# CONTENTS

# 1

# Awakenings

A SPECTER MOVES among us—shadowed, indistinct, silent; it hovers at the edge of vision and then is gone, shape-shifting unrecognizably into plain sight. It lives in the quiet of a woods where birdsong used to be, in the chemicals that course imperceptibly through our soil and water and bloodstreams, in the long, low, windowless buildings on the outskirts of town that supply our insatiable appetite for cheap meat. It is at the dinner table with us, seated across the aisle on the flight to Chicago, sewn into the bags we carry, the mattresses we sleep on, the down jackets that keep us warm in winter.

This shadowed shape-shifter is a constant companion in modern democratic societies; like the air itself, it is everywhere and unseen. It is the specter of a domination that shapes every aspect of our lives while being virtually invisible to us: the domination that human beings exercise in relation to nonhuman nature. People are a part of the natural world, of course, and consequently the human domination of nature entraps and exploits us too, albeit in different ways depending on who we are and where we fall in human hierarchies. Yet whereas modern democracy establishes principled constraints on power in relation to persons, constraints that are intended to check arbitrary power and exploitation, it entails few such protections for nonhuman beings and things. This structural condition of vulnerability to insufficiently constrained power and exploitation is the essence of domination.

The domination of nature is not unique to democratic societies, of course; it permeates regimes of all types in most every part of the world. Yet democratic domination is especially troubling because it cannot be blamed on a thug or a political strongman. We all play a role. Most of us do not see the role we play in the domination of nature, or the ways it circles back to entrap and exploit other people and ourselves. And even if we did see it, this domination is not a condition we can rectify as individuals. A distinctive feature of

domination in this form is the forced complicity in which it holds us. On the one hand, poor and marginalized people are made to be the tools of a "slow violence" exercised over nature and themselves by extractivist industries and corrupt governments.[1] On the other hand, the relatively privileged masses in even the most prosperous societies are enlisted, through the promise of consumer satisfactions and misguided notions of freedom, in their own entrapment and exploitation by a system that makes sustainable living essentially impossible, compromises health and well-being, and feeds the slow violence of environmental degradation abroad and at home.

To speak of the human domination of nature may seem to imply a stark divide between people and the Earth, one that is belied by our dependence on Earth's nonhuman parts, our embeddedness in ecosystems, and the porous, networked character of our human selves and communities. It is estimated, for example, that at least half the cells making up a human body are not human cells at all but bacterial.[2] The oxygen that animates us, the calories that fuel us, the sun that warms and illuminates us, the physical forces that hold our parts together—all these more-than-human things are constitutive components of human beings. We are very much a part of nature, not outside it. Indeed, the whole idea of nature as a separate entity has been more or less repudiated over the last generation. In our era of anthropogenic climate change, all ecosystems now bear a human imprint, so the old notion of nature as untouched wilderness is obsolete.[3] Yet while human beings are a part of nature, we are not the whole of it. The material world we inhabit contains many beings and things that exceed the *merely* human. For this reason, William Connolly has warned against overly "sociocentric" views that ignore how human agency always interacts with "deeply nonhuman" beings, things, and "planetary forces with degrees of autonomy of their own."[4] The environmental domain manifests a "socionatural hybridity" in which human beings are constitutively entwined with nonhuman beings and things, with no one part being simply reducible to any other.[5]

In this book I refer to more-than-human beings and things under the rubric of nature, including both nonhuman animals and the Earth systems that we commonly think of as the natural environment. In using the language of nature, I never mean to mark out a domain that is fully cut off from human influence, or to deny the deep and important fact of human dependence on Earth others and embeddedness in ecosystems. Human beings are natural phenomena. At the same time, the scale of the destructive impact that human power has had on the Earth, and the fact that this power can be guided by

deliberation and choice, do make the human species distinctive. We do not stand outside nature, but there are certain things that only we can do within it, such as take responsibility for the environmental harms we have caused, consciously cultivate new ways of thinking and new sensibilities, coordinate our action with others to alter the trajectories of our power, and create more sustainable, inclusive political communities going forward. To make progress on our environmental problems, we need to acknowledge both our embeddedness and our distinctiveness. Both are central to how we got into the environmental mess we are currently in, and both are necessary to find our way out.

The notion of the human domination of nature also may seem to overstate the extent and efficacy of human power. There is much in nature that we do not control, after all, including many of our own environmental effects, as climate change and superbugs and mass extinctions demonstrate. Yet domination has never been a matter of perfect control. Think of the despots depicted by Plato or Montesquieu, whose anxious efforts to master their subjects leave the despots themselves desperate and dispirited because perfect control perpetually eludes their grasp.[6] Domination is about power that lacks effective institutional constraints, not about perfect control. The purposes to which power is put also are relevant. Domination is self-serving and indifferent to the well-being of those it subordinates, instrumentalizing them to satisfy the superior's desires rather than showing them consideration in their own right. This feature of domination makes it intrinsically unstable as a form of political order, as both Plato and Montesquieu knew. Domination uses up the sources of its own life by eviscerating its subjects and the conditions of their common existence. It is not sustainable. This should sound familiar to us; it is a fitting description of how most of us relate to the nonhuman world. The power that human beings are permitted to exercise in relation to nonhuman nature is a form of domination both in its structure and in its ends, even though it is far from perfect control.

The use of nature for human purposes is not in itself domination, of course. Use is a necessary condition of existence, one that holds for all living things. To live on the Earth is inevitably to consume, transform, and destroy. Life entails violence. What makes our relationship to nonhuman nature one of domination is not the fact of our use but the insufficiently constrained structure of our power, and the unabashedly exploitative ends this power is permitted to serve. True, states routinely regulate the use of nonhuman beings and things by people, but the vast majority of animal and environmental regulation today is self-serving rather than principled. It is formulated to protect human

interests, and when human interests are deemed to change, the regulations change too. Moreover, institutional protections for nature are for the most part only weakly entrenched and easily obviated, as the Trump administration's rapid retraction of many environmental regulations showed. While efforts by some countries to protect ecosystems and nonhuman animals through constitutionally established rights gesture toward more fundamental structural constraints on human power, at this point they remain mostly aspirational in character and are not widespread.[7] So the domination of nature is not the same thing as the use of nature for human purposes. Domination is a specific condition, the condition of systematic vulnerability to power that is insufficiently constrained and exploitative.

Domination so conceived is harmful and illegitimate. To some, the domination of nature will seem to be a misnomer in this regard. Nothing is more common in the Western canon of philosophy than the twinned ideas (1) that nature is composed of inert matter and thus impervious to harm, or at least impervious to harm that is of moral and political concern; and (2) that human beings, as the only morally significant things on Earth by virtue of their unique capacity for rational agency, are entitled to make use of nature however they like. From the biblical assertion that God gave human beings "dominion over all the earth,"[8] to Aristotle's idea that plants and animals "exist for the sake of human beings" as "instruments" to be used for human purposes,[9] to Locke's assumption that "the inferior ranks of creatures" are "made for human use,"[10] to Marx's depiction of nature as "man's inorganic body" and "the instrument of his life-activity,"[11] the Western tradition has tended overwhelmingly to legitimate the exercise of relatively unchecked, instrumentalizing human power in relation to nature, and to disavow the harm it brings to nonhuman beings and things. Political theories that agree on virtually nothing else agree with striking unanimity on this much.

The purpose of *Eco-Emancipation* is not to prove that the human domination of nature is harmful and illegitimate but rather to diagnose the dynamics that sustain domination and envision alternatives to them. There are multiple reasonable considerations that can be brought to bear in explaining the wrongness of domination in relation to nature, and we need not agree on all the particulars. As in the overlapping consensus that Rawls envisioned to sustain a pluralistic people's commitment to justice, we can make sense of the wrongness of environmental domination from within a range of different perspectives. My own view is that just as the domination of people is wrong because it imposes harm on subordinates that superiors have no right to impose, so

nothing has endowed human beings with a legitimate title to exercise power over nonhuman parts of nature in this way. In the absence of a title to unconstrained, merely exploitative use, such use can only constitute a usurpation, a violation of the basic condition of nonhuman beings and things as existing in and for themselves, for their own diverse purposes and according to their own logics of being, within Earth's interdependent webs of life.

It is true that the wrongness of domination among people seems self-evident to us today in a way that does not hold for the human domination of nature. Yet historically the wrongness of domination among people was far from self-evident to many human beings—perhaps most—until relatively recently. The growing recognition of its wrongness has been the result of inventiveness in modern moral and political theory, along with activist struggle over centuries to establish the idea in practice, struggle that continues (unfinished) today. Think of Locke's inventive assertion that human beings are by nature free and equal in the sense that no person has a natural title to rule over others, or Kant's inventive assertion that the rationality of noumenal beings confers moral dignity on them and makes them ends in themselves. These inventive assertions have become our deepest moral intuitions in modern democracies, and they have made human societies better in some very important respects, despite the fact they are more like articles of faith than actual proofs.

For us to see and feel the wrongness of human domination in relation to nature with the force we now feel about prohibitions on domination among people, we do not need proof of the intrinsic worth of nonhuman beings and things any more than we need proof of the intrinsic worth of people. We do not have proof of the intrinsic worth of people. What we have in the case of people is a series of inventive assertions and articles of faith that over time, and with the help of activist struggle, have been internalized by enough of us in enough places to become common intuitions, and that have tended on the whole to make human lives go better. The new and inventive intuition we must now internalize is that nonhuman beings and things, like other people, are not *for us* in any constitutive or morally meaningful way, that no legitimate title exists granting authority to human beings to exercise unchecked power over nonhuman parts of nature, or to make use of them in merely instrumentalizing, exploitative ways. If internalized by enough people over time, this intuition has the potential to make it as self-evident to us that the human domination of nature is wrong as it is now self-evident that domination among people is wrong. This perspective on the wrongness of domination in relation to nature is woven into the chapters that follow, but one need not accept this perspective

to learn from the analysis of domination and the vision of emancipation that are the focus of the book. The analysis of domination and the vision of emancipation offered here are compatible with a range of different perspectives in this regard.

The belief that people do have a legitimate title to rule nature has been tremendously durable and destructive. It not only excuses but also occludes the damage we do to Earth others, to one another, and to ourselves by means of insufficiently constrained power and exploitation, making it difficult for us to see that we are complicit in a usurpation *and* that we ourselves are subjugated by it.[12] The first objective of *Eco-Emancipation* is to make this unseen usurpation and subjugation visible, to awaken us to the multiple strands of domination that are with us everywhere, and that currently set the terms of human life on the Earth. One might be forgiven for thinking that this awakening is already under way. Environmental consciousness is clearly on the rise around the world. Recycling is now a major global industry, alternative energy use is expanding, workplaces and college campuses are going green, the language of sustainable development is everywhere, even large oil companies build advertising campaigns around their putative commitments to the Earth, and as a result of the 2015 Paris climate accord, 196 countries have agreed to limit their carbon emissions. Valuable as they are, however, these developments do not alter the fundamental structure of human power in relation to nature, and hence they do not change the basic conditions of environmental domination. Consequently, industrialized agriculture and factory farming are extending their reach worldwide while deforestation, species extinctions, toxic dumping, the proliferation of drug-resistant superbugs, the growth of greenhouse gas emissions, and the acidification of the seas continue apace. We may worry about our environmental problems today more than we did in the past, but we are not doing much to change the basic structure of human power that drives these problems, partly because we still do not see the domination it entails.

Historically, domination has had two sides: *dominium*, the exercise of insufficiently constrained power by particular persons, groups, and economic entities in the private sphere; and *imperium*, the exercise of insufficiently constrained power by public authorities or the state. Domination as dominium and imperium was associated with slavery, whether as personal servitude to a master or as political servitude to a despot.[13] Both dominium and imperium are evident today in how human power is exercised in relation to nature. In the private sphere, the power that individual people and groups exercise in their

interactions with nonhuman beings and things is insufficiently constrained such that, for example, farmers and corporate agricultural operations are free to deplete the land and water supply and to impose unconscionable suffering on animals for the purpose of increasing their profit margins. In the public domain, the power of states to extract resources, dump waste, and permit carbon emissions within their borders likewise lacks constraints that are principled and reliably enforced.

The fact that environmental domination is a function of the structure of human power makes it relatively independent of individual human intentions in these contexts. Insofar as I *can* poison the soil with pesticides, the land I farm and the nonhuman populations that live there are vulnerable to me in a way that does not change simply because as an individual farmer I choose to go organic. Likewise, one US administration opting not to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling in no way mitigates the basic status condition of that land relative to the imperium of American public power as long as the next administration is free to do so. The structure of human power in relation to nonhuman beings and things, both individual human power and collective human power, puts nonhuman nature into a position of systematic vulnerability to people and treats nature as if it were primarily a resource for the satisfaction of human desires. The status condition of nature in this regard is separate from the intentions that particular human beings may have as individuals. Whoever we are and whatever we do, if we live in democratic societies that do not adequately constrain human power relative to nature or protect nonhuman beings and things from exploitation, we play a part in the domination of nature.

This is not to say that we all play the *same* part. As Naomi Klein aptly puts it, "You, me and Exxon (Mobile) are not all in it together" in the sense of being equally responsible for environmental degradation, or responsible in the same ways.[14] Similarly, wealthy Americans who opt to commute in gas-guzzling SUVs play a different role, given their relative privilege and political power, than local peoples of the Amazon who have been driven by poverty and political oppression into jobs that violently extract resources from their land. The large-scale structural forces through which the domination of nature mostly transpires are human inventions and are driven by human agency. Yet the human agency that drives them is compromised in varying degrees by prevailing relations of power.[15] Consequently, a core feature of domination in this form is that many of us contribute to the damage it effects without intending to do so, sometimes very much against our wishes.

Moreover, even as we participate in the degradation of the Earth, we ourselves, including both poor people and privileged ones, are confined and exploited by the forces through which the domination of nature transpires. We are confined and exploited when we are led to believe that the only path to job creation is to allow industries to extract, emit, and dump with abandon, compromising our own health and well-being alongside that of the nonhuman beings and things that live among us. We are confined and exploited by a production culture of planned obsolescence, in which we must purchase even the most basic tools of a modern existence again and again, filling our dumps with toxic, unnecessary refuse and our waterways with mountains of plastic because everything is made to be disposable. We are confined and exploited whenever the only goods available for purchase are toxic to us but profitable for the seller, and when our land, water, air, and bodies are polluted by commercial enterprises. We are confined and exploited by food industries that fill our grocery stores with products that fail to nourish us or actively sicken us while depleting and destroying the ecosystems we depend on. In all these contexts, we are treated not as ends in ourselves but as the means for generating profits for corporations and power for the political officials who serve them. Because human beings are a part of nature not separate from it, the shape-shifting specter that is the human domination of nature circles back to subjugate people too, albeit in different ways and to different degrees depending on how we are positioned in human hierarchies.

The effects that the domination of nature has on people compromise our ability to envision and enact the deeper changes required to solve our environmental problems. Activities such as dumping and extractivist modes of production are frequently carried out by means of exploitation and violence against people who are already poor and politically marginalized. This exploitation and violence further undercut their ability to resist the pressures of large multinationals and to hold their governments accountable for the damage they do. To be sure, the environmentalism of the poor has shown itself to be a formidable force in many places around the world. Still, the disabling effects on people that accompany the human domination of nature are real. They affect privileged people too, although in different ways. For example, many privileged people living in prosperous societies feel, not unreasonably, that today's big environmental problems are simply beyond their ability to influence. They may wish to live sustainably, they may even make a respectable effort to do so, but they know that the effects of their individual efforts are negligible, and that truly opting out of practices that degrade the Earth is not

a live option for anyone living in modern societies, whether poor and politically marginalized or prosperous and privileged.[16] Whatever we do or eat or buy, in work and in leisure, in birth and in death, we inevitably find ourselves contributing to the despoiling of the Earth. We are at once complicit and entrapped. The domination of nature has been inscribed so deeply in the basic structures that organize our lives—political, economic, cultural—that we cannot really do otherwise; there is no viable way out for us as individuals.

In view of the multiple, interacting ways that the domination of nonhuman nature by people circles back to subjugate human beings too, it makes sense to understand these dynamics in terms of a broader concept of *environmental domination*. As the idea is developed here, environmental domination is a multifaceted phenomenon that includes the political, economic, and cultural forces through which human beings (1) *dominate nature*, understood as Earth's more-than-human parts; and (2) *are themselves dominated* in terms of both (a) the special burdens placed on poor and marginalized people with respect to environmental harms, and (b) the ways that virtually all of us—even privileged people in the world's most affluent societies—are confined and exploited by forces that degrade the Earth, often in our names and with our (not always willing) participation. Whoever we are, and whether we know it or not, we are in need of ecological emancipation, meaning the liberation of the Earth from human domination, and the liberation of human beings from a way of life that is at once exploitative and exploited, complicit and entrapped.[17]

The key to this emancipation is a new kind of political order, one that institutionalizes principled constraints on human power in relation to nonhuman beings and things, and that prevents the exploitation of nature and people. Ethical orientations emphasizing our interdependence with nonhuman nature and personal efforts at sustainable living are valuable, but they are radically insufficient because they are no match for the structural conditions that constitute environmental domination. To reverse this domination, real politics are needed. This means more than simply expanding state-based environmental regulations; it requires changing the basic structure of human power by means of new political institutions and forms of political incorporation for nonhuman nature, new practices of political economy, and new constellations of collective action.

All this goes beyond mere stewardship. In fact, it points up the insufficiency of the stewardship model. Environmental stewardship, as an ethical practice of ecological care, leaves human power unreconstructed, and it makes nonhuman beings and things essentially dependent on the kindness of strangers in

their interactions with us. It does not solve the fundamental problem, which is nature's condition of systematic vulnerability to human power that is insufficiently constrained and exploitative. This problem cannot be solved without establishing robust limitations on human power, limitations that are supported through political institutions and collective action, and that can be coercively enforced by the state. Such limitations on power are not by themselves enough to reverse environmental domination, but they are necessary. Their necessity makes ecological emancipation a political project, not something that can be achieved through ethics alone.

It may seem strange to talk about the relationship between human beings and the natural world as a political one. We do not see ourselves as being in political relationship with nature at all. Yet nonhuman beings and things are everywhere subject to the coercive force of states and other political bodies, and to the political will of democratic majorities. Political power regulates how the nonhuman things we think of as natural resources are extracted and distributed and disposed of, how the animals that live among us are produced and slaughtered and studied, and how the Earth itself is divided up, populated, and protected (or not) by human beings. Our relationship to Earth's nonhuman parts is thoroughly infused with political power; it reflects our political values and is constitutive of our political communities. We may prefer not to see this relationship in political terms, but this preference is mainly a matter of bad faith. Given how we treat the Earth, acknowledging the political character of our relationship with it quite rightly makes us uneasy.[18]

A better life is possible, one that is freed of bad faith and liberated from insufficiently checked power and exploitation, but it will require inventing new kinds of political community. The political communities we need to cultivate will incorporate nonhuman nature through institutions of representation and regimes of rights that reliably constrain the use of human power and force nonhuman well-being to count with human decision makers. They will treat nonhuman beings and things as members, rather than as things whose sole function is to be used by members. Because politics is in part a domain of shared decision making for the purpose of guiding the collective use of power, human beings will have a distinctive place in these communities. Our abilities to deliberate, communicate, and coordinate with one another, and our capacity for norm-responsive choices, enable us to take on certain political responsibilities that are not feasible for other kinds of beings and things. Still, the fact that only people can deliberate with others in the ways required for a political assembly to make decisions about the collective use of power does not make it

right for only human well-being to count in this deliberation. Political inclusion for, say, cows and rainforests need not entail asking cows and rainforests to vote or run for office. It just means setting things up institutionally so that people must consider cows and rainforests when making decisions about animal agriculture or gold mining. We can make sense of political membership without insisting on political equality in the form of the same set of rights and responsibilities for all members. We do need to support political equality for persons, albeit in the difference-respecting forms that many feminists, disability theorists, and Indigenous peoples have called for. Yet we can incorporate nonhuman beings and things through a range of institutional mechanisms that accommodate their variety while forcing their well-being to count. In the chapters to come we shall explore what this kind of political incorporation and more-than-human political community could look like.

Eco-emancipation will involve certain limitations on us as people, including limits on consumption, limits on population growth, and limits on our uses of nonhuman nature. It will also require active efforts on our part to respect Earth others, to take responsibility for our impact, to create new economic arrangements, and to carry out political change. Like any kind of emancipation, eco-emancipation is an activity rather than a gift, and it is demanding. Still, the limits and the demands it involves are not about ascetic self-denial or the sacrifice of all pleasure and prosperity. We can live well, meaning with pleasure and prosperity, by living better, meaning more sustainably and with more respect and responsibility. Likewise, eco-emancipation does not ask us to reject modernity or turn back the clock on human development. It is very much a forward-looking, world-expanding project for human beings, one that promises to make our lives better and, crucially, *freer*. It is of a piece with postcolonial efforts aimed at generating alternative modernities that bring into being more freedom, in diverse forms, for distinctive populations.

Freedom is certainly not the only illuminating lens for theorizing solutions to our environmental problems. Important recent work has focused on environmental justice, for instance, or on eco-virtue and the human Good, or on the shared human interest in species survival.[19] The freedom lens offers an especially important perspective, however. The specter of domination that haunts so many environmental problems today not only plays a role in creating the problems but also tends to occlude the dynamics that drive them, and to undermine effective responses. Until we properly diagnose this domination and address it as such, our remedies will remain weak and ineffectual, and we will never make much progress in solving the problems. In this sense,

eco-emancipation is a necessary condition for achieving other valuable outcomes in the environmental domain from environmental justice to eco-virtue to species survival.

The domination of nature is a familiar trope in environmental ethics and environmental political theory. Its history is tied more broadly to the rise of modern science, philosophy, and politics.[20] The effort to understand the causal relations that govern the physical world so as to intervene in these relations in ways that could, as Francis Bacon put it, "ameliorate the human condition," marked the beginning of modernity in the West.[21] For a long time, the "domination of nature" referred to this effort to understand and control the nonhuman environment, and it was seen as an unambiguously good thing. This effort made possible new technologies and rising economic prosperity, promised an end to many forms of human suffering, and demonstrated the triumph of reason over ignorance and superstition. Its costs began to be visible with industrialization in the nineteenth century, which generated obvious environmental damage and engendered among many people a sense of alienation from the land and the more-than-human communities composing it. One sees a growing unease about these costs in novels of the era such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), in poems like Wordsworth's "Michael" (1800) and later Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), and in the early nature writing of Thoreau's *Walden* (1854).[22] Yet systematic, critical analysis of the domination of nature as a problem came into its own only with the environmental studies movement in the 1970s. Since then, the trope has come to have a broadly negative valence, with the domination of nature being viewed as harmful and illegitimate, as well as dangerous to human interests.

Too often, however, the domination of nature has been identified simply with human damage to nonhuman species and ecosystems. Indeed, the term is commonly used today in a generic way to refer to all bad things that result from human interventions in the natural world. Yet this generic usage confuses more than it illuminates. It runs together different kinds of human impact, some of which are inevitable and unobjectionable, and it may seem to imply that the only way to avoid the domination of nature is for people to stop interacting with their environments entirely. Domination is not every bad thing; domination means being subject to insufficiently checked power and exploitation. Treating the domination of nature as all bad things muddies the waters of analysis and impedes us from finding a freer path forward. This freer path is not to withdraw from nonhuman nature (as if we could do so) but to change the conditions of our interaction that constitute environmental domination.

And we cannot make the requisite changes without first understanding the dynamics that drive this domination.

To grasp these dynamics in their full complexity we must include in our analysis the multiple ways that the domination of nature by people circles back to entrap and exploit human beings too. The last generation has seen important advances in this connection by scholars working in environmental political theory and critical theory. Murray Bookchin's *The Ecology of Freedom* offers an incisive account of how the exploitation of nonhuman nature, culminating in the rise of industrial capitalism, proceeded hand in hand with the exploitation of human labor. On his view, the environmentally damaging extractivism, pollution, and waste that he associates with the domination of nature was made possible by social hierarchies and the exploitation of the laboring classes by more powerful groups.[23] In a similar way, Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* makes the case that the cultural orientation of mastery characteristic of human approaches to nature in the Western tradition is replicated in male/female relationships as well as other instances of social inequality along lines of race, class, colonization, and the like.[24] The now expansive literature on environmental justice also demonstrates that environmentally damaging practices play out in especially detrimental ways for people who are poor and marginalized, thus calling attention to the interaction between the domination of nature and the domination of particular groups of people.

A different strand of literature, this one growing out of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, looks at how the domination of nature, understood as the mastery of a technological apparatus that enables the exploitation of the natural world for human profit, has been utilized in modern capitalist societies by a few human beings to exploit the many.[25] The domination of nature in this sense coincides with the domination of the masses as a whole, rather than particular groups of people who are poor or marginalized. And while it involves exploitation, domination in this context has a gentler hand, working (and concealing) its effects through the manipulation and satisfaction of consumer desires. Developed by figures such as Herbert Marcuse, William Leiss, Timothy Luke, and more recently Andrew Biro, the critical theory approach to environmental politics emphasizes the idea that the domination of nature always proceeds in conjunction with the domination of human beings.

Crucial as these different strands of literature are, each one has been limited by its focus on a particular category of people, whether on the laboring class, on women and other subordinate groups, on the poor and the marginalized,

or on the privileged masses. Part of understanding how human beings are affected by environmental domination is to see the ways that these different forms of domination among people interact with one another, and to grasp the multiple, sometimes cross-cutting roles that people play in these dynamics. Then, too, work that explores the relationship between the domination of nature and the domination of human beings has tended to privilege the domination of people in its analysis and its focus of normative concern. Nowhere is this truer than in the work of Leiss, whose book *The Domination of Nature* offers a seminal account of domination as applied to the natural world but ultimately concludes that the true meaning of "the domination of nature" is only "that by such means . . . some men attempt to dominate and control other men."[26] For Leiss, the domination of nature is reducible in the final analysis to the domination of people, and the domination of people is the real problem. Although this conviction is not always articulated in such an explicit way, the literatures that explore interactions between the domination of nature and the domination of people do tend to focus on the people. There are good reasons for this focus. The human suffering and injustices that result from environmental domination are often extreme, and they should be of pressing concern to us. Also, addressing this suffering and injustice is a necessary step in remediating the human domination of nonhuman beings and things. Still, by decentering or even occluding the domination of nonhuman nature, the work remains partial and incomplete.

We need a new way of thinking about environmental domination, one that allows us to hold in view all at once the different forms, dimensions, subjects, and sources of this domination and their interactions with one another. Part of what makes environmental progress so difficult is precisely the fact that the tentacles of environmental domination reach so widely across the different domains of our lives, and across different human lives in different ways. Our analysis of environmental problems must be alive to this complexity, and our responses must reach as widely as the tentacles of domination do. Such an analysis is the purpose of this book. The holistic and intersectional framework developed here is new in how it connects an account of the ways that environmental domination compounds the harms of historical and continuing global power inequities among people to an account of how domination also cuts across these inequities, confining and exploiting all of us in significant respects even as it formally constitutes the political status of nonhuman nature as subordinate to human beings as a whole in law and public policy. The analysis is also distinctive in the close linkage it establishes between (the different forms of)

environmental domination among people and the domination of nature per se, incorporating nonhuman beings and things at the center of the analysis and treating their domination as a normative concern in its own right, rather than sidelining it or viewing it as derivative of domination among people.

In addition to the holism of its approach, *Eco-Emancipation* offers a novel account of what environmental domination is. By emphasizing the idea that environmental domination involves vulnerability to power that is insufficiently constrained and exploitative, and that this vulnerability is a function of political, institutional arrangements and not only cultural orientations and personal values, it enables us to distinguish the domination of nature from the more general phenomena of human use and impact, and also from human control. This conceptual clarity offers activists and others engaged in shaping environmental policy and practices a more well-defined target. The target is not too broad, as when environmental domination is defined as any human use or impact, or as all bad things caused by human hands, thus implying that the only way to avoid environmental domination is by disengaging from the nonhuman world, or seeking to restore some mythical wilderness free from human influence. Nor is the target too narrow, as in demands to eliminate particular consumer goods or to promote certain sustainable technologies, which might make marginal improvements in some areas but still leave intact the larger, institutional apparatus of insufficiently constrained human power and exploitation. The account also makes sense of how human beings can exercise domination in relation to nonhuman beings and things (and one another), even though we quite obviously do not control them.

By clarifying what the domination of nature entails and how it operates, this account helps us to better understand the underlying causes of our environmental problems, and it points us to the changes needed to make a real difference, changes that focus on reconstructing how power flows between human beings and nonhuman nature, and among people. These changes involve establishing robust, institutional constraints on human power in relation to nonhuman beings and things, and protections against exploitation for both nature and people. And they combine new institutional arrangements with extra-institutional forms of political activism as well as civic ethos and cultural transformation, including a new sensibility of political respect for nature and new public practices of eco-responsibility. The promise of emancipation they offer is not a promise of perfect harmony between the human and more-than-human parts of nature, or among persons. Perfect harmony is not the goal; nondomination is the goal. Or better yet, the goal is a way of living that pursues

liberation from environmental domination for people and nature through political communities that constrain human power in new ways and formally incorporate Earth's more-than-human parts so as to allow a freer life for all of us over time.

The book begins by taking aim at a linchpin of environmental domination: the old human exceptionalism thought to justify it. This exceptionalism rests on an ideal of human agency as rational autonomy, even personal sovereignty, that is rooted in individual reason and will and that putatively enables us to exercise rational control over our actions. Agency so conceived is thought to set human beings apart from and above the rest of nature. It purportedly frees us from the mechanistic determinism said to characterize the natural world, and it gives us both the capacity and the right to govern ourselves and everything else. Agency in this form is often seen as the sole source of moral value and political standing; it makes human beings (and only human beings) ends in themselves. The ideal of agency as personal sovereignty sets the boundaries of moral and political belonging in a way that calls for limitations on the exercise of power over people but justifies human beings in exercising relatively unconstrained power in relation to nature.

Chapter 2, "A New Exceptionalism," argues that this ideal of agency is deeply misleading. It neglects human agency's nonsovereign, distributed character, the fact that agency cannot be located exclusively within the individual, in inner faculties such as reason and will. Agency does involve inner faculties, but it also extends beyond the individual to include social and material exchanges as well, meaning exchanges with other people and with nonhuman nature. Agency has what David Abram refers to as a "porosity" that makes each agent like "an open circuit that completes itself only in things, in others, in the surrounding earth."[27] This porosity and dependence on both human and nonhuman others means that action is never fully subject to the agent's rational control or even contained within the boundaries of the self. Agency is a robust but *nonsovereign* experience, to invoke language introduced by Hannah Arendt.

The nonsovereignty of agency disrupts the strict, hierarchical divide between human beings and the rest of nature. If agency arises through circuits of vitality that include and depend on nonhuman aspects of the material environment, then human agents can hardly claim to stand apart from and above this environment. Human beings do have some distinctive capacities not shared by most other parts of nature, and this distinctiveness is significant insofar as it makes us subject to ethical and political accountability in special ways. But to acknowledge this distinctiveness is a far cry from insisting on a

strict, hierarchical divide between human beings and everything else on Earth, one that could justify unchecked human power and exploitation in relation to nature. The truth is that we depend on the Earth as we depend on one another, and we depend on it to provide more than just a field of opportunity for the exercise of our agency. We depend on it as a vital, contributing source in the composition of agency, the very thing that supposedly sets us apart.

If human beings are not agentic in exactly the ways we have often thought, it is also the case that many nonhuman beings are more agentic than we have typically assumed. The last generation has seen an explosion in animal studies research documenting a range of agentic capacities, including reflective choice, social coordination, and norm responsiveness, among not just higher primates but many mammals and birds. Agency exists on a continuum and admits of significant diversity, and many beings other than human ones manifest agency in some form and to some degree. The distribution of agentic capacities across species further unsettles the old exceptionalism thought to justify the human domination of nature. At the same time, however, there are ways in which human agents do stand out, at least when it comes to accountability for environmental domination and efforts to generate eco-emancipation. We are distinctive both in the quality and scale of the damage we have done and in the potential we have to do things better going forward. This distinctiveness cannot sustain the old human exceptionalism with its claim to moral superiority and its justification of domination. Instead, it points to a new kind of exceptionalism, one that acknowledges that only human agents can rightly be held accountable for the abuse of human power, including the political institutions, social systems, and cultural values that effectuate environmental domination, and that human agents have a special role to play in correcting this abuse.

This new exceptionalism rests on an understanding of human agency as a nonsovereign, more-than-human phenomenon. It does not set people apart from and above the rest of nature. It will not support the illusion of human control over nature, and it does not invite human beings to instrumentalize nature solely for our own purposes. On the contrary, it gives us reason for humility and gratitude toward nonhuman beings and things, and sometimes awe and fear as well. The new exceptionalism of nonsovereign agency orients us to communities of interdependence marked by respect and responsibility toward nonhuman nature, rather than mastery and exploitation. It is a nonsovereign exceptionalism both in the sense that it is rooted in a distinctive but nonsovereign faculty of human agency and in the sense that the orientation to nature it recommends is one of respectful interdependence, rather than of

aspirations to sovereign control. Yet it insists that overcoming environmental domination will require engaging what is distinctive in human beings alongside what we share with other parts of nature.

Chapter 2's account of agency draws on work by Arendt, who helps us see the social distribution of agency, and by new materialists such as Jane Bennett, who turn us to the material aspects of human agency and to the agentic capacities of some nonhuman parts of nature. Yet the theory of agency developed here integrates the social and corporeal dimensions of agency in ways that neither Arendt nor the new materialists have done, and it attends more carefully to the ways that power differentials figure in the social and corporeal assemblages that compose agency. It also departs from previous work in showing the need for a new, nonsovereign exceptionalism in relation to nature and in demonstrating the importance of the new exceptionalism for eco-emancipation. The chapter lays groundwork for the larger argument of the book, setting up the discussion of environmental domination in chapter 3, and providing background for the new frameworks of political respect for nature and eco-responsibility developed in chapters 4 and 5. Above all, it underlies the deep relationality of the freedom envisioned in chapter 6 as eco-emancipation, a freedom that is rooted in the intersubjective, interspecies, ecosystemic assemblages that compose us all.

Chapter 3, "Environmental Domination," develops the book's holistic understanding of domination, which includes the interacting dynamics involved in the human domination of nature and the variegated forms of domination among people that figure in the environmental context. This view draws on contemporary republican theory in arguing that domination involves a status condition that is fundamentally political, rooted in a particular way of situating subjects relative to human power within the field of political institutions, law, and public policy. This status condition is one of systematic vulnerability to insufficiently constrained power and exploitation. To be sure, environmental domination is also tied to cultures of instrumentalization and political economies of extractivism. We shall have plenty to say about culture and political economy as the project unfolds. Yet the political status-condition aspect is crucial, both for understanding how the domination of nature differs from the simple use of it, and for identifying more emancipatory alternatives. It also helps us see the distinction between domination and perfect control, thus making it possible to understand how human beings can be said to dominate nature even as phenomena such as climate change and superbugs demonstrate the limits of human control.

Although the account draws on republican theory in its emphasis on the status-condition aspect of domination and its focus on insufficiently constrained power, it departs from conventional republican views in significant respects. Above all, it extends the political-institutional view of domination to cover the exercise of power by human beings in relation to nonhuman nature. This departure forces modifications to the republican concept of domination and, by extension, to its idea of freedom. In particular, it decenters the role of reflective choice. Domination among people compromises freedom by hindering them in the exercise of their choices, but many parts of nature lack the capacity for reflective choice. For them, being subject to insufficiently constrained human power jeopardizes not freedom as choice but a more general liberty to live on their own terms, meaning to manifest the logics of their diverse existences and to fulfill the purposes (however unreflective) that are distinctive to their kinds, without having their existence distorted or their well-being obstructed by insufficiently constrained, exploitative human power. The capacity for reflective choice is indeed a necessary condition of exercising domination; without it, no institutional framework of insufficiently constrained power nor systems of exploitation could exist. But the capacity for reflective choice is not a necessary condition of being subject to domination.

Another departure from (at least some) republicanism is that the account of environmental domination developed here rejects the model of personal control as the defining dynamic of domination. It holds that domination can be effected through impersonal structural forces through which the well-being of subordinates may be compromised by insufficiently checked power and exploitation, even absent relations of personal control on the traditional models of slavery and despotism, or the personal relations of husband and wife under patriarchy, or employer and worker under unreconstructed capitalism. It also denies that any agent, including those who occupy positions of superiority within human hierarchies, ever has full control over subordinates, given the nonsovereign nature of human agency and the degree to which we are all embedded in prevailing relations of power that shape and constrain our action. Often the dynamics of environmental domination involve people participating in large-scale structural forces that entrap and exploit nature, other people, and themselves, although as individuals they do not control any of it; and they sometimes participate without being aware of their impact.

The integral role that exploitation plays in the meaning of environmental domination as it is developed in these pages also distinguishes the view from at least some republican theory. Exploitation has sometimes been seen as the

concern of a very different tradition of political thought, in fact, namely Marxism.[28] Although we typically associate exploitation, as Marx did, with the labor sector, where it refers to treating employees "unfairly in order to benefit from their work," the word has a wider life.[29] I mean to use it in a broad sense to include benefiting in a general way at others' expense, or extracting value from others in a way that brings harm to them. To be exploited is to be treated as a mere instrument for the profit or power of another, without regard to one's own well-being. Taken together, these departures are sufficiently deep that it would be a mistake to regard the concept of environmental domination developed here as a republican one, strictly speaking. It draws from republican perspectives on domination but ultimately reconstructs the concept for new purposes.

Chapter 3 also builds on work in the environmental justice and critical theory literatures to elaborate key aspects of domination among people that arise in the environmental context. Yet it moves beyond that prior work to develop an intersectional approach, one that acknowledges the sometimes cross-cutting ways that environmental domination affects people, and introducing a plural, differentiated account of responsibility that responds to this complexity. The intersectional approach is important because it illuminates not only environmental domination's distinctive effects on people who are poor and marginalized but also the ways it cuts across human hierarchies to confine and exploit all of us, often without our awareness. To the extent that we associate environmental domination exclusively with people who are poor and marginalized, we perpetuate the blind domination of the more privileged populations diagnosed by Horkheimer and Adorno. The reality is that we are all in need of emancipation, even if the precise dynamics of our environmental domination differ. To see this, we must hold multiple realities in view simultaneously; we must learn to recognize what is common and what is distinctive about how environmental domination affects different human populations, and how it affects nonhuman ones.

Understanding the varied and intersecting dynamics of environmental domination is a necessary step toward emancipation, but understanding alone is not nearly enough, as we shall see in chapter 4, "Political Respect for Nature." At the structural level, political respect for nature supplements political respect for persons with institutional mechanisms that formally constrain how human power may be exercised in relation to nonhuman beings and things, and that require us to use our power in ways that are attentive to nature's well-being along with our own, thus interrupting exploitation. And much as respect

for persons, when internalized by citizens as part of their shared public ethos, protects against the abuse of power over other people, so a public ethos of respect for nature promises to motivate greater self-restraint and responsiveness in our interpersonal relations with Earth's nonhuman parts. Political respect for nature means acknowledging that nonhuman beings and things count, that they deserve to be treated according to standards of right, that there are principled limitations on how human power may be exercised in relation to them. It means formalizing these limitations in the basic structure of society, and fostering a public sensibility of self-restraint and responsiveness.

Chapter 4 explores what the meaning, experience, and practice of respect in this form could be, drawing inspiration from two very different sources: Kant's normative theory of respect for persons and Levinas's phenomenology of response to the other, which I approach through Jacques Derrida. I take Kant and Levinas as points of departure, but I develop the notion of respect in ways that go beyond both. First, I take up the meaning of respect as involving the Kantian idea that others should count with us always also as ends in themselves, but I reconstruct this idea so as to eschew Kant's focus on the putatively autonomous individual, and to cover nonhuman beings and things as well as people. Next, I examine the experiential dimensions of respect for nature, including the deep existential challenge it poses to us as human beings, given existing conceptual frameworks of human superiority and entitlement. For insight here I draw on Derrida's notion of "abyssal rupture,"[30] along with the Levinasian concepts of alterity and asymmetrical response across difference. Finally, I explore some concrete practices of political respect for nature that combine self-restraint with responsiveness to the well-being of nonhuman others.

As we shall see, respectful interactions are not always harmonious ones. Ecosystems are often violent places, and our relationships with Earth others regularly entail conflict. Respect for nature does not mean the end of this conflict. Nor does it preclude the defense of basic human interests when conflicts arise. It allows for us to defend ourselves against pests and predators, and to provide for our own well-being, even when this requires damage to nonhuman nature. What it rules out is the unreflective degradation of nature for the purpose of satisfying endless consumerist desires and the boundless pursuit of profit, or in thoughtless reaction to the inconveniences that life in a biotic community inevitably imposes on all its members. Respect asks us to bring a more discriminating sensibility to the pursuit of human well-being, and to pair it with attunement and responsiveness to the well-being of Earth others. There

will be plenty of conflicts and competing needs here, some of them irreducible. Respect for nature is not a solution to these conflicts but a political approach to navigating them. It asks us to treat human needs and interests as parts of a larger whole that has value, rather than as the only things that have value. To interrupt the destructive dynamics of our environmental domination, we need to establish respect for nature in the political institutions that govern our collective life with one another and with nonhuman beings and things, and to affirm it as a public ethos that is authoritative for us, even imperative for us, as democratic citizens of more-than-human polities.

Along with political respect for nature, moving beyond environmental domination will require new ways of thinking about and practicing responsibility. Our current conceptions of responsibility not only are ill suited to many environmental problems but can be positively disabling insofar as they treat individual intentionality and control as preconditions of responsibility. This way of thinking about responsibility is at odds with the structure of many environmental problems, in which people often contribute to damage without intending to do so or controlling their effects. It also conflicts with the nonsovereign character of human agency itself, and it is inattentive to the differential effects of power on differently placed persons. Chapter 5, "Eco-Responsibility," develops a pluralist approach that enables us to distinguish among types and degrees of responsibility for environmental damage, acknowledging the interacting dynamics of domination, the structural complexity of environmental problems, the nonsovereignty of human agency, and the differential effects of power. It draws on recent work in political theory that seeks more capacious ways to understand responsibility in the context of structural injustice, and it elaborates a new repertoire of responsibility that distinguishes responsibility as *culpability* from responsibility as *accountability* and *responsiveness*, arguing that all three must have a role in the environmental domain.

In addition to changing how we think about responsibility, we need to generate new cultures and practices of responsibility, including networks of what Brooke Ackerly calls "connected activism" in which people purposefully cultivate their ability to respond to environmental domination together with others.[31] Moreover, because existing social epistemologies shape what we think we are responsible for, including what we even regard as a problem requiring a response, we will need to shake up some of our core assumptions about the world and our place(s) in it. Disruptive politics can be an important resource for changing existing cultures of responsibility by forcing us to

confront forms of environmental damage and creaturely suffering that have been masked by prevailing epistemologies of ignorance.[32] Disruptive politics can generate social and cognitive crises that open the door to more reflective thinking and to behavioral change.

In this respect, the cultivation of eco-responsibility must build on the diagnostic work undertaken in chapter 3, which makes the dynamics of environmental domination visible and helps us to see and feel the violations it entails. Eco-responsibility also draws support from the analysis pursued in chapter 2, which shines light on the nonsovereignty of agency and illuminates the limitations of traditional views of responsibility, with their emphasis on intentionality and control. Eco-responsibility is nonsovereign responsibility, and it is alive to how power differentials impact agency, but it also has the potential to be empowering for people across the whole spectrum of human hierarchies. It relies as well on efforts to cultivate political respect for nature as described in chapter 4, which reorient our sensibilities toward nonhuman beings and things, shifting us away from the mere instrumentalization of Earth others toward forms of use and engagement that incorporate greater responsiveness to their well-being. Yet even as eco-responsibility builds on ideas developed in other parts of the book, it also supports them; these different dimensions of ecological emancipation are reciprocally reinforcing. The practice of eco-responsibility generates learning about nonhuman nature and the human place in nature, and it cultivates capacity for change on the part of nonsovereign human individuals and more-than-human communities. In doing so, it makes us better able to respond with respect to the needs of Earth others, human and nonhuman, to resist domination in its various guises, and to create more emancipatory forms of political relationship.

Chapter 6, "Ecological Emancipation," explores what these more emancipatory forms of relationship might look like, and how the freedom they generate might feel. I use the language of emancipation to characterize this freedom because of the conceptual and historical associations between emancipation and domination. To experience emancipation is to gain release from the dynamics of insufficiently checked power and exploitation that constitute domination. The language is familiar to us from the historical struggles of American slaves before abolition, of the working class under industrial capitalism, and of women subjected under patriarchy to the tutelage of husbands and fathers. I do not mean to equate these different forms of domination with one another or with the environmental domination of nature and people. Each one entails its own unique violations and forms of suffering. Still, they share a structural

similarity insofar as all are marked by a status condition of systematic vulnerability to insufficiently checked power and exploitation. In each of these contexts, emancipation was conceived as a release from domination based on a change in the structural conditions of life, such as the systems of property law, economic production, and the patriarchal family. To be sure, people who struggled for emancipation in all these contexts knew, or came to understand, that the formal change in status that constituted abolition or the collectivization of property or women's enfranchisement was not by itself sufficient to release them from domination. Emancipation includes not only a change in formal status but a transformation of selves and a shift in the wider interpersonal relations that constitute culture and society. To speak of *ecological* emancipation is to focus on how the liberation of people from environmental domination is inextricably entwined with the liberation of nonhuman beings and things and the networks of interdependence that make up ecosystems.

It is true that the ideal of freedom, at least in certain guises, has often been invoked by people to justify or excuse many forms of environmental damage as well as practices that impose great suffering on nonhuman animals, even to sustain environmental domination. When freedom is equated with unfettered property rights, for example, or limitless consumer choice, it tends to end in the exploitation of Earth others. Still, not every form of freedom ends in domination, and some of them are very much worth having. We are not wrong to care about freedom; in fact, caring about it is crucial to remediating our environmental problems. Yet we need to understand it differently. Freedom as eco-emancipation consists in continuing practices of worldmaking in tandem with human and nonhuman others, practices that embody new institutional constraints and extra-institutional mobilizations. These constraints and mobilizations are geared toward limiting how human power may be exercised over nature and people, and toward more inclusive incorporation for all. Emancipation also includes political respect for nature and persons along with a culture of responsibility that makes us accountable and responsive to a wide range of others, both human and nonhuman. And even as it orients us in new ways to the more-than-human world, it avoids resting the emancipation of nature on the domination of certain groups of people. Once again, eco-emancipation does not promise perfect harmony, either among persons or between people and nature. What it promises is release from the entrapment and exploitation that constitute environmental domination; it prevents us as human beings both from exercising domination in this form and from suffering it.

Eco-emancipation will affect differently positioned people in different ways, and it will affect human beings differently from other parts of nature. It is a plural, diversified phenomenon in this sense. Moreover, the freedom it entails is a nonsovereign kind of freedom. Instead of individual or collective mastery, eco-emancipation unfolds through relations of interdependence across individuals, communities, and types of being. And while it does involve greater influence over the human forces that shape our lives and affect the Earth, this influence is far from an experience of perfect control. Emancipation always coexists with uncertainty and precarity (our own and that of others), and it is marked by continuing contestation among the members of the more-than-human communities it sustains. Then too, emancipation is never complete because domination is a permanent possibility of power. We live on a continuum in which domination and emancipation are perpetually in play, which means that there is always work to be done and that we regularly face irresolvable remainders, but also that there is ever a reasonable hope of progress toward greater liberation. Envisioning what this liberation could be—its meaning, its mobilizations, its institutions—can help us make good on that hope. Chapter 6 lays out the meaning of ecological emancipation as combining a status condition of nondomination with political respect for nature and a culture of eco-responsibility, and it explores the plural, nonsovereign character of emancipation in this form. The chapter then takes up techniques for mobilizing eco-emancipation and examines some political, economic, and cultural mechanisms for institutionalizing it.

Each of the book's chapters engages a concept that has been fundamental to political theory in the modern West—agency, domination, respect, responsibility, emancipation—and reconfigures it in ways that serve the goal of theorizing freer forms of more-than-human political community. I draw on existing work for this purpose, sometimes on work that has been highly influential in the field, such as Kant and Levinas on respect, Philip Pettit on domination, Hannah Arendt and Jane Bennett on agency, Iris Young on responsibility, Hardt and Negri on emancipation. Yet in each instance I develop the concept in ways not envisioned by the people I draw from, often in ways that they might reject. I also rework the concepts to apply to our relationships with nonhuman beings and things, and this reworking frequently requires of the reader a certain exercise of imagination, sometimes even a leap of faith. I have found this combination of invoking the familiar, on the one hand, and calling for imagination and leaps of faith, on the other, to be unavoidable in theorizing novel types of human/more-than-human relations. Nothing runs deeper in

the social epistemologies of the modern West than the subordination of the nonhuman to the human. This subordination is so pervasive in our conceptual frameworks that it saturates the very language we have for talking about it. This makes it a real challenge to articulate in ways that are legible within our current terms of reference a genuinely different vision of human/nonhuman relationship. The method I have adopted is to begin with something familiar and then work it, like clay, to see what shape it might take when extended beyond our human-dominant frames.[33] In being worked this way, the concepts have all come out in the end meaning something different from what they meant at the beginning.

I hope that the novel ways of thinking about agency, domination, respect, responsibility, and emancipation that are introduced here will have a life beyond the environmental context. They seem to me to offer promise for understanding other important problems in political theory, including structural injustice, oppression, sovereignty, and irresolvable conflict, among other things. Perhaps the concept whose reconstruction here has the widest significance is the concept of political community itself. *Eco-Emancipation* challenges an assumption that has been constitutive of the field since its inception in ancient Greece, namely that the political domain is an exclusively human one. The book joins with other recent work in environmental political theory to contest this constitutive assumption by imagining more-than-human forms of political order, and by helping us to see them as genuine possibilities—and emancipatory ones.

The aim of *Eco-Emancipation* is partly critical in the critical-theory sense of excavating and unmasking hidden realities. It means to uncover the deep dynamics of domination that currently undergird human relationships with nonhuman beings and things, dynamics that saturate and define the structure of human power in most contemporary democratic societies. It means to reveal the illegitimacy of these dynamics, to help us see that the emperor has no clothes on, that our naked assertion of power in relation to nonhuman nature is nothing more than a naked assertion of power. It is intended to awaken us, as Socrates put it, from a dogmatic slumber that makes us oblivious to the true character of our way of life and to the harms it effects. The book also means to sting those of us who are relatively privileged and prosperous into an awareness of our own subjugation, to make us feel our confinement and exploitation at the hands of the same forces that ravage the Earth for profit and power, often in our names and with our support. It means to generate an awareness in us that environmental domination affects us too, that it is not only the poor and

the marginalized whose bodies, minds, and futures are being instrumentalized by the toxic products, production processes, and waste that are the basic, inescapable conditions of modern human existence today. In this sense, the book aims to provoke not only a certain shame about our usurpations but even more an indignation at our subjugation. It also means to illuminate the roles we play, often unwittingly or unwillingly, in perpetuating these dynamics. Its objective is less to blame people for what human beings have done to the Earth than to awaken us, as human beings, to how what we do figures in the forces that now sustain environmental domination, including our own.

In addition to this critical aim, *Eco-Emancipation* has an aspirational one. It points us to new ways of structuring (and contesting) human power, and to new forms of political community that could help reverse environmental domination and enable freer ways of life. It is true that the forces sustaining environmental domination are large and powerful, and the environmental problems they generate are tremendously complex. There is nothing surprising about how helpless so many of us feel in the face of these forces. Still, part of the emancipatory promise of the project is to remind us that our complicity in these forces is also their vulnerability. Because the political, economic, and cultural systems that sustain environmental domination depend in the end on participation by all of us, they are ultimately subject to our influence. This influence is not the same thing as sovereign control, and it can be exercised only through coordinated action and sustained effort. The fact of our influence should not be taken to imply that making change is easy; nothing could be further from the truth, as the persistence and acceleration of our environmental problems demonstrate. Yet *Eco-Emancipation* means to inspire us to take up the challenge by making the case that the current terms of our existence are not as intractable as they seem.

Admittedly, the project is also aspirational in the further sense that it cannot promise us success. In fact, because we can begin to make change only from within the context of our current condition, which is a condition of pervasive domination, even our best efforts, taken separately, are bound to be limited in how much impact they have. Struggles for liberation typically unfold over the course of a *longue durée,* and they usually include losses and periods of retrenchment. Liberation is an iterative and uncertain process, and no single effort or initiative could ever take us all the way to the finish line. In truth, there is no finish line when it comes to getting free of environmental domination. The impulse to subordinate and exploit, to take from the Earth and from other people without being responsive to their well-being, is likely to be with us

indefinitely. If the dream of fully eradicating these impulses is unrealistic, however, we can reasonably hope to contain and redress them with the right institutional arrangements and forms of civic engagement, and by nurturing a political ethos of respect and new cultures of responsibility.

*Eco-Emancipation* is aspirational as well as critical, then, because in addition to awakening us it means to activate us—for the long, precarious, and always-unfinished business of making better, freer political communities. And although the freer way of life it aims for cannot be guaranteed, the approach it offers is firmly rooted in reality. Rather than asking us to disengage from nature, it helps us to rethink and reconstruct the interactions that we cannot help but have with the other members of our Earthly home. And instead of focusing narrowly on piecemeal efforts at greater sustainability—carbon cap-and-trade schemes, for instance, or geo-engineering, or personal recycling—*Eco-Emancipation* puts us in touch with the deeper, broader dynamics that generate environmental domination in all its forms, and guides us to the kinds of comprehensive changes that could make a real difference. In this sense, the project of eco-emancipation points us to a radical reconstruction of selves and societies. Yet however aspirational it may be, the project rests on a clear-eyed assessment of our situation and a realistic understanding of what is actually needed to transform it: a politics of nondomination for people and the Earth, an Earthly politics of freedom.

# INDEX