The Dialectical Social Geography of Elisée Reclus

John Clark

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While Elisée Reclus is still recognized as an important figure in both the history of geography and the history of anarchist political theory, his thought has been given little careful examination in recent times.[1]

This is unfortunate, since his ideas are even more relevant today than they were in his own day, when he was widely known as the foremost geographer of France, and feared by many as a dangerous political radical. Indeed, a careful study of his thought shows him to be not only a pioneering figure in social geography, but also an ecological social theorist who long ago explored areas that have become central concerns of ecophilosophy and environmental ethics today. Perhaps most notably, Reclus is found to be an important precursor of social ecology, which is widely considered to be one of the three major tendencies in contemporary radical ecological theory.[2] This essay will focus on one important aspect of his impressive body of thought: his holistic, dialectical interpretation of the place of humanity in the natural world. First, however, a brief discussion of Reclus' place in the political and intellectual life of his time may be helpful in putting his ideas in historical context.

Reclus' career as a pioneering and impressively prolific geographer spans over half a century. Beginning in the 1860's, he began publishing articles in the *Revue des deux mondes*and many other journals, and he completed the first of his three great geographical projects, *La Terre: description*

[1] None of Reclus' most significant works in social theory have been available in English, and the first collection in English of important selections from his extensive theoretical writings is only now being published. This work also includes the first comprehensive analysis in English of Reclus' social and political thought. For a much more detailed discussion of the issues raised in the present discussion, see John Clark and Camille Martin, eds. and trans., *Liberty, Equality, Geography: The Social Thought of Elisée Reclus* [Littleton, CO: Aigis Press, 1996] . I would like to thank Camille Martin for her invaluable comments on this article.

[2] For an introduction to social ecology, see John Clark, ed., "Part Four: Social Ecology," in Michael Zimmerman, et al., eds., *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993). The most extensive presentation of Bookchin's version of social ecology, which is compared with Reclus' social geography at several points in this article, is The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982). For a spectrum of views associated with social ecology, see John Clark, ed., *Renewing the Earth: The Promise of Social Ecology* (London: Green Print, 1990).

des phénomènes de la vie du globe.[3] Its two volumes, running to over fifteen-hundred pages, were published in 1867 and 1868. Though still in his thirties at this time, Reclus was already gaining wide recognition as an important geographer.

Reclus' intellectual work was interrupted in the early 1870's by the events of the Paris Commune and its aftermath. He personally participated both in the politics of the Commune and in the defense of Paris. His column of the Paris National Guard was taken prisoner by the victorious Versailles troops and he spent the next eleven months in fourteen different prisons. He was later tried and sentenced to deportation to New Caledonia, but because of his prestige as a scientist and intellectual, his friends and supporters succeeded in having his sentence reduced to ten years' exile. As a result, he was allowed to emigrate to Switzerland, where he began his association with the anarchists of the Jura Federation, and developed close ties with the major anarchist theorists Bakunin and Kropotkin.

It was also in Switzerland that he began his greatest work, the *Nouvelle géographie universelle*.[4] This monumental achievement, which ran to seventeen-thousand pages, appeared in nineteen volumes between 1876 and 1894. According to geographer Gary Dunbar, in his biography of Reclus, "for a generation the NGU was to serve as the ultimate geographical authority" and constituted "probably the greatest individual writing feat in the history of geography."[5] Reclus remained in Switzerland until 1890, heavily occupied with both scholarship and political activity, and then finally returned to France.

In 1894, Reclus began a new phase of his career when he accepted an invitation to become a professor at the New University in Brussels. He had some reservations about this undertaking, having remained outside the academic world until quite late in life. However, he was a great success, achieving renown as a teacher and winning the enduring admiration of many students. During this period he also completed his last great work, *L'Homme et la Terre*,[6] which he completed shortly before his death in 1905. This impressive, wide-ranging study in six volumes and thirty-five hundred pages reinforced his reputation as a major figure in the history of geography. It is in this final work that Reclus' most extensive and most sophisticated discussions in social theory are to be found.

While Reclus' social geography makes an important contribution in many areas of scholarship, his most enduring intellectual legacy is his contribution to the development of an ecological world view, and to ecological social thought, in particular.[7] Béatrice Giblin, in her article "Reclus:

[3] Elisée Reclus, *La Terre: description des phénomènes de la vie du globe* (Paris: 1868–69). The first volume was translated as *The Earth: A Descriptive History of the Phenomena of the Life of the Globe* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871), and the second as *The Ocean, Atmosphere, and Life* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1873).

[4] Paris: Hachette, 1876–94. 19 vols. The work was translated as *The Earth and Its Inhabitants: The Universal Geography*. London: H. Virtue and Co., Ltd., 1882–95. 19 vols.

[5] Gary S. Dunbar, *Elisée Reclus: Historian of Nature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), p. 95.

[6] Elisée Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre* (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905–08), 6 vol.

[7] While the emphasis in the present discussion is on the relevance of Reclus' social geography to ecological thought and social theory, the considerable importance of his contribution other areas, including physical geography and geology, should not be overlooked. Among Reclus' achievements was his early advocacy of the theory of continental drift and his defense of the view that this phenomenon is compatible with uniformitarian explanation. As early as 1872, in *The Earth*, he proposed that the planet is many times older than most contemporary theory indicated, and that the continents formed a single land mass as recently as the Jurassic period. In 1979, an intriguing discussion of Reclus' geological significance appeared in the journal Geology. In his article, "Elisée Reclus—Neglected Geologic Pioneer and First (?) Continental Drift Advocate." [*Geology* 7 (April, 1979), pp. 189–92] , James O. Berkland concludes that Reclus "was a peer of the geologic greats of the nineteenth century such as Darwin and Lyell" and that while

An Ecologist Ahead of His Time?" contends that Reclus "had a global ecological sensibility that died with him for almost a full half-century."[8] This sweeping generalization is perhaps even an understatement. The kind of ecological perspective that Reclus developed, especially in his magnum opus of social theory, *L'Homme et la Terre*, effectively disappeared from social thought for most of the century, and did not reemerge into the intellectual mainstream until well into the 1970's, in response to growing public awareness of the ecological crisis. And, indeed, his sweeping account of humanity's integral development within a larger earth history has been unparalleled until Berry and Swimme's *The Universe Story* was published in 1992.[9]

Reclus begins the first volume of *L'Homme et la Terre* with the epigraph: "Man is nature becoming self-conscious."[10] This proposition (which in the original French states literally that humanity is "nature taking consciousness of itself") captures the essence of Reclus' message: that humanity must come to understand its identity as the self-consciousness of the earth, and that it must in its own historical development realize the profound implications of this identity. In effect, Reclus proposes to humanity an ethical project of taking full responsibility, through a transformed social practice, for our place in nature, and a corresponding theoretical project of more adequately understanding that place and of unmasking the ideologies that distort it. Accordingly, he seeks to explain the development of human society in its dialectical interaction with the rest of the natural world, and expounds a theory of social progress in which human

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his name "has faded to near obscurity," he "should be recognized in the history of plate tectonic theory as one of its foremost pioneers and perhaps, as its founder." (p. 192). In a "Comment" on this article [Geology 7 (Sept., 1979), p. 418] Myrl E. Beck, Jr. suggests that Reclus' lapse into "obscurity" may have had more to do with his anarchist philosophy than with the merits of his scientific theories. In his "Reply," Berkland agrees, and laments "the slow literary descent of Reclus to the status of a quasi-nonperson" [sic] as a case of "book-burning through neglect." In his concluding statement, Berkland surprisingly admits that "had [he] possessed full knowledge of just how 'revolutionary' Reclus really was, it is probable that [he] would not have invested the time and effort to give him well-deserved credit for his geologic accomplishments." (Ibid.) I am very grateful to geologist Anatol Dolgoff for drawing my attention to this exchange.

[8] Béatrice Giblin, "Reclus: un écologiste avant l'heure?" in *Hérodote* 22 (1981): 110. Giblin edited and wrote the introduction for a book of selections entitled *L'Homme et la Terre—m orceaux choisis* (Paris: Maspero, 1982). The entire issue of Hérodote containing her article is devoted to studies of Reclus' work, with a strong emphasis on the ecological implications of his social geography. Contemporary ecological thought (with the exception of some varieties of eco-anarchism) has devoted little attention to the connection between geography and ecology. It is noteworthy that in a forthcoming work, Thomas Berry, one of the best-known contemporary ecological thinkers, devotes a chapter to "Ecological Geography," and states that "geography is one of the basic integrating disciplines for those who would enter into ecological studies, with their emphasis on the single community that humans form with the Earth and all its component members." See Thomas Berry, *The Meadow Across the Creek: Ecological Essays* [forthcoming] .

[9] Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

[10] "L'Homme est la nature prenant conscience d'elle-même." Elisée Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, I:1. [All quotations for which the original French edition is cited are my translations, in collaboration with Camille Martin.] The parallel between Reclus' concept and Hegel's idea of human history as a process of Spirit's coming to consciousness of itself is obvious. Indeed, Reclus makes an important contribution to the project of developing a naturalistic, evolutionary reinterpretation of Hegel's conception of "Spirit knowing and enjoying itself as Spirit." It is also instructive to compare Reclus' holistic evolutionary concept to Marx's much less dynamic and holistic conception of nature as "man's inorganic body." While the two thinkers were contemporaries (Reclus being only twelve years younger than Marx), Reclus was much more successful in transcending the spirit of the age by applying a dialectical analysis to the relationship between humanity and nature. For a discussion of Marx's philosophy of nature and his failure to to develop the dialectical naturalism implicit in his thought, see my essay "Marx's Inorganic Body," in *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 243–258; reprinted in Michael Zimmerman, et al., *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, pp. 390–405. It should also be noted that in this area Reclus far surpassed the contemporary anarchist thinkers, who often shared the limitations of Marx, while lacking the latter's subtlety and complexity.

self-realization and the flourishing of the planet as a whole can be reconciled with one another. In these goals, Reclus' problematic intersects with the most central concerns of recent ecological thought.

Reclus exhibits in all his works a strong sense of humanity's embeddedness in nature. Even in his early work, he eloquently describes humanity as an expression of the earth's creativity and stresses our kinship with the entire system of life. "We are," he says, "the children of the 'beneficent mother,' like the trees of the forest and the reeds of the rivers. She it is from whom we derive our substance; she nourishes us with her mother's milk, she furnishes air to our lungs, and, in fact, supplies us with that wherein we live and move and have our being.'"[11] Throughout his works, he continues to develop this holistic, integrative outlook. While over the course of his career his studies of the natural world became increasingly scientific and empirical, he never abandoned his early romanticist, poetic, moral, and spiritual attitudes toward nature. Indeed, his resultant effort to integrate forms of rationality with aesthetic and moral sensibility (in effect, to unite the quest for the true, the beautiful and the good) is one of the most noteworthy dimensions of his thought.

One aspect of this endeavor is his effort to synthesize a theoretical and scientific understanding of nature with an awareness of the practical implications of such an understanding. The result can be seen as a kind of politics of self-conscious nature, a thoroughly political geography that anticipates today's political ecology. Yves Lacoste, one of the contemporary French geographers who has done the most to revive interest in Reclus, contends that while Reclus was "the greatest French geographer," he has been "completely misunderstood" because of the "central epistemological problem of academic geography: the exclusion of the political."[12] Lacoste finds it ironic that recent discussions of social geography systematically "forget" Reclus' massive six-volume work in which social geography is itself the "main thread."[13]

The surprisingly far-reaching conception of social geography found in *L'Homme et la Terre* contributed much to the development a dialectical, holistic view of nature. For example, Reclus accepts the dialectical principle that every phenomenon embodies in itself the entire history of that phenomenon. He utilizes this principle when he observes that "present-day society contains within itself all past societies,"[14] and applies it to human nature in general, adopting a version of the doctrine that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny." In his variant of this theory, "Man recollects [remémore] in his structure everything that his ancestors lived through during the vast expanse of ages. He indeed epitomizes [résume] in himself all that preceded him in existence, just as, in his embryonic life, he presents successively various forms of organization that are more simple than his own."[15]

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[11] Elisée Reclus, *The Ocean, Atmosphere, and Life* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1873).

[12] Yves Lacoste, "Editorial" in *Hérodote* 22 (1981): 4–5.

[13] Yves Lacoste, "Géographicité et géopolitique: Elisée Reclus" in *Hérodote* 22 (1981): 14. While American geography once accorded Reclus a significant level of recognition, it has engaged in a similar process of "forgetting." For example, one finds in The Geographical Review (founded in 1916) three reference to Reclus in the 1920's, three in the 1930's, two in the 1940's, and then a long silence. There was a modest resurgence of interest in Reclus among American geographers during the 1970's. This is evidenced by articles dealing with his work in the radical geography journal *Antipode*, and the publication of geographer Gary Dunbar's biography *Elisée Reclus: Historian of Nature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978).

[14] Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, VI: 504.

[15] Reclus, Ibid. I: 14.

In accord with this dialectical approach, Reclus believes that an examination of the history of the evolution of human society can guide us in understanding the structure and contradictions of present-day society. In his analysis of modern societies, Reclus discovers that each of them "is comprised of superimposed classes, representing in this century all successive previous centuries with their corresponding intellectual and moral cultures," and that when they are "seen in close juxtaposition, their vastly differing conditions of life present a striking contrast."[16] In his investigation of these classes, Reclus seeks to uncover certain fissures in the social structure that are usually concealed under layers of ideological mystification. It can thus be shown how the hidden legacy of social domination reveals itself in contemporary social conflicts.

Reclus holds that in order to transcend that legacy, humanity must develop a critical consciousness of past historical development. Such awareness can offer a basis for consciously creating a future collective history. He describes this process as humanity's attempt "to realize itself through one form that encompasses all ages."[17] As the species comes to see itself as part of a historical and geographical whole (and thus, a temporal and spatial one), it gains both self-consciousness, and a corresponding freedom. We achieve the ability "to free ourselves from the strict line of development determined by the environment that we inhabit and by the specific lineage of our race. Before us lies the infinite network of parallel, diverging, and intersecting roads that other segments of humanity have followed."[18]

While an "ecological" perspective was once identified with a one-sided emphasis on harmony, balance and order, recent discussions in ecological theory have challenged the classical "ecosystems" model. In fact, some theorists, inspired by postmodernist thought, have embraced the opposite extreme, seeing only disorder and chaos in nature. Reclus long ago supported a much wiser dialectical view that avoids both the static and chaotic extremes.[19] There is indeed, according to Reclus, a harmony and balance in nature, but it is one that operates through a tendency toward discord and imbalance. He notes that "as plants or animals, including humans, leave their native habitat and intrude on another environment, the harmony of nature is temporarily disturbed"; however, these introduced types either die out or adapt to the new conditions, making a contribution to nature as they "add to the wonderful harmony of the earth, and of all that springs up and grows upon its surface."[20] The balance of nature is thus a balance of order and disorder.

Reclus' strongly holistic view of nature often sounds strikingly similar to contemporary ecological analyses. An example is his discussion of the function of forests in global ecological health. He laments the reckless and destructive actions of the "pioneers" of both North and South America, who burned huge expanses of ancient forest in order to establish agriculture, "at the same

[16] Reclus, Ibid., VI: 504.

[17] Ibid., VI: 527.

[18] Ibid.

[19] In Reclus' time, just as today, there were views that overemphasized unity and the whole and others that overemphasized diversity and the individual phenomenon. In the past century much of the organicist tradition stemming from Hegel tended toward extreme holism and social authoritarianism, while the individualist tradition arising out of classical liberalism produced social atomism and anomic individualism. An authentically dialectical position, which interprets the whole as a dynamic, developing unity-in-diversity, avoids both of these dangers without resorting to ad hoc solutions to internal contradictions. For a discussion of the ecosystem model of Clements and Odum, with its implications of order, harmony, and homeostasis, and later challenges to that model, see Donald Worster, "The Ecology of Order and Chaos" in *Environmental History Review* (1990): 1–18. For more extensive treatment of the history of ecosystems theory, see Worster's *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), especially chapter 16.

[20] Reclus, *The Ocean*, p. 434.

time burning the animals, blackening the sky with smoke, and casting to the wind ashes that that scatter over hundreds of kilometers."[21] He notes that while this action was shortsighted even from an economic point of view, the great loss is that the forests have been prevented from playing "their part in the general hygiene of the earth and its species," which is "an essential role."[22] Reclus uses strongly organicist imagery to present a model of ecological soundness conceptualized as health, and he shows the links between human health and ecosystemic health. The earth, he says, "ought to be cared for like a great body, in which the breathing carried out by means of the forests regulates itself according to a scientific method; it has its lungs which ought to be respected by humans, since their own hygiene depends on them."[23] He also uses aesthetic images to express this same holistic, organicist view of nature, as when he describes the earth as "rhythm and beauty expressed in a harmonious whole."[24]

One of the most widely debated concepts in recent ecological thought is "anthropocentrism," which is often defined as an outlook that places human beings in a hierarchical position over all other beings, and which reduces all value in "external nature" to a merely instrumental one in relation to human ends. Reclus sometimes uses language that sounds distinctly "anthropocentric," as when he writes of the "conquests" involved in human progress. However, the major import of Reclus' social geography is to remove humanity from a position above or over against the natural world, and to incorporate it fully into the life and history of the planet. What is striking about Reclus' viewpoint is the degree to which he could, unlike so many other nineteenth-century thinkers, shift from a human-centered to an earth-centered perspective.

Rather than being "anthropocentric," Reclus' view of the place of humanity in nature centers around the larger whole of nature of which we are a part, and the larger processes of development in which we participate. In a sense, Reclus' view may be called an "emergence" theory, if it is understood that he sees humanity as emerging within nature rather than out of it. His analysis prefigures in some ways Bookchin's division of the natural world into a "first nature" and a "second nature," corresponding more or less to the natural world and the social world, both of which are seen as developing forms of "nature."[25] Reclus delineates similar realms of being

[21] Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, VI: 254.

[22] Ibid., VI: 255.

[23] Ibid. Reclus' holism may be compared to a similar strain in the thought of his friend and colleague Kropotkin, who contends that geography should "represent [nature] as a harmonious whole, all parts of which are … held together by their mutual relations." See "What Geography Ought to Be," quoted in Myrna Breitbart, "Peter Kropotkin, Anarchist Geographer" in David Stoddart, ed., *Geography, Ideology and Social Concern* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p. 145. There are also striking similarities between Reclus' views and the Gaia hypothesis. Reclus' description of the earth "regulating" itself through forests may be compared to James Lovelock's definition of Gaia as "a complex entity involving the earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soils; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet." *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 10.

[24] Thérèse Dejongh, "The Brothers Reclus at the New University" in Joseph Ishill, ed., *Elisée and Elie Reclus: In Memoriam* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: The Oriole Press, 1927), p. 237.

[25] While Bookchin has used the terms "first nature" and "second nature" frequently in recent years, he never presents a detailed philosophical analysis of the relationship between the two realms. In his essay "Thinking Ecologically," he states that by "second nature" he means "humanity's development of a uniquely human culture, a wide variety of institutionalized human communities, an effective human technics, a richly symbolic language, and a carefully managed source of nutriment." [Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1990), p. 162.] He describes "first nature" as the larger natural world from which second nature is "derived." "The real question," he says, "is how second nature is derived from first nature." (Ibid., p. 163). Unfortunately he does not go very far in answering this key question. He also posits a third natural realm, called "free nature," which he does not

within the natural world. There is, on the one hand, that sphere of nature which exists independently of humanity, and which had, indeed, existed for aeons before nature began to "become conscious of itself" through the development of humanity. As humanity emerges, it remains in intimate interrelationship with an external sphere of nature, and the complex relationships of interdependence between the two realms take on an increasingly planetary dimension. Reclus calls the realm of natural being that has arisen and related itself to the rest of nature "the human social milieu."

However, the human social world does not constitute for Reclus a single "second nature," for it is itself dual, and might be said to encompass both a "second nature" and a "third nature." He calls the former "the static milieu" or "the natural conditions of life," while he labels the latter "the dynamic milieu" or "the artificial sphere of existence." The former sphere, even though it is shaped, in a sense, by human culture, constitutes our most immediate embeddedness in nature, and thus still remains in some ways a realm of natural necessity. The latter sphere is much more subject to human direction and is much more profoundly shaped by social contingency. For Reclus, there is "a quite marked distinction between the facts of nature, which are impossible to avoid, and those which belong to an artificial world, and which one can flee or perhaps even completely ignore. The soil, the climate, the type of labor and diet, relations of kinship and marriage, the mode of grouping together, these are the primordial facts that play a part in the history of each man, as well as of each animal. However, wages, ownership, commerce, and the limits of the state are secondary facts."[26]

Reclus' discussion here does not seem entirely coherent. On the one hand, some of his "facts of nature" seem eminently cultural, as in the case of kinship systems. On the other hand, while systems of commerce are profoundly cultural, they are also an expression of the quite "natural" needs to produce and to exchange products in some way. However, Reclus still seems to be making an important point. While all human activity is cultural, there seem to be certain "facts of nature" that require a cultural expression, while there are certain "facts of culture" that seem to be relatively autonomous from natural necessity. In defense of the arbitrariness of the institutions he associates with "secondary facts," he observes that many earlier societies managed to exist without them. He argues for the theoretical priority of the "static milieu," since it has always existed, and has often had a determining force in social affairs. While he admits that "quite often in the case of individuals the artificial sphere of existence prevails over the natural conditions of life," he thinks that "it is necessary to study the static milieu first and then to inquire into the dynamic milieu."[27] This statement does not seem particularly dialectical, since the important question is not which sphere is considered first, but rather whether the mutual determinations between them are investigated adequately.

But when he considers the relationship between the two spheres he does see it as a dialectical one. He is particularly concerned that the place of nature in the dialectic should be given adequate attention. Reclus contends that the influence of nature and of the "static milieu" in determining the character of social phenomena is much greater than historians and social theorists have previously recognized. He states that in the development of society over history "nothing is lost,"

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describe as an existent sphere, but rather as a possibility in a future ecological society. He says that it would constitute "a nature that could reach the level of conceptual thought." (Ibid., p. 182) This is, however, a confused formulation, since nature has already reached "the level of conceptual thought" in what he calls "second nature."

[26] Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, I: 42.

[27] Ibid.

for "the ancient causes, however attenuated, still act in a secondary manner, and the researcher can discover them in the hidden currents of the contemporary movement of society."[28] While superimposed political and economic factors are often given primary recognition as social causes, "this second dynamic milieu, added to the primitive static milieu, constitutes a whole of influences within which it is difficult, and often even impossible to determine the preponderance of forces. This is all the more true because the relative importance of primary and secondary forces, whether purely geographical or already historical, varies according to peoples and ages."[29] Once again, the phenomenon—including even the social whole—can only be understood as the cumulative product of its entire history. Indeed, humanity itself, "with all its characteristics of stature, proportion, traits, cerebral capacity" is "the product of previous milieux multiplying themselves to infinity" since the origins of the species.[30]

Reclus may be seen as a precursor of bioregional thinking, in so far as he concludes that we and our cultures reflect the earth and the specific regions of the planet in which we have developed. In his words, "the history of the development of mankind has been written beforehand in sublime lettering on the plains, valleys, and coasts of our continents."[31] While bioregionalism has only recently become an important tendency in ecological thought, Reclus long ago recognized that we are, in our very being, regional creatures.[32] Yet, as is the case for every relation, that existing between humanity and the earth and its regions is also a dialectical one. It results from mutual interaction, as the earth expresses itself through humanity, and as humanity acts upon the earth. And Reclus recognizes that this interaction includes humanity's struggle with the rest of the natural world. Thus, "the accordance which exists between the globe and its inhabitants" cannot be described adequately through a one-sided focus on terms like "harmony," "balance" and "oneness" that exaggerate the degree to which order prevails, since whatever order that exists "proceeds from conflict as much as from concord."[33] The interrelationship between humanity and the earth is a process of dynamic mutual determination.

Reclus is especially interested in analyzing the side of this interrelationship that has been neglected by much of social thought throughout the modern period: the conditioning of the "social" by the "natural." His position on this subject should not be confused with the tradition that begins with Montesquieu's famous speculations on the influence of climate on society.[34] In

[28] Ibid., I: 117.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., I: 119.

[31] Reclus, *The Ocean*, p. 435. Of course, a bioregional perspective is not merely descriptive, although it may begin with an analysis of how our natural regions shape our selves and communities. The point of bioregionalism is to generate a creative dialectic between culture and place. The sense of place is a poetic response to nature on the part of the human imagination. The best sources on bioregionalism are the works of Gary Snyder and the publications of the Planet Drum Foundation and other bioregional organizations. See Snyder's "The Place, the Region, and the Commons" in *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), pp. 25–47, and *A Green City Program* (San Francisco: Planet Drum, 1989). For the place of regionalism in the ecology of the imagination, see Max Cafard, "The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto" in *Exquisite Corpse* 8 (1990): 1, 22–23.

[32] One of the many similarities between the social geography of Reclus and that of Kropotkin lies in the strongly bioregional flavor often found in the works of both. Myrna Breitbart in "Peter Kropotkin, Anarchist Geographer" points out that he "believed that it was necessary to reestablish a sense of community and love of place. Rootedness in a particular environment would foster greater human interaction and a more intimate relationship with one's surroundings." (p. 140)

[33] Ibid.

[34] See Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (New York and London: Haffner Publishing Co., 1949), Chs. XIV-XVII. Neither should it be confused with the work of a historian like Le Roy Ladurie, whose impressive study

such discussions, the appeal to natural influences becomes little more than an attempt to give an "objective" basis to the writer's social and cultural prejudices, so that characteristics attributed to various peoples become essential qualities that dictate strict limits for possible social change. This tradition culminates in theories such as Huntington's "human geography," in which the appeal to nature becomes the ideological justification for white supremacy and European hegemony.[35]] Reclus' analysis should be distinguished from such views not only on the basis of his differing value-commitments, but also by his radically different methodology. He is interested in a dialectic between nature and culture, and on the interaction between a great many natural and social factors that shape human society. Far from attributing rigidly determined, almost immutable qualities to peoples and cultures, he hopes that by understanding the determinants of the social world, all peoples can ultimately become active, conscious agents in their own liberation. His analysis helps remind us that the investigation of the influence of the natural world on cultural practices and social institutions does not necessarily have reactionary implications.

Reclus offers the history of ancient religions as an example of the influence of natural geography on social institutions. He suggests that the monotheism of the ancient Near East reflects the austere character of that region's terrain. He remarks that one might generalize "that throughout the Semitic countries the splendid uniformity of tranquil spaces, illuminated by a violent sunlight, must have contributed mightily to giving a noble and serious turn to the concepts of the inhabitants. They learned to see things simply, without searching for great complications."[36] He contrasts this unifying vision to the unity-in-diversity expressed in Indian religion. The Near Eastern mythology "bore no resemblance to the chaos of divine forces leaping out of nature in infinite variation that one finds in India, with its high mountains, great rivers, immense forests, and climate whipped into rages by the abundant rains and the fury of storms."[37] Reclus notes that the "Hindu spirit" also perceived an underlying order and unity in the cosmos, but it naturally expressed this "single force" in "an infinite variety" of manifestations.[38]

Reclus does not, it should be stressed, attempt to reduce the complexity of religious phenomena (or any others) to a mere reflection of geographical qualities. Indeed, he often puts at least

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Times of Feast, Times of Famine: A History of Climate Since the Year 1000 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971) deals—as the title indicates—with the effect of the viccisitudes of climate on a variety of social conditions. Reclus should rather be compared with thinkers who investigate the effect of the constants of climate on the character of cultures and peoples. More in his tradition is critic and photographer D. E. Bookhardt, who writes that the great Louisiana surrealist photographer Clarence Laughlin, "attempted to confront the genius loci head on. Relics of the cultural landscape, subjected to the ferocity of the subtropical elements over time, served as foils for his visual reveries—a kind of Old South vision of Atlantis, infested with ghosts and creatures of indeterminate mythology, all illumined by a spectral, tropical radiance." See "The Jungle is Near: Culture and Nature in a Subtropical clime," in *Mesechabe* 2 (1988–89): 4.

[35] Ellsworth Huntington argues that there is "a close adjustment between life and its inorganic environment," and that factors such as "soil, climate, relief" and "position in respect to bodies of water" all "combine to form a harmonious whole" in affecting human society. [*The Human Habitat* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1927), pp. 16–17.] It turns out that this "harmonious whole" dictates racial hierarchy, since "racial differences" in areas such as "inherent mental capacity" are caused by the various natural factors, especially climate. ["Climate and the Evolution of Civilization" in *The Evolution of the Earth and Its Inhabitants* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), p. 148.] Elsewhere he seeks to defend his racialist conclusions by arguing—or more accurately, speculating—that climate has had an enormous influence on inheritance through its effects on "migration, racial mixture, and natural selection," and perhaps even "mutations." [*Civilization and Climate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915), p. 3.

[36] Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, II:91.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

as much emphasis on the significance of the economic, the technical, and other "material" determinants, not to mention the political ones, in shaping all aspects of society. But in an age in which other determinants (and, specifically—under the influence of capitalist, socialist, and even some anarchist ideology—the economic and technological ones) were attributed enormous significance, he wished to emphasize the general neglect of the influence of the natural world on human history. His philosophy is noteworthy for the degree to which it uncovers, beneath the historical dialectic of institutions and experience, an active natural world, that continually exercises its influence through certain geographical factors that are often overlooked in our focus on human transformative activity.

Reclus emphasizes the need for a greater recognition of nature, not only in the sense of understanding its activity, but also in the sense of developing a new responsibility toward it. This concern underlies the scathing critique of humanity's abuse of the earth that he began to develop early in his work. In "The Sense of Nature" he writes of the "secret harmony" that exists between the earth and humanity, and warns that when "reckless societies allow themselves to meddle with that which creates the beauty of their domain, they always end up regretting it."[39] When humanity degrades the natural world, he concludes, it thereby degrades itself. Reclus' analysis of this phenomenon is very close to the view recently developed by Thomas Berry, who argues that the diversity and complexity of the human mind reflects the richness and complexity of the earth and its regions, so that in damaging the earth, we harm ourselves not only physically, but in our "intellectual understanding, aesthetic expression, and spiritual development."[40] Reclus states similarly that "where the land has been defaced, where all poetry has disappeared from the countryside, the imagination is extinguished, the mind becomes impoverished, and routine and servility seize the soul, inclining it toward torpor and death."[41] And he does not neglect the material damage to human society caused by ecological degradation. He notes that "the brutal violence with which most nations have treated the nourishing earth" has been "foremost among the causes which have vanquished so many successive civilizations."[42]

In accord with his general view that the good and the beautiful tend to accompany one another, he links our ethical obligations to the natural world with our aesthetic appreciation of it. He gives an example of this link in the case of the domestication of animals, which he considers an intolerable abuse of nature. He notes not only the callousness with which animals are treated, but the "hideousness" of the results of this process, in which animals bred for human purposes lose both their adaptive qualities and their natural beauty.[43] And just as he links the act of harming nature to the creation of ugliness, he associates acting in accord with the good of nature with the creation of beauty. "Man," he says, can find beauty in "the intimate and deeply-seated harmony of his work with that of nature."[44] But our obligations in this sphere go beyond this complementary activity. Beyond acting in harmony with nature, we must engage ourselves also in the active defense of it. In view of the fact that "a reckless system has defaced that beauty," it is

[39] Reclus, "Du Sentiment de la nature dans les sociétés modernes" in *Revue des deux mondes*63 (1866), p. 379.

[40] Thomas Berry, "The Viable Human," in M. Zimmerman, et al, eds. *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, p. 174.

[41] Elisée Reclus, "Du sentiment de la nature," pp. 379–80.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Elisée Reclus, "On Vegetarianism" in *The Humane Review* (January, 1901), p. 318.

[44] Reclus, *The Ocean*, p. 526.

necessary for "man" to "endeavor to restore it" through efforts to "repair the injuries committed by his predecessors."[45]

In Reclus' holistic conception of humanity-in-nature, humanity's striving to achieve beauty and harmony should be seen as an integral part of the creation of these qualities throughout the natural world. Thus, "man" should "assist the soil instead of inveterately forcing it," in order to achieve "the beautification as well as the improvement of his domain," by giving "an additional grace and majesty to the scenery which is most charming."[46] Human creative self-expression will thus cooperate with the larger processes of creative self-expression in nature. Our goal in life should be "making our existence as beautiful as possible, and in harmony, so far as we are capable, with the aesthetic conditions of our surroundings."[47] For Reclus there is a continuity between our concern for ourselves, for others, and for the earth. "Ugliness in persons, in deeds, in life, in surrounding nature—this is our worst foe. Let us become beautiful ourselves, and let our li[ves] be beautiful!"[48] According to Reclus' holistic conception of human nature, as "man" becomes aware of the implications of being "nature becoming self-conscious," and thus "the conscience of the earth," "he" will naturally accept "responsibility as regards the harmony and beauty of nature around him."[49]

Reclus recognizes, of course, that we are far from achieving such a harmonious and cooperative relationship with the earth. He laments the fact that we become so engrossed in the process of transforming nature through labor according to our narrow technical and economic ideas that we fail to recognize nature's own creative powers. He urges us to learn to appreciate the integrity of the earth, so that we may cooperate with it in achieving various goods, instead of seeking to impose our will on it. In his view, "when man forms some loftier ideal as regards his action on the earth, he always perfectly succeeds in improving its surface, although he allows the scenery to retain its natural beauty."[50] Agriculture, for example, must not be reduced to a process of mining the soil of its nutrients for the sake of productivity. It is necessary, instead, to "comprehend" the land and to "humor" it by discovering which crops suit it best. In a recognition of the importance of imagination, sensibility, and symbolic expression, he praises the Shakers for mutualistic practices that make agriculture a "ceremony of love" in which all aspects of nature are "cherished."[51]

Much like Kropotkin, his fellow anarchist geographer, Reclus looks for contemporary models for a more balanced and humane relationship to the natural world. He notes certain examples in Europe of the way in which agricultural productivity can be reconciled with the beauty of the landscape. Writing in the 1860's, he remarks that "a complete alliance of the beautiful and the useful" has been attained in certain areas of England, Lombardy and Switzerland, places where agriculture is in fact "most advanced."[52] He also cites as instances of such a beneficial alliance the draining of marshes in Flanders to produce farmland, the irrigation of the barren Crau region,

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Reclus, "On Vegetarianism," p. 322.
[48] Ibid., p. 323.
[49] Reclus, *The Ocean*, p. 526.
[50] Ibid., p. 527.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Reclus, "Du sentiment de la nature," p. 379.

the planting of olive trees along the slopes of the Apennines and Alps, and the replacement of Irish peat bogs by diverse forests.[53]

While these examples may support Reclus' contention that humans can contribute to beauty in nature, they also show certain flaws in his outlook from an ecological point of view. Although the kind of projects he cites have sometimes increased natural beauty, his examples show his bias toward "humanized" landscapes. He seems less sensitive to the natural beauty of, for example, the more austere terrain of rugged mountains, or the rich wildness of a swampland. Similar criticisms have sometimes been directed toward Bookchin's version of social ecology. In both cases, however, the writers' pastoralist emphasis reflects the way in which their own proclivities conditioned their versions of these theories, rather than any fundamental limitation of the applicability of either social geography or social ecology. Both theories are based on a dialectical view of the relationship between humanity and nature, a holistic analysis of phenomena that stresses the importance of unity-in-diversity, and a commitment to non-domination and spontaneous development. These theories are therefore fully capable of grasping the place of wilderness and "free nature" in the processes of natural unfolding.[54]

This is not to minimize the self-contradictory nature of certain aspects of Reclus' thought (or Bookchin's, for that matter). In Reclus' works, one finds an implicit contradiction between his developing holistic, ecological perspective and remnants of the dualistic, human-centered outlook that was so common in his age. In an early work, he exhibits the latter tendency strongly when he remarks favorably that science is "gradually converting the globe into one great organism always at work for the benefit of mankind."[55] This rather extravagant conception of the earth's processes as a vast conspiracy to benefit our species is far from his later, more developed holistic perspective. There, humanity is integrated into the planetary whole as the consciousness of the earth, and the healthy functioning of the earth's metabolism benefits humanity only as one part of that flourishing whole. In the passage just cited, Reclus says that human transformative activity has the capacity to make the earth into "that pleasant garden which has been dreamed of by poets in all ages."[56] Such an image expresses Reclus' enduring ideal of a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature, but errs in the direction of stasis, omitting the element of dialectical tension that must always characterize human confrontation with the otherness of nature.[57] Further, it can easily be taken to imply the desirability of the destruction of the wildness and freedom of the natural world, and to idealize a domesticated, highly humanized nature that is far

[53] Ibid.

[54] "Free nature" is used in this case in Arne Naess's sense of areas in which spontaneous ecological processes can take place without major human disruption. George Sessions claims that social ecologists "have yet to demonstrate an appreciation of, and commitment to, the crucial ecological importance of wilderness and biodiversity protection." ["Wilderness: Back to Basics," an interview by JoAnn McAllister with George Sessions, in *The Trumpeter* 11 (Spring 1994), p. 66.] Yet, a dialectical, holistic position that sees humanity as "the self-consciousness of the earth, " interprets history as the movement toward a "free nature" (in a sense that synthesizes Naess's and Bookchin's concepts), and conceives of the earth as a unity-in-diversity, is eminently capable of dealing theoretically with these important issues. Steve Chase has presented a very circumspect analysis of the neglect of wilderness issues by Bookchin and many other social ecologists, and the need for attention to these issues from a social ecological perspective. See "Whither the Radical Ecology Movement?" in Steve Chase, ed., *Defending the Earth* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), pp. 7–24.

[55] Reclus, *The Ocean*, p. 529.

[56] Ibid.

[57]] For a perceptive discussion of "otherness" and the distinction between "splitting" and "differentiation" in relation to the other (including nature as other), see Joel Kovel, *History and Spirit: An Inquiry into the Philosophy of Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), pp. 45–58.

from being an authentically ecological conception. Such themes become more muted in Reclus' later works, but they do not disappear entirely.[58]

On the other hand, Reclus was from the outset a forceful critic of the more blatant forms of human destructiveness toward nature that were accepted with complacency by many of his contemporaries. He judges that in civilization's dealings with nature, "everything has been mismanaged," so that what is left is "a pseudo-nature spoilt by a thousand details—ugly constructions, trees lopped and twisted, footpaths brutally cut through woods and forests."[59] Like later social ecologists, he sees the problem as both ideological and institutional. Looking at its subjective dimension, he points out that human interaction with nature has not been guided by "a sentiment of respect and feeling" for nature, but rather by "purely industrial or mercantile interests."[60] For this to change, a revolution in values must certainly take place. But this ideological transformation can only succeed if there is a complementary process of social transformation. An attitude of "respect and feeling" can prevail only if the social order based on disrespectful and unfeeling interests—for example, "industrial or mercantile" ones—can be eliminated. The ultimate union between "the civilized" and the "savage" and between humanity and nature can take place "only through the destruction of the boundaries between castes, as well as between peoples."[61] This implies for Reclus the abolition of the system of economic inequality embodied in capitalism, the system of political domination inherent in the modern state, the system of sexual hierarchy rooted in the patriarchal family, and the system of ethnic oppression stemming from racism.

In analyzing the effects on nature of an exploitative society, Reclus showed an awareness of the dangers posed by loss of biodiversity and by ecological disruption that was unusual in his time. In La Terre, he presents examples of the extinction of species caused by human "destruction," "slaughter" and "butchery," and concludes that human activity has caused a "rupture in the harmony primitively existing in the flora of our globe."[62] As early as the 1860's, long before wilderness preservation became an organized movement with the establishment of the Wilderness Society in 1936, and indeed even before the establishment of the first national park in the United States in 1872, Reclus was warning of the dangers to ancient forest ecosystems in North America. For example, he laments the loss of "colossal" and "noble" trees like the sequoias of the west coast, which he considers "perhaps an irreparable loss" in view of the "hundreds and

[58] This raises an important issue not only for Reclus, but for social ecology. While humanity can and ought to make a unique contribution to the emergence of greater freedom and creativity in nature, this contribution cannot be limited to humanity's attainment of its own non-dominating self-realization and to creative interaction with the natural milieu in a way that respects the integrity of nature, as important as these goals may be. At this point in the history of the earth, another essential ecological question is the way in which human beings can reorganize society so that its impact on large areas of the earth can be reduced and finally minimized. A stronger conception of "non-domination" is needed: one that recognizes the need for the earth to have a sphere of ecological freedom and evolutionary creativity guided neither by human self-interest nor by human rationality.

[59] Elisée Reclus, "The Progress of Mankind," in *The Contemporary Review* 70 (July-Dec. 1896): 782.

[60] Ibid.

[61] *L'Homme et la Terre*, VI: 538. It is not clear precisely to what extent Reclus believed that the elimination of social domination would result in an end to human antagonism toward the natural world. He never states in a simplistic, undialectical way that the the former is a necessary and sufficient condition for the latter. As a general principle he thought that the establishment of a society based on cooperation, love and aesthetic appreciation would result in non-exploitative institutions and patterns of behavior in relation to humanity, to other species, and to the larger natural world.

[62] Reclus, *The Ocean*, pp. 517–18.

thousands of years" that will be necessary for their regeneration.[63] He also discusses the damage produced through the introduction into ecosystems (whether by intention or negligence) of exotic plants and animals without consideration of their effects on the balance of nature. Here again, he focuses on another major ecological problem that has only recently gained widespread attention in "environmental" thought. Reclus quotes the poignant comment of the Maori of New Zealand that "the white man's rat drives away our rat, his fly drives away our fly, his clover kills our ferns, and the white man will end by destroying the Maori."[64]

Despite his remarkable grasp of ecological problems in general, Reclus often shows a great deal less ecological insight in his discussions of demography and population growth in particular. It was his opinion that the human population of one and one-half billion in his time was not only supportable but even "still very minimal, relative to the habitable surface of the earth."[65] He did not seriously consider the impact on the biosphere of such a possibility as several doublings in human population during the next century. At one point, he minimizes the significance of increases in human population by noting that if each person were given a square meter of space, everyone could fit into the area of greater London.[66] Such a fact is, of course, entirely irrelevant from his own standpoint of social geography. We could stand several persons in each square meter, and even put some on the shoulders of others, without learning very much about the interaction between human communities and the earth.

Fortunately, Reclus' discussion of population is often much more nuanced than this, though still tinged with progressivist optimism. He is well aware of the fact that there is no optimal human population that can be calculated by means of arithmetic and plane geometry, or even discovered through more complex natural and social sciences. In this recognition, he was already far ahead of many of our contemporary advocates of simplistic conceptions of "carrying capacity." He notes that if the world consisted of a population of hunters, the earth could perhaps support a population of only five-hundred million, or one-third the actual population as he was writing. He cites various estimates of the possible sustainable human population, and comments favorably on the view of "that circumspect evaluator, Ravenstein," that a population of six billion is a possible limit.[67] However, he expresses skepticism about all such estimates since there are numerous variables that cannot be predicted with any certainty. As an example, he cites changes in methods of production, and, most notably, those in the area of agriculture. In his view, such changes would probably allow a much greater human population to be supported. He believes that when farming attains "the intensive character that science dictates," population will increase at "a completely unforeseen rate," and that "the expanse of good land, which is presently quite limited, cannot fail to grow rapidly, whether through irrigation, drainage, or the mixing of soils."[68] He did not stress another set of possibilities that are equally in accord with his basic theoretical orientation: that if vastly increased social and ecological costs of increased technological development lead to a slowing of growth in productivity, if the supply of land dwindles under population pressures, and if ecological degradation causes the quality of the soil to deteriorate, then exactly opposite conclusions concerning population must be drawn.

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[63] Ibid., p. 518.

[64] Ibid., p. 519; quoted by Reclus, who cites Hasst, von Hochstetter and Peschel in Ausland (Feb. 19, 1867).

[65] Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, V: 300.

[66] Ibid. V: 332.

[67] Ibid. V: 332.

[68] Ibid.

In reality, Reclus shared with his contemporaries certain pro-natalist biases, and saw the decline in birth rates in parts of Europe as a sign of decadence. He moralizes about the fact that in the more affluent areas, natality drops drastically. He cites the examples of the départements of l'Eure and Lot-et-Garonne, where the death rate had surpassed the birth rate for most of a century, although these are among the départements "whose soils have the greatest fertility."[69] He attributes the failure of the citizens to reproduce at appropriate levels to the egoism of affluence. He sees this failure as an example of the conflict under capitalism between the pursuit of individual self-interest and the general good. He notes that proprietors who fear the division of their land among numerous heirs, and functionaries with modest incomes who want to improve their social status find that having fewer offspring serves their self-interest better.[70] What he fails to note is that where egoism reigns, all social phenomena take on an egoistic coloring, and that their character in such a context says little about these phenomena "in themselves."

Despite his pro-natalist tendencies, Reclus did not share the widespread view that increase in population was an unmixed blessing to society. He says that although "growth in numbers has been, without doubt, an element contributing to civilization, it has not been the principal one, and in certain cases, it can be an obstacle to the development of true progress in personal and collective well-being, as well as to mutual good will."[71] Today he would probably see it as an unmixed curse, as ecological devastation accelerates, as the accompanying social crisis intensifies, and as a rapidly-increasing human population now approaches the limit of six billion that could seem plausible even in his optimistic age. Moreover, the conditions of production have changed in a sense opposite to the one he hoped for: their development shows little promise of abundance for a rapidly expanding human population, while it threatens to destroy the biotic preconditions for supporting existing human and many other populations at any "optimal level," if indeed at any level at all.[72]

An area in which Reclus was far in advance of his time, and in which he anticipated current debate in ecophilosophy and environmental ethics is in his concern with ethical and ecological issues regarding our treatment of other species. Reclus was unique in being not only a pioneer in ecological philosophy, but also an early advocate of the humane treatment of animals and of ethical vegetarianism. Even today, after several decades of discussion of "animal rights" and "ecological thinking," there are few theorists who have attempted to think through carefully the interrelationship between the two concerns. Yet, a century ago Reclus offered some highly suggestive ideas about how a comprehensive holistic outlook might encompass a serious consideration of our moral responsibilities toward other species.

Reclus observes that all social authorities, in addition to public opinion in general, "work together to harden the character of the child" in relation to animals used for food.[73] This conditioning, he says, destroys our sense of kinship with a being that "loves as we do, feels as we

[69] Ibid., V: 415.

[70] Ibid., V: 416.

[71] Ibid., V: 418.

[72] This is not to deny the obvious fact that scarcity is socially generated, and that thus far the burden of famine and malnutrition has fallen most heavily on those who suffer from economic and political powerlessness, not on those who "overuse resources" most flagrantly. See Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, *World Hunger: Twelve Myths* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1986). The point is, however, that from a global ecological perspective, continued population growth will necessarily aggravate ecological crisis, whatever other social variables may exist.

[73] Reclus, "On Vegetarianism," p. 318.

do, and, under our influence, progresses or retrogresses as we do."[74] Like utilitarian defenders of animal welfare since Bentham, he objects to the suffering inflicted on animals raised for food. But adopting a much wider perspective, he also censures the injury caused to the species by the process of domestication. The flourishing and development of species that is possible in the wild is reversed as the animal is increasingly adapted to its single role as a source of food. It has already been noted that Reclus links the ethical and the aesthetic in his analysis of this subject, observing that the abuse of animals that is morally repugnant is also repellent to our sensibilities. He also relates this issue to the question of value. "It is just one of the sorriest results of our flesh-eating habits that the animals sacrificed to man's appetite have been systematically and methodically made hideous, shapeless, and debased in intelligence and moral worth."[75] This reduction of "moral worth" suggests two aspects of the moral problem: first, that humans fail to recognize the intrinsic value or worth of the animal's life and experience; and second, that the "debasing" treatment to which it is subjected reduces the possibilities for the animal's attainment of its own good, or value-experiences. Were Reclus to observe the factory-farming practices of our day, he would no doubt reaffirm this point even more strongly. The importance of ethical vegetarianism, in his view, is that it expresses "the recognition of the bond of affection and goodwill that links man to the so-called lower animals, and the extension to these our brothers of the sentiment which has already put a stop to cannibalism among men."[76]

This reference to "bonds" and "links" indicates how this issue is related to Reclus' general holistic position. In this theoretical context, the issue of treatment of animals goes far beyond the "moral extensionism" of many later theorists who merely adapt conventional, non-ecological ethical concepts and apply them to non-humans. Reclus instead undertakes a fundamental rethinking of the ethical. He believes that our attitude toward other species is not only a question of moral treatment of other individual beings, but also a good measure of our awareness of our connectedness to the whole of nature. Moreover, an understanding of our relationship to other animals is important in the process of human self-realization, as the domain of reason and that of feeling expand concomitantly. Our growing knowledge of animals and their behavior "will help us to penetrate deeper into the science of life," and "will enlarge both our knowledge of the world and our love."[77] We thus grow morally as the scope of our knowledge grows and as our attachment to the larger system of life is strengthened.

Here as elsewhere in his thought (indeed, going back to his earliest work), the centrality of the concept of love to Reclus' world view is evident. His view of human moral development is noteworthy in relation to recent discussions of the distinction between an ethics of abstract

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., p. 322. Reclus' arguments constitute an eloquent defense of the humane treatment of animals, but they are far from conclusive as a proof of the moral necessity of strict vegetarianism. He presents an excellent case for the immorality of systems of food production that inflict continual suffering on animals and callously ignore the moral relevance of the attainment of goods or of the self-realization of these beings. His critique would therefore apply to much of today's meat industry, with its factory farming and mechanized mass production. In addition, his arguments concerning the evils of domestication present a strong case against raising certain animals even in non-factory conditions. Nevertheless, he does not demonstrate that all forms of animal husbandry and hunting are inhumane. It is noteworthy that Reclus never subjects traditional hunting societies to the scathing criticism he directs toward the modern meat industry. Unfortunately, he fails to explore the possibility of morally-relevant differences between the two systems.

[77] Elisée Reclus, "The Great Kinship," trans. by Edward Carpenter, in Joseph Ishell, ed. *Elisée and Elie Reclus: In Memoriam*, p. 54.

moral principles and an ethics of care.[78] Reclus is unusual among nineteenth-century radical social thinkers in that he focuses so strongly on the importance of the development of moral feeling, compassion, and the practice of love and solidarity in everyday life. In his time, much of the radical opposition to the dominant order was fueled by a sense of injustice and outrage at the oppression and inequities in society. While this opposition certainly had an authentic ethical dimension, it also succumbed to the reactive mentality and spirit of ressentiment that Nietzsche so perceptively diagnosed in socialism, communism and anarchism. Reclus' outlook achieves a remarkable synthesis between, on the one hand, an interest justice and the expansion of knowledge and rationality, and on the other hand, a concern for social solidarity and the development of care and compassion. In this synthesis, he anticipates contemporary ethical theorists who seek to restore the balance between these two sets of concerns.

Reclus' conception of love and solidarity is also instructive in relation to issues in contemporary ecophilosophy. While various recent theorists have offered "identification" with nature as an antidote to "anthropocentric" attitudes and practices, such proposals have sometimes remained on a rather abstract idealist level at which identification has the character of an act of will, if not indeed that of a leap of faith. From Reclus' perspective, it is our growing knowledge of (in the sense of both savoir, understanding, and connaître, being acquainted with) the earth and its human and non-human communities that offers an expanded scope for identification and solidarity. As we come to know each realm more adequately, we achieve greater identification with our own species, identification with all the inhabitants of the planet, and finally, as "the conscience of the earth," identification with the living, evolving planet itself.

In this insight, as in so many other aspects of his thought, Reclus anticipated some of the most profound dimensions of contemporary ecological thinking. It is quite striking that a century ago he was exploring in considerable detail so many themes relevant to current fields of interest such as social ecology, ecological holism, animal rights theory, bioregionalism, the ethics of care, and earth-centered narrative. Reclus' social geography therefore deserves much greater recognition and continuing study as an important chapter in the history of ecological thought.

[78] See Carol Gilligan, "Moral Orientation and Moral Development" in Kay Kittay and Diana Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987), pp. 19–33. According to Gilligan, "since everyone is vulnerable to both oppression and abandonment, two moral visions—one of justice and one of care—recur in human experience." (p. 20) This essay develops further the ethical implications of her ground breaking work, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*(Cambridge, MA: Harvard Un. Press, 1982).

John Clark
The Dialectical Social Geography of Elisée Reclus
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