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# Rethinking Political Philosophy through Ecology and Ecopoiesis

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## Abstract

The failure to effectively confront major challenges facing humanity, most importantly, the global ecological crisis, it is argued, is due to the failure of those analysing the root causes of these challenges to engage with and invoke political philosophy to find a way out, and concomitantly, the failure of ethical and political philosophers to effectively engage with the deep assumptions, power structures and dynamics actually operative in the current world-order. It is claimed that this is due to a tacit acceptance of a cultural dualism manifest in the opposition between the sciences and the humanities, with the humanities having been marginalized by the sciences. To overcome this dualism and marginalization of the humanities, and to defend communitarian ethical and political philosophy in a way that both challenges mainstream thinking and engages with the world as it is, with the potential to inspire and orient people for effective action, it is shown how communitarian ethical and political philosophy can be defended and developed through ecology incorporating the notion of ecopoiesis. It is shown how this can serve to create an effective counter-hegemonic culture, integrated as a dialogic grand narrative, uniting and orienting people to create a multi-polar world-order as an ecological civilization.

Keywords: Ecopoiesis; Ecological Crisis; Political philosophy; Communitarianism; Ecology

# Rethinking Political Philosophy through Ecology and Ecopoiesis

Arran Gare

## Introduction

We are currently afflicted by multiple political crises, not least of which is the threat to the future of humanity posed by global ecological destruction. As the eminent US sociologist, William Robinson (2018: 1), observed:

Humanity stands at a crossroads. Global warming and environmental destruction, unprecedented social inequalities, the increasingly difficult struggle for survival of billions of people around the world, escalating social strife, military conflict, and the growing threat of nuclear war – all of these threaten the collapse of global civilization and even our annihilation and mass extinction.

Perhaps the biggest crisis of all is the manifest failure to effectively address these threats to our future. Political leaders, if they acknowledge these problems, for the most part look to market forces and technological fixes for solutions. Climate scientists, ecologists and radical social scientists, including radical economists, do argue for different, more radical policies than those now being pursued, but they are largely ignored. In grappling with all these issues, most importantly, the failure of politicians to respond effectively to the problems confronting them and to heed the warnings of scientists, political philosophy challenging current assumptions and political practices has been even more completely marginalized and is generally regarded as irrelevant to the real world of economic and political struggles, even by radical scientists and environmental activists. It is my contention that this marginalization of political philosophy, for whatever reason, has made it impossible to mobilize humanity to overcome this crisis of civilization.

In claiming this I am not arguing that all that is needed is for politicians, scientists and the general public to embrace the work of current political philosophers, even those who have turned their attention to environmental issues. Part of the reason why such philosophers, and philosophy generally, have lost their audience is the inadequacy of most of their work. When it comes to global environmental issues posing threats to the lives of billions, mainstream political philosophers, particularly in Anglophone countries, do not define and defend ultimate values, provide guidance for creating better institutions, define goals for action in the world as it now is, or provide effective alternative bases for policy formation than those manifestly defective approaches that now dominate. There is more radical work in political philosophy, but with some rare exceptions even these are too limited to really challenge mainstream thought. There is a failure to work out how, given the current state of the world, their radical ideas could be put into practice. With the triumph of neoliberalism, economists have taken the place of and marginalized political philosophers when it comes to defining the direction societies should take.

My contention, following Jason Moore, is that this is really a manifestation of a deeper problem of our current fractured culture with its dualism between the subjective realm focussed on by the humanities and the objective realm focussed on by science, the 'Two Cultures' referred to by C.P. Snow,

and the almost complete triumph of the objective over the subjective. This division has its roots in the dualism that, in philosophy, goes back to René Descartes' mind-body dualism. However, this had even deeper roots in new forms of life that developed in Western Europe from the Fifteenth Century onwards as feudalism was displaced by capitalism. This is now seen to have originated not in the Seventeenth Century in Britain with the enclosure of the commons, creation of wage laborers and then industrialization, as Karl Marx argued, but with colonialism led by Portugal and Spain (Castile-Aragón) financed by Northern Italian bankers. These bankers aimed to gain a return on their capital investments through funding economic ventures that plundered natural resources of colonies and then conquered and enslaved people in these colonies to work on plantations. This established a form of life based on the endless accumulation of capital, defining and evaluating the world in terms of this quest. Success was dependent upon finding cheap inputs, which at the same time led to cheapening, that is, devaluing these inputs. As Moore among others have argued, from this time onwards, 'Society', seen to be made up of rational egoists, came to be seen as outside 'Nature', and Nature (which included 'savages', slaves, land and other natural resources) was conceived as a realm to be commodified, cheapened, and efficiently controlled to be exploited by Society (Moore, 2015: 19ff.; Wolf, 1982. 131ff.).

It was this form of life that engendered Cartesian dualism, upholding a decontextualized, atomistic conception of subjects as asocial, free agents outside Nature, able to act rationally on Nature to pursue their interests, produce and exchange goods, make contracts, including contracts to establish Society with political institutions and laws designed to serve their interests, conjoined with a mechanistic conception of Nature comprehensible through mathematics and thereby controllable for the benefit of such a Society. It is this dualism that is encoded in the division between the humanities and the sciences, including mainstream economics and positivist social sciences. Later, this dualism was manifest in the division between managers and those they manage, whether colonized countries, primitive people and slaves, women, or wage laborers, and the institutions, including financial institutions to facilitate such relations and to keep the managed under control and exploited efficiently. This was associated with the displacement of the quest for justice by the quest for rights based on contracts focussed on protecting life and property, and utilitarian ethics focussed on controlling people and keeping them contented. As Western Europeans colonized and dominated the world over subsequent centuries, so also did this dualist culture.

Acknowledging a place to subjects at least to some degree provided the basis for challenging Descartes' atomistic, asocial notion of subjects through the arts and humanities; that is, those domains of culture designed to foster people's spirituality and humanity and the capacity for people to govern themselves. The humanities originated in Northern Italy in the Fifteenth Century Florentine Renaissance, reviving and developing ideas from the Ancient Roman Republic and from Ancient Greece, and culminated in the work of Giambattista Vico. Proponents of the humanities generally sought to recognize the reality of historically developing communities capable of self-governance, more primordial than social relations formed by contracts between property owning males. Philosophers who defended the humanities in opposition to those who defended 'scientism' – claiming that only science could advance genuine knowledge, often defended some form of Idealism, taking knowing subjects, either individuals in the case of Subjective Idealism or collective in the case of Objective or Absolute Idealism, as the reference point for characterizing the world, including Nature. The philosophical foundations of the humanities were most fully developed in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century German philosophy, which could be regarded as a second Renaissance. This Renaissance was inspired Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, with one of Kant's students, J.G. Herder (1744-1801) arguing that we are essentially cultural beings, formed by our unique cultures and committed to self-realization in the context of these cultures, and another of Kant's students, J.G. Fichte (1762-1814), arguing that we only become self-conscious subjects, capable of acting freely as moral agents, through

being recognized by and seeing ourselves from and judging the principles of our actions through the perspective of other free subjects. G.W.F. Hegel and F.W.J. Schelling integrated these insights, offering a general theory of history as the realization of the World-Spirit involving the development of culture and institutions that recognize the significance and freedom of all people. In opposition to Fichte's Objective Idealism, they defended Absolute Idealism, although later Schelling went beyond Idealism. Almost all advances in the humanities in modern European civilization, including political philosophies challenging the atomistic individualism of mainstream thought, can be traced back to the influence of these philosophers.

As the market, technology and the instrumental reasoning associated with these advanced, the place accorded to subjects contracted. The dualism in Western culture originally upholding the spiritual salvation of the individual as the ultimate end was transformed as the dominant rational materialism encroached into and then eliminated human autonomy. Idealism of any kind lost its plausibility, along with the values the Idealists had defended. It was this, which finally triumphed with neoliberalism beginning in the 1970s, that finally trivialized and marginalized the humanities and their concern with human experience, culture and community. As Friedrich Nietzsche observed, this paved the way for the final, complete devaluation of all life, not only theoretically, but in practice.

## **The Central Place of Economic Thought**

The science of economics has had a central role in these developments. Under the influence of Descartes, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who had embraced the mechanistic view of nature and attempted to characterize humans in a way that was consistent with this, individuals were understood as *homo economicus*, characterised as agents able to acquire instrumental knowledge of nature and make contracts to further their own interests – most importantly, avoiding aversions and satisfying their appetites (to use Hobbes' language) and acquiring property, wealth, or more abstractly, capital. The extension of markets in which people were free to enter contacts and exchange goods, including labour, with property rights protected, was portrayed by the economists as the basis of freedom. This is the philosophy of 'possessive individualism' as it was characterized by C.B. Macpherson (1962). Despite challenges, and with some modifications by neoclassical economists, this basic framework has dominated up until the present. It was reinforced by being used by Darwin as a metaphor to characterize evolution in nature, making the competitive struggle for survival in which progress is achieved through the survival of the fittest, a universal characteristic of life. This metaphor was then used not only to further justify capitalism but also imperialism and genocide (Young 1985).

This tradition of thought has been reinvigorated by neoliberal economists associated with the Mont Pelerin Society and Chicago School of Economics, most importantly Friedrich Hayek (1976) and Milton Friedman (1982). These neoliberals called for the imposition of unconstrained markets on all facets of life. It is the political thought of these economists, combined with militaristic foreign policies of USA and its allies to impose this political philosophy on recalcitrant countries, beginning with the overthrow of the elected government of Chile in 1973, that has dominated the world for the last half century, including almost all supposedly left-wing governments, with little effective opposition. The followers of this doctrine embraced British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's claim that there is no society; there are only individuals, families and the global market (despite Thatcher having led Britain to a war with Argentina over a remaining fragment of the British Empire).

Neoliberals, freeing markets to determine what is produced and how income is distributed, claim they are liberating people from the constraints of oppressive governments, and following the failure and collapse of the Soviet Union, they also claim there is no alternative to neoliberalism. They identify

neoliberalism with upholding freedom, democracy and human rights. At the same time, individuals are simultaneously portrayed as controllable through rewards and punishment, and with the advance of the human sciences, peoples' desires and aims are seen as controllable through advertising and public relations, the mind control industries. With the globalization of the economy and the growth and domination of transnational corporations promoted by neoliberals, the institutions of nation states have been transformed into instruments serving these transnational corporations (Robinson 2004). Utilizing the US military-industrial complex and intelligence organizations imposing markets on all facets of life, neoconservatives, in the name of freedom, democracy and individual rights, have endeavoured to overthrow democratically elected governments, interfered with elections, had foreign leaders assassinated and initiated a succession of wars against countries that have resisted their absorption into the global market and hindered transnational corporations profiting from exploiting their resources (Blum 2014, 1). Associated with the information technology revolution developed by the military industrial complex, people have been reconceived as information processing machines manufactured by DNA and controllable through new digital surveillance technology.

In this context, in which genuine democracy with citizens having real political power has been effectively subverted, the arts and humanities have been devalued, and if not eliminated (as they are being eliminated in some universities), are redefined as contributors to the entertainment and decoration industries, or as providing useful knowledge for people working in advertising or public relations. Idealism and the ideals defended by Idealists have been totally marginalized.

## **Challenging the Hegemonic Culture**

In the past, mainstream culture had been challenged most effectively by those who have embraced the humanities and viewed humans as essentially cultural beings, but engaged with science and identified the source of oppression in the culture of modernity in the tradition of economic thought, incorporating the philosophies of Descartes, Hobbes and Locke. Usually they were influenced by Marx and the tradition of Marxism, although there were allied thinkers influenced by the same thinkers who had influenced Marx, such as the social liberals, pragmatists, institutionalist economists and process philosophers. These are the thinkers who utilized and built on the insights of Herder, Fichte and Hegel, but like Schelling, moved beyond Idealism. Such thinkers have the means to explain why radical proposals required to reverse ecological destruction are marginalized and rendered ineffective, although their explanations are ignored.

Marx and Marxists in particular offered powerful critiques of ruling ideas and explained their dominance and resistance to critique. These critiques are necessary and extremely important. However, Marxists and post-Marxists have tended to privilege critique above all else. For instance, we have Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, and the subtitle of Marx's major work, *Capital*, was *A Critique of Political Economy*. Furthermore, supposedly orthodox ('vulgar') Marxists have tended to grant a privileged place to the base/superstructure model of society and embraced scientism. This is really Cartesian dualism in a modified form, treating politics and the development of ideas other than those relevant to advancing the forces of production as part of the superstructure and as such, merely an expression of or an instrument of the economic base. The ultimate end is the development of the forces of production by the most efficient means possible. The call for dictatorship of the proletariat with state ownership of the means of production is no political philosophy at all. Nor was Lenin's notion of the withering away of the state. In the final analysis, as Alexander Bogdanov predicted in June, 1917 (Gare 2000, 342), it boils down to rule by managers. The rise of managerialism, characterized by James Burnham in *The Managerial Revolution* (1962), first published in 1941, was portrayed not as the replacement of capitalism and its oppressive dynamics, but with its further advance. What we now

have is rule by corporatocracy, the managers of transnational corporations forming a transnational ruling class who control which politicians gain power, and this, many now argue, is the problem (Korten, 2001; Robinson, 2004).

Even when Marxists (usually influenced by Hegel) reject the base/superstructure model of society for a holistic characterization of the development of capitalism as a socio-economic formation, showing how all the practices, technologies, institutions, cultural productions and ways of thinking in the modern era are internally related to and are aspects of the development of this formation, according a significant place to culture and cultural struggles in its constitution and maintenance, they usually avoid questions of what political structures could replace those which are oppressive and which would not become oppressive in turn, while being dismissive of the achievements of efforts to control these oppressive tendencies without completely replacing the market by social liberals, social democrats and democratic socialists.

This is less the case with the best Marxist work on culture and politics, however, most importantly, the work of Antonio Gramsci and those he influenced. Gramsci, who was influenced by Bogdanov and the council communists, argued that to rule, an existing ruling class has to maintain cultural hegemony through which it organizes consent, while those challenging the ruling class have to develop a counter-hegemonic culture. Organization of consent for the existing order requires some understanding by people of the socio-economic political order they are part of, while a successful counter-hegemonic movement requires unification by those who are or feel oppressed by the existing order by identifying this oppression, finding common interests with others who are oppressed, and convincing people that the current order can be replaced by a different order that is worth fighting for. To prevent radical movements being ideologically captured by the forms of thinking that previously prevailed, Gramsci concluded that rather than a counter-hegemonic culture an alternative hegemonic culture needs to be developed based on different conception of the world (Ahearne 2013). As the Gramscian social and cultural theorist Carl Boggs (2012, 184ff.) argued, Gramsci's work provides a starting point for those facing the crises of our civilization and aspiring to create a different world order, locally and globally, one that augments rather than destroys the ecological conditions for humanity. To begin with, those challenging the current order need to understand the current ruling elites and how they dominate the world, culturally and politically.

## **Developing a Counter-Hegemonic Culture**

As noted, if the current order is to be challenged and replaced, it is necessary to provide a perspective from which the oppressive and destructive tendencies of the current order can be understood, while showing that a different and better order is possible. Central to this is the development of historical narratives. With the marginalization of the humanities, the role of narratives or stories in life has been vastly under-estimated (Gare, 2002). As David Carr (1991) argued, all our actions, individual and collective, are lived stories, projecting a future state to be realized and articulating the steps to achieve this. Stories can create and are constitutive of human organizations and communities, including nations and civilizations, upholding an image of the future to be realized (Polak, 1973). Lived stories, especially collective stories, encompass sub-stories, including alternative and even rival or conflicting stories, on the path to realizing goals. Sub-stories can be focussed exclusively on efforts to develop better understanding of situations and the broader world, as in the stories of the development of philosophy, history and science, and narratives are an essential component in developing and judging ideas in such quests. This is even the case in mathematical research. The existence of sub-stories is essential to shared lived stories, which can range all the way from small, temporary organizations up to the stories of civilizations and humanity as a whole. Usually,

these broader stories are embraced tacitly without reflection. This is particularly true of the narratives defining the goals of civilization. However, even these can be brought to consciousness and articulated, either in words or other art forms, questioned and rethought, and then explicitly embraced whether in its original or in some radically modified form, thereby refiguring people's lives. Lived stories can be monologic, in which a dominating elite treat subordinates as instruments, or dialogic, allowing participants to participate in questioning, discussing and reformulating these lived stories.

To succeed in gaining cultural hegemony, those challenging the existing order require stories to orient themselves and define their goals, and to inspire others to embrace their goals. It requires understanding of the dominant narratives and openness to the narratives of all people oppressed by the existing social order, and constant efforts to reformulate narratives to be more inclusive of these others. Their narratives should be dialogic rather than monologic, although once power is gained, commitment to dialogue tends to be lost. Established elites in order to maintain their cultural hegemony in the face of disappointments and problems tend to uphold monologic grand narratives, excluding the narratives of those who are being suppressed or exploited, and any place for the questioning of these narratives. The most extreme form of narrative denial is illustrated by the refusal to acknowledge that 'primitive' people have a history. As Eric Wolf (1982) put it, these are the 'people without history'. Such denial amounts to a refusal to acknowledge the life conditions, aspirations and projects of such people. Removal of any place for questioning the dominant narratives is typical of societies in the face of crises which could undermine the legitimacy of their rulers. Narratives that reveal problems in or alternatives to lived narratives, or which, by providing parallels with other societies and civilizations, past or present, which might provide insight into current problems, the need for drastic changes and real alternatives to the existing order, are likely to be censored or at least marginalized.

The neoliberal grand narrative that came to dominate the world after the financial crises of the 1970s, the integration of China into the global market and then the collapse of the Soviet Union, was imposed as a monologic narrative from the beginning. Its leaders embraced Walter Lippmann's argument that modern society is too complex for genuine democracy and what is required is the manufacture of consent (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009, 13ff.). Committed to dismantling the welfare state and weakening democracy in the West, destroying communism and suppressing Third World aspirations to end their exploitation, neoliberalism was defended through neoclassical economics claiming to be a hard science and therefore out of the scope of ordinary mortals to understand. This went along with a massive public relations campaign to manufacture consent, increasing domination of the mass media by a few media moguls, and subversion of institutions of education through transforming universities into transnational business corporations. Policies based on neoliberalism were imposed by global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization which forced countries to privatise public assets, dismantle welfare programs and eliminate barriers to free trade, allowing governments to be sued by transnational corporations if their legislation damages their profits. This was reinforced by the US that after WWII imposed the US dollar as the international currency and later used this to sanction countries that acted against the interests of transnational corporations. All this has been associated with the massive growth of debt and the increasing dominance of the financial sector of the global economy (Hudson, 2022). All these institutions have been backed up by military alliances such as NATO and SEATO committed to maintaining a unipolar world dominated by the US military industrial, intelligence, finance complex promoting above all the interests of US based transnational corporations.

Essentially, neoliberalism was a revival of Nineteenth Century capitalism in a much expanded form, now dominated by USA rather than Britain and France, committed to dismantling the advances made

by the labour movement world-wide over the previous century. It has resulted in a massive transfer of wealth and income to the wealthy, the precarization of work and the impoverishment of vast numbers of people, including people in USA, and a destabilization of the global economy. This has been conjoined with the rise of fascism, a connection observed by Karl Polanyi in early Twentieth Century Europe. The basic problem, he observed, is that 'the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness.' (Polanyi 1957, 3). It had to produce a reaction, and if not some form of socialism, then fascism. In blinding people to the connection between market fundamentalism and fascism, and to succeed in making people believe that there is no alternative, it has been necessary to erase as much as possible historical memory, and if historical knowledge cannot be erased, to uphold a false or at least highly distorted, one-sided understanding of history. Increasingly, ruling elites follow the approach of the Roman Empire, dividing others in order to rule, co-opting potential opponents to implement their agenda, while relying more and more on surveillance and coercion to eliminate opposition. As William Robinson (2020) argued, the transnational ruling elite have created a global police state.

A more adequate historical narrative is required not only to correct omissions, falsifications and distortions, but to identify what is driving oppression and destruction, what has succeeded in the past in overcoming at least to some extent such oppression and the possibilities for reviving suppressed forms of thinking and political trajectories. However, achieving this is not just a matter of reviving genuine history. It is necessary to develop historical narratives that unite people to become effective agents of history and to succeed in this. Historical narratives need to be formulated through a theoretical perspective that facilitates not only an appreciation of the suppressed narratives and an understanding how distorted narratives are maintained and more adequate narratives are sidelined or crippled, but also to provide a better understanding of the world, orienting people to create the future. All this is central to identifying, understanding and challenging the current hegemonic culture as part of the process of developing counter- or alternative hegemonic culture.

## **Ecology as a Challenge to Neoliberal Hegemony**

Where is the theoretical perspective required for these alternative hegemonic historical narratives to come from? If the humanities, including history, have had their cognitive status undermined by scientism, then science is the obvious place to look. The cognitive status of mainstream economics derives largely from its efforts to emulate and accord with physics, which had marginalized the philosophy of Aristotle largely inspired by biology. However, physics has stagnated over recent decades, and the most creative work in science is coming from biologists opposed to mainstream reductionist thinking. Within biology, one of the most creative areas is now ecology, with organisms being portrayed as highly integrated ecosystems and humans distinctive characteristics now made intelligible through biosemiotics and human ecology. Robert Ulanowicz (1997, 6) has argued that ecology should now be taken as the reference point for defining all science, with ecologists developing the concepts, forms of thinking and mathematics that might overcome the logjams blocking the advance of physics. Ecology, which also challenges mainstream evolutionary theory by revealing the importance of symbiosis, synergies and emergence in evolution in opposition to the neo-Darwinian synthesis that reduced organisms to machines for reproducing genes and had been used to revive social Darwinism in the 1970s, provides a solid basis for challenging the hegemonic culture.

Ecology is the study of biotic communities, now usually characterized as ecosystems. What became evident from such study is that organisms interacting with each other transform their



environments in a way that is conducive to their life, making these communities resilient in the face of perturbations while creating niches (or 'homes') that allow individuals and species to explore new possibilities. That is, biotic communities are 'ecopoietic', creating the conditions or homes within which components can flourish and new living forms can emerge that augment the life of these communities. Incorporating thermodynamics into ecology and human ecology facilitated further advances in these disciplines. Advances in thermodynamics, notably, the development of non-linear thermodynamics and the study of dissipative structures by Ilya Prigogine and his colleagues, along with other developments in complexity theory, including work on morphogenesis and the development of hierarchy theory by Howard Pattee, Timothy Allen and Stanley Salthe among others have strengthened the anti-reductionist tradition of ecology. Salthe (2005) has also integrated endophysics, the view that it is necessary to appreciate that we are part of the world we are trying to understand, into an ecological world-view. This work has enabled Jacob von Üexkull's biology and Peircian biosemiotics to be integrated into ecology, generating a new sub-discipline – ecosemiotics. (Gare 2017, 131; Maran 2020). On the basis of such advances, Ilya Prigogine (1980, xiif.) claimed that 'we are in a period of revolution - one in which the very position and meaning of the scientific approach are undergoing reappraisal - a period not unlike the birth of the scientific approach in ancient Greece or of its renaissance in the time of Galileo.' Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers argued that this would bring about a new alliance between science and the humanities (Prigogine & Stengers 1984, 68; Gare 2017, 129), and the development of ecology, including ecosemiotics and human ecology, provides strong justification for this claim.

## **From Marxism to World Systems Theory and Human Ecology**

While there are a number of marginalized traditions of social thought opposing mainstream culture, the strongest tradition is still Marxism, including 'post-Marxism', the tradition heavily influenced by Marx but integrating other research traditions and grappling with new facets of world history as it has unfolded since the Nineteenth Century, most importantly at present, the global ecological crisis. The core of this Marxist tradition is the view that capitalism originated in Western Europe as something radically new in human history, a mode of production and socio-economic formation in which the quest for capital based on commodifying nature and labour as a means to gain more capital has no limits and had to grow until it dominated the world, with commodification growing extensively to encompass the globe, and intensively, commodifying more and more facets of life in the quest for new avenues for profitable investments. The current situation with the domination of the world by a transnational corporate elite controlling the most powerful cultural and political institutions, inexorably moving towards the destruction of the ecological conditions for civilization, is the logical outcome of this growth.

One of the most important developments in post-Marxism was world systems theory developed by Immanuel Wallerstein under the influence of Marxist theories of imperialism, systems theory and the geo-historical work of Fernand Braudel and the Annales School of historians. Wallerstein argued that capitalism emerged in Northern Italy and has been characterized not by the creation of a global empire, but a global system characterized by core zones, semi-peripheries and peripheries. The core zones use the semi-peripheries to exploit the peripheries. Countries vie with each other to rise in this system, but few succeed in rising. The system has been dominated by a succession of hegemonic powers – first, Venice, then the Dutch Republic, then Britain, and then USA. Successions are usually characterized by instability, increasing conflict and warfare over which country will succeed the old hegemonic power – for instance, between France and Britain and her allies as the Dutch Republic declined, and between

Germany and USA and their allies as Britain declined. USA is now in decline, and what we are seeing is growing instability and violent conflict as USA and its allies are challenged by China and its allies.

Wallerstein's work has been further developed by Stephen Bunker and Jason Moore, among others, integrating it with advances in thermodynamics and ecology. Bunker embraced the work of Richard Newbold Adams, a social theorist indirectly influenced by Alexander Bogdanov, on the thermodynamics of human societies. From this perspective:

Everything in the environment of man is composed of energy forms and processes and can be measured in terms of the amount of energy that is potentially available for conversion or is being converted. ... In dealing with social power ... we are concerned not so much with the rate of flow or conversion as with *the control that one actor, or party, or operating unit exercises over some set of energy forms or flows*, and, most specifically, over some set of energy forms or flows *that constitute part of the meaningful environment of another actor*. (Adams 1975, p.1)

The control that matters most is control over the triggers that begin processes of energy transformation.

Focussing on Brazil and the Amazon Basin, Bunker showed how the relationship between the core zones, semi-peripheries and peripheries can be understood as the appropriation and control of energy flows by the core zones, in this case, USA, which as a productive economy, becomes more powerful and more able to control the semi-peripheries and peripheries as they develop, while the semi-peripheries, in this case, the metropolises of Brazil, are manipulated into extracting energy from the peripheries. The Amazon as an extractive economy, exporting its reserves of minerals and destructively exploiting its ecosystems, becomes poorer as it develops. As Bunker (1985, 22) argued:

... production models cannot explain the internal dynamics of extractive economies because the exploitation of natural resources uses and destroys values in energy and material which cannot be calculated in terms of labour or capital. When natural resources are extracted from one regional ecosystem to be transformed and consumed in another, the resource exporting region loses values that occur in its physical environment. These losses eventually decelerate the extractive region's economy, while the resource-consuming communities gain value and their economies accelerate.

It is this structure that facilitates ecologically destructive exploitation of the peripheries. The lesson Bunker drew from his study that:

Dominant classes depend on their societies' total environment; in this sense they depend on the organization of other classes' adaptation to the environment. The clearest lesson of class relations in the Amazon is that dominant groups which impoverish the rest of society ultimately impoverish themselves. Only when human communities with balanced exchange relations exist is it possible for social organization to adapt to its total environment in ways which sustain both human community and the ecosystem itself. (Bunker 1985, 252)

Bunker claimed this as an extreme form of 'hypercoherence' as it was characterized by Anatol Rapaport, the tendency of dominant social systems to increase control, to use up more and more available energy, until a stage is reached where they have so much power they can survive while contributing little or nothing to the systems on which they are dependent - until they destroy these systems, the conditions of their own existence.

Bunker's use of Adam's work to reformulate Wallerstein's world systems theory involved conceiving humans as cultural beings in naturalistic terms as part of and within nature. Bunker's perspective is that of human ecology, in which human communities are seen as ecosystems participating in broader biotic communities or ecosystems. This amounts to a rejection of the dualism between Society and

Nature and a conception of nature which acknowledges that humans with their distinctive powers and liabilities have evolved within and are part of and participants within nature. However, Adam's and Bunker's work still contained a residual dualism between humans and their environment, with energy flows being seen to be controlled by people, as though people and their were actions not themselves forms of energy transformations.

Jason Moore in his theoretical work, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (2015) attempted to overcome such residual dualism afflicting even radical environmentalists who claim to see people as within nature. For Moore, this is not merely a theoretical problem. As he wrote in his introduction to this work:

I argue that "Society" and "Nature" are part of the problem, intellectually and politically; the binary Nature/Society is directly implicated in the colossal violence, inequality, and oppression of the modern world; and that the view of Nature as external is a fundamental condition of capital accumulation. Efforts to transcend capitalism in any egalitarian and broadly sustainable fashion will be stymied so long as the political imagination is captive to capitalism's either/or organization of reality. And relatedly, efforts to discern the limits of capitalism today—such discernment is crucial to any anti-systemic strategy—cannot advance much further by encasing reality in dualisms that are immanent to capitalist development. ... Capitalism's governing conceit is that it may do with Nature as it pleases, that Nature is external and may be coded, quantified, and rationalized to serve economic growth, social development, or some other higher good. This is capitalism *as a project*. (p.2)

In opposition to this, Moore argued that humans have to understand themselves consistently as components of the 'web of life': 'The "web of life" is nature as a whole: nature with an emphatically lowercase n. This is nature as us, as inside us, as around us. It is nature as a flow of flows. Put simply, humans make environments and environments make humans—and human organization.' (p.2). The pattern of relations that we call capitalism works *through* nature, while nature works *through* the more limited zone, capitalism. Moore called this movement of capitalism through nature and of nature through capitalism, the 'Double Internality', and argued this should be understood as a dialectical relation. In developing this notion, he offered '*world-ecology*' as a new paradigm. Modernity, with its multiple crises, he characterized as 'the capitalist world-ecology' in which external nature and humanity co-produce capitalist relations, including a commodified Nature.

Central to this new paradigm is the concept of 'oikeios'. Moore (2015, 35) wrote of this:

*Oikeios* is a way of naming the creative, historical, and dialectical relation between, and also always within, human and extra-human natures. The *oikeios* is shorthand: for *oikeios topos*, or "favorable place," a term coined by the Greek philosopher-botanist Theophrastus. ... The *oikeios* is a multi-layered dialectic, comprising flora and fauna, but also our planet's manifold geological and biospheric configurations, cycles, and movements. Through the *oikeios* form and re-form the relations and conditions that create and destroy humanity's mosaic of cooperation and conflict: what is typically called "social" organization. Nature-as-*oikeios* is, then, not offered as an additional *factor*, to be placed alongside culture or society or economy. Nature, instead, becomes the matrix within which human activity unfolds, and the field upon which historical agency operates.

Moore argued that: 'Key to realizing such a deeper understanding is developing a language, a method, and a narrative strategy that puts the *oikeios* at the center.' (p.4)

The world ecology of capitalism involves a particular kind of *oikeios*, one which objectifies nature as Nature separate from Society, an objectified world of taps and sinks to be exploited for profits, simultaneously generating a distorted understanding and evaluation of the broader natural processes

which has made the exploitation of commodities possible. This does not mean that these broader natural processes are not recognized at all in the concept of Nature. However, the concern of those striving for profitable capital investments is to have these as cheaply as possible in order to reduce labour costs. In *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, Moore spoke of four 'cheaps' – labour-power, food, energy and raw materials. In a later work, *History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* (2018), Patel and Moore argued that the quest to cheapen seven things - nature, money, work, care, food, energy, and lives, has driven the history of the modern world. The quest for Cheap Nature, he argued, generates a 'relentlessly innovative quest to turn the work/energy of the biosphere into capital (value-in-motion).' (2015, 14) It is this that can explain the evolution of capitalism, the division into core zones, semi-peripheries and peripheries, and through which the current crisis of modernity-in-nature can be understood.

Moore argued that capitalism now faces a major complex of crises because there are no more boundaries to cross to provide new sources of cheap things. Peak oil illustrates this, but this is only one of many cheap things that are no longer cheap. At the same time, sinks are being exhausted, including the atmosphere and oceans that are no longer sinks for greenhouse gas emissions. In the past, the exhaustion of cheap things has been circumvented, with colonialism and slavery in the sixteenth century overcoming a crisis on limits of exploitable labour in Western Europe after the devastation caused by the plague. We now appear to have reached the ultimate limits where there are no more frontiers to cross and exploit. The consequence has been that more and more wealth has been generated by asset inflation rather than production, with income generated through this really being the transfer of wealth from poorer to wealthier people and the creation of a global rentier class (Hudson 2022, 25ff.). This has been associated with the exclusion of more and more people from the economy, and concomitantly, the revival of fascism characterized by exclusivity and the refusal to acknowledge the humanity of the excluded. This parallels the developments that took place in the early Twentieth Century, culminating in World War II. It might be hoped that a successful challenge to the hegemony of USA in the global system by China, with Russia as a client state, will overcome this crisis. However, apart from the likelihood of a new world war, possibility involving nuclear weapons, this would still be operating within the destructive logic of the capitalist world-system. It would not solve the global ecological crisis, but possibly, accelerate it. What is required is a transcendence of this system by creating a global ecological civilization committed to augmenting the health of the ecosystems of which we are part, based on multi-polarity rather than domination of the world-system by a new hegemonic power.

The notion of oikeios offers a basis for comprehending what was achieved by and what is wrong with the current world-system, or as Moore characterized it, the capitalist world ecology. The term largely corresponds to the term 'ecopoiesis', with minor differences. As I understand it, 'ecopoiesis' assumes and places more emphasis on the role of 'household- or home-making' or ecopoiesis in the functioning ecosystems, being essential to them, their health and adaptability. The creation of oikeiois through the logic of the market, defining all value through actual or potential monetary exchanges, has facilitated the functioning of some human communities but has damaged others and damaged ecopoiesis in biotic communities. While generating major technological advances facilitating the growth of human populations, it has provided the conditions for the emergence of what the ecological historian, William McNeill (1992, 69ff.) characterized as macroparasites who contribute nothing to life, blind to the brutality of their exploitation of other people, their role in the destruction of the ecosystems of which they are part, and the complexity of and intrinsic significance of terrestrial life. The notions of oikeios when combined with ecopoiesis provides a basis for comprehending what kind of oikeiois is required that is sustainable, one in which conditions are provided for people to flourish while augmenting the life and health of their communities, human and non-human. 'People' here

should be understood not just as individuals, but also as communities at multiple levels up to the whole of humanity; that is, communities of communities. That is, a good *oikeiosis* facilitates creative, health generating *ecopoiesis*, the production of environments, including semiotic environments, conducive to the flourishing of life in a way that augments the conditions for life.

## **Reviving Communitarian Ethical and Political Philosophy**

So understood, *ecopoiesis* provides a framework not only for rethinking economics as institutionalist ecological economics, but for ethical and political philosophy. It is not necessary or desirable to develop this ethics and political philosophy in abstraction from previous work in this area. Post-reductionist ecology, incorporating the notions of *oikeiosis* and *ecopoiesis*, provides the basis for defending, rethinking and advancing work in the humanities on naturalistic foundations, including work in social and political philosophy, while rejecting the mechanistic form of atomistic individualism deriving from Hobbes and Locke. Ethical and political doctrines challenging mainstream thought are generally associated with the communitarian tradition that took inspiration from the philosophies of Aristotle and Hegel, and less directly, of Herder, Fichte and Schelling (Avineri & de-Shalit, 1992). Communitarians argue against atomistic individualism that community is central to and the condition of human existence, that without being socialised into the culture of a community the notion of any contract, let alone a contract to found society as postulated by Locke, would be unintelligible. The philosophy of the communitarians is much more in accord with non-European traditions of thought and avoids Western ethnocentrism. It provides the basis for defending core values of other cultures around the world, including Chinese culture, and at the same time, uniting those oppressed or threatened by the current world order. This includes most of humanity, including most people living in affluent Western nations.

Reviving communitarianism can be seen as an effort to recover the quest for justice (giving people their due) that survived the onslaughts of Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke and their followers. This communitarian tradition, while subordinate, has not been without influence. It appeared to be triumphing with the defeat of Nazi Germany and its allies, and then with the development of the United Nations, the advance of social democracy in the West, the triumph of Communism in China, the dismantling of imperialism, liberalization of communism in the East and the defeat of US neo-colonialism in Vietnam. The next challenge was to deal with environmental problems. This was the historical trajectory that the New Left tried to revive, but was derailed in the 1970s and 80s by neoliberals and 'neocons' (neoconservatives) associated with the rise of the global corporatocracy.

Aristotle argued that we are essentially 'political animals' (*zoon politikon*), that the principle concern of ethics is to work out the ultimate ends or end, which he argued is '*eudaimonia*', and that the polis should be organized to facilitate people realizing these ultimate ends. This is the basic principle (*arche*) of politics, the condition for engaging in political arguments. Without understanding this, people will simply talk past each other. It can be argued that this is still the case. He characterized *eudaimonia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* as proper functioning, an activity of the 'soul' over a complete life in accordance with the best or most complete virtue. By 'soul', Aristotle meant the final cause of the organism, and in humans, this is life of the rational element through active engaging in public affairs based on the quest for justice and participating in inquiry understood as the quest for wisdom, with the habituated disposition to pursue justice and wisdom being the highest virtues. *Eudaimonia* is then realizing one's highest potential in one's life, and it is in realizing this potential that one becomes most fully human, and that this can only be achieved through participation in a community. In *The Politics* Aristotle classified and examined the various constitutions to work out which constitution best provided the conditions for achieving *eudaimonia*. Aristotle assumed the Greek polis as the topic to

be investigated, and focussed on governance of these. Roman, Islamic and Medieval European philosophers did not depart radically from Aristotle's philosophy, but went beyond him in not presupposing the polis as the only political form, recognizing mixed constitutions (from Polybius onwards), and rethinking what is eudaimonia. This tradition was challenged by Machiavelli who questioned the primacy accorded by Aristotle to the quest for justice, but was really only sidelined the Seventeenth Century Scientific Revolution with the work of Hobbes and Locke with their mechanistic world-view.

The German Renaissance was pre-eminently concerned to challenge the tradition of thought deriving from Hobbes and Locke. In doing so, many of Aristotle's basic notion of ethics and politics were recovered, but advanced by taking into account history and the greater complexity of human societies, rethinking the nature of humans and of rationality. Herder developed the notion of 'cultures', arguing that humans only become human through being socialised into cultures, most importantly, through language. He argued that the ultimate end of life is self-realization, but instead of assuming that this would be the same for everyone, he argued that cultures differed, upholding different values, and each historically situated individual is challenged to find their own unique centre of gravity and realize their own unique potential, in doing so, developing their own culture. Artists, expressing their whole personality in their work, were seen by Herder as the model for this. While praising cultural diversity and attacking the tendency of empires in the past and capitalism in the present to dominate and homogenize people, Herder was not a complete relativist. He argued that through history there has been a general tendency to greater humanity. This tendency could be explained through the struggle for recognition as described by Fichte, where this is only possible through recognising the significance of others, this providing an impetus for the quest for justice. Following Rousseau, Kant and Fichte this was associated with recognizing a form of rationality over and above instrumental, self-centred rationality, a rationality of the general will committed to the common good, participation in which elevates people beyond their appetites to be truly free.

Hegel and Schelling integrated Herder's work on history with this notion of rationality. In doing so, they greatly advanced ideas on what humans are and what motivates them (Gare 2017, 163ff.). Hegel argued that humans are involved in three dialectical patterns of culture through which they transcend their immediate engagement in the world and achieve self-hood. There is the dialectic of labour which operates through tools, or technology, the dialectic of recognition which operates through ethical relations and the dialectic of representation which operates through language. Each of these are dependent on the other, but are associated with different motives that transcend the motives of satisfying appetites and avoiding aversions identified by Hobbes. On the basis of these, Hegel argued we can identify rational progress in history as the significance and freedom of all people are increasingly recognized through art, history, religion and philosophy, that is, Absolute Spirit, and then embodied in institutions and practices, that is, Objective Spirit. In the modern world, recognition is institutionalized in the family, based on love, in the economic institutions of civil society, including corporations (trade unions and professional bodies) through which workers protect their livelihoods and gain recognition for the significance of their work, where recognition takes the form of rights, and then in the institutions of the State (equivalent to the Greek polis) which unifies the principles of the family and civil society to achieve solidarity, according people and these institutions due recognition through the laws it promulgates and enforces and through the public institutions financed and sustained by it. The State in this sense gives a place to the market, but ensures through its institutions that it functions for the common good and recognizes the significance of each institution and its members and each individual as well as the whole community, providing the conditions for families, institutions and communities uncorrupted by calculative reasoning to flourish.

While Hegel ended up totally subordinating diversity to his geometrized form of dialectics, upholding a monologic historical narrative of humanity that reduced individuals to instruments of the World-Spirit, Schelling resisted this (Gare 2017, 170ff.). He gave a place to individual freedom, defended the cognitive status of art as equivalent to that of philosophy, and called for the development of an international body to guarantee the autonomy of nations and defend them against aggression, anticipating the League of Nations and the United Nations. To defend his ethics and political philosophy and his conception of humans on which this was based he rejected Newtonian cosmology and called for the development of a new physics that would enable humans to be understood as having evolved as a form of life within nature, which he held to dynamic, creative and intrinsically valuable. This helped inspire thermodynamics, field theories in physics, the notion of emergence through limiting activity, with organisms defining their environments as their worlds. C.S. Peirce, who characterized himself as a Schellingian of some stripe, showed how the emergence and evolution of life is associated with the emergence and development of semiosis, the production and interpretation of signs, accounting for human culture as a complex form of semiosis involving symbols. Schelling argued that humanity is evolving towards a global consciousness, integrating the cultural achievements of all past civilizations, but understood the movement towards this through a dialogic narrative in which all people in all societies would participate in its development.

## **Rethinking Communitarianism through Ecology and Ecopoiesis**

Ecology as it has developed and served to reformulate our understanding of history is really the realization of Schelling's pioneering work. Once this suppressed tradition is recognized it is a fairly simple matter to appreciate that through ecology, giving a central place to the notion of ecopoiesis as the basis for radically extending Aristotle's understanding of politics and all subsequent developments of political thought in the communitarian tradition is provided. Taking ecology as the starting point for recovering and developing this tradition, conceiving humans in a way that does justice to the insights of Aristotle, Herder, Hegel and Schelling, not only puts the global ecological crisis at the centre of the picture, unifying all those threatened by it against the current world elites and involves the total rejection of the dualism of modern civilization that has reproduced oppression over and over again.

Ecopoiesis as 'home-making' is the process of creating or augmenting the conditions for the flourishing of life, that is, for realizing the potential to augment the conditions for life, and as such, can be taken as a generalization and development of Aristotle's first principle of politics as providing the conditions for achieving eudaimonia. Accepting that we are components of ecosystems, human and non-human, involves appreciating that in this quest we are participants in the self-creation of these ecosystems. To characterize this as *oikeios* implies recognition that external nature and the socio-economic order of which we are part are co-producers with us of these conditions or homes, even when this is denied or misunderstood, as it tends to be in the capitalist world ecology with its dualism between Society and Nature and associated commodity fetishism. While the resulting *oikeios* might benefit some of the human agents involved in its production, it could be damaging the broader ecosystems making up this external nature, just as cancer cells in a body can produce an environment suitable to their flourishing, resulting the death of the organism of which they are a part.

Appreciating this possibility indicates what should be produced and this also shows how politics should now be understood. For Aristotle, the good life involved people realizing their highest potentialities to participate in and advance the life of the polis, providing the conditions for such a life. For Herder it involved people realizing their unique potential defined initially through their national (and civilizational) culture to augment humanity. Hegel argued that the Greeks only recognized the significance and freedom of some people. In the modern world, the significance of everyone is

recognized, and also the diversity of roles in society and the diversity of life conditions required for their flourishing. This is associated with sub-communities, including corporations, trade unions or professional bodies and local communities within broader community of the State. Self-realization involves *ecopoiesis* as maintaining and developing the conditions for individual self-realization, but also the conditions for these sub-communities and their relationship to each other through which the conditions for individual self-realization are provided. We can now conceive *eudaimonia* and self-realization as *ecopoiesis*, fulfilment in life through augmenting the conditions for life, including the possibilities for such self-realization, of both oneself and the communities of which we are part, including nations, civilizations and humanity as a whole. These should not be understood separately but as conditions for and components of each other. The development of humanity through history and within each community involves participating in the three dialectical patterns identified by Hegel, of representation through language and other symbolic forms striving for truth, including artistic truth, mutual recognition through institutions embodying a commitment to justice, and labour or work using and developing technology to produce the conditions for living and having the means to participate in community life. This can be characterized as liberty. In opposition to the notion of liberty as freedom from every constraint, which inevitably involves those with power enslaving others, liberty so understood should be seen as not being dependent upon those who can harm one (the Ancient Roman conception of liberty) and having the conditions to live ethically, realizing one's potential in pursuing truth, justice and liberty, free to challenge defective beliefs, practices and actions without fear of retribution, and room to be technologically innovative and to develop new organizations. It is in relation to these quests that 'rights' should be recognized – for instance, the right to economic security. *Ecopoiesis* should encompass all these quests.

Schelling also called for peace between nations through international organizations protecting countries from aggression, that is, providing the conditions or homes for countries to realize their potential through these dialectical patterns. And he recognized that humans are part of and participants in nature, and that nature apart from humans has intrinsic significance. Developing this claim through ecology, self-realization can also be taken to include people, both as individuals and as organizations and communities, living in a way and developing people's character so that they augment the life of the broader human and biotic communities of which they are part. 'People' involved in the quest for such self-realization can be understood as individuals, but also as communities and as communities of communities, including nations and ranging up to the whole of humanity. *Ecopoiesis* should include the 'homes' of nations, a world order in which countries are safe from invasion or efforts of other countries to destabilize, intimidate and corrupt them and then impose comprador elites.

Such self-realization through *ecopoiesis* has to be undertaken by people while involved in the continual production, reproduction and development of these communities at all levels. Some of these are bound to be in some degree of conflict, with some destroying the conditions of their own and other's existence. *Ecopoiesis* involves the struggle to deal with such conflicts, requiring creative efforts through dialogue and the means for such dialogue to develop forms which avoid these conflicts and self-destructive dynamics. Central to ethics is how to deal with situations where success in augmenting the conditions of oneself or one's immediate community involves being destructive of others, including broader communities of which one is also a part. Dealing with such problems cannot be just a matter for individuals as isolated actors. It inevitably involves developing new relationships to others, new communities and new institutions that can avoid such destructiveness. Institutional economics provides guidance for thinking about what institutions are required to control markets to ensure they serve the common good and guarantee people's freedom to realize their potential, as Karl Polanyi (Brie & Thomasberger 2018) and Ruslan Dzarasov (2014) among others have argued. Statecraft from this perspective involves advancing the conditions for life in one's own country in a way that augments the



conditions of other countries to augment their ecosystems. Economic development through relations with other countries can be designed so that these other countries also develop their economies through these relations. It is necessary to acknowledge the need for defence, but this can be undertaken in a way that does not threaten other countries and augments institutions designed to maintain global peace. Acting according to such principles illustrate ecopoiesis in practice.

Creating and developing such institutions must inevitably involve political struggle, which also involves envisaging what kind of future we should be striving to create that can inspire others to unite and participate in creating this future and working out what are the paths that need to be taken to realizing it. These paths have to involve creating the conditions, niches, or homes for further efforts by individuals and countries to advance this quest. Ecopoiesis, providing these homes, is central to developing these paths, providing the conditions for other people, communities and organizations to advance this quest. The quest to avoid global ecological destruction understood in this way can be characterized as the quest to create an ecological civilization. I have suggested the quest for this future be formulated as a dialogic grand narrative, with the notion of ecopoiesis providing a practical way of thinking about what is involved in providing and developing the conditions for participation in advancing this grand narrative.

## **Conclusion: Creating an Ecological Civilization**

It should not be difficult to see that ecopoiesis so understood brings into focus and clarifies the broad counter-hegemonic project of overcoming the logic of the capitalist world-system and liberating people from destructive market imperatives and the macroparasites generated by these imperatives. The defeat of this counter-hegemonic project in the 1970s with the triumph of neoliberalism appeared to have been permanently cemented with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War, which President George W. Bush claimed USA had won. American ruling elites then set about maintaining a unipolar world, with USA setting the rules for all countries, which USA itself did not follow. From the perspective of world-systems theory, USA had achieved hegemony and has been using this to exploit the resources of the entire world, in the process, generating a hypercoherent elite which is playing the major role in creating a global ecological crisis. The rise of China has challenged this hegemony, but USA with 870 military bases around the world and controlling oceans with its navy is still the most powerful country in the world. The continued development of China, with its Belt and Road Initiative, allying itself with other BRICS countries against the G7 and NATO aligned countries, has destabilized this monopolar world-order. It is possible that China could eventually replace USA as the dominant hegemonic power within the capitalist world-system. While possibly being less oppressive, this by itself would be unlikely to solve the global ecological crisis, except perhaps by provoking a nuclear war. The power relations driving ecological destruction would still be in place. The alternative is to transform this world-system with its hierarchical structure of exploitation with its division between core, semi-peripheral and peripheral regions of the world-system, into a multipolar world, liberating all of humanity, understood as communities of communities in all their diversity, creating a global ecological civilization.

What I have tried to show in this paper is that through rethinking communitarian ethical and political philosophy from the perspective provided by ecology, incorporating the notion of ecopoiesis and rejecting at its foundation the dualism that has afflicted European culture, this is a realistic possibility. Ecological civilization involves creating a multipolar world without hierarchies rather than a monopolar or bipolar world. This goal should prevent rivalries between oppressed people that could be exploited by the current ruling powers. It is important, for instance, that China and India, not to mention Russia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Iran, Brazil and South Africa, all severely threatened by

global warming and US aggression, overt, or more commonly, covert, are allied with each other. Rejecting homogenization, the quest for ecological civilization will involve different regions and countries of the world, with very different histories, having different strategies to achieve this. However, the notion of ecological civilization provides a framework for these different regions and countries to appreciate their common interests while enabling them to understand each other's interests and to deal with conflicts between them through diplomacy. This is of central importance for challenging dominant powers which, as in Ancient Rome, generally follow the principle of divide and rule, especially when they are hypercoherent and have ceased to rule for the common good, as is clearly now the case. The current ruling elites are not only not ruling for the common good, but through their neoliberal philosophy, have claimed that even striving for the common good is oppressive.

As I have presented it, ecological civilization need not be a challenge to USA as such, or to its European and Anglophone allies. USA was founded on rival philosophies, being influenced by Roman Republicanism as well as the Lockean tradition of possessive individualism sanctifying rights to property. The former assumed a form of communitarianism that made USA receptive to Nineteenth Century German ethical and political philosophy. This was manifest in the Idealist philosophy of Josiah Royce and the pragmatist tradition of philosophy which, through the influence of John Dewey, strongly influenced the New Dealers promoted by Franklin Roosevelt. These were really social democrats committed to global justice. Initially USA supported social democracy in countries such as West Germany and Austria, although Cold War warriors tried to subvert such developments. The Lockean tradition revived by neoliberalism, which is really committed to rule by oligarchy, has resulted in the growth of a class of macroparasites associated with the military-industrial complex, the financial sector of the economy and managerialism (Hudson 2022). With neoliberalism, this class has effectively destroyed the conditions for democracy in USA. Between 1989 and 2018, the top 1% of Americans increased their wealth by \$21 trillion, from \$8.4 trillion to \$29.5 trillion, while the bottom 50% lost \$900 billion, from owning \$0.7 trillion to being indebted by \$0.2 trillion. The wealthy have used their wealth to further consolidate their power, taking control of both major political parties, most importantly, the Democratic Party, while undermining the economic security of the rest of the nation, which is a condition for people to function as citizens of a democracy. This is combined with US foreign policy committed to having the entire world fear and obey American power (to use the language of Hobbes), which is inimical to their ruling elites' proclaimed commitment to freedom and democracy (Blum 2014). Neoliberalism is the betrayal of the ideals of the founding fathers of USA and a betrayal of the achievements of the New Dealers in developing the welfare state, redistributing income and wealth, and establishing the United Nations. Their ideals could and should be recovered and revived by embracing the quest for an ecological civilization to replace the rule of these oligarchs and those who have aligned themselves with them, in USA, as in everywhere else in the world.

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Arran Gare is Associate Professor in Philosophy and Cultural Inquiry, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia. He graduated with honours from the University of Western Australia in 1975 and gained his Ph.D. from Murdoch University in 1983, after which he was awarded a Fulbright Postdoctoral Fellowship to Boston University. He is the author of a number of books, including *Beyond European Civilization: Marxism, Process Philosophy and the Environment* (Bungendore: Eco-Logical Press, Cambridge: Whitehorse Press, 1993), *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (London: Routledge, 1995), *Nihilism Inc.: Environmental Destruction and the Metaphysics of Sustainability* (Sydney: Eco-Logical Press, 1996) and *Philosophical Foundations of*

*Ecological Civilization: A Manifesto for the Future* (London: Routledge, 2017), and co-editor of two anthologies, *Environmental Philosophy: A Book of Readings* (St Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1983) and *For a New Naturalism* (Candor: Telos Press, 2017). He is the founder of the *Joseph Needham Centre for Complex Processes Research* and founding editor of the online journal *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 2005- of which he is the chief editor.

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