

Indeed, by creating cultural centers, parks, and good housing, they may well be improving the system by giving capitalism a human face without diminishing its underlying unfreedom as a hierarchical and class society.

A bouquet of struggles for "identity" has often fractured rising radical movements since SDS in the 1960s, ranging from foreign to domestic nationalisms. Because these identity struggles are so popular today, some of the critics of libertarian municipalism invoke "public opinion" against it. But when has it been the task of revolutionaries to surrender to "public opinion"—not even the "public opinion" of the oppressed, whose views can often be very reactionary? Truth has its own life—regardless of whether the oppressed masses perceive or agree on what is true. Nor is it "elitist" to invoke truth, in contradiction to even radical public opinion, when that opinion essentially seeks a march backward into the politics of particularism and even racism.

Critics of libertarian municipalism even dispute the very possibility of a "general interest." If, for such critics, the face-to-face democracy advocated by libertarian municipalism and the need to extend the premises of democracy beyond mere justice to complete freedom do not suffice as a "general interest," it would seem to me that the need to repair our relationship with the natural world is certainly a "general interest" that is beyond dispute—and, indeed, it remains the "general interest" advanced by social ecology. It may be possible to coopt many dissatisfied elements in the present society, but nature is not cooptable. Indeed, the only politics that remains for the left is one based on the premise that there is a "general interest" in democratizing society and preserving the planet. Now that traditional forces such as the

## LETTER

### On Nontheistic Spirituality

In the main I agree with Janet Biehl's contention in "On Theistic Spirituality" [*Green Perspectives* 14] that theistic spirituality poses special problems for a rigorously environmental outlook. I think we must avoid, however, any implication that a rejection of theistic spirituality involves a rejection of spirituality per se. While the concept of a transcendental deity governing the world—whether masculine, feminine, or neuter—must be rejected as hierarchical, it is nonetheless possible to locate an ultimate spiritual principle within human consciousness, both individual and collective.

It is not at all evident to me why ecology should be particularly committed to a "naturalistic" philosophy in the sense that Biehl seems to mean. First, a clear distinction must be made between "naturalism" in the classical sense as a philosophical tendency based on an essentially mechanistic worldview, and the more contemporary usage which equates "naturalism" with an organic and ecological worldview. The former brackets out spirituality and values on the ground that they cannot be reduced to the empirical laws of science, and thus perpetuates rather than resolves a split between objectivity and subjectivity. The latter, however, with its more wholistic outlook,

workers' movement have ebbed from the historical scene, it can be said with almost complete certainty that without libertarian municipalism, the left will have no politics whatever.

A dialectical view of the relationship of confederalism to the nation-state, an understanding of the narrowness, introverted character, and parochialism of identity-movements, and a recognition that the workers' movement is essentially dead—all illustrate that if a new politics is going to develop today, it must be unflinchingly public, in contrast to the alternative-cafe "politics" advanced by many radicals today. It must be electoral on a municipal basis, confederal in its vision, and revolutionary in its character.

Indeed, in my view, libertarian municipalism, with its emphasis on confederalism, is precisely the "Commune of communes" for which anarchists have fought over the past two centuries. Today, it is the "red button" that must be pushed if a radical movement is to open the door to the public sphere. To leave that red button untouched and slip back into the worst habits of the post-1968 New Left, when the notion of "power" was divested of utopian or imaginative qualities, is to reduce radicalism to yet another subculture that will probably live more on heroic memories than on the hopes of a rational future.

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opens up the possibility for a true reintegration of the subjective and the objective—and by extension of the sacred and the secular.

The solution to the problem of "dualism of spirit and matter" is not simply to reject spirit in favor of matter, which is the typical course resorted to in classical naturalism. It can be argued that a materialistic and mechanistic view of nature, which has been the main thrust of Western philosophy since the Renaissance, is itself responsible for much environmental degradation. By promoting the idea of unending progress, achieved through scientific advance and technological manipulation, the heirs of the European Enlightenment have denied not only the importance, but also the validity, of spirituality and values. We are left with a purely materialistic philosophy, which sees nature in purely mechanistic terms. This philosophy offers no opportunities for higher values; indeed, it ultimately undermines even its own humanistic values, since humans too come to be looked at as nothing more than biological mechanisms to be manipulated both scientifically and socially.

The contemporary problem, then, is a truncated, materialistic monism which fails to integrate the spiritual and the subjective into its

worldview. This monism would not have been possible, however, had there not been a prior dualistic tendency to split the spiritual from nature and to invest it in a transcendental realm, i.e., Supernature. In moving from animism to theism, Western civilization shifted from a perspective which originally located spirit within nature to a view which located spirit in a realm above nature. Theism is thus a decidedly negative development in the history of Western spirituality, not only because it deprives humankind of an inner, intuitive spiritual consciousness, but also because it ultimately deprives nature of its intrinsic value. Ultimate "truth, goodness, and beauty" are no longer to be found in the world itself, but are invested instead in a transcendental God.

We must reappropriate humanity's inherent capacity to create values and spiritual meaning. I would put forth nontheistic mysticism (cf. Erich Fromm's religious nontheism and Fritz Mauthner's *gottlöse Mystik*) as a spiritual alternative which avoids the pitfalls of both transcendental theism and materialistic atheism, and which can provide the basis for a philosophy of nature which sees both nature and humankind not in purely materialistic terms, but as wholly permeated and suffused with value and meaning. Spirit and matter can thus be rejoined in one metaphysical reality. By relocating the spiritual principle within the self and within nature we may be able to once again see spirituality as an important and integral part of the world and of human consciousness.

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#### Biehl replies:

Those who are familiar with social ecology's view of nature know that social ecology does not conceive of "naturalism" in what Evanoff describes as the "classical" sense of "mechanism." To be sure, many things in both human and nonhuman nature do have a mechanistic aspect to their functioning: the pumping of a heart, for example, is at least partly mechanical, as is the hinge of an elbow. Problems arise when mechanism is turned into a worldview, as it notoriously has. Clearly, such a worldview is inadequate—it cannot account for those aspects of nature that do not function mechanistically. The historical consequences of this worldview—in conjunction with social hierarchy and an expanding market economy—have been disastrous, both for human beings and the biosphere. Social ecology has explicitly rejected the mechanistic worldview since Murray Bookchin's "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" in 1964.

Moreover, in the philosophical framework of mechanism and its descendants, discussions of the spiritual must necessarily perpetuate the dualism of "spirit-matter." Thus, even if we deny that there is a transcendent, divine "ghost" that inhabits or supports the "machine" called "nature," we can simply give that ghost another name (but continue to conceive of nature as a machine). Thus, after rejecting a god, one may still worship ersatz-gods like power, or money, or the market, or the nation, or the Absolute, or glamour, or success, or a particular person. Within the psyche, habits of worship

#### Facts You Can't Live Without Knowing Department

### British Green Party Cofounder Icke Goes New Age

by Wendy M. Grossman

New Zealand is going to disappear. Los Angeles will split off from the American mainland. The Isle of Arran, Teesside, and the Kent cliffs will be under water by Christmas 1991. These predictions startled all of Britain in March. The man making them was David Icke (pronounced *Ike*), a former sports star, one of the cofounders

are not deeply changed when the object of worship is changed from Yahweh to Madonna—or to an "immanent" goddess. Thus, a *New York Times* editorial (May 12, 1991) freely extends its "respect and sympathy" to goddess-worship—while the social "machine" called capitalism remains noticeably unchanged.

Like me, Evanoff is not content to rename the ghost in the machine as "goddess." Rather, also like me, he wants to change our view of nature from one of a "machine" to one of an organic phenomenon. As much as I agree with Evanoff that nature is organic, defining it this way is not enough—it too is a partial truth, extended to the whole. Not all of nature is organic: in fact, only a very small portion of the cosmos as we know it is truly organic. Nature is partly mechanistic, and it is partly organic—and other aspects of it don't fit into either of these categories, such as areas studied by subatomic physics and astrophysics.

Thus, I find Evanoff's alternative reconceptualization of nature not wrong, but not adequate either. Social ecology, for its part, conceives of nature not only mechanistically and organically but above all developmentally, as an evolving process, as the history of nature. It sees organic nature as evolving out of inorganic nature, even as organic nature itself evolves. Within this evolution, different degrees of subjectivity have emerged of which the most differentiated that we know of is human consciousness and self-consciousness. This consciousness is informed by a wealth of aspects: not only conventional reason and dialectical reason, but all varieties of emotion, passions, sensations, sensualities, and aesthetic appreciation. This constellation of subjective traits is rooted in the very nature out of which it emerges, yet of which it remains a part. Social ecology terms this wealth of sensibility "spirituality."

I'm not certain what Evanoff means by a "spiritual principle in human consciousness," but its very nonspecificity could become a problem. Evanoff cites Erich Fromm's "religious nontheism" as a spiritual alternative, but I cannot help but wonder why posit anything *religious* at all? Fromm writes that "The human reality . . . underlying the teachings of Buddha, Isaiah, Christ, Socrates, or Spinoza is essentially the same. It is determined by the striving for love, truth, and justice." But the very fact that Fromm can name the ethical teachings in secular terms seems to dispense with the need for either a nontheistic "spiritual principle" or a "religious nontheism." If the valuable kernel of even humanistic, nontheistic religion consists of things that we can now name in secular terms, why need we justify them in terms of "the spiritual" at all?

The major world religions have played an important part in shaping who we all are today—and I wouldn't even write of theism, as as Evanoff does, as entirely "negative." The point, however, is that we know better now than to return to religion or mysticism. *The important question today is not so much how we reconceive the spiritual as how we reconceive the natural.* If we reconceptualize nature as a graded developmental process, we no longer need to reify a "spiritual principle" but understand that human subjectivity, with all its attributes, emerges out of that process, even as it remains rooted in it.

of the Green Party (an environmentalist political party), and a well-known TV sports commentator.

Dressed in a turquoise track suit ("the color of wisdom"), Icke called a press conference to announce his apocalyptic visions. The British press were fascinated; however, they were even