continues to be justified is through Western religious teachings. From the Romans who defined themselves and their gods in opposition to the wide world of barbarians, to the Islamic and Judaic concepts of Ummah (i.e., the transnational community Muslim believers) and the Chosen People, respectively, community

has operated as a divisive force.²⁷ The Community (there is only one) separates those who are made in God's image from those who are not.²⁸ In fact, early Christians regarded themselves as 'citizens of heaven' not of earth; the only true community was the one that awaited them in the afterlife.²⁹ Jesus himself is depicted in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as performing a mass exorcism by transferring the demons of possessed 'believers' into 2,000 pigs, who subsequently flung themselves off a cliff and into the ocean to drown.³⁰ When the pigs' caretakers, a village of gentiles, get rightfully upset at Jesus for killing their pigs, Jesus shows no remorse for the pigs' or the gentiles' loss.³¹ Neither are God's chosen and are therefore not part of the community that takes priority—heaven's outpost on earth.

This trend of correlating individual value/worth with communal inclusion can also be seen in the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions—the cradle of Western philosophy. Aristotle famously claims that Man is a "political animal," that is, he tends "by nature to live together with others."³² Despite its notoriety, the phrase 'political animal' is only used 108 times in the entire Aristotelian corpus. All 108 of these uses occur within Aristotle's political/ethical works, that is, within those of his writings that deal exclusively with the human sphere. Though Aristotle does not maintain that Man is the *only* political animal, he quite explicitly states that Man is the *best* political animal.³³ Man is the best political animal because "he is the only animal with rational

²⁷ Robert A. Saunders, "The Ummah as Nation: A Reappraisal in the Wake of the 'Cartoons Affair,'" *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no. 2 (2008):303–4; Deuteronomy 14:2. Deuteronomy claims of the Jewish people, "...thou art a holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be His own treasure out of all peoples that are upon the face of the earth."

²⁸ Both bodily and intellectually being made in God's image has historically meant being Man.

²⁹ Sheldon Wolin, "The Early Christian Era: Time and Community," in *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 100.

³⁰ Matthew 8: 28-34; Mark 5: 1-20; Luke 6: 26-39.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a2; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b19.

³³ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a8–10. For example, bees and other 'gregarious' animals are noted by Aristotle. By contrast, Plato, uses the phrase (a mere 86 times) in a variety of contexts including the biological. Despite this variety, he seems to imply, as Aristotle does, that Man is the best political animal.

discourse.”³⁴ Furthermore, inclusion within Man’s political body (i.e., the city/polis) is the clearly the most valuable way of living together because “anyone without a city because of his nature rather than his fortune is either worthless or superior to a human being.”³⁵ Given that nonhumans are most definitely not higher up than Man on either the Platonic or Aristotelian earthly hierarchies, it is not hard to see how the claim that Man is the best political animal has been most commonly appropriated to mean that *Man is the only political animal who matters*. In other words, he is the only communal being (i.e., one who tends to live with others by nature) who matters. In this way, the polis functioned to draw lines not only between those who were the best at living communally and those whose natures were insufficiently political but also between those who had worth and those who were worthless. As we well know, however, the polis was never a particularly universal institution even amongst humans; who qualified to be a citizen was neither accidental nor apolitical.

Knowing what we do about the fraught history of community, we might be tempted to excuse the gold standard of rationality from any blame given that as community has the unfortunate tendency to unjustly disenfranchise outsiders or the oppressed. Philosophy’s insistence that community be defined by rationality may only be the *latest* incarnation of communal exclusivity, the exclusivity being the ‘real’ problem after all. Perhaps the somewhat more modern development of separating the huMan race by means of our rationality could be blameless in the grand scheme of things. The blame, as Rand would like us to believe, could lie with community itself.

After all, if all the gold standard of rationality enabled us to do was to treat individuals like atoms and our species as uniquely qualified for communal living, this would not be enough

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a2–4.

to call the criterion anthropocentric. Putting our doubts about atomism aside for a moment, simply recognizing differences between species is not inherently problematic. Bats have echolocation; humans have reason. We are all ‘uniquely qualified’ in one way or another. What is so wrong with that? ‘Anthropocentrism’ is a (more or less) pejorative term. It implies that one’s exclusive focus upon humanity is unfair or untenable in some way. Surely, it must be the older hierarchical understanding of community (i.e., insiders good, outsiders bad) that is mucking up the political gears. Rationality could still be apolitical, right? It is the ‘us versus them’ dynamic that gets us into trouble, right? If I have portrayed these questions as desperately grasping at straws, it is because that is precisely what I believe them to be doing.

Perhaps *human* rationality might be excused if such a thing existed, but the gold standard of reason is not founded upon the concept of *human* rationality. As I have alluded to several times, in the context of additive community it is very much hu*Man* rationality that grounds the criterion of communal membership. In this context, rationality is not at all value, species, gender, or racially neutral. Being rational/reasonable is so closely tied to what it means to be Man that a standard of community that excludes all but the rational is a subtle way of excluding nonhumans (and a good number of humans as well) without having to say outright that is what you are doing. Since we have seen that how we understand community matters deeply for how we frame politics (the way we live together), this should make us very suspicious of the supposed neutrality of our gold standard.

What is the connection between being rational and being Man? In the Western tradition, reason is what likens Man to God. Though, according to the book of Genesis, Man is made in the *image* of God, modern philosophers and theologians highlight reason as the hu*Man*ity’s true divine inheritance. As Locke reminds us in the quote at the beginning of this section, God

endowed Man with similar faculties to His own, namely, the faculty of reason.³⁶ Reason is the very essence of Man precisely because it is this quality that makes him different. The divine gift of rationality ensures that Man is set apart from other species (genders, races, etc.). In fact, not only is Man set apart, he is set above. No other species were given gifts comparable to the gift of reason. No other was created in God's own image. Man is uniquely and authoritatively situated in the 'natural' order. As we are so fond of saying, Man is at the 'top of the food chain.' Man commands the hierarchy of living beings. Community is about being huMan, about being worthy of respect.

In this way, being non-rational is equated with inferiority. Furthermore, because failing to be rational also necessitates communal exclusion, existing apart from the community is likewise equated with being less than. To be less than Man—to be non-rational, to be without community—is to be Animal. This is not a matter of differing abilities; it is a matter of valuing one ability above all others. While obviously disadvantageous for nonhumans, this speciesist hierarchy and criterion for communal access has also been tremendously harmful to historically oppressed humans. Anthropocentrism can hurt humans just as much as it hurts nonhumans. When women and non-whites are denied equal communal membership (e.g., the vote, medical autonomy, fair wages), the logic is speciesist if it is done so in the name of reason however subtly. Theriomorphism (i.e., the derogatory likening of humans to animals) is a common method for establishing and reinforcing unjust political states of affairs. For example, currently, the Tea Party and others who would police the boundaries (both literal and metaphorical) of American society advocate for communal exclusion using a racially dehumanizing rhetoric. The matter is more straightforward with nonhumans; attempting to theriomorphize animals is redundant. Lacking rationality, Animal is communally disenfranchised by default.

³⁶ Locke, *Second Treatise*, 9–10.

This normative dynamic of communal inclusion/exclusion is the reason why I have chosen to refer to this aspect of the mainstream communal discourse as the *anthroponormative* thread, as opposed to the anthropocentric or rationalistic thread. Though ‘anthropocentrism’ is indeed a pejorative term, I do not believe it does enough to highlight the fact that not only is Man at the ‘center’ the communal discourse—he is the standard by which all other living beings are judged. Continuing the long tradition of quoting Protagoras out of context, one might even say that “man is the measure of all things.”³⁷ In short, Man is the norm.

When we deign to include animals, or those humans deemed animal-like, within communal protections if not community itself, it is often because we see something of ourselves (e.g., rationality) in them. The dolphin-safe tuna campaign was sparked by the species’ inquisitive and cheerful demeanor. Our primate cousins are deemed ‘special’ (e.g., gorilla poachers are condemned with a vehemence rarely directed at cattle ranchers, fisher folk, or mussel farmers) because they use tools and can in some instances recognize themselves in a mirror. Giant squids are admired for being crafty enough to evade human contact. Animal rights activists highlight the ‘surprising’ intelligence of pigs, rats, chickens, etc. to bolster the appeal of their ethical arguments to the general public. In the United States, advocates of universal suffrage often made their case by attempting to show that women and African Americans were just as intelligent (i.e., rational) as men.

While this inclusion of ‘rational animals’ opens up community in one way, in a more important sense, it functions to reinforce the rigid anthroponormative criteria around which the additive community is organized. While the circumference of inclusion has been (imperfectly) expanded to include women, non-whites, and Man’s best friend in some instances, the gold

³⁷ Carl Poster, “Protagoras (fl. 5th C. BCE),” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, IEP, 2005–, accessed March 13, 2013, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/protagor/>>.

standard of huMan rationality remains fixed firmly to the center of the bull's-eye. In order to achieve communal and, thereby, political inclusion (i.e., the acknowledgment that you live *with* not *for* Man), it is that bull's-eye for which you have to aim. It is not beneficial to be located on the fringes. The closer you are to the epicenter of Man the more you matter and the more fully you are seen to participate in the community. Furthermore, those (relatively) newly included in the community are only valued for their rational capacities. We may appreciate a dog's keen sense of smell, but we will only protect her (legally or socially) for her huMan-like rationality.

More recently, both utilitarian and non-utilitarian animal rights advocates have suggested that sentience replace reason as the basis of moral and political inclusion. While this strategy has become increasingly popular and the larger discourse of community has come to reflect this trend, it is not hard to imagine how huMan sentience could easily replace huMan rationality at the heart of the bull's-eye.³⁸ Neither sentience nor rationality as abstracted ahistorical concepts necessarily lead to speciesism; however, we cannot consider them abstractly and ahistorically if we want to know what has gone wrong with the actual politics of community. For this reason, amongst others that I will examine in the next chapter, I hesitate to see sentience as the savior of interspecies communal politics.

Thus, we can see that the anthroponormative thread does more than just reinforce the additive understanding of community; it also encourages us to see those who are not part of The Community as *less than* those who are. In the next section, I will discuss how this separation of rational huMan superiors and irrational Animal inferiors lends itself to a proprietary communal politics. Being non-communal means being equated with disposability. Pigs, gentiles, racial 'inferiors,' whole ecosystems—those outside the community are only viewed instrumentally due to their lack of 'huManity.' This is the fourth thread that I hope to highlight—the idea that

³⁸ I will discuss the possibility of anthroponormative sentience in greater detail in the next chapter.

whatever does not fit within the additive, atomistic, anthroponormative community can only be considered in an instrumental sense. As Locke says in pursuit of political equality for Man, “we were (*not*) made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours.”³⁹

V: The Proprietary Thread

The mission of Wild Salmon Center is to promote the conservation and sustainable use of wild salmon ecosystems across the Pacific Rim. We identify science-based solutions to sustain wild salmonids and the human communities and livelihoods that depend on them.
— the mission statement of Wild Salmon Center⁴⁰

You think you own whatever land you land on; the earth is just a dead thing you can claim.

— Disney's *Pocahontas*⁴¹

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

— Genesis 1:26⁴²

Environmentalism, like many social movements, breeds strange bedfellows. The environmental non-profit Wild Salmon Center is no exception to this trend. As the lone vegan in an office full of fly fishers, I was often torn between my desire to help ensure that Pacific salmon did not go the way of their Atlantic cousins and my ethical discomfort regarding the organization's philosophy of ‘sustainable use.’ The mission statement of Wild Salmon Center implies that salmon exist to be (a) eaten or (b) the keystone species of numerous aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems that supply human society with invaluable resources (e.g., timber, recreation, biodiversity, clean water).⁴³ After all, it would be wasteful to protect the salmon if it

³⁹ Locke, *Second Treatise*, 9–10.

⁴⁰ Wild Salmon Center, “Homepage,” WSC, accessed December 3, 2012, <www.wildsalmoncenter.org>.

⁴¹ Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz, “Colors of the Wind,” *Disney's Pocahontas (Original Soundtrack)*, 2005, compact disc.

⁴² Genesis 1:26.

⁴³ A ‘keystone species’ is a species that plays a critical, often irreplaceable, role in healthy ecosystem functioning.

was neither the case that we could do something with them (e.g., eat them) or that they could do something for us (e.g., sustain our timber forests). Somehow the fact that human communities depend upon salmon is used to justify conservation practices in which salmon are framed in exclusively instrumental terms. We protect salmon and salmon strongholds only because it is in humanity's interest to do so. Apparently, no one is working *for* the environment, not even the environmentalists.

How are these inherently exploitative conservation practices justified and what warrants their widespread appeal? While researching this project, the song “Colors of the Wind” from Disney’s *Pocahontas* would frequently lodge itself in my brain. I laughed it off—talk about oversimplification and the essentialization of native peoples—but I could not shake the feeling that despite all its gimmicks the song held some small nugget of truth. “You think you own whatever land you land on; the earth is just a dead thing you can claim” is, I would argue, a pretty apt way of summarizing the self-serving arrogance of colonization, what Vandana Shiva calls “cowboy economics.”⁴⁴

The term ‘cowboy economics’ emerges from Shiva’s analysis of the evolution of private water rights during the process of America’s westward expansion/colonization. Also known as the doctrine of prior appropriation—*Qui prior est in tempore, potior est in jure* (He who is first in time is first in right)—cowboy economics can be traced back (in part) to Locke’s discussion of property in his *Two Treatises of Government*.⁴⁵ In his *Second Treatise*, Locke argues that

⁴⁴ Vandana Shiva, “Water Rights: the State, the Market, the Community,” in *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit*. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22–3, 25. In this way, Shiva argues that Locke effectively legitimized what she refers to as “the theft of the commons.”

property is only created when idle natural resources are transformed through human labor.⁴⁶ Of this transformation Locke writes,

*Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a 'property' in his own 'person.' This nobody has any right to but himself. The 'labour' of his body, and the 'work' of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men.*⁴⁷

In this passage, we can see both the anthroponormative and the atomistic threads hard at work to establish Man's proprietary relationship to 'nature.' By 'proprietary' I hope to capture Man's tendency to envision his world as one of society versus property, owners versus the owned. As one bumper sticker I saw around town so eloquently mused, "You either own property, or you are property." In the proprietary vision, community is defined in opposition to that which it has the right to exploit. Man's dependence upon the 'natural world' does not broaden the concept of community. The fact that we depend upon salmon does not encourage us to see them as part of our communities, quite the opposite. We need them and our need turns them into things. The only way to 'annex' nonhuman affairs to Man's is through ownership. Salmon only become part of society as property. After all, God created Man to "rule over the fish of the sea," not to treat them as equals.⁴⁸ Community is a dominion not a cooperative.

Of course, neither Locke nor the proprietary thread more generally can be understood as simply parroting Judeo-Christian scripture. Like the others, this thread is part of a larger

⁴⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁷ Locke, *Second Treatise*, 20.

⁴⁸ Genesis 1:26.

conceptual tapestry. The proprietary dynamic of community (i.e., the external ‘how’ of community) is only made possible because the ‘who’ of community (i.e., Man) has been framed atomistically and anthroponormatively.⁴⁹ In his anthroponormative guise, Man ensures that community is valued above the non-communal; his interests are the only interests that matter. Almost any mining proposal will take advantage of this anthroponormative discourse in order to frame the literal destruction of the environment as ‘responsible’ or ‘sound’ by emphasizing the extensive mineral deposits that stand to be converted into valuable resources for human society. The would-be developers of the Pebble deposit near Bristol Bay, Alaska, for example, frequently call attention to the fact that the proposed mine would take advantage of the “largest undeveloped copper-gold-molybdenum porphyry system in the world.”⁵⁰ The implication is that we sure could use all that copper, gold, and molybdenum and that our need makes the massive (4,000 ft. deep, 3 mile wide) open pit mine worth it.⁵¹ Not everyone agrees that the Pebble Project will be worthwhile, however. Wild Salmon Center believes the Pebble Mine would be too destructive to the Alaskan environment and to salmon in particular. Specifically, they argue that the headwaters of Nushagak and Kvichak Rivers—“the most abundant wild salmon fishery in North America”—are too important to imperil.⁵² Therefore, the Pebble Project would not be in our best interests. Too important for whom? Whose interests? If it were salmon interests that really mattered, then there would be little doubt that the mine in question is a terrible idea. It is not enough, however, for environmentalists to prove that salmon are threatened by the Pebble Project; they must also show how a threat to salmon is a threat to humans. This is exactly what

⁴⁹ I refer to the proprietary thread as the *external* ‘how’ because I will refer to the additive thread as the *internal* ‘how’ of community. While the former has to do with how community as a whole engages with the world, the latter regards the nature of the bonds between communal constituents.

⁵⁰ Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd., “The Pebble Project: the Future of U.S. Mining and Metals,” NDM Ltd., 2011–, accessed March 10, 2013, <http://www.northerndynastyminerals.com/i/pdf/ndm/NDM_FactSheet.pdf>.

⁵¹ Wild Salmon Center and Trout Unlimited, *Bristol Bay’s Wild Salmon Ecosystems and the Pebble Mine: Key Considerations for a Large-Scale Mine Proposal*, (Portland, OR: Wild Salmon Center, 2012), 17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

Wild Salmon Center attempts to do in their environmental report on Bristol Bay's fisheries, tourism, economy, and native traditions.⁵³ Though the Pebble controversy is framed as a salmon issue, it is human interests that take center stage.

In fact, the proprietary mindset makes it difficult to even imagine beings outside of community as having legitimate interests/needs of their own. Needs are the purview of societal beings. As Locke demonstrates above, for *something* (the earth or an 'inferior creature') to be transformed into property is has to "be common to all men."⁵⁴ A *someone* with needs cannot be thusly transformed because "every man has a property in his own person."⁵⁵ NonhuMans (e.g., salmon, women, so-called 'inferior' races), however, are ideally suited to become *someone's something*. As we saw in the last section, who gets to be a *someone* (i.e., an individual) is a distinctly political affair. Individuals must possess an autonomous rational will or, in other words, be Man. By reserving individuality for huMans, Man's Others are left with no other options than to be things or to remain 'outside' society. If huMan society really were an insulated bubble, then the latter option *might* be good for salmon; however, both choices are unpalatable for Man's human Others.

Lest we forget the additive nature of the communal entities in question, Locke's passage also serves as a reminder that community's proprietary associations are conducted by autonomous individuals. When someone makes something theirs, they simultaneously exclude others from accessing those resources. As Locke says, "It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men."⁵⁶ Since Man's body and mind are autonomous, so too are his labor

⁵³ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁴ Locke, *Second Treatise*, 20.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

and his property. In a world of scarcity, it is easy to envision competition as the default setting for beings whose interests only incidentally (as opposed to inexorably) overlap. This may be one of the reasons why environmentalism is somewhat unpopular with Americans who prescribe to a more traditional conception of the individual. Wild Salmon Center and other environmental organizations try to make proprietary claims for human communities as a whole (e.g., the Bristol Bay community) and, therefore, depart slightly from the traditional proprietary model. It is harder to grasp how you as an autonomous individual might benefit immediately from salmon conservation than, say, from tax cuts. In his speech at the 2012 Republican convention, Mitt Romney claimed, “President Obama promised to begin to slow the rise of the oceans. And to heal the planet. My promise is to help you and your family.”⁵⁷ While his words have the opposite of their intended effect upon me, many republicans were no doubt very pleased by Romney’s Thatcher-esque approach to society’s ills. He certainly knew his audience that night.

Thus, in his atomistic guise, Man ensures that ‘communal ownership’ is as empty a concept as that of ‘additive community.’ If the traditional concept of community accomplishes anything, it is to justify Man’s entitlement to be left alone in his piecemeal dominion over our world. And so, it is not only how the literature frames the internal characteristics of communities (i.e., their constituents and bonds) as atomistic, anthroponormative, and additive that I take issue with but also how community has been understood in relation to the non-communal as its rightful owner.

VI: The (Im)Possibility of Interspecies Community

Animals...are outside the scope of the theory of justice, and it does not seem possible to extend the contract doctrine so as to include them in a natural way. A correct conception

⁵⁷ Fox News, “Transcript of Mitt Romney’s speech at the RNC,” FoxNews.com, 2012–, accessed March 2, 2013, <<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2012/08/30/transcript-mitt-romney-speech-at-rnc/>>.

of our relations to animals and to nature would seem to depend upon a theory of the natural order and our place in it.

—John Rawls⁵⁸

As I hope has already become obvious, the four threads of community that I have highlighted in this genealogy create a discourse that makes interspecies community next to impossible. What exactly do I mean by ‘interspecies community’? As I understand it, interspecies community is a way of thinking about living together that is neither delineated by nor organized around the characteristics of Man. To refer to a community as ‘interspecies’ might mean that it has both nonhuman and human members (e.g., the urban ecosystem of Manhattan). Or, it could convey something more subtle, perhaps, a community for which Man’s essential features are not the only ones seen as relevant to determine membership (e.g., a society of persons whose personhood is not grounded in rationality alone). Then again, interspecies community might simply be a community where Man is not the normative standard, a community where both of the traditional counterpoints to Man—Woman and Beast—are recognized and included.⁵⁹ (Hopefully, what it means to be part of the human community is an example of this third expression of interspecies community, that is, humanity could be about more than being or imitating Man.) By using a communal lens to work towards both gender justice and a meaningful nonhuman politics, interspecies community is a fundamentally (eco)feminist endeavor.

As it stands, however, the dominant paradigm (represented in this chapter by the four threads) is dismissive of an interspecies approach. With huMan rationality at the center of the web/tapestry, it is not hard to see why. Man is the only sort of being that qualifies to be a ‘1’ in the communal arithmetic. It should be noted, however, that not all of these threads are as close to

⁵⁸ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 512.

⁵⁹ These three iterations by no means exhaust the category of interspecies community.

the center of the web as others. For instance, the additive thread by itself does not pose an immediate problem to interspecies community; there is nothing inherently species-specific about the plus sign. Of course, the additive and the atomistic threads cannot be untangled from each other (a '+' is nothing without at least two '1's to link together and two atomistic '1's can only be linked with a '+'). We must adopt both threads or neither. For an additive/atomistic theory of communal to qualify as 'interspecies friendly' it must, at the very least, adopt criteria for being a '1' that do not use Man as a template. The resulting 'community' would be a loose confederation of both humans and nonhumans. Even if this was the sort of interspecies community we had in mind (as perhaps Bentham does), as strands of an organically spun and historically contingent conceptual web, these four threads are not so easily disentangled in practice.

That being said, it is not my intention to present these threads as four homogenous philosophical monoliths. The quintessential additive, atomistic, anthroponormative, proprietary philosopher is an archetype not an embodied reality. Those who draw on and contribute to one or more of these threads rarely do so absolutely without the slightest departure from the accepted conceptual narrative.⁶⁰ For example, Aristotle's characterization of the polis goes beyond the additive framework by including the common involvement of communal constituents.⁶¹ This 'counterexample' might be damning to my project if my tactic was to evaluate individual theorists one by one without situating them within the larger philosophical discourse. Given that I have provided a fairly critical analysis of the additive approach with regards to community in general, this would be an extremely odd strategy for me to adopt in my assessment of the *philosophical community*. It has not, however, been my intention to produce a fragmented

⁶⁰ Descartes might be an example of one of those rare exceptions. This is perhaps why Descartes has always been my favorite philosopher to love to hate.

⁶¹ Sheldon Wolin, "Chapter Three—The Age of Empire: Space and Community," in *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, Inc., 1960), 76.

account of the conversation surrounding community. As I said at the beginning of the section, broad brushstrokes are the goal. I am after community—as a concept, as a practice, as a communally practiced concept.

What these genealogical brushstrokes have revealed is a collaborative philosophical discourse (as opposed to an additive assortment of Men in armchairs) that has plenty to say about Man but nothing to say about interspecies community. This is why I have brought back Rawls in this section's epigraph—his quote perfectly encapsulates the casual exclusion of nonhumans from society and community and, thus, from politics.⁶² Rawls assumes that if we are compassionate people we will care about nonhumans. How or if we do so, however, is not a political concern, that is, a matter of justice. Neither is huManity's place in the 'natural order' (i.e., where we might find a justification for an interspecies ethics) of political interest for Rawls.⁶³ Man alone has access to the social contract that both (a) underpins society and (b) defines the boundaries of politics. Therefore, insofar as society is an exclusively huMan affair, so too is political community. To make this move, Rawls and others rely upon the equation of community with society. As we have seen, in the philosophical discourse that emerges from the four threads, community is an additive entity designed to group autonomous rational beings (i.e., Man). This means that the only community that makes sense (even in phantom form) is a community that consists of a loose confederation individual Men, that is, society. This explains why I have used the terms 'society' and 'community' so interchangeably throughout this chapter, despite the fact that society and community have not historically been synonymous. By being

⁶² Perhaps, I ought to say that Rawls perfectly encapsulates the *spirit* of this casual exclusion, since not all those who make society a huMan affair do so by means of a social contract.

⁶³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 512.

reduced to society in this way, the dominant interpretation of community precludes any thought of interspecies community or politics.⁶⁴

If society has replaced community, why then has community not simply disappeared from the lexicon? What sense are we to make of those instances when community does not simply refer to the society of Men? For example, the ubiquitous motto '*E pluribus Unum*' (out of many, One) certainly has the potential to jar with the additive understanding of community. As I claimed at the beginning of the chapter, community is a complex tapestry with more than four thematic elements. Despite the powerful reverberation of the dominant chord, the concept of community continues to have diverse expressions. It would not be much of a tapestry otherwise. In fact, the loud, brassy quality of the four-thread chord partially derives its conceptual integrity through contrast with what its proponents consider to be inferior threads. Can we trust the judgment of the mainstream discourse in this matter? Are these other threads really so flimsy? If we want community to be an interspecies affair, we cannot afford to take their word for it. We must explore what these other threads have to offer.

⁶⁴ Since, as I stated in the introduction, I do not believe that you can remove the politics from community or the community from politics, I prefer would prefer to think of the denial of 'interspecies community *and* politics' as the denial of 'interspecies communal politics.'

CHAPTER THREE

Living Together in Communal Ecodependence

I: Overture

What do alternatives to the additive, atomistic, anthroponormative, and proprietary vision(s) of community look like? How are we to situate and evaluate these alternate visions? Why should we be interested in alternatives in the first place? These are the overarching questions that guide my exploration of communal eco-dependence as a political methodology and a critical social theory.

In the previous chapter, my genealogy, I started to answer the last of these three questions. Why might we need to develop alternatives to the orthodox conceptualization of community/society?—because we care about the possibility of interspecies communal politics. As I already hinted at, however, making room for an interspecies politics is about more than simply expanding the current boundaries of community (i.e., society) to include non-humans.¹ The real challenge lies in undermining the gold standard of huManity in all its diverse forms whether or not they directly concern non-humans.² In order for truly meaningful interspecies politics to be possible, the focal point of community (i.e., Man) must shift. It is with this shift in mind that I have developed my theory of communal eco-dependence. Building off of the work of feminist and non-feminist communitarians, proponents of animal rights both academic and grassroots-based, ecofeminists, and others, I argue that instead of holding the concept of

¹ As I discussed in the last chapter, in the vision of community woven by the four threads, community becomes synonymous with human society. Thus, inclusion within community translates to granting non-humans societal protection but only insofar as they can be deemed societally viable or valuable. Examples include animal welfare legislation, such as, laws against the abuse of domestic cats and dogs, guidelines for primate laboratory testing, and minimum cage sizes for chickens.

² Remember, I argued that the shift from a huMan community to an interspecies one has liberatory potential for human and non-human communities alike insofar as their oppression can be linked to ‘failing’ to live up to the standard of Man.

community together with the four threads discussed in the previous chapter we adopt a vision of communal beings and bonds rooted in the inevitable messiness of living interdependently with others.

Towards these ends, I (a) acknowledge the critics of Liberal community and anthroponormativity to whom this project owes so much, (b) argue that, when pursued separately, both of these avenues of critique are incomplete, (c) put forth the theory of communal ecodependence as a way of merging these two lines of thought so as to reframe community as irreducible and inescapably alive, (d) situate my project using Sally Haslanger's discussion of how we ought to understand critical theory as primarily epistemically situated and secondarily empirically adequate, and, finally, (e) discuss the practical political potential of my theory.

II: Seeking Alternative Roots

i: (Feminist) Communitarian Critiques

Feminist theorists argue that the vision of the atomic, 'unencumbered self,' criticized by communitarians, is a male one, since the degree of separateness and independence it postulates among individuals has never been the case for women.

— Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell³

I am far from the first to rail against the additive or atomistic threads that weave throughout the mainstream literature on community. Both feminist and non-feminist communitarians have long criticized the atomistic understanding of individuals and the additive model of community in the Liberal philosophical tradition.⁴ These two 'types' of

³ Penny Weiss, "Feminism and Communitarianism: Comparing Critiques of Liberalism," in *Feminism and Community*, edited by Penny A. Weiss and Marilyn Friedman, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), 162-3.

⁴ Though the categories of non-feminist and feminist communitarianism both encompass a wide variety of political theories, I have split the field into two distinct camps because of how infrequently feminists (even feminist communitarians) and mainstream communitarians can be considered allies. As Weiss points out, feminists have

communitarians disparage the Liberal self, believing the radically autonomous ‘I’ to be both mythical and undesirable.⁵ They argue that Liberalism “does not so much provide a justification for politics as it offers a politics that justifies individual rights.”⁶ In this way, they show us that Liberalism is not a philosophy that is terribly interested in helping us live together. Though I am much indebted to non-feminist communitarians (e.g., Michael Walzer, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Michael Sandel) for creating a rich philosophical dialogue around the failings of Liberal community, I feel I owe more to feminist communitarians for their apt recognition of mainstream communitarianism’s tendency to idealize community in such a way that obscures the gendered dynamics of so-called ‘traditional’ communal institutions (e.g., the nuclear family).

Unlike non-feminist communitarians who maintain that the root of our social problems is ‘fragmentation’ and ‘connection’ is their solution, feminist communitarians are much more attentive to exactly how communal selves are constituted, towards what ends, and with what costs/benefits for whom.⁷ They do not believe, as non-feminist communitarians often do, that community is in any danger of dissolution. These feminists know that community is still very much alive and not always for the better. In linking societal woes to the fragmentation of community alone, mainstream communitarians fail to see that the mere existence of a cohesive (as opposed to atomistic) community is not enough to ensure justice. As feminist communitarians rightly acknowledge, community has often operated as an oppressive institution for women by making illegitimate political demands of them (e.g., that women be subordinate to

historically been quite concerned with community, while communitarians rarely consider gender an important philosophical concern (Weiss 161).

⁵ Penny Weiss, “Introduction,” in *Feminism and Community*, edited by Penny A. Weiss and Marilyn Friedman, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), 3.

⁶ Weiss, “Feminism and Communitarianism,” 177. Weiss is quoting Benjamin Barber.

⁷ Weiss, “Feminism and Communitarianism,” 169, 175.

their husbands in the family).⁸ It is this problematic history of Liberal community, and not just individualism, that communitarians usually ignore. By investing everything in the ‘healing power’ of community, mainstream communitarianism lacks the appropriate tools or impetus to conduct an adequate normative analysis of communities in practice (those we have) and in theory (those we want).

Feminist communitarianism, on the other hand, is very much aware of the historically gendered implications of both Liberal individualism and its lasting impact on modern Western political institutions/communities (e.g., democracy, nationalism, the heteronormative family). By seeing Man where many communitarians would just see misguided atomism, feminists (like Benhabib and Cornell in their above quote) greatly enrich the critical and political relevance of the communitarian discourse. The feminist acknowledgement of the destructive capacity of a community/society founded upon a masculine ‘I’ is invaluable for my project. Furthermore, the entire premise of my critical genealogy—that, even in their denial of its existence, Liberal philosophers and their allies have shaped community and its boundaries in deeply problematic ways—would not have been possible if I had relied upon the non-feminist communitarian logic that (a) Liberalism negates community and (b) community is good in and of itself.

ii: Critiques of Anthroponormativity

There is no ethical basis for elevating membership of one particular species into a morally crucial characteristic. From an ethical point of view, we all stand on an equal footing—whether we stand on two feet, or four, or none at all.

— Peter Singer⁹

Academic proponents of animal rights have sought to challenge the primacy and perceived singularity of the human species in a variety of ways and with a variety of intentions.

⁸ Marilyn Friedman, “Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community,” in *Feminism and Community*, edited by Penny A. Weiss and Marilyn Friedman, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), 191.

⁹ Peter Singer, *In Defense of Animals*, (New York, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 6.

How have they generally gone about doing so? Jeremy Bentham tells us, "The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? But rather, Can they suffer?"¹⁰ No doubt echoing Bentham, fellow utilitarian Peter Singer penned the above claim about humanity's false superiority. Here, we can see both Bentham and Singer challenging the usual criterion for political and moral worth—human rationality. Instead, they propose suffering, or to be more technical 'sentience,' is what matters. Non-utilitarians are also known to adopt this general tactic (i.e., to emphasize sentience—or some aspect of it—over rationality) to argue that we are justified in thinking of non-humans as moral patients if not moral agents. For example, Tom Regan, in a distinctly Kantian fashion, argues for non-humans' natural rights by developing his 'subject-of-a-life' criterion.¹¹ He claims that any creature who can value her own welfare has inherent value and ought not to be treated as mere means, regardless of whether or not she is valuable or useful to anyone else.¹² For Regan, 'complex awareness' (i.e., the ability to recognize one's own welfare as valuable) and not rationality is what matters.¹³

I owe much to these moral and political philosophers insofar as they genuinely seek to destabilize anthroponormativity, that is, the discursive practices that situate Man at the pinnacle of the political hierarchy thereby rendering his human and non-human Others unworthy of communal inclusion. Though it can be argued (as I did briefly in the last chapter and will again in a moment) that in some circumstances sentience is just a convenient stand in for (huMan) rationality, the philosophical work of shoring up sentience frequently undermines the myth of

¹⁰ Jeremy Bentham, "Chapter XVII: Of the Limits of the Penal Branch of Jurisprudence," *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, in *The Library of Economics and Liberty*, XVII.6, accessed November 13, 2012. <<http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML1.html>>.

¹¹ Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 144.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Donovan, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory," 170.

Man.¹⁴ This is because valuing sentience often helps us see that there is more to humanity than our rationality. What we *feel* is also important. Furthermore, the realization that other beings can also feel allows empathy to begin the vital work of tearing down the walls that have kept our species isolated and elevated for so long.

Some, Singer and Regan included, might object that dispassionate respect is more meaningful than empathetic connection. In fact, Singer writes, “The portrayal of those who protest against cruelty to animals as sentimental, emotional ‘animal lovers’ [*has meant*] excluding the entire issue...from serious political and moral discussion.”¹⁵ Similarly, Regan bemoans the equation of animal activism with sentimentality, arguing that “reason—not sentiment, not emotion—reason compels us to recognize the equal inherent value of...animals and...their equal right to be treated with respect.”¹⁶ Apparently, others’ feelings should be thought about not felt about. I have no doubt that the perceived sentimentality of animal rights (and all the gendered baggage that goes along with it) has hurt the movement in certain circles (e.g., academic philosophy). It has been my personal experience as both a philosopher and an activist, however, that empathy (and emotions in general) is a more effective catalyst for *action* than reason alone. As the beloved song of my childhood taught me to believe of spiders, they’re living things and they’ve got feelings too.¹⁷ To this day, I cannot squash a spider despite the fact that I now suspect (via reason) that they are most likely incapable of sentience.

¹⁴ Hinting at the potentially suspect nature of the move toward sentience, one of Peter Singer’s early books is entitled *The Expanding Circle*. As I argued in the last chapter, expanding the circle or widening the dartboard will not be enough to produce a truly interspecies politics so long as Man is still at the center of the bull’s-eye.

¹⁵ Singer, “Preface,” *Animal Liberation*, ix-x.

¹⁶ Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights,” in *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, edited by Tom Regan and Peter Singer, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), accessed February 2, 2013, <<http://www2.webster.edu/~corbetre/philosophy/animals/regan-text.html>>.

¹⁷ Linda Arnold, “Hey, Mr. Spider.” This song was quoted in the preface.

iii: Failure to Connect

The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men.

— Alice Walker¹⁸

In their preface to *Feminism and Community*, Penny Weiss and Marilyn Friedman write that “any signs of hierarchy or dominion within feminist communities are occasions for communal self-reflection and readjustment.”¹⁹ And yet despite these impassioned words, Weiss and Friedman’s excellent anthology scarcely mentions non-humans let alone their systematic exclusion from community. Mainstream animal rights activists, on the other hand, have almost nothing to say on the subjects of community or gender justice but plenty to say about non-human exclusion from politics, ethics, etc. Beyond suggesting that feminist communitarians and mainstream animal rights theorists have failed to build bridges to each other, what does this surprising schism mean for my attempt at a gender sensitive, interspecies communal politics? Before I can answer this question, we need to look more closely at how both feminist communitarianism and sentience-focused challenges to anthroponormativity miss the mark.

Animal rights advocates rarely engage with the concept of community. In fact, as conceived of by the likes of Singer and Regan, sentient individuals (even those who are non-rational) are still very much atomistic. The happiness of a rat colony, for example, has to be assessed by considering each individual rat in turn. It should perhaps not be overly surprising that an ‘inclusive’ utilitarianism (i.e., one that values the suffering of animals and humans equally) possesses many of the same theoretical underpinnings/weaknesses (e.g., a reliance on additive communal arithmetic) as the more explicitly ‘rational’ utilitarianism of Mill and others

¹⁸ Alice Walker, forward to *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, by Marjorie Spiegel, (New York, NY: Mirror Books/I.D.E.A., 1996), 13–4.

¹⁹ Penny Weiss and Marilyn Friedman, “Preface,” in *Feminism and Community*, edited by Penny A. Weiss and Marilyn Friedman, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), xiii.

who attempt to avoid the label of ‘swine morality.’²⁰ It is disappointing but not terribly surprising. Whether or not we value human happiness over porcine happiness, a pig’s happiness is an autonomous experience in the utilitarian framework. Once again, however, atomism and additive community are not unique to utilitarianism. Regan’s subject-of-a-life criterion is founded upon the premise that individuals determine their own value in isolation or autonomously. It does not matter that the individual might be valued by others or, more importantly, that she might find her value by living with others. Only that she values herself is significant.

In this way, I believe we can clearly see the legacy of rationalism hard at work in Regan’s valuing of sentience. Though he rejects Kant’s claim that rationality is the only way to gain access into the Kingdom of Ends, we might wonder how far removed ‘complex awareness’ really is from huMan rationality and what is so darn special about it.²¹ While it seems likely that the recognition that one’s welfare is valuable to oneself is an ethically pertinent fact, it is unclear what makes this the *only* ethically pertinent feature of a life. Like the rationality criterion, the subject-of-a-life criterion is met by most humans. Though it has the added bonus of including most non-humans animals with whom humans develop sentimental attachments (Regan no doubt would be horrified to see it put that way), the subject-of-a-life criterion still has Man at the center of the radiating circles of inclusion. Man is still the one *best* qualified for respect.

Regardless of how strongly Kantian rationalism lives on in Regan, it is clear that living separately and respectfully, not living together, is the ultimate aim of his interspecies politics. The idea is that we should not ‘interfere’ with non-humans just as we do not interfere with each

²⁰ I understand Singer’s utilitarianism as truer to Bentham’s teachings than to Mill’s insofar as he does not differentiate between higher (huMan) and lower (Animal) pleasures.

²¹ Donovan, “Animal Rights and Feminist Theory,” 170.

other.²² Similarly, Singer suggests, “Once we give up our claim to ‘dominion’ over the other species we should stop interfering with them at all. We should leave them alone as much as we possibly can.”²³ Implicit in this non-confrontational normative standard is the perceived possibility and positive valuing of autonomy. That is, it is possible and preferable to not interfere with each other. In this way, the atomistic individual (and thereby the additive community) lives on in the mainstream animals rights discourse, which otherwise has been quite helpful (if imperfectly so) in combating the anthroponormative features of Man.

Feminist theories of communitarian justice have the opposite dilemma; they are mute on the interspecies ramifications of the atomistic/additive conceptualizations of individuals/communities that they criticize. Though they are quick to explore the gendered implications of Man’s involvement in rational individuality, the speciesist corollaries of Man are rarely commented upon. This is unfortunate given the fact that gendered oppression (not to mention racial, class-based, etc.) is/has so often been justified by a lack of huManity. Within the feminist communitarian discourse, however, Man’s masculine/atomistic guise tends to overshadow or erase his anthroponormative one.²⁴ Insights like that of Alice Walker in the above epigraph are few and far between. In this way, community remains a human if not a huMan affair. Where I would like to see feminist communitarianism go further is in connecting the oppressive realities of the Liberal ‘I’ and the communal politics that it grounds to the broader realm of interspecies injustice.

²² Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 91.

²³ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 226. Singer admits this is a simplistic view but *not* because he believes interspecies community to be inevitable. Instead, he claims (in typical utilitarian fashion) that it would be callous to not interfere in non-human affairs when humanity’s superior knowledge can prevent easily avoidable suffering (e.g., rescuing grey whales trapped in the Alaskan ice).

²⁴ Though I sometimes refer to atomistic Man and anthropocentric Man as two distinct guises in order to highlight certain aspects of Man’s visage, we should not forget that they are really two sides of the same coin.

There are of course exceptions to this all too common trend of total non-communication between the critics of anthroponormativity and the critics of atomistic/additive individualism/community. Bridges have been built, albeit tentatively, haphazardly, or inadvertently. Aldo Leopold, for example, developed his ‘land ethic’ to expand “the boundaries of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals” because he saw that Man had “outgrown” the land with tragic consequences.²⁵ He argues that “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.”²⁶ Though his concern was for the *land*, Leopold’s bold interspecies vision of community represents a significant departure from all four of the orthodox communal cornerstones. With humans occupying just one small part of the biotic community, the land ethic stands firmly in opposition to anthroponormativity. By emphasizing the interdependency of all living beings, Leopold also troubles the additive and atomistic assumptions of Liberalism.²⁷ Finally, he dispenses with the proprietary relationship between community and the planet by envisioning *Homo sapiens* as not the conqueror of the ‘land-community’ but as a member of it.²⁸

The vision and actions of a small, vegan café in Portland, Oregon also pose a potent threat to the four threads. Red and Black Café is an all vegan, closed union, worker cooperative that actively seeks to be a force for social change in their community whose interests they consider inseparable from their own. As they claim on their website, “The Red and Black Cafe is committed to mutual aid—helping our community back through providing a safer space for those pushed to the edges of our society, for those doing work to make positive changes, for those who

²⁵ Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” in *A Sand County Almanac: with Essays on Conservation from Round River*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1970), 262.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 262

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 239

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

just want to grab a good vegan meal & a warm cup of coffee.”²⁹ As explicit about their socialist and feminist roots as they are about their veganism and environmentalism, Red and Black’s attitude towards and relationship with/as a community (both local and global, human and interspecies) cannot be captured by the orthodox conceptualization. This is because they refuse to see themselves as an insular ‘equation’ in the larger communal formula.

Perhaps the most important bridge (with regards to my project) that has been built between feminist communitarianism and animal rights is the one provided by ecofeminism. At the heart of ecofeminism lie the beliefs that (a) no attempt to liberate women (and many other oppressed human groups) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate ‘nature’ and vice versa and (b) being an individual means being interconnected with all life.³⁰ As will soon be apparent, my theory of communal ecodependence is ecofeminist in both of these senses. With all its talk of interconnectivity, however, ecofeminism is somewhat vague about how it understands communal bonds, constituents, and entities. Community is mentioned quite frequently but is seldom delved into with any real philosophical rigor. This is an oversight I hope to remedy.

Though far from perfect, it is thanks to thinkers/movements such as these that I have come to believe my project is even possible within the Western philosophical framework. Unfortunately, these bridges (especially those of the grassroots variety) can lack credibility to those in academic philosophy. With my theory of communal ecodependence, I hope to build a bridge between feminist communitarianism and the animal rights discourse that is both architecturally sturdy and credible to political philosophers.

²⁹ Red and Black Café, “Homepage,” accessed February 27, 2013, <<http://www.redandblackcafe.com/>>.

³⁰ Greta Gaard, “Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature,” in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, and Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 1.

III: Growing Further

i. Animating the Communal Arithmetic

a. The ‘+’ Need Not Be Empty

To be one is always to become with many.

— Donna Haraway³¹

I have long mulled over the above passage from Donna Haraway’s book *When Species Meet*. Her claim is both intuitively appealing and deceptively simple.³² The unfortunate nature of *deceptive* simplicity is, of course, that it fades all too quickly into unexpected complexity. What is it that makes Haraway’s claim simultaneously resonant and opaque? Where does the confusion lie? Breaking her position down, it is not the ‘to be one’ or the ‘many’ that leave me puzzled. No matter how interconnected individuals are determined to be, it still seems likely that we will be able to talk sensibly in some fashion about this *one* or that *one* and about the *many* these ones compose together. Rather, uncertainty arises when I try to make sense of what it means to ‘become with’ others. As I am not terribly metaphysically inclined, the ‘becoming’ of ‘becoming with’ does not distress me much, though I know it has troubled many a metaphysician.³³ It is the ‘with’ that I find far more elusive and politically enticing. The precise nature of this ‘with’ and what it can tell us about the (internal) ‘how’ and the ‘who’ of community is what I take to be the key to understanding and wielding the concept of community towards an interspecies politics.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is the ‘with’ that I find most conspicuously and detrimentally lacking from the discourse of community shaped by the diffusive (and often fractured) influence of the four threads discussed in my genealogy. In the context of additive communal arithmetic ($1+1+1+\dots =$ the totality of community x), the ‘+’ is synonymous with an ‘&.’ A mere tool for

³¹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 4.

³² Perhaps it is only intuitively appealing for those of us who grew up with tree-friends.

³³ For example, Aristotle in the *Physics*.

summation, the plus sign presumes to create linkages without substance. The '+' can tell us that there is *this* '1' and there is *that* '1' with quality x, but not how or if *this* '1' and *that* '1' are in dialogue with each other as '1's. There are no easy analogies for the linkage involved in this additive arithmetic. Even the marble metaphor is somewhat misleading with its tangible physicality. Unlike pooled marbles, '1's linked by '+'s do not jostle or slide past each other. Insofar as they are the right sorts of '1's for the communal equation (i.e., the right sort of marbles for the box), '1's do not contact each other. The plus sign captures nothing of relational dynamics.

Philosophers who adhere to the additive framework may try to give the '+' greater meaning by appealing to the fact that a string of '1's held together by '+'s are of the same town, city, country, racial group, sex, species, etc. In reality, however, group 'locators' such as these are what provide philosophers with a reason to feel justified in employing the plus sign and not the other way around. (The other way around being that '1's obtain their locators by being linked together in communal addition.) For example, if a group of '1's all live in the same city, then philosophers would be justified in adding up their interests, rights, happiness, etc. to get those of the city. The '+' has nothing to do with how communal locators, such as being human, are assigned to '1's in the first place. You are human if you meet certain criteria as an individual. Determining that a being is part of the human species is an insular affair; only factors internal to the individual are considered. As an additive community, the human species consists of individual constituents that share the characteristic of humanity. Members of the species, however, do not share this characteristic because of any relationship they bear to each other.

Since the additive '+' cannot help us say anything significant about how individuals relate in community, there is no 'with' to speak of in the additive framework. In contrast,

‘becoming with’ others is not the afterthought (i.e., what happens to ‘1’s after they are ‘1’s) that communal addition has to be; it is the main event (i.e., what happens to ‘1’s to make them ‘1’s). Rather than accommodating and maintaining rigid boundaries between ‘1’s as the ‘+’ does for the additive orthodoxy, the ‘with’ brings ‘1’s into intimate contact with each other. Being *with* others means being messy. In an attempt to capture the spirit of this messiness, I will refer to these sort of ‘with’s as *sticky* ‘with’s.³⁴ A sticky ‘with’ is a ‘with’ that conceives of individuals as continually reliant upon each other for their identities, survival, wellbeing, etc.³⁵ This is why Haraway’s rhetoric of *becoming with* is so important. Whereas the language of ‘*being with*’ might lead one to believe that ‘1’s can *be* with or without each other, ‘*becoming with*’ makes it clear that ‘1’s can only ever *be with* other ‘1’s.

The plus sign, however, need not be neat or empty. It has the potential to express the qualities of the connection two (or more) ‘1’s share, should we determine that there is more to being in a community than having one’s interests/characteristics tallied/likened with/to those of other individuals. This seemingly bland mathematical symbol could carry far more clout than the basic arithmetical function of addition. In a world where ‘partners may not precede their meeting,’ the ‘+’ might have to get its hands dirty.³⁶ To elaborate further on this point, Haraway writes, “Once ‘we’ have met, we can never be ‘the same’ again.”³⁷ Given a taste of life, a touch of animation, the ‘+’ could turn out to be a sticky ‘with’ after all.

And so, we have arrived at the crux of the matter: *do we want to think of the communal bonds between individuals as anything more complicated than simple arithmetic?* I would argue

³⁴ Haraway uses the term ‘sticky’ several times in *When Species Meet* to refer to the threads/knots that connect companion species (Haraway 42, 88, 287, 296, 300, 314). Though she never explicitly defines the term, I believe my use of ‘sticky’ is in the spirit of Haraway’s project. For this reason, I feel I need to credit her.

³⁵ I will elaborate on the nature of this ‘continual reliance’ shortly.

³⁶ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 287.

that there are many contexts in which we most certainly do. To begin to understand why, we need to take a closer look at the nature of the ‘I’s in question.

b. The ‘I’ Need Not Be Man

I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.

— John Mbiti³⁸

Drawing on the southern African philosophy of Ubuntu, John Mbiti makes his above claim, which is about as far from Rand’s earlier sentiments as possible, about the ‘I’ and the ‘We’ of community. There is, of course, a very superficial way of reading Mbiti’s quote (i.e., that it is merely a loose causal claim regarding the others who must have existed before the ‘I’ for her birth to have been possible) that may be tempting to those of us most familiar with the idea of additive community or sympathetic to Rand’s (or others’) staunch individualism. For this reason, I have included a second quotation from the Ubuntu tradition.³⁹ The same philosophy tells us that “a person is a person through other persons.”⁴⁰ I take this to mean that who we are at heart (human, woman, white, queer, etc.) cannot be determined without knowing first who we are to and with others. We only achieve personhood (humanity, femininity, whiteness, queerness, etc.) together. In this context (and given our knowledge of early modern philosophy), we can clearly read Mbiti as taking a stab at Descartes’ infamous ‘cogito ergo sum.’ In this way, he pushes against the atomism and rationalism that have come to define the individual in much of modern Western thinking often with disastrous consequences (especially for those disadvantaged

³⁸ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed., (Johannesburg, SA: Heinemann Publishers Ltd., 1990), 106.

³⁹ Ubuntu is a popular (primarily sub-Saharan) African philosophy of personhood that emphasizes the communal and spiritual dimension of human identity (Battle 1).

⁴⁰ Michael Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me*, (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 1990), 54. Here, Battle quotes Desmond Tutu.

by European colonization and its lasting legacy).⁴¹ Together, both claims encourage an understanding of the communal ‘1’/‘I’ that requires relational reference.

This meshes well with the arguments of communitarians, ecofeminists, and various other opponents of Liberal individualism who would have philosophers acknowledge that human beings (and perhaps others) are thrust into communal relations from their very inception. Who a person becomes and continues to become is determined by the communities of which she is a part.⁴² To know her, you must know how she stands in relation to others. This spatial analogy, however, can be misleading. Communal relations are not as simple as arranging the members of a marching band. Standing in relation to others in community means that parts of an individual (e.g., her humanity) can only be located in conjunction with or through (as Ubuntu suggests) other beings. Given this, humanity is not something we *have* as individuals but rather something we *do* as a community. Determining who is human cannot be accomplished by looking at individuals in isolation. Deciding that *she* is human means understanding how *we* are human.

In this way and in other ways, an individual’s partially ‘external’ identity does not allow her to be a neat, circumscribed ‘1.’ Individuals actively relate to the members of their communities in such a manner that the well-defined boundaries of their ‘1’s become fuzzy. This is because, unlike the crisp ‘1’s of additive community, the fuzzy ‘1’s of individuals who ‘become with’ other ‘1’s *depend upon* and are *bonded to* each.⁴³ For this reason, their communal relationships are not well captured by empty symbols. The ‘+’ has to convey

⁴¹ For example, the modern institution of racialized slavery was in large part justified by the belief that the enslaved were not fully capable of rational thought and where, therefore, not fully huMan.

⁴² I use ‘determined’ loosely here.

⁴³ I will use the terms ‘interdependent’ and ‘bonded’ interchangeably. The expression of these interdependencies/bonds is manifold. Most generally, I understand these terms as capturing the *need* individuals have of each other. This need can be quite tangible and straightforward, for example, the need individual members of a species have of each other to perpetuate said species. As a reproductive community, individuals are hopelessly intertwined. The need can also be more abstract, for example, the need individual members of a species have of each other to call themselves singular members of said species. One specimen, does not a species make.

substantial linkage to be accurate or, more importantly, useful. It must be meaningful enough to express the fundamental (as opposed to trivial) give and take of interdependent, bonded beings.

What this all boils down to is that, as both products and parts of community, individuals are conceptually and physically sticky creatures. They cannot meaningfully be atoms. It will not do to try to understand individuals apart from their communities, that is, apart from their fellow fuzzy '1's. Insofar as they are communal beings, individuals can only be understood interdependently. Thus, I propose replacing the atomistic model of the individual with an interdependent one. Before we can delve deeper into the dynamic that interdependent '1's have when linked by a messier '+,' I want to more fully explore what framing individuals as interdependent means for the 'who' of community.⁴⁴

In the orthodox imagining of community, atomistic individuality, and thereby additive community, has been firmly grounded in huMan rationality. Does this mean that without atomism rationality will disappear from the picture? As previously discussed, I believe that rationalism is what feeds the atomistic understanding of the individual but not the other way around. Though it may be hard for us to imagine, the idea that our rationality is what matters most (for justice, for ethics, for a discussion of human nature, etc.) does not require that we be atoms. Therefore, discrediting atomism does not necessarily rid us of the problematic gold standard of huMan rationality. It might be suggested that interdependent beings must bond with each other in ways afforded to them by their uniquely rational essences in order to form legitimate communities. Adopting this strange marriage of individual interdependence and rationalism as the basis of community would leave intact most of human 'society.' For example, the Market could still ground itself in rational agency while accepting that individual rational agents cannot be pried apart for accurate macroeconomic analysis. Lest we begin to worry that

⁴⁴ A messier plus sign is just another way of saying a sticky 'with.'

this is the only path available if we dispose of atomistic individuality, let us remember that rationalism is merely a sufficient condition for atomism. This means that rejecting atomism does not force us to either (a) adopt reason as the universal basis for communal bonds or (b) completely discard the possibility of rooting (some forms of) communal interdependence in rationality. What seems rather obvious, however, is that when it comes to the ways living beings depend on each other, reason cannot be the whole story.

What is it then that makes communal interdependence possible/thinkable? In its most general form, what shape does this interdependence take? Instead of rationality, I offer up vitality as the basis of ‘communal individuality.’ In other words, I propose that the fact that we are alive should ground us as communal beings. But what is *alive*? Since this is a large (and contentious) enough question to easily consume an entire thesis (or book, or career), I will have to be satisfied with either (a) providing a definition or theory that I have neither the space nor resources to adequately defend or (b) declining to provide a definition or theory at all. The rationale for leaving ‘life’ vague (i.e., option ‘b’) might be that any characterization of life is as good as another for my purposes, or it might be that life is such an inescapable fact about the world that it needs no universal definition to be useful. While both of these claims may be tempting, neither feels particularly satisfying. On the other hand, defining life (i.e., option ‘a’) will help clarify what it is that makes living suitable to be the foundation of communal interdependence. For this reason, I have decided to be bold and suggest that life is ‘the capacity to achieve autopoiesis⁴⁵ with others.’ The ‘with’ I employ here is of the sticky variety. For those familiar with the concept of autopoiesis (i.e., the ability to self (re)produce), my choice of ‘with’s will seem somewhat strange. Given the complex and myriad interdependencies of the individuals in question, however, whatever is identified as life’s primary aim/feature (in this case self-

⁴⁵ Definition soon to follow.

perpetuation) needs to be accomplished interactively. This is because the selves involved in this self-perpetuation rely upon each other for survival and their identities. It might be objected that my logic here is somewhat circular. Because I am fairly convinced that concepts are always defined with a particular end in mind, this does not trouble me much. Life is messy because individuals are interdependent, and individuals are interdependent because living is a messy business. Either way, it is the messiness of life that makes the ‘with’ of community so important.

By framing the individual as interdependent and living, as opposed to atomistic and rational, the metaphorical gates of community are thrown wide open. No longer need the individual be subtly or explicitly coded as (hu)Man. Living interdependently ‘with’ others is something that many (possibly all) beings must do.⁴⁶ It is not only humanity, whiteness, queerness, etc. that are *done* by communities; communities also *do* felinity, bovinity, broccolinity, and terrinity.⁴⁷ There are potentially as many ways of *doing* community as there are kinds of living interdependencies. Communities can be astoundingly complex and sprawling (e.g., encompassing earth’s entire biosphere) or fragile and miniscule (e.g., consisting of half a dozen albino salamanders in an isolated subterranean stream).⁴⁸ They can be dysfunctional and exploitative (e.g., the dependence of America’s White community upon the Black community for privilege, capital, racial identity, etc.) or nurturing and equitable (e.g., the Golden Girls). Rationality can play a significant part in communal interdependence (e.g., the interspecies—human and orca—community of hunters based in Eden, Australia) or be utterly irrelevant (e.g.,

⁴⁶ Here and elsewhere I use ‘being’ in the colloquial (as opposed to the metaphysical) sense as shorthand for ‘living being.’

⁴⁷ To clarify—felinity: cat / bovinity: cow / broccolinity: broccoli / terrinity: terrestrial resident :: humanity: human. I would also like to note that I have consciously avoided the rhetoric of ‘performativity’ in favor of ‘doing community.’ It may very well be the case that some ways of doing community (e.g., some aspects of being human) are performative in the Butlerian sense of the word. However, while I enjoy that Butler imagines performativity as necessarily communal, I do not believe that the process of doing community needs to be read to be legitimate. For example, singular broccoli plants certainly do not ‘read’ each other as broccoli, but there may still be ways of talking about broccoli community nonetheless.

⁴⁸ Thank you *Planet Earth*.

the emotional interdependence of two lovers).⁴⁹ Nothing about the nature of individuals' bonded vivacity suggests that community is exclusive to huManity, Homo sapiens, rational agents, sentient beings, or any other subgroup of life whose defining characteristic 'just happens' to be one our species has in abundance.

DehuManizing the communal arithmetic also ensures both (a) that community can no longer be synonymous with society and (b) that society can no longer be limited to humanity. As I see it, 'society' refers to a community of *persons*.⁵⁰ Making community a truly interspecies affair will extend it well beyond society; most of the living beings that share our planet are not persons. This is not, however, the sense in which I take (a) to be a potentially contentious claim. Rather, it is (a)'s implication that exclusively human interdependencies do not necessarily fall under the purview of society that might make some nervous. Here, the 'threat' lies in daring to suppose that human beings are bonded to each other in ways that do not directly involve their personhood (historically one of our most 'distinguishing' features as a species). While understanding the individual as lively and interdependent certainly does not rule out sticky *interpersonal* connections, it leaves ample room for other kinds of human communal dynamics.

⁴⁹ Educational Broadcasting Corporation, "Killers in Eden: Introduction," *PBS.org*, 2005–, accessed February 10, 2013, < <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/killers-in-eden/introduction/1048/>>. During the 1800s in the small southeastern Australian whaling community of Eden in Twofold Bay, human whalers (in the tradition of aboriginal natives) and orca whales cooperated in astounding ways to hunt migrating baleen whales. The local orcas would send messengers to the humans to signal with their tales that the rest of pod had found a baleen whale (often several miles away) and was detaining/harrying it until the humans arrived. The messenger would then lead the boats of whalers (sometimes through dangerous fog or the black of night) far offshore to the rest of the pod where the whalers would undertake the dangerous task of finishing off the exhausted baleen whale with harpoons. In return for their cooperation, the human whalers would leave the orcas the delicacy they desired but could not obtain without human help—the immense lower jaw and tongue of the baleen whale. Similarly, the human whalers could not have taken on the giant baleen whales using only hand thrown harpoons and long boats without the orcas' help. There are stories of orcas saving humans when they fell overboard, recognizing individual human faces, leading whalers to drowned bodies, and attending human funerary processions across the bay. This communal symbiosis continued until a non-local human broke the covenant by killing one of the pod. The majority of both the local orca and the aboriginal populations left Eden after that betrayal. Here is a link to the fascinating and heart wrenching documentary: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04B02AAX7jA>>.

⁵⁰ I do not need to define personhood here to make my point. So long as we are able to agree that most human beings are persons and that many, though not necessarily all, non-human beings are not, I will be able to utilize the term without having to precisely pin it down.

We might regard our species bond, for example, as at least a partially non-societal one. After all, the fact that humans are persons should not preclude the real possibility we are also alive and are selves in ways that have nothing to do with being persons. The anxiety that humanity is inevitably debased through association with ‘mere animality’ will have to be set aside if we are to accept that human individuals are not alone in community and in life.⁵¹

The acceptance of (a)’s more controversial implications will be especially important in order to approach (b)—the possibility of non-human society—with an open mind. Expanding community to include non-humans means that, in theory, any type of communal interdependence is available to any living being whether they are human or not. Mere species lines are no longer legitimate grounds for any type of communal exclusion. If there are non-humans who qualify as persons (the orca whales of Eden come to mind), then society too (and not just community more generally) becomes a potentially interspecies arena. I say ‘potentially’ because I do not know if there are such things as non-human persons. Perhaps earth’s society is entirely human simply *by default*. It cannot be exclusively human *in principal*, however, unless we are willing to arbitrarily define society as ‘*human* interpersonal communal affairs.’

Together, both (a) and (b) serve to highlight how the concept of communal individuality (i.e., of being a ‘1’) outlined in this section has the potential to wreak havoc on the Great Divide of nature versus culture.⁵² Though the standard of personhood is upheld where society is concerned, this does not mean that non-societal communities can or should be contained by some monolithic Other. The majority of the communal interdependencies on this incredible planet fall under the banner of the ‘non-societal.’ We will undoubtedly need more ways of talking about

⁵¹ I have always found the rhetoric of the search for extraterrestrial life somewhat offensive. Are we alone? Certainly not. Just have a look around. Bernard Williams makes a similar mistake in his 2002 talk entitled ‘The Human Prejudice,’ in which he argues that we do not need to discuss placing ‘special value’ on our species because there is no one around with whom to discuss the matter.

⁵² Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 9.

this diverse assortment of bonds than harping on one of the many things they are not. Accepting that humans are not fully societal and that society is not fully human should hopefully have the effect of weakening the façade that society has to be understood in stark, binary *opposition* to its absence. Muddling the nature (read Animal) and culture (read Man) divide in this way is encouraging because it helps to undermine the problematic political divisions that have kept Man dominant and our species isolated for so long.

I turn now to examine the implications that reframing individuality as interdependent and lively will have upon the way in which we understand what it means to be ‘with’ others in community. Put more plainly—now that we know who our ‘1’s are and what we want our ‘+’s to do, what does that get us? It is by answering this question that the concept of communal ecodependence can finally emerge.

c. ‘1+1’ Need Not Equal ‘2’

We need a model [of community] that allows for organic connections, some more fundamental than others...connections of dependency and interdependency of many kinds.

— Elizabeth Wolgast⁵³

In previous two sections, I outlined an alternative way of conceptualizing communal bonds (the ‘+’s) and constituents (the ‘1’s). Instead of rational and atomistic, the concept of the individual I advocate is vivacious and interdependent. Her communal ties are messy not empty. It should now be apparent that how we understand the individual will directly impact how we make sense of her communal relations and vice versa. The relationship is appropriately dialectical; community and constituent emerge in tandem. Beings who share a common web of interdependence are part of a community. Finding oneself affixed to these webs is what it means to be an individual. Together, what do the reimagined ‘who’ and (internal) ‘how’ of community

⁵³ Weiss, “Feminism and Communitarianism,” 174.

mean for the overall ‘what’? How are we to make sense of the communal equation as a whole? In what follows, I argue that by ‘animating’ the arithmetic, community changes from additive to irreducible.⁵⁴ It is this irreducibility of community and how it is supported by a dynamic of lively interdependence that I refer to as *communal ecodependence*.

What does the ‘eco’ stand for? From the Greek *oikos*, ‘eco’ means home. Home body, homestead, hometown, home country, home planet, homing signal. Home is where you are from. Home is where the self puts down roots. Whose home? Whose self? Whose roots? This should be obvious by now. Sticky and strange, life is the answer. *Ecology* is an interdisciplinary field that marries biology and the earth sciences. It is the study of life and where life calls home. Insofar as nonliving beings (rocks, water, air, etc.) support living communities they too must be included in the concept of home. The ‘eco’ is a way of orienting ourselves as living beings in relation to our environs, a way of highlighting the strands of the web with dew drops in order to see our origins and location more clearly.

‘Home’, however, is not simply a place and so neither is the ‘eco.’ An individual’s origins are not fixed to a single temporal or spatial point. Living communal beings are constantly remade (sometimes trivially, sometimes significantly) as the communities they are part of undergo changes. For example, whether by the slow crawl of evolution or the decisive legislation of the 13th, 15th, and 19th amendments to the U.S. Constitution, what it means to *do humanity* undergoes frequent mutations. The ground beneath us is always shifting. In this way, the ‘eco’ has a whiff of both instability and unpredictability despite having its toes in the dirt. If home is where the heart is, then the heart had best be ready for anything. Home is a mess.

⁵⁴ By ‘animating’ the communal arithmetic I hope to breathe some life into it. Put plainly, an animated approach to communal politics would require us to take the sticky vitality of communal constituents seriously.

How can community be both so vital and so capricious? An ecodependent community is a complex tangle of tangible interdependencies. These are the conditions, the primordial soup, from which the individual emerges. As Haraway puts it, “Actors become who they are *in the dance of relating*.”⁵⁵ I enjoy the metaphor of ‘the dance’ because it requires both a floor and a partner, both something and someone solid to work *with*. But more importantly, it is an apt analogy because it highlights the movement and, thereby, the irreducibility of community. Like dancing, community is a process not easily contained in frozen images.⁵⁶ As I have already suggested, community is something we *do*, a way we move together. Through their movements, communal individuals coshape each other.⁵⁷ It is the totality of this coshaping dance that constitutes community. We cannot break the dance of community into pieces, into individual snapshots, with the hope of understanding what it is and why it matters. No matter how many ‘1’s gathered in the communal equation, the result is always a resounding One, an irreducible whole.

When I spoke to an ecologist about my idea of ecodependence, she expressed surprise that anyone still doubted the irreducibility of living communities. For her, attempting to deconstruct an ecosystem would be as futile as trying to untangle a spider’s web (and about as useful as an unspun spider’s web to boot). When it came to ecological communities, it was obvious to her that ‘the whole was more than the sum of its parts.’ Communal irreducibility, however, is far from obvious to political philosophers let alone metaphysicians, for whom the idea of emergent properties is highly controversial.⁵⁸ In the living world, irreducibility is only entertained on the microscopic level where viruses and bacteria exist symbiogenetically with

⁵⁵ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 25.

⁵⁶ In fact, movement is what great photographers are said to be able to capture with their art.

⁵⁷ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 42. I borrow the term ‘coshaping’ from Haraway.

⁵⁸ Timothy O’Connor and Hong Yu Wong, “Emergent Properties,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 2012–, accessed March 2, 2013, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/properties-emergent/>>.

their hosts. In fact, it is the perceived autonomy of life that supposedly sets it apart. Viruses, we are told, are “organisms at the edge of life.”⁵⁹ They do not qualify as legitimate living beings because they lack the appropriate degree of autonomy. For example, they need to commandeer a host cell’s genetic material in order to reproduce. While I do not wish to seriously challenge the classification of the virus, I do want to question whether viral reproductive interdependencies are all that different from the need ‘legitimate’ living beings have of each other.

Somehow, the more complex the organism, the less interdependent it becomes.

According to the atomistic, anthroponormative ethos, humans, as the ‘most complex’ beings, are also the most autonomous. Resisting this impulse, Haraway theorizes that “ever more complex life forms are the continual result of ever more intricate and multidirectional acts of association of and with other life forms.”⁶⁰ She is able to depart so radically from the prevailing logic because she understands life as fundamentally interdependent. Once again, how we frame the basic conditions of life and individuality (primarily autonomous versus primarily interdependent) will dictate how we approach the concept of community (additively versus irreducibly). My ecologist friend clearly subscribes to the latter approach, that is, interdependency. Given that I have defined life as ‘the capacity to achieve autopoiesis with others,’ my theoretical allegiances should also be fairly obvious at this point. Community is alive, interdependent, and irreducible. The sticky, living bonds of ecodependence are of such an intractable nature that it would be futile to examine individual constituents one by one with the hope of understanding the community in its entirety.

Does this mean that community is actually more than the sum of its parts? Sidestepping the ontological question for the moment, I claim that communal ecodependence at least requires

⁵⁹ E.P. Rybicki, “The Classification of Organisms at the Edge of Life, or Problems with Virus Systematics,” *S Afr J Sci.* 86 (1990):182–186.

⁶⁰ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 31.

us to *treat* community as if it is.⁶¹ Adopting this concept/tactic does not rule out approaching community from the bottom up, that is, starting with the individual. For example, you might choose to investigate queer communal dynamics by beginning with individual experiences. What interpreting community irreducibly does preclude is any methodology that attempts to get a handle on community by considering individuals in isolation. At best, this will result in an incomplete (if not totally inaccurate) vision of the community under investigation. Even if community is not technically more than the sum of its parts, accounting for all those parts means going well beyond a tally of individual living beings.⁶² The interactions between constituents are also vital to the equation. The dance cannot be reduced to partner(a) and partner(b). We must know how communal partners ‘move’ together.

Additionally, treating ecodependent communities themselves (species, ecosystems, families, cities, races, nations, etc.) as independent entities disregards their nested or fractal-like relations. Smaller communities are *part* of larger communities; however, we can no more think of sub-communities as distinct ‘1’s than we can of individuals. This is because communities themselves relate to each other through all sorts of dependencies. For example, feminists have long argued that the categories (and I would argue the *communities*) of ‘men’ and ‘women’ depend upon each other for their existence. Like the dependence of Whites upon Blacks that was previously mentioned, this gendered communal dynamic is highly dysfunctional. I refer to dependencies on the level of communities as *intercommunal* ecodependencies to contrast them with the *intracommunal* ecodependencies on the individual level. This differentiation is more for clarity and convenience than anything else. After all, what I deem to be the individual (or

⁶¹ I will return to the question of ontological/descriptive adequacy in section III.

⁶² In fact, even accounting for all the ‘parts’ of an individual (i.e., an interdependent living being) will require us to go beyond a solitary analysis.

intracommunal) level could very easily be thought of as already several rungs up the ladder. The human body, for example, is in many respects an ecosystem in own right.⁶³

In this section (II i(a-c)), I have argued that we ought to understand community irreducibly, individuals interdependently, and both as alive. Together these three features give us the ecodependent approach to community, which I believe allows for organic (inter)connections of many kinds. I think Wolgast, whom I quoted in the epigraph, would be pleased. In the next section, I will explore how ecodependence precludes a proprietary relationship between community and the planet.

ii. Deconstructing Dominion with Earthkind

If you do not allow your neighbor to reach nine you will never reach ten.

— Akan proverb⁶⁴

Without the isolated, rational individual, what becomes of the proprietary (i.e., the external) ‘how’ of community? Remember that the additive, atomistic, anthroponormative community was defined in opposition to that which it had the right to exploit. Or as the bumper sticker read, “You either own property, or you are property.” The first justification for this outlook was rooted in anthroponormativity. As the only legitimate members of community, humans are entitled to reap the world’s bounty (living or inanimate) regardless of the consequences for non-communal beings. After all, only Man can rightfully be considered an end in himself or capable of true suffering/happiness. This mentality has long had disastrous consequences for those considered beyond the protective boundaries of society and, as we shall soon see, for Man as well. It is hard to select just a smattering of examples from the extensive list

⁶³ Perhaps this means that we can think of allopathic medicine as tending towards an ‘additive’ approach and naturopathic medicine as tending an ‘ecodependent’ approach insofar as they generally regard the body reductively and holistically respectively.

⁶⁴ Kwasi Wiredu, “Moral Foundations of an African Culture,” in *Person and Community*, edited by Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 198.

of Man's destructive communal legacy. Suffice it to say, the human race is on the verge of causing the sixth mass extinction in our planet's history.⁶⁵

With ecodependence, community is a comprehensively interspecies affair. All life falls equally under the sheltering umbrella of community. This should make it hard for any one community to claim special privileges. All communities are irreducible, interconnected collections of living beings; precisely how they form these connections (i.e., what grounds their interdependencies) does not have any bearing upon how well they qualify to be called a community. That being said, it is certainly possible for the degree of interdependence to vary across communities. A lichen community (a single lichen consists of a fungus and a photosynthetic partner joined in tight biological symbiosis), for example, could arguably be deemed more interdependent (at least biologically) than your average human community. There might even be vague communities (e.g., Whovians—Dr. Who fans—who may have not yet established the communal identity that Trekkies have, for instance). Claiming that some kinds of interdependence are more valuable than others, however, is nonsensical within the ecodependent framework. Human beings might be interdependent in ways that lichen cannot be (e.g., societally), but the mere fact of difference does not provide a legitimate basis for valuing human interdependencies more highly.

Why even worry about the emergence of communal hierarchies? What makes us think that communities will necessarily be pitted *against* each other? Perhaps this anxiety has something to do with the other anchor of proprietary communal dynamics—atomism. As isolated, rationally self-interested beings, atomistic individuals are most readily envisioned as

⁶⁵ Endangered Species International, Inc., "Overview: The Five Worst Mass Extinctions," accessed March 8, 2013, <<http://www.endangeredspeciesinternational.org/overview.html>>. The five previous mass extinctions being the Ordovician-Silurian, the Late Devonian, the Permian-Triassic, the End Triassic, and the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinctions.

locked in the throes of competition. In true atomistic fashion, we all pursue our own welfare separately in ways that either help or harm those around us. Ecodependent communities, however, never exist in isolation. While I do not deny that on one level communities may be at odds with one another (e.g., the human community and the pine tree community every December), I propose that somewhere down the line all communities become interdependent parts of a larger community, the overall welfare of which depends upon the success of all its constituents. Humans and Christmas trees, for example, are both part of the larger North American ecosystem, for which deforestation is pressing concern. This is not a simple instrumental claim (i.e., we should respect the communal interests of pine trees because it is in the best interest of humans). Pine tree interests *are* human interests to the extent that we are part of the same ecodespendent community.

Thus, the irreducible, interconnected nature of ecodespendent community has the ability to counter this second proprietary tendency (competition in isolation) as well. While it may make sense (if not be just) to own and exploit those you merely depend upon instrumentally, in the end, you do not benefit from harming those whose interests are your own.⁶⁶ By obliging us to acknowledge our inevitable involvement in ‘earthkind,’ a properly executed ecodespendent approach should be able to ensure a more equitable interspecies global community.

We (in the modern Western world) know all too well what proprietary communal dynamics look like. The ubiquitous nature of these relationships makes it hard to envision the alternatives. Ecodespendence may even seem fantastical or impractical. Therefore, I would like to end this section by calling attention to a community that I understand as consciously practicing ecodespendence. In a recent issue, *Nature Conservancy* featured an article about returning

⁶⁶ We may have reason to respect the interests of a community regardless of whether or not their interests are our own. This is the difference between saying, ‘I respect you because we are one’ and ‘I respect you because it is the just thing to do.’ I will explore the latter possibility in the next section.

colonized land in Australia to Aboriginal hands.⁶⁷ The land in question has not thrived under European ‘stewardship,’ becoming more and more plagued by devastating fires.⁶⁸ In the ten thousand years prior to colonization, semi-nomadic Aboriginal communities shaped the Outback by practicing patchwork burning that kept fires from sweeping across the landscape.⁶⁹ Recently, the consensus has become that “nature here needs people;” it is not best left ‘alone’ and ‘pure.’⁷⁰ Refreshingly, the ‘people’ nature needs in this context are not White conservationists. Though the article uses terms like ‘traditional owners’ and is sometimes racially essentializing, the practices and choices it describes are fascinating from an ecodependent perspective. This is not only because the local Aboriginals think of themselves as ‘belonging to’ rather than as owners of the land.⁷¹ Additionally, the joint decision (i.e., one made by both the descendants of the colonized and the colonizers) to return the land to Aboriginal hands was made with both social and environmental justice in mind. The land (wracked by fires), the Aboriginals (suffering under the legacy of racial oppression and colonization), and the White population (faced with ecological disaster and the responsibility of combatting their privilege) all need each other to flourish in the modern world.

This example illustrates further how communal ecodependence is at heart a theory about how to we do and should live together. This is what makes the theory of ecodependence political. Admittedly, my understanding of who gets included in this ‘we’ and what this ‘how’ looks like (both internally and externally) departs significantly from the mainstream political discourse. The popular discourse, however, has proven itself unfit (i.e., unhelpful and often detrimental) to address systemic interspecies injustices. Section II of this chapter has been dedicated to

⁶⁷ Ron Geatz, “What Will Be Your Lasting Legacy,” *Nature Conservancy* 1 (2012):31–37.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

describing an alternate vision of communal constituents, bonds, dynamics, etc. in the hopes of developing a new way of thinking about community's politically emancipatory potential. In this final section, I will locate communal ecodependence within the tradition of critical theory and explore its potential political uses.

IV: Bearing Fruit

In the introduction to her latest anthology of works, Sally Haslanger differentiates between institutional critique, ideological critique, and critical theory. The first, she says, hones in on existing social institutions and argues that they are unjust.⁷² Institutional critique, however, will sometimes need to be bolstered by ideological critique—a critical exploration of a concept's various meanings and limitations.⁷³ Haslanger notes, “In some cases this will involve calling attention to aspects of the discursive frameworks that we consciously employ, their history, and their relation to the practices and institutions they underwrite. This is sometimes called *genealogy*.”⁷⁴ I believe this quote sums up the objective of my previous chapter quite well, though my genealogy of community is also intended to be redescriptive.⁷⁵ What some call community I call interspecies injustice. Revision frequently accompanies redescription. Or, as Elizabeth Anderson says, “One way to expose the limitations of a concept is by introducing new concepts that have different meanings but can plausibly contend for some of the same uses to which the criticized concept is typically put.”⁷⁶ Thus far, this chapter's aim has been to revise the

⁷² Sally Haslanger, “Introduction,” in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, 3–34, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16.

⁷³ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 17.

⁷⁴ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 19.

⁷⁵ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 19. Haslanger defines ‘redescription’ as the critical task of showing a social phenomenon in new light with the intent of highlighting the ways in which it is problematic or immoral.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Anderson, “Unstrapping the Straitjacket of ‘Preference’: a Comment on Amartya Sen’s Contributions to Philosophy and Economics,” *Economics and Philosophy* 17.1 (2001):22.

concept of community. To understand why this revision was necessary we need to turn to Haslanger's discussion of ideology critique's frequent partner in crime—critical theory.

Critical theory does not begin by asking what justice is; it assumes that the current conditions we live with are unacceptable.⁷⁷ As Anderson suggests, “We recognize the existence of a problem before we have any idea of what would be best or most just.”⁷⁸ I have assumed in this project that the current conditions of community are unacceptable, particularly with regards to nonhumans and those humans seen as less than huMan. Excluding all but Man (in either his atomistic or anthroponormative guise) from community and thereby from politics is unjust. I do not make any rigorous attempts to justify this assumption. The primary purpose of my genealogy was to illuminate the mechanisms that have made this injustice possible not to provide an exhaustive institutional critique of the four threads. In reimagining community as ecocodependent, I have begun the work of opening up the highly exclusive, dominant political discourse. A true remedy, however, must be able to bear succulent political fruit. In order to do so, the theory of communal ecocodependence must be able to (a) satisfy the descriptive criteria for critical theory, (b) demonstrate significant political uses, and (c) have the potential for widespread resonance amongst those to whom the theory applies.

i. Descriptive Adequacy

A...critical theory does not attempt to be 'neutral'...but begins with the assumption that the current conditions are unacceptably unjust and a commitment to understand and remedy that injustice...Critical theory, like all good theories, aims to be empirically adequate. However...it also has a practical aim: it should be helpful to those committed to furthering the aims of social justice.

— Sally Haslanger⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 22.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3. Here, Anderson has in mind non-ideal theory more broadly. I understand critical theory as one way of doing non-ideal theory.

⁷⁹ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 22-3.

This chapter is entitled ‘*Living Together in Communal Ecodependence*’ partly because I have always found the philosophical discourse surrounding what it means to be an individual (politically or otherwise) so disappointingly sterile, that is, devoid of vitality and the stickiness of life. When I encountered Descartes in my first philosophy class, I was hard pressed to wrap my mind around his efforts to extract himself from the intricate knots that connected him to other living beings.⁸⁰ As someone who grew up immersed in the rhetoric of social construction and fascinated by the many ways in which I participated in tangible webs of lively interdependencies (e.g., the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide between a small girl and her tree-friend or the joyous, altruistic act of sending dandelion puffs into the summer breeze), Descartes’ project struck me as exceedingly odd, not to mention doomed to failure. It has taken me quite some time to figure out how to properly respond to Descartes and others who perpetuate the additive, atomistic, anthropomorphic, and proprietary conceptualization of individuality/community. Communal ecodependence is my response. This would not be my tactic if I did not consider the mainstream account woefully lacking in ‘empirical adequacy,’ in addition to being the cause of numerous interspecies injustices.

In its current form, however, the alternative descriptive account of community I offer in place of the vision woven by the four threads would not satisfy a metaphysician’s exacting ontological standards. For example, I have argued in the previous section that communities are irreducible entities. While I do not understand my theory as necessarily committed to the controversial metaphysical claim that ‘the whole is more than the sum of its parts,’ I do suggest that communities have more ‘parts’ than allowed for by the mainstream discourse. This is because the interactions between individuals are just as important for understanding community as a whole as the individuals themselves. What evidence do I offer for the claim that community

⁸⁰ See my discussion of Descartes in section IV of the genealogy for a refresher.

is a dance rather than a simple tally? I provide a theory of life that would prevent us from comprehending individuals in isolation, but this definition is explicitly chosen to suit my political purposes. I doubt that this rationale would be empirically satisfying to those who make a career out of the study of life (in either philosophy or the biological sciences). Though I strongly suspect that ecocodependence provides a better descriptive account of the ways we do community and are individuals, I do not make any serious attempts to provide empirical justification for these suspicions or the claims that give rise to them.

Not only would such attempts be beyond the scope of this project, they are also only secondarily important to my overall objective—the development of new and productive ways of conceptualizing interspecies politics, particularly interspecies injustices. It has not been my intention in this chapter to make definitive, unshakable ontological claims. As Haslanger suggests, empirical adequacy is not unimportant to critical theory, but “justified truth is not enough; practical significance is an additional condition of success.”⁸¹ Furthermore, in the context of critical theory, empirical inquiry must be self-consciously epistemically situated. For Haslanger this means that “inquiry arises from and speaks to social conditions at a particular historical moment.”⁸² I came to this project assuming that there was something wrong (both empirically and politically) with the way that huMan community thinks of itself in relation to the rest of earthkind. I am not alone in this belief. As we have seen, the theory of communal ecocodependence has roots of its own. It is the product of multiple intersecting communities. For now, the knowledge that communitarians, ecofeminists, environmentalists, and even Portland cafés have recognized some of the same problems and devised similar solutions as I have must be enough to stave off any nagging descriptive uncertainties. The practical significance of

⁸¹ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 23.

⁸² Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 24.

communal ecodependence is the more pressing concern. Above all, my theory must be politically useful. It must have the potential to make a difference.

ii. Political Uses

We are not a nation that says, ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’. We are a nation that says, ‘Out of many, we are one.’

— *President Barack Obama*⁸³

What is the practical significance of communal ecodependence? As the lived expression of politics, community is practically significant when it is politically useful, that is, when it helps us live together well. One of the primary assumptions of my project is that the discourse of community spawned by the four threads does not help us live together well. With Man as its normative glue, community has been and continues to be a politically destructive force. The theory of communal ecodependence attempts to rehabilitate the concept of community. It is politically useful because it allows us to re-envision the focal point of community as Life. What exactly is accomplished by giving community a new anchor? In this section, I explore three very general ways in which communal ecodependence helpfully reshapes the political landscape.

The first practically significant outcome of communal ecodependence is the emergence of a nonhuman politics that goes beyond individual animal rights. By ‘nonhuman politics’ I have in mind the application of basic political principles to nonhuman affairs.⁸⁴ Community and society are two such principles; justice is another. As we have seen, there is a pressing need to move away from the proprietary model of community and start thinking about nonhumans as more than mere means for advancing our human ends. Ecodependence can help motivate this

⁸³ The White House Blog, “The President Signs Repeal of ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’: ‘Out of Many, We are One,’” WhiteHouse.gov, accessed March 13, 2013, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/12/22/president-signs-repeal-dont-ask-dont-tell-out-many-we-are-one>>.

⁸⁴ I am putting aside the more abstract question of whether or not politics of any kind can exist without humans. Suffice it to say, humans do exist, many of us are responsible for our actions, and politics is a very real phenomenon.

shift by framing human dominion as *communal injustice*. Isn't all justice 'communal' injustice? That is, don't theories of justice almost exclusively focus on systemic issues as opposed to isolated incidents? For example, even Liberal accounts of injustice do not deny that individuals can suffer by being a part of a socially stigmatized group (e.g., the working class). To qualify as a communal approach to justice, however, it is not enough that a theory acknowledge the systemic causes of individual suffering. What communal justice offers is a way to conceptualize intercommunal relations as (un)just in and of themselves. Exploitative modes of communal interdependencies (e.g., human/salmon relations) are unjust because they are destructive to communities as a whole not just to the individuals within them.⁸⁵ Furthermore, a complete picture of injustice on the intercommunal level cannot be attained by a tally of the harm done to individuals. An irreducible model of community is central to the theory of communal (in)justice. This means that insofar as individual-x belongs to a community that can be treated (un)justly, individual-x can also be treated (un)justly, regardless of whether individual-x is a dandelion, a rat, or a human.⁸⁶ Individuals are relevant to communal justice not because they can think or feel but because they participate in a web of communal ecodependencies.

Of course, communal justice is highly relevant for humans as well, and communal ecodependence has the potential to help clarify distinctly human political quandaries. The above quote is taken from President Obama's speech on the day he repealed 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' in 2011. In the fragment I chose for the epigraph, Obama references the motto on the United States national seal—*E pluribus Unum* (Out of many, One). While it is clear how this infamous saying

⁸⁵ This implies that for communal justice to make sense, there has to be irreducible communal welfare (i.e., communities have to be the sorts of entities for which things can go poorly or well). I know this is a controversial claim, but it is an assumption I am willing to make in order to explore the potential political uses of communal ecodependence.

⁸⁶ That individual-x can be treated unjustly as a member of its community does not necessarily mean that individual-x can be treated unjustly as a singular individual. Perhaps things can go well for a community of dandelions but not for dandelions individually.

could support an irreducible understanding of community, it is less obvious why Obama choose to use this motto in the context of social justice. Perhaps he just wanted the implicit authority of the U.S. seal, or perhaps he recognized the emancipatory potential of a community that is unified in more than name, a community for whom the oppression of one sub-community is detrimental to the community as a whole.⁸⁷ Justice for queer Americans is justice for all Americans. Or, so the saying might go. This is certainly an appealing battle cry, but it is only one half of the picture. Not only does communal justice help us recognize that it is in everyone's best interest to support the LGBTQ community in a "if you do not allow your neighbor to reach nine you will never reach ten" kind of way, this approach *enables us to refer to the communal interdependencies involved in heteronormativity as unjust*.⁸⁸ The privilege of the straight community depends upon the subjugation and invalidation of the queer community. Together these communities (i.e., the straight and the queer) embody unjust communal ecodependencies.⁸⁹ Though they support the privilege of Man in very different ways, queer communities, non-White communities, women's communities, etc. are all disadvantaged by the straight, white, male, etc. communities' dependence upon them. These unjust communal interdependencies cannot be reduced to the abstract mutual dependence of binary concepts. As incarnations of ecodependence, unjust communal interdependencies are the dysfunctional dances of actual living beings. If we stop articulating the identities of the oppressed (e.g., refuse to call ourselves women), the communities they refer to do not disappear. They keep right on dancing. Thus, when applied to the humanity, communal justice serves both to (a) highlight the inevitably lively nature of communal injustice and (b) remind us that systemic inequalities occur communally.

⁸⁷ I am not usually an Obama flag-waver, but he really got to me here.

⁸⁸ Wiredu, "*Moral Foundations*," 198.

⁸⁹ The fact that 'anthroponormativity' resembles 'heteronormativity' is no coincidence. The concept of heteronormativity has been an immensely powerful tool both in my everyday life and in helping me think through the irreducibility of those communities involved in societal injustice.

In reality, the ‘human’ and the ‘nonhuman’ are not so easily disentangled when it comes to communal (in)justice. This is both because Man’s atomism and anthropocentrism are so tightly fused and because, as Anna Tsing muses, “human nature is an interspecies relationship.”⁹⁰ I see the third (and perhaps most important) political application of communal ecodependence as the creation of a genuinely interspecies approach to justice locally, globally, and on every level in between. I would like to write an entire chapter on this point, but, as it is, I will have to be content with a few short remarks. Earthkind, while a daunting concept to justify as a political philosopher, has been my goal from the beginning. I do not desire to erase difference with this concept, but I would see the Great Divide that separates our species from all others disappear.⁹¹ Communal ecodependence can seal this rift. Sometimes, this happens as simply as recognizing that the boxelder bugs and fuzzy centipedes that invade the first floor of your house are not, in fact, invaders but deserving cohabitants, with whom boundaries must be set (as with any human housemates). Most of the time, however, the rift will have to be sealed through the collective actions of communities, for example, the conservation and social justice project currently underway in the Australian Outback. Getting communities to mobilize towards interspecies (or any other) political goals is by no means easy. In the next section, I explore what it might mean for ecodependence to resonate with those whom the theory intends to help.

iii. A Call to Community

A critique is acceptable only when it can gain a foothold among those adversely affected by the practice or structure being criticized; in other words, it is a necessary condition on acceptable critique that the subordinated and their allies find it illuminating or useful, that it contributes to their quest for social justice.

— Sally Haslanger⁹²

⁹⁰ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 11.

⁹¹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 9.

⁹² Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 26.

Theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth.
 — Adrienne Rich⁹³

It is hard to imagine a critical theory being particularly useful unless it has the potential to resonate with those whose lives it intends to help. I understand both Sally Haslanger and Adrienne Rich as communicating similar messages in their quotes above. As always, Haslanger's words are crisp, clear, and to the point. If communal ecodependence is to be truly politically useful, it must be illuminating to the Others of Man and their allies. Also along these lines Haslanger writes, "Acceptable feminist social critique...must be meaningful to the women in whose name it speaks."⁹⁴ The implication here is that the living beings in whose name I presume to speak need to be able to find meaning in communal ecodependence. Who exactly are these 'Others of Man' and how might they 'find meaning' in my theory?

Technically, ecodependence has the potential to 'be meaningful' to every living creature on the planet (i.e., all of earthkind). I do not say this out of vanity; I have no illusions about academic philosophy's real world impact. It is nonetheless important to acknowledge the expansive theoretical scope of communal ecodependence. Every time I write 'earthkind,' I feel a little queasy about it. In addition to the daunting implications of earthkind, the Others of Man (and their potential allies) are numerous and varied. How then can the theory of ecodependence be a practical and manageable tool for political philosophy? Before we get too lost in the clouds, let us remember that communal ecodependence was developed contextually in response to a specific set of systemic injustices within the Western community and philosophical discourse. Although it is possible for the theory to having meaning in other contexts, it is vital that communal ecodependence resonate with those for whom it originated. I imagine this community

⁹³ Adrienne Rich, "Notes Towards a Politics of Location," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1984), 65.

⁹⁴ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 27.

divided into two groups: (a) humans who have been subjected to theriomorphism as a community and (b) nonhumans at particular risk from the proprietary actions of Man.

With regards to the first group, I believe communal ecodependence and its political applications have the potential to be very meaningful to the human Others of Man. In fact, some aspects of my approach are already quite common and popularly accepted. For example, I am far from the first to comment on the collective ‘bestialization’ of people of color and women. Many oppressed groups already connect their marginalization to their supposed failure to live up to the normative standards of Man. These Others know all about (and may even internalize) the dominant communities’ assumptions that they are stupid, emotional, oversexed, violent, irrational, degenerate, or ugly. They may also already have developed a cohesive group identity out of necessity, due to segregation, or for the purposes of political mobilization. Possessing a group identity will make it easier for oppressed individuals to understand themselves as part of the dance of inter- and intracommunal ecodependence, though the idea that we *do* community may seem odd at first. The possibility of communal flux (e.g., what it means to be gay is always changing) may also be alienating for those who understand their identities as unchanging constants (e.g., being gay means being born a certain way). Perhaps the biggest obstacle, however, will be assuaging concerns about the lack of traditional individual autonomy.⁹⁵ Though I do not deny that there will certainly be challenges, I believe that the familiar, appealing features of communal ecodependence will outweigh its strangeness to those whom the theory endeavors to help.

⁹⁵ I address this concern further in the next chapter.

It is somewhat trickier to assess how well my theory might resonate with (a) nonhumans and (b) humans with cognitive impairments (I include children in this category).⁹⁶ For someone to find meaning in communal ecodependence do they need to be capable of self-conscious reflection or conscious appreciation? Much of earthkind can do neither. Must resonance be a conscious or self-conscious affair? I certainly do not want to exclude beings from this vital stage of critical reflection on rationalistic grounds. On the other hand, if we dilute the requirement of meaningfulness too far it might lose its bite. Perhaps, allies are the key to resolving this dilemma. I will devote a substantial part of the next chapter to this potential quandary.

V: Overview

In this chapter, I have attempted to answer the questions: (1) What do alternatives to the additive, atomistic, anthroponormative, and proprietary vision(s) of community look like? (2) How are we to situate and evaluate these alternate visions? (3) Why should we be interested in alternatives in the first place? Section III was devoted to the first of these three questions. Instead of the empty '+' I proposed a 'sticky' with, instead of Man we have Life, instead of a simple arithmetic equation we have irreducible community, and instead of dominion we have the ecodependent web of earthkind. Additionally, Section IV showed us some of the political forms a practical application of ecodependence might take. Section II and IV combined served to address question (2) by situating ecodependence within its own theoretical community and within the discourse of critical theory. I have danced around the answer to the third question several times throughout this chapter and the last. The bottom line—if we care about interspecies

⁹⁶ I seriously debated grouping humans with cognitive impairments together with nonhumans in this paragraph. Hopefully, it should be clear by now that I do not condone theriomorphism. That I liken human and animal abilities in this context is not an attempt to politically marginalize members of the human community who have differing cognitive abilities.

justice, then we ought to care about alternative approaches to community. The conventional approach is lousy for earthkind. Though I believe these three lines of inquiry form the core of my project, there are still many questions that could be raised even by those sympathetic to an ecodependent approach to community. In the next chapter, I try to anticipate some of these concerns and acknowledge the boundaries and limitations of my theory.

CHAPTER FOUR

Boundaries, Limitations, and Concerns

Without community, there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between individual and her oppression...but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.

— Audre Lorde¹

I: Whose Concerns?

In this chapter, I hope to anticipate some of the most likely objections to my theory of communal ecodependence. Precisely *whose concerns* do I plan to address? To be honest, I am far more interested in those critiques that may originate from within feminist communitarianism, postcolonialism, ecofeminism, and other philosophical communities potentially friendly to ecodependence than those that take root within the mainstream discourse of community. My project explicitly rejects the four threads (the additive, the atomistic, the anthropocentric, and the proprietary), and, so, I do not expect approval from their supporters. Additionally, it would worry me somewhat to rework communal ecodependence based upon feedback from this camp. As Bernard Williams suggests, "...the acceptance of a justification does not count if the acceptance itself is produced by the coercive power which is supposedly being justified."² I would amend this statement by adding "or which is supposedly being *rejected*." One way of capturing the spirit of my addition would be to claim, as Audre Lorde does, that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."³ While I have always been wary of interpreting Lorde's advice here too literally, I certainly do not want to use the four threads of community to

¹ Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 112.

² Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, edited by Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6.

³ Lorde, "The Master's Tools," 112.

justify communal ecodependence. Furthermore, I would much rather address the concerns of those who are at all likely to put my theory into practice. After all, it is communal ecodependence's political usefulness with which I am most concerned. Towards this end, I plan to address four broad challenges for understanding and implementing communal justice: (1) the impossibility and undesirability of universal resonance, (2) the difficulties of an interspecies critical theory, (3) the question of individual autonomy, and (4) the totalizing dangers of community. In this way, I hope to both sooth some of the worries that will no doubt arise in response to my project and provide a better sense of communal ecodependence's practical and theoretical boundaries and limitations.

II: Universal Resonance?

In this project, I have used broad brushstrokes to paint a picture of ecodependence and its rivals. Sometimes this 'impressionistic' approach has involved wielding the concept of community in a rather sweeping fashion. By aiming for water lilies (as I suggested in the beginning of the third chapter), do I really mean to imply that communal ecodependence can speak to/for all communities everywhere? I surely hope not. It has never been my intention to put forth ecodependence as universal criterion for all communities across this marvelously complex, tiny, blue planet. I do not want to make the mistake of prescribing one model of community regardless of context. This is one of the characteristics of the additive approach that I find least appealing. Admittedly, earthkind is itself a somewhat sweeping concept, but (as I will elaborate upon shortly) it is intended more to get us to start thinking about the political nature of our interspecies interdependencies than to set the only bar for communal membership. As I have said before, community is a rich tapestry. This project has selected a handful of highly visible threads to critique (Chapter Three) and suggested a 'restoration' of sorts for some of the subtler

background threads (Chapter Four); however, even taken together, this assortment of dominant and dissonant threads do not represent the entire tapestry.

We might all be earthkind, but this does not have to mean that lively interdependencies are the *only* way communities come to be and maintain themselves. Perhaps other understandings of communal origination and participation are more productive in certain contexts. For example, it seems likely that mutual recognition might be a more useful concept for interpreting the founding charter of the United Nations, though I would suspect that ecodependence is a more appropriate tool for framing the sticky interdependencies that the U.N. has grown into. As I argued in the last chapter (III.i.b), I believe that ecodependence is *capable* of accounting for communal bonds grounded (wholly or partially) in rational behavior (e.g., economic markets). This does not mean, however, that it is always the best theory for the job. There might very well be circumstances in which ecodependence is trumped by other forms of intragroup or intergroup relations. The vitality of communal constituents does not disappear in these contexts; it simply becomes less relevant to the matters at hand political or otherwise. We might think of the community of nearly half a million individuals who recently voted to name Pluto's moons Vulcan and Cerberus as one such context.⁴ Despite the unavoidable (and in my mind reassuring) limitations of a communal methodology rooted in ecodependence, I believe that the problems of today's world provide plenty of scope for a theory of communal justice that takes seriously the sticky nature of living communally.

Even in those contexts for which my theory is ideally suited, communal ecodependence may not resonate with everyone. Drawing on Sally Haslanger's work, I have suggested that it is vitally important for a critical theory to have meaning for those whom it primarily intends to

⁴ SETI Institute, "Pluto Rocks: Help us Name the Smallest Moons of Pluto," accessed February 20, 2013, <<http://www.plutorocks.com/>>.

help.⁵ That being said, Haslanger also notes that “it is easy to imagine that there are unjust social structures that are so ingrained that few directly affected can recognize their harm.”⁶ The unjust communal structures that produce and perpetuate interspecies injustice for both humans and nonhumans are often quite difficult to discern. Overcoming centuries of huMan exceptionalism is not proving to be an easy task. What are we to do in the meantime while word of communal ecodependence disseminates and percolates? Is it ethically questionable to call communities ecodependent before they have come to that understanding themselves? Rather than presuming to speak for communities without ‘engaging with’ them in any way (e.g., socially, textually, academically), I would propose that we (a) continue to foster dialogue to demystify communal ecodependence and (b) listen to what communities may have already had to say about their ecodependencies without being fully aware that this was what they were referencing.⁷ In this way, proponents of communal justice can attempt to speak *with* and not *for* the communities they presume to help.

III: The Challenges of an Interspecies Critical Theory

Speaking for others is an especially difficult ethical pitfall to avoid when attempting to include nonhumans within critical theory, particularly if the goal is to assess how meaningful communal ecodependence is for nonhumans. Traditionally, many animal advocates problematically assume that nonhumans are incapable of communicating with humans and, therefore, that it is their duty to speak for nonhumans. What makes this problematic? In her article “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” Linda Alcoff reminds us that speaking is an individually situated activity that occurs in a community, the politics of which often serve to

⁵ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷ Certainly, no one is going to be using the terminology of ‘ecodependence,’ seeing as I am fairly certain that it does not exist outside of this project.

disauthorize some kinds of voices and empower others.⁸ She argues that speaking for others means “participating in the construction of their subject-positions.”⁹ With regards to nonhumans, I believe that the anthroponormative discourse of community does more than disauthorize voices—it erases them (and the beings they belong to) from community entirely. Thus, in their attempt to speak for the ‘voiceless,’ well-meaning nonhuman advocates not only fail to be held accountable to actual nonhuman voices, they relegate nonhumans to the peripheries of community or worse—the realm of property.

Good nonhuman advocacy, on the other hand, claims that nonhumans can ‘speak’ but that their voices are not ‘heard’ by most humans. Merely recognizing the ‘vocal ability’ of those you claim to speak for, however, is not enough to establish a meaningful dialogue. For that, you have to be willing to listen. Citing Gayatri Spivak, Alcoff proposes that we are better off thinking of this sort of advocacy as speaking *to* others than *for* them.¹⁰ Though we lose the authority that comes with speaking *for* others, when we decide to speak *to* others, dialogue becomes possible. An important part of speaking *to/with* is being open to hearing many different kinds of voices and ways of vocalizing beyond those you are expecting from your dialogue partner. If you ask a rat how she feels about yogurt treats or a field of dandelions how they ‘feel’ about weed-killer and expect a human verbalization, then you are setting yourself up for miscommunication. Nonhuman ‘voices’ are often so different from ours that we fail to recognize their owners as viable partners for dialogue.

This is one of the major hurdles facing any interspecies critical theory—how to conceptualize and achieve resonance with nonhumans. As a critical theory, communal

⁸ Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” in *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader*, edited by Alison M. Jaggar, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 486–7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 486.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 491.

ecodependence should be meaningful to those “in whose name it speaks.”¹¹ Though this is never a simple matter, ensuring a theory’s meaningfulness/resonance is especially challenging with regards to nonhumans, particularly non-sentient nonhumans. We neither (a) want to assume that we can speak for nonhumans nor (b) dilute the criteria of resonance so far that any indication of flourishing (e.g., now the fuzzy centipedes call both floors of my house their home) is proof that nonhumans (or humans for that matter) can find meaning in communal justice’s implementation. The former’s (i.e., ‘a’) paternalism is deeply ethically problematic and the latter (i.e., ‘b’) is simultaneously too myopic and too vague to be particularly useful. Somewhere in between the two lies communal dialogue, that is, the process by which ecodependent communities attempt to communicate with each other about their needs. Just as community is a dance, so too is communal dialogue. When it comes to assessing the meaning nonhumans derive from communal justice’s application, we will have to be very creative about the ways in which we respectfully initiate dialogue. For example, as a community, humanity’s current response to deer overpopulation is to encourage deer hunting. Though this practice reduces the number of deer that die of starvation during the winter months, the interspecies ‘dialogue’ it initiates is still decidedly deadly. A dialogue instigated by interspecies communal justice, on the other hand, would be more likely to proactively address the unjust ecodependencies that lead to deer overpopulation and intracommunal suffering in the first place (e.g., insufficient food sources and the lack of natural predators) than to respond reactively by killing deer.

Interpreting the responses of nonhuman communities will often require a good amount of guesswork on the part of their human allies. Speaking with nonhuman communities will undoubtedly be a challenging and imperfect endeavor. This does not mean that we would be better off opting for one of the two alternatives: (a) speaking for nonhumans or (b) declining to

¹¹ Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 27.

practically apply communal justice to nonhumans at all. Seeing as how most of the humanity's interspecies ecodependencies are decidedly unjust (i.e., human communities benefits at the direct expense of nonhuman communities), it is hard to imagine how instigating a dialogue around communal justice (i.e., attempting to put communal justice into practice) will make things worse.

IV: The Invisible Individual

In all this discussion of *communal* politics, *communal* justice, *communal* resonance, etc. what is to become of individual autonomy? Within the context of communal ecodependence the individual is inseparable from the sticky bonds that connect her to other communal beings. Though community can be decidedly unjust to her (she does not live in the utopia envisioned by non-feminist communitarians), the theory of communal justice can only conceptualize the harm done to her in the larger ecodependent context. Does this mean that harm and injustice no longer exist on the level of the individual? Once again, I certainly hope not. It seems perfectly reasonable to suggest that while many aspects (perhaps the majority) of an individual are communally determined, the subjective experience of consciousness may be something that is by definition separate and private (e.g., I would never doubt that my bout of laughter belonged to me and not some other conscious mind). That injustice is experienced subjectively may very well require us to look beyond communal (in)justice for the full picture. While I cannot explore here exactly what this fusion would look like, I see no reason to assume that the theory of communal ecodependence necessarily rules out the possibility of individual welfare, rights, justice, etc. There may very well be ways of understanding individual justice that do not preclude communal justice; however, individual autonomy of this sort would have to look substantially different from the rational autonomy of Man we saw in the genealogy. In fact, I suspect that the lines must

be fuzzy, that is, we may not always know where the community ends and an autonomous individual begins.

If individual justice and communal justice are really to work together, however, then neither can be thought of as an automatic trump card. How we weigh individual and communal claims to justice will be context dependent. I see no obvious reason for one type of claim to always take precedence over the other. For dandelions, for example, that may only have communally based interests, the automatic trumping of the individual over the community would mean that in all human-dandelion disputes the dandelion would be literally and figuratively trampled upon. On the flip side, it would also be unjust for communal concerns to dominate individual needs indiscriminately. When individuality is truly imperiled by community, society's conscious is often speaks to us through art and literature. Ursula Le Guin's beautiful short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and Yevgeni Zamyatin's iconic science fiction novel *Mbi* (*We*) come to mind.¹² It is possible, nay imperative, for communal and individual justice to work together and be evaluated fairly in context, though we will no doubt have to think long and hard about what guidelines for balancing these two sorts of considerations might look like.

For the purposes of this project, I have chosen to focus exclusively on the communal side of justice. This decision was made in direct response to the kinds of interspecies injustices that are in constant supply due to the almost exclusive focus on the huMan individual. If this were not the case, that is, if one of the major sources of injustice was *not* the complete disregard of communities as a whole, then this project would not be a political priority. As it is, communal

¹² Le Guin's fairytale-esque story features a utopian town called Omelas, whose near perfect beauty, happiness, and success depend upon the total suffering of one small child. It is wonderfully written and especially poignant for its discussion of the town's dissenters—the ones who walk away from Omelas. Here is a link to the story: <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/dunnweb/rprnts.omelas.pdf>. Penned during the formation of the Soviet Union in 1920, *Mbi* is about one citizen's psychological struggle to understand himself in relation to the totalitarian forces of the One United State. Unlike Rand, Zamyatin attempts to validate the 'I' without destroying the 'We.' His novel inspired both George Orwell and Aldous Huxley to write *1984* and *Brave New World*, respectively.

concerns are rarely recognized, and when they are, communal justice is seen as subordinate to individual considerations no matter how trivial, for example, the removal of a 200-year-old grove of trees to build a swimming pool or the refusal of a university to release any information about sexual assault/harassment within a philosophy department due to the perceived rights of the accused (what of the rights of the community?). There is a pressing need for interspecies communal justice; therefore, so long as it does not erase the individual completely, I believe that communal ecodependence has the potential to be very politically useful and to fill an unfortunate gap in the philosophical discourse.

V: The Dangers of Community

There will always be those who are afraid of community and the ‘monster of We.’¹³ The ‘greater good’ has been used to justify many fictional (e.g., Grindelwald’s reign of terror in *Harry Potter*, the ‘crime-free’ town of Sandford in *Hot Fuzz*) and actual (ethnic cleansing, Stalin’s purges, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) atrocities that tend to reflect badly on the concept of community for some reason. In addition to rejecting the ‘greater good,’ Ayn Rand is disgusted by the ‘We’ of community because it makes equals of the weak and the strong and erases the godlike ‘I.’¹⁴ While I do not deny that there are good reasons to be wary of the totalizing potential of community, I do not believe that fear of the ‘greater good’ should be amongst them.¹⁵ Neither do I consider Ayn Rand’s other anxieties regarding community to be particularly well grounded. Her first concern (i.e., the equalizing potential of ‘We’) is blatantly offensive and the latter (i.e., the potential erasure of ‘I’) was just addressed in the previous section. Community does not have to erase the individual from politics, though it can certainly

¹³ Rand, *Anthem*, 97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁵ I understand the philosophy of the ‘greater good’ as more of a problem for utilitarianism than for communal ecodependence.

minimize the political differences between individuals sometimes with unfortunate consequences.

In this chapter's epigraph, Audre Lorde reminds us that the invaluable project of communal justice cannot "mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist."¹⁶ Community is irreducible but not homogenous. Sometimes we may call something a community when it has no right to be one or when it is detrimental to do so. When applying the concept of communal ecodependence to actual political scenarios, it will be vital to keep in mind the context dependent *motivations for* and the *mechanics involved in* communal irreducibility. As queer theorist Shane Phelan suggests, "Identity formation, inevitably bound as it is to the location of community membership, is a matter not only of ontology but also of *strategy*."¹⁷ If we hope to utilize communal ecodependence to its fullest potential, we must always keep in mind these two questions: (1) "What makes this a community?" and, (2) "Why do we care that it is one?"

Additionally, we can never forget the sub-communities involved or the unjust ecodependencies that may link these sub-communities together under the larger communal banner. For example, the universal banner of 'woman' is a highly contested term. If we want to think of women as an irreducible community, then we will need to know how women are conceived of as ecodependent and why it is politically helpful to think of them as such. Let us assume, as I do, that it is politically useful to think of women as an ecodependent community. The wonderful thing about communal ecodependence is that it does not require us to find one common thread that unites all women together. Instead, understanding 'woman' will mean understanding the many dances (some equitable and some highly unjust) that constitute that

¹⁶ Lorde, "The Master's Tools," 112.

¹⁷ Shane Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989), 136.

community as a whole and as smaller overlapping sub-communities (e.g., women in philosophy, Asian-American women, queer women, working class women, etc.). ‘Woman’ is a wonderfully sticky mess!

The same is true of earthkind. Currently, earthkind is a bubbling cauldron of inequity. We cannot overlook this unfortunate fact if we want to put the concept of earthkind to good use towards productive political ends. The interspecies nature of our political interdependencies must be revealed in all their marvelous and thoroughly depressing glory. Though it is by no means a panacea for the world’s ills, the banner of earthkind should encourage us to work together to improve upon our unjust state of affairs. The real purpose of earthkind is not to smooth over difference but to enable us to better appreciate our differences and the ways they ensure life’s myriad interdependencies—both just and unjust.

VI: Tying up Loose Ends

The challenges to communal ecodependence I have discussed in this chapter are not challenges that can be addressed and dismissed. They are the kinds of hurdles that repeatedly and predictably arise. This means that we can and must be ready for them. Proponents of communal justice and communal ecodependence must be wary of community’s potential to erase difference and provide a false sense of universality. We must constantly seek out opportunities for meaningful communal dialogue and resist the urge to speak for communities to which we do not belong. Individuality cannot be forgotten, but it must not be allowed to take priority over community. Lastly, ecodependent community must be ready to step aside in those contexts when it is not the most appropriate tool in the philosopher’s box.

CHAPTER FIVE

Concluding Notes: Responding with Communal Ecodependence

The point is not to celebrate complexity but to become worldly and to respond.
—Donna Haraway¹

In 2001, 1.5 million women filed the largest private-sector civil rights class-action lawsuit in U.S. history against Wal-Mart.² The five plaintiffs who represented this class (or, dare we say, community) of women claimed that Wal-Mart discriminated against female employees on the basis of their gender by denying them equal pay and opportunities for career advancement.³ In 2011, the case was thrown out by the Supreme Court, which ruled five to four that the suit failed to satisfy the most basic requirement of class-action law, that is, it did not demonstrate that there were “questions of law or fact common to the class” under consideration.⁴ Writing for the majority, Justice Antonin Scalia claimed that the plaintiffs had not demonstrated that they would provide “a common answer to the crucial question, *why was I disfavored.*”⁵ In his mind, there was no “glue” holding together the millions of discriminatory employment decisions in question.⁶

Speaking as one of the four justices who dissented in part, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg lamented that the court had gone too far in “disqualifying the class at the starting gate” by ruling

¹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 41.

² Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 49.

³ Andrew Martin, “Female Wal-Mart Employees File New Bias Case,” *New York Times*, October 27, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/28/business/women-file-new-class-action-bias-case-against-wal-mart.html?_r=0>.

⁴ Adam Liptak, “Justices Rule for Wal-Mart in Class-Action Bias Case,” *New York Times*, June 20, 2011. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/21/business/21bizcourt.html?pagewanted=1>>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

that the women of Wal-Mart had no common issues.⁷ Ginsburg argued that both the statistics and the personal accounts presented by the plaintiffs provided sufficient evidence that “gender bias suffused Wal-Mart’s corporate culture.”⁸ Feminist Wal-Mart scholars agree. They claim that Wal-Mart has developed a specialty of prospering off of female poverty.⁹ As Bethany Moreton suggests, Wal-Mart treats economically and socially disadvantaged women like straw to be spun into gold—gold for Wal-Mart that is.¹⁰ It has been all too easy for Wal-Mart (amongst others) to devalue the labor of working mothers/wives, whose skills are already undervalued by society as a whole, in pursuit of profit. On the global level, Wal-Mart’s manufacturing of cheap goods is also problematically bound up with gendered exploitation. The presumption that cheap labor and docile, nimble, feminine fingers are plentiful and ripe for the picking in the Global South has led to a plethora of exploitative (and distinctly gendered) labor relations.¹¹ While it is quite clear that Wal-Mart did not singlehandedly create these unjust gender dynamics, it is equally obvious that the company relies upon and perpetuates a paradigm that devalues women’s labor and skills. In this way, Wal-Mart’s reliance upon disadvantaged gendered communities both at home and abroad can arguably be understood as (a) rooted in and (b) constituting *unjust ecodependencies*.¹²

Wal-Mart, the largest company in the world and the employer of over 1% of the U.S. population, is mentioned here for two reasons: (1) It is the focal point of an ongoing nationwide debate surrounding the impact of superstores upon American *communities*; (2) The class-action

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jennifer Scanlon, “‘Your Flag Decal Won’t Get You Into Heaven Anymore’: U.S. Consumers, Wal-Mart, and the Commodification of Patriotism,” in *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy Became a Commodity*, edited by Dana Heller, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 184.

¹⁰ Moreton, *To Serve God*, 50.

¹¹ In her book *Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico’s Global Factories*, Leslie Salzinger claims that multi-national corporations do not simply take advantage of pre-existing gender inequalities in the Global South; they shape (and often create) gendered inequalities to their advantage.

¹² Of course, the same could be said of Wal-Mart’s exploitation of nonhuman and racially disadvantaged communities both at home and abroad.

suit filed against Wal-Mart represents a unique opportunity for the theory of communal ecodependence.¹³ Despite the fact that the rhetoric of community features so prominently in the popular discourse surrounding Wal-Mart, the 1.5 million women who charged the superstore with civil rights violations somehow failed to qualify as a class/community. Justices Scalia, Roberts, Kennedy, Thomas, and Alito declined to draw the connection between Wal-Mart's well-publicized questionable communal impact and the complaints of over a million women. This astounding oversight leaves me wondering "Where did the disconnect occur?" and, more importantly, "How can an ecodependent approach to community help us with similar situations in the future?"

Let us return to Justice Scalia's remarks regarding the absence of class status. For Scalia, there were no "questions of law or fact" that united the women of Wal-Mart. There was no glue. Glue would have been present if each of the individual women involved in the suit could have provided the same answer to the question "Why was I disfavored?"¹⁴ This fairly strict criterion for achieving class cohesion and diverges significantly from Justice Ginsburg's suggestion that the common issues faced by the women of Wal-Mart are a matter of corporate culture.¹⁵ While Justice Scalia's argument relies upon a distinctly additive understanding of class/community membership, Justice Ginsburg's position is quite compatible with an ecodependent approach to communal justice given the right spin. It would be easy to frame Wal-Mart's gender-biased corporate culture as a living dance of unjust intracommunal ecodependencies. Seen in this light, these 1.5 million women qualify as a class because they are collectively disadvantaged through their involvement in the exploitive dance of Wal-Mart's profit driven and culturally situated

¹³ Henry Blodget, "Wal-Mart Employs 1% of America. Should It Be Forced To Pay Its Employees More?" *Business Insider*, September 20, 2010, <<http://www.businessinsider.com/walmart-employees-pay>>.

¹⁴ Presumably, the answer "I was disfavored because I am a woman in a professional community that profits from the gendered exploitation" would not have been acceptable to Scalia.

¹⁵ Liptak, "Justices Rule for Wal-Mart," *New York Times*.

corporate machinations. If this case (or one like it) rises through the courts again, it will not be enough, however, to counter the Scalias of the world with arguments highlighting the so-called ‘common issues’ that *individuals* experience. We will have to put living bodies into motion and refer to the dance by name—community. The women of Wal-Mart must form an irreducible whole if they are to counter the question “Why was *I* disfavored?” with one of their own—“Why were *we* disfavored? ”

By applying the critical tools of communal ecodependence to this small fragment of the Wal-Mart controversy, I hope to have strengthened our conviction that this (as yet) untested theory can attend to concrete instances of communal injustice, especially those instances in which the four threads are particularly influential. This brief sketch offers a taste of the ways that communal ecodependence can aid us in our efforts to “become worldly and respond.”¹⁶ I would have us understand ‘becoming worldly’ as the process by which we learn to consciously and respectfully engage with living communities. Though it is certainly pleasurable to marvel in our involvement in earthkind, as Donna Haraway suggests, celebrating complexity is not enough. We must endeavor to live together well, “or at least well enough that care, respect, and difference can flourish in the open.”¹⁷ The dominant threads of community will not unravel themselves. To counter their sterile arithmetic we need to respond with the irreducible vivacity of community. By coming face to face with our communal partners in all their sticky glory, we have the best chance of acting in ways that ensure justice for ourselves, for our species, and for earthkind.

¹⁶ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 41.

¹⁷ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 287.

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