

**Individual Freedom or Eco-Social Justice?
Autonomous Self or Interconnected Self?**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how two opposing world views espoused respectively by two social movements coexist within our society. One view holds that humans, non-humans, and all of nature are interconnected and interdependent. Its proponents believe that social justice should, therefore, be extended to all of nature. The other view holds that people are autonomous, independent individuals, each with a fundamental right to freedom from the coercion by others. Its proponents believe that social justice is a means of social control and, so, is incompatible with freedom. Four activists for each of these social movements were interviewed to understand their personal world views and to gain insights on the social implications of the coexistence of their respective projects. While the 'freedom' activists understand nature as being hierarchical and the 'eco-social justice' activists deny a hierarchy, agreements between the two groups and disagreements within them suggest a dynamic mechanism for social change.

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Individual Freedom or Eco-Social Justice? Autonomous Self or Interconnected Self?

by Mark Reed

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, through some relatives of mine, I have become acquainted with a grassroots individual freedom movement. The movement's general aim is to free people from systemic control and domination by government, the corporate world, and the financial elite. Though the movement is populist in nature, it is not expressly political, not associated with any particular ideology, nor organized beyond the level of the small group. It is populist in that it comprises an informal collection of diverse ordinary people who advocate for the freedom of ordinary people.¹ People are 'enslaved', they argue, through their mandatory, coerced, or ignorant participation in numerous contracts, including the so-called 'social contract', that obligate them to behave according to laws, the making of which they had no input. Similarly, people are forced to yield large portions of their labor to governments, banks, and other financial institutions. Asserting that people are sovereign, autonomous individuals, each with an inalienable right to freedom, the movement's activists seek and teach ways through which individuals can legally extricate themselves from the systemic bonds of 'slavery'. Typical targets of the movement are income taxes and debts to banks and credit companies. This legalistic

¹ Populism in Canada traces back to the 1890s. During the first few decades of the 20th century, it influenced and, in great part, led to the formation of political parties on both the 'left' and 'right'. Today, except in Alberta, populism in western Canada tends to be leftist, though, at the grassroots level, the various rhetorics are informed by left and/or right ideology. This is perhaps due to the fact that grassroots populists have more ideology in common with each other than they have with the status quo sociopolitical system that they oppose in common. Two useful discussions on populism can be found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Populism> and <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5202/ccf.htm>.

social movement is, thus, distinct from such freedom activists who are prepared to engage in violent conflict with the state.

This freedom movement seems to fly in the face of the logic and apparent objectives of another grassroots movement, one with which I was previously familiar and sympathize - the environmental movement. By this general term, I mean the social movement that seeks to protect all of nature - the atmosphere, all living things, water, land, the Earth itself - from the negative effects of human activity. I understand environmentalism as a form of social justice advocacy that recognizes speciesism as yet another form of unjust discrimination and, so, extends the 'social' to beyond humans. A common view in the movement is that humans are just one type of participant in nature and that everything in nature is interconnected and interdependent for survival. Proponents of the environmental movement advocate on nature's behalf, typically by raising awareness of the harmful effects of human behavior and by lobbying for or demanding nature-friendly laws, treaties, and government initiatives. Some less trusting and less patient activists use more antagonistic and sometimes illegal tactics, such as blockades, disruptive demonstrations, and other forms of civil disobedience, not to mention outright vandalism and worse, to pressure targeted groups or organizations, to treat nature better.

Many of the environmental movement's objectives and the methods it uses to achieve them, legal or not, are examples of the sort that the freedom movement opposes. Freedom proponents object to being *forced* to participate in or support activities and programs, whatever they may be. Further, each movement's underlying logic is antithetical to the other. One asserts and valorizes individual freedom and autonomy,

whereas the other posits and acclaims interconnectedness and interdependence. One appeals to care for the self and the other appeals to empathy with the 'other'. In practise, the two social movements get in each others' ways. Though they may not explicitly view each other as opponents, some of their respective gains are at the others' expense.

I am interested in how these two contrary world views manage to coexist, particularly within the same society and even among one set of relatives (my own). I'm not suggesting that there is no overlapping of these two world views or that one person can't conditionally hold to both views. Indeed, I am interested in how this is done. Nor am I suggesting that one world view might be more correct or more preferable than the other. After all, who wants to be enslaved? Who wants to be treated unfairly? As well, both social movements are driven by people who want to help others, even those who are not presently aware of their plight - unwitting 'slaves' to the system, and non-humans, accordingly. What is it about these activists' lives that makes it important for them to so intently pursue their respective, antithetical ideals? What is it about these ideals that these people find so appealing?

To find answers to these questions and to gain an understanding of the contrasting world views, I interviewed some activists, four from each of the two grassroots movements. In order to maximize the contrast between the two groups, for analytical purposes, I interviewed activists whose world views are as extreme, in these two respects, as I could reasonably find.

The more radical individual freedom activists pursue individual freedom for themselves and others principally by devising legal ways to withdraw from the 'social contract' that virtually all citizens enter into simply by participating in society's

institutions. Their arguments typically cite their country's founding constitution, various human rights agreements, and other documents, sometimes including the Magna Carta of 1215. Some of these references and many of the movement's activists' and theorists' beliefs have religious underpinnings. Virtually in common, though, they view the individual as a sovereign, autonomous, human being bearing inalienable fundamental human rights to life, liberty, and property, a notion that has been variously articulated by such influential theorists of liberty as John Locke and Friedrich Hayek. For the purposes of this thesis, I draw upon these conceptions of liberty (or freedom) to loosely form the concept that I term 'radical freedom'. I term the group of freedom activists whom I interviewed 'radical freedom activists'.

The more radical environmental activists believe that social justice, having increasingly expanded its sphere of equal consideration among humans, should also equally consider some, if not all, non-humans. Some environmentalists would further extend social justice consideration to all of nature, including the inorganic. Arguments for such extreme notions of social justice typically cite evolution theory, socialist theory, and ecological sciences. Some of these references and many of the activists' and theorists' beliefs are metaphysically based. Generally, these people understand humans and all other beings and things as fundamentally interrelated. Variations of this understanding have been theorized most notably by ecological feminists, social ecologists, and deep ecologists. For this thesis, I loosely group these conceptions of an all-inclusive social justice to form the concept that I term 'eco-social justice'.² I term the

² One should not confuse this term with 'social ecology' which is an influential environmental theory focussed on the relationship between environmental problems, capitalist labor relations, and social hierarchies (per Noel Sturgeon. *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*. New York: Routledge, 1997, 32).

group of environmental activists whom I interviewed 'eco-social justice activists'. I should make clear that the terms, 'radical freedom activist' and 'eco-social justice activist' are my own and not theirs.³

Also, I should explain why I am interested in the world views of some activists of two grassroots movements rather than in the movements' central theories. Essentially, there are two reasons, in tension with each other. First, activists so passionately believe that their personal visions of how the world ought to be are preferable to how they perceive the world, that they devote much of their lives to bring their visions about. They are knowledgeable about their own ideology, can explain it and argue for it, can defend it, and can critique opposing ideologies and the status quo. Second, their ideals and world views are more likely than that of non-activist theorists to be tempered by the realities of their daily lives. Working in the trenches, as it were, activists' perspectives are more grounded in and influenced by the micro terrain of everyday existence, the terrain that they are working to change.

The success of gaining an appropriately deep understanding of the activists' unique world views and how their life experiences bear on their psyche is heavily dependent upon the chosen research methodology. To this end, I used a poststructuralist research style developed by Norman K. Denzin, a style that he calls 'interpretive interactionism'. It is a research style that focuses on participants' life experiences and epiphanies and tries to elicit the meanings that the participants give to them. Interpretive

³ Indeed, one of the participants doesn't consider himself to be an activist because he doesn't pursue a social goal. Rather, he helps interested others to free themselves by informing them of his own research and experiences as he works to free himself. For the purposes of this project, though, I consider any person who works to bring about social and/or political change to the hegemonic sociopolitical system and/or consciousness to be an activist, even if the person helps to change society one person at a time, as this person does.

interactionism is especially appropriate for this project because it helps to communicate an understanding of those meanings that the activists formed through experience and that they try to instill in others and in society, through their activism.

In order, also, to elicit the participants' own expressions of the most salient elements of their self-concepts which are also key elements of their world view, I asked the participants to undertake, at the outset of their interviews, what is known as the Twenty Statements Test. Devised by Manford H. Kuhn and Thomas S. McPartland in the 1950s, the test uses a single question questionnaire. Simply, the 'test' consists of the participant providing twenty answers (statements) to the single question "Who am I?" Rather than performing a content analysis of the participants' statements, as Kuhn and McPartland originally prescribed, I analyzed each activist's statements together with his/her interview transcripts using interpretive interactionism, resulting more in a form of discourse analysis. The Test also helped to contextualize the interview for each participant.

To understand how differently the two groups of activists consider a common, yet controversial, social practise, I asked the participants for their views on the commodification of nature. By that term, I mean valuing nature as a resource to exploit for financial gain. Learning the participants' views on this practise should lead to a better understanding, I believe, of how they each conceive of their relationship with nature, particularly in terms of to what extent their concepts of their self and nature may be conjoined. Additionally, the degree to which the commodification of nature is an issue, why, and whether it is one at all, depends upon one's point of view. Certainly it is one for radical environmentalists. They reject the consideration of nature as only a resource and

advocate, for its own sake, that we minimize our use of it. Any use beyond that required to meet our most basic needs is a form of oppressive domination. These environmentalists equate the commodification of nature to the domination of nature, which they oppose.

I am not suggesting that members of the individual freedom movement would necessarily *support* the commodification of nature, though some might. Simply, it isn't an issue with which they, as a group, are concerned. Nevertheless, I felt that it would be instructive to learn, for instance, what might be the bases of any concerns they may have with the commodification of nature and how they fit with the notion of the autonomous individual. To the extent that they are empathetic with nature, how does that fit with their opposition to the efforts of others to obligate society to protect nature? If empathy is not involved in any concern for the use of nature or if there is no such concern, what does that mean?

This line of questioning helps to understand how the two groups of activist participants in this project regard 'others', in view of their markedly different understandings of their 'selves'.

At bottom, I aim to use this exploratory study to bring about some insights on the social implications of the coexistence of these two contrasting world views with respect to projects for social change.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Analytical Framework: Radical Freedom vs. Eco-Social Justice

A number of theorists' views on the relationship between the concepts of liberty and social justice have informed the analytical framework of this project. In particular, some people's belief that liberty and social justice are incompatible, even antithetical ideals provides a conceptual structure with which the efforts of diverse liberty and social justice-oriented theorists and activists can be understood in relation to one another.

A good place to start is liberal theorist Friedrich Hayek's emphatic position that freedom is "independence of the arbitrary will of another"⁴ and that social justice is incompatible with a society whose members are free.⁵ Hayek distinguishes social justice from 'justice'. The former, he argues, is a "mirage," a "dishonest insinuation,"⁶ an 'empty phrase,' and is "intellectually disreputable."⁷ Recognizing that social justice is generally understood as being synonymous with distributive justice, Hayek points out that there is no agreement nor any means to reach agreement on general rules of individual conduct that can achieve some desired distribution scheme. Justice pertains, he maintains, to general rules of individual conduct in particular instances, the consequences of which are neither just nor unjust. The translation of subjective

⁴ Friedrich A. Hayek. The Constitution of Liberty. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960, 12.

⁵ Friedrich A. Hayek. New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, 57-58.

⁶ Friedrich A. Hayek. Law, Legislation and Liberty, vol. 2: The Mirage of Social Justice. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976, 99, quoted in Green, David G. The New Right: The Counter Revolution in Political Economic and Social Thought. Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987, 127.

⁷ Friedrich A. Hayek. New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas, 57-58.

preferences for outcomes of individuals' conduct to general rules of conduct is incompatible with a society of free individuals.⁸

Hayek's view, then, is that only the general rules of individual conduct can acceptably constrain individuals' freedom. These rules are necessary to prevent individuals or segments of society from being dominated by others, especially by lawmakers and their supporters. Thus, Hayek favors the principle of the rule of law, a liberal tradition first clearly formulated by John Locke 300 or so years ago.⁹ The point, then, at which rules of conduct unjustly encroach into individuals' freedom is when they cease to be general and, instead, become particular or seemingly arbitrary, serving some particular group's interests. Time, though, has changed the face of the wielders of legal influence. Whereas, in Locke's time, liberty was concerned primarily with freedom from the arbitrary rule of lawmakers, modern liberty is at least equally concerned with freedom from the arbitrary rule of influential social groups.

Yet, there are those for whom Hayek's and Locke's formulas for liberty fall short. These people object to being involuntary participants in the so-called 'social contract' that automatically and necessarily makes them subject to 'man-made' laws. Instead, they recognize the legal authority only of natural law, law which "originates with the divine, nature or reason."¹⁰ This medieval English view of law, that only God creates law, dates back to the Magna Carta of 1215 and was completely accepted in England during the Middle Ages. According to Hayek, "[f]or centuries, it was recognized doctrine that kings or any other human authority could only declare or find the existing law, or modify

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John Locke. "The Second Treatise." Two Treatises of Government, student ed. ed. Peter Laslett. Reprinted. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, s137, 360.

abuses that had crept in, and not create law.”¹¹ During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, natural law was gradually displaced by concepts of the rule of law.¹² For analytical purposes, I use Hayek's understanding of liberty conjoined with the preeminence of natural law as the radical liberal benchmark position for this study.

A concept that has remained constant through the transition from natural law to the rule of law is the belief in the supremacy of the rights to life, liberty, and property. This is not to say that the concept was ever universally practised in medieval England or anywhere else since. Just as the ancient Greeks invented democracy but excluded women, slaves, and children from participating in it, so have women, slaves, children, and other segments of society been historically and variously excluded from bearing the rights to life, liberty, and property in the very societies that supposedly champion those rights. Progress in universally extending those rights in practise has been hard won against great resistance and, after many centuries, there is still much more progress to be made. The championing of such rights appears to reflect the great need to do so. Nevertheless, however realized in society, the declaration and belief in the pre-eminence of the rights to life, liberty, and property prevail.

The foundation for this pre-eminence seems to be that they are god-given. For example, Russell Anthony Porisky, the author of an educational publication produced by the Canadian Rights and Freedoms Foundation, maintains that the rights of life, liberty, and property are the three headings under which are collected “our gift of unalienable

¹⁰ Pocketbook Dictionary of Canadian Law, 3rd ed., “natural law.”

¹¹ Hayek. The Constitution of Liberty, 163.

¹² Ibid.

rights and freedoms,” the gift having been given to us by our creator.¹³ Porisky then traces assertions of these rights in important historical documents ranging from the Magna Carta, through Blackstone’s Commentaries (in the eighteenth century), the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and various Canadian and Provincial Bills, Acts, and significant court decisions.¹⁴ Locke, too, even as he drafted the social contract, invoked God as the original bestower of natural rights. He says, “’tis very clear, that God, as King *David* says, Psal. CXV. xvj. *has given the Earth to the Children of Men*, given it to Mankind in common”.¹⁵ (emphasis in original) Elsewhere, Locke subsumes “Life, Liberty and Estate” under the heading of “Property”.¹⁶

When appeals to god-given gifts or natural rights are not posited as the basis for the right to property, the assertion of that right is problematic, though not seriously so. Libertarian economist David Friedman recognizes that “it is very [hard] to derive property in land from some *a priori* theory of natural rights.” Nevertheless, “it does not matter very much,” he argues, “since only a small fraction [perhaps one-twentieth, he estimates] of the income of a modern society is derived from such resources.”¹⁷ The importance of these rights, though, is paramount. Friedman says, “The concept of property is fundamental to our society, probably to any workable society.”¹⁸ Porisky

¹³ Russell Anthony Porisky. “It’s All About You.” Book 1. Canadian Rights and Freedoms Foundation. Russell Anthony Porisky, 2001, 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28-54.

¹⁵ Locke. s26, 286.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, s87, 323.

¹⁷ David Friedman. The Machinery of Freedom: Guide to a Radical Capitalism. 2nd ed. Chicago: Open Court, 1989, xviii, 170-71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

expresses the point in terms of the individual. He says, “The words Life, Liberty and Property are more than just words, they are an integral part of us. . . . Protecting these gifts, is more than a right, it is a duty. It’s a duty for everyone, not only to protect their own rights, but also the rights of others.”¹⁹

However sound the rationalizations, these rights were proclaimed as fundamental and inalienable by the architects of liberalism three hundred or so years ago, in response to the dominance in society of the aristocracy and clergy. Initially, the holders of these rights comprised only the emerging bourgeois ‘enlightened’ individual, namely the white, male landowner – people like themselves. Since then, these rights have been gradually extended, though grudgingly, conditionally, and to varying degrees, to other oppressed social groups – the landless, laborers, women, non-whites, children, and, more recently, non-heterosexuals. Typically, advocates for the fair treatment of members of these social groups appeal to the logic of liberalism. However, not only do radical liberals, such as Hayek, argue that such group-directed treatment in law is the opposite of liberty for society as a whole, some proponents of radical versions of social and ecological justice criticize this approach, as well.

These eco-social justice advocates share, more or less, the view that all people around the globe are interconnected and interdependent participants in the Earth’s ecology, a view that is antithetical to the liberal notion of the autonomous, independent individual. I use it, therefore, as another benchmark, together with the radical liberal benchmark advanced by Hayek and nuanced by pre-Lockean understandings of liberty, to

¹⁹ Porisky, 20

delineate a framework with which to analyze the experiences and views of the activists who participated in this project.

This analytical framework is an extension of one that Nancy Fraser presented in her book Justice Interruptus and in a series of articles she authored in the New Left Review during the last half of the 1990s. Fraser observes that social injustices can be grouped into two different types, both equally harmful: economic injustice and cultural injustice. Both types, having distinguishable origins in the status and class hierarchies of contemporary society, can be differentiated by their respective remedies. An ideal type of economic injustice is the exploitation, in the Marxian conception, of a class of people whose “mode of social differentiation . . . is rooted in the political-economic structure of society. A class exists as a collectivity only by virtue of its position in that structure and of its relation to other classes.” The remedy for this type of injustice is the abolition of the class structure, “to put the proletariat out of business as a group,” as Fraser puts it, and the accompanying redistribution of economic goods.²⁰ An ideal type of cultural injustice, on the other hand, is the devaluation of a group of people whose “mode of collectivity is that of a despised [characteristic, such as] sexuality, rooted in the cultural-valuational structure of society. From this perspective, the injustice they suffer is quintessentially a matter of recognition.” That is, certain groups of people are institutionally devalued and excluded from full participation in society by virtue simply of being those certain groups of people. The remedy for this type of injustice is not

²⁰ Nancy Fraser. Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition. New York: Routledge, 1997, 16-18.

redistribution, but recognition, “to valorize the group’s “groupness” by recognizing its specificity,” as Fraser puts it.²¹

As is obvious, the remedies to these two types of social injustice pose a dilemma. This is especially so for those social injustices experienced by groups of people that Fraser terms as “bivalent”. Fraser cites both gender and ‘race’ as “paradigmatic bivalent collectivities.” “They are differentiated as collectivities by virtue of *both* the political-economic structure *and* the cultural-valuational structure of society.”²² (emphasis in original) As a result, bivalent collectivities are bound in “a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination.”²³ The remedy to the social injustices that these groups experience would appear to be both to abolish and valorize the subordinated groups. Fraser calls this impasse the “redistribution-recognition dilemma” and she observes that this is precisely the situation that the United States, at least, is presently in. “Our best efforts to redress these [economic and cultural] injustices by means of the combination of the liberal welfare state plus mainstream multiculturalism are generating perverse effects,” she says.²⁴

Fraser terms these problematic remedies ‘affirmative remedies’, meaning that they are “aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them.”²⁵ The surface level

²¹ Ibid., 18-19.

²² Ibid., 19.

²³ Ibid., 21.

²⁴ Ibid., 21, 33.

²⁵ Ibid., 23.

reallocation of goods and respect to existing social groups through liberal welfare and mainstream multiculturalism institutions, respectively, underscore group difference, marking the recipient groups as being deficient, insatiable, and forever needing redress. This approach thus undermines itself by tending to generate resentment towards and devaluation of the very groups to whom it tries to bring social justice.²⁶

Instead, Fraser proposes what she terms 'transformative remedies', "remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework."²⁷ The transformative remedies that Fraser recommends are a combination of socialist economics and deconstructive cultural politics, both of which tend to undermine group differentiations. They will work best, she argues, "to finesse the dilemma for the bivalent collectivities of gender and "race" . . ." and she expects that they are, together, a superior remedy for "multiple, intersecting injustices" than are the combination of the liberal welfare state and mainstream multiculturalism.²⁸

I should make clear what Fraser means by deconstructive cultural politics. It is a politics, consistent with transformative socialist redistribution, that works to replace hierarchical identity-based dichotomies with "networks of multiple intersecting differences that are demassified and shifting."²⁹ It is also consistent with some radical eco-socialist notions of the self and their associated politics. Postmodern ecological feminist Catriona Sandilands, for example, describes how self-concepts are a dynamic

²⁶ Ibid., 27-29.

²⁷ Ibid., 23.

²⁸ Ibid., 28, 31-32.

²⁹ Ibid., 31.

product of society. Drawing from the radical democratic writing of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe which, in turn, reflects Jacques Lacan's insights about identity formation, Sandilands conceives of an intrinsically social and political self. She presents

a notion of political subjectivity in which the subject is imperfectly constituted in discourse through the taking up of multiple subject positions, discursive spaces describing shifting moments of symbolic representation derived from a temporary common understanding.³⁰

In this view, there is no differentiated 'other'. Just as society produces the dynamic subject, subjects produce society. Nature is also produced in this way. "[W]e produce nature through the process of articulation itself," says Sandilands.³¹ Thus, the self, nature, and society are mutually contingent, integral, dynamic elements of an ecological whole.

This understanding of the self, nature, and society may be beyond what Fraser has in mind when she speaks of "deep restructuring of relations of recognition" and "destabliz[ing] group differentiation".³² Like differences between some concepts of freedom, differences between concepts of interconnectedness are a matter of degree.

Nonetheless, Fraser's framework shows that the liberal welfare state and the valorizing of group identity are inadequate to the task of achieving social justice. As soon as social justice appeals to the logic of liberalism, it is destined to fail. This is consistent with Hayek's view that liberty and notions of social justice are incompatible.

³⁰ Catriona Sandilands. *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, xx.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

³² Fraser. 27.

For him, *any* attempt to achieve social justice, including the implementation of a liberal welfare state or the extension of individual rights to a specified group, is an encroachment upon individual freedom. Even other liberals' attempts to address social inequality by devising equal opportunity theories and affirmative action programs are unacceptable to Hayek. For him, any government's "deliberate adaptation of opportunities to individual aims and capacities [is] . . . the opposite of freedom." It also rests "on the assumption that government knows best how individual capacities can be used."³³

The analytical framework that I am using for this research, then, is delineated by two polarized benchmarks. One is the radical liberalism position, beyond Hayek, that holds that people are autonomous, sovereign individuals who hold fundamental, inalienable human rights and who are ultimately answerable only to natural and not man-made law. The other benchmark is the eco-social justice position articulated by some ecological feminists that holds that we and all of nature are interconnected, mutually contingent, yet unique, inherently social and political subjects constituting a dynamic, ecological whole. Of course, like Fraser, I acknowledge that such explicit distinctions between radical liberty and eco-social justice don't exist in the real world. In certain contexts, some people may think of themselves as being either a disconnected, autonomous individual or an interconnected, interdependent being. But contexts change and there is a continuum of self-concepts between the two extremes to which people may relate, at different times. The continuum of possible self-concepts requires the extreme world views. In order for radical liberal and eco-social type ideologies to be present in a

³³ Hayek. The Constitution of Liberty, 92-93.

society, some elements of their opposites must be present. Each ideology would be nonsensical without an implicit reference to a conception of its counterpart. For this study, then, I use the two extreme, idealized, world views as analytical references.

Analytical Perspective: The Self-Concept

Several observations lead to me to use people's concepts of the self and their world views as a vantage point for an analytical perspective for this investigation. First, most people in capitalist societies tend to strive to seek emancipation from the will of others. Typically, they do so by asserting and valorizing their differentiated 'selves' as individuals and/or, as I explain below, as integral members of self-identified groups. During the Enlightenment, liberal theorists observed citizens' (and their own) growing dissatisfaction with being ruled by the arbitrary will of aristocrats and clergy. They prescribed social systems comprising individuals who, conceived of as being free agents, willingly associate in society and allow their selves to be governed by institutions that they themselves create. Similarly, many self-identified groups emerge when individuals perceive that they and some others who are dominated, marginalized, or otherwise unable to express their free will share some traits that are apparently the basis for their oppression. Nietzsche noted this. He said, "A species comes to be, a type becomes fixed and strong through the long fight with essentially constant *unfavorable* conditions."³⁴ (emphasis in original) Those traits both define the groups' identities and differentiate the groups and their members from others.

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. [1886]. trans. by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1966, p. 210 (#262), quoted in Barry D. Adam. *The Survival of Domination: Inferiorization and Everyday Life*. New York: Elsevier North-Holland, 1978, 9.

This leads me to another, related, observation that suggests the use of self-concepts for an analytical perspective. By self-concept, I mean an ontological understanding of what a self is, particularly in terms of how the self may be differentiated from the non-self or 'other', to the extent that there is such a differentiation. Understandings of the self are not only self-created. They can result from the assimilation of imposed identities. Of course, those who impose the identities have established, at least within their own group but possibly throughout a whole society, their own ontological group-understanding of the self as the benchmark in relation to which all 'others' are differentiated. Where those who impose an identity on another can make it stick, there is domination, social inequality. Iris Marion Young calls this type of domination 'cultural imperialism'. She explains, "Given the normality of [a dominant group's] own cultural expressions and identity, [it] constructs the differences which some groups exhibit as lack and negation. These groups become marked as Other."³⁵ Also,

[T]he injustice of cultural imperialism [is] that the oppressed group's own experience and interpretation of social life finds little expression that touches the dominant culture, while that same culture imposes on the oppressed group its experiences and interpretation of social life.³⁶

The injustice of cultural imperialism, of 'othering', is dependent upon difference. As Barry D. Adam puts it, "The creation of social inequality requires the "discovery" of means by which to distinguish sameness and difference, self and other."³⁷ Whether

³⁵ Iris Marion Young. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁷ Barry D. Adam. *The Survival of Domination: Inferiorization and Everyday Life*. New York: Elsevier North-Holland, 1978, 9.

difference is self-asserted or imposed and assimilated, it can engender oppression.

Without difference, there is no means for oppression; the oppressor cannot simultaneously be that which it oppresses. The Liberal view is that, though difference may reflect types of inequality, this is not the same as domination or oppression. Some types of inequality are legitimate. According to this position, difference cannot necessarily be equated with oppression. The eco-social justice view espouses difference but rejects any bases for or logic of inequality. Inequality, unlike difference, is a hierarchical concept and is necessarily oppressive.

A third observation that justifies the use of self-concepts for an analytical perspective to investigate the pursuits of liberty and social justice is the recognition by some social psychologists of a mutually productive relationship between self-concept and ideology and, relatedly, between identity and behavior. Sandra Bem, for example, emphasizes the enculturalization of the self-concept. In discussing the construction of gender identity, she argues that “the individual’s deepest thoughts and feelings about what is alien to the self and what is not alien are shaped by internalized cultural definitions of what a man and a woman ought to be.”³⁸ Elsewhere, she describes how American infants are molded, almost from birth, into individualistic adults who embrace individualistic ideology. While the concepts of gender and the individual are “culturally created *fictions*,” they are fictions, she says, that “have psychological reality if they are institutionalized by the dominant culture.” As such, they “can have extraordinary political power both for cultural oppression and for the resistance to cultural

³⁸ Sandra Lipsitz Bem. The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994, 153-54.

oppression.”³⁹ Thus, Bem recognizes (urges) self-concepts that challenge those imposed by the dominant culture, implying some sort of agency, though she doesn’t use that term.

Peter Leonard, on the other hand, gives more weight to each person’s “highly specific biography”, her/his unique life experience.⁴⁰ He argues that it is the awareness of contradictions between an individual’s life and the social order that imparts the dynamism to that relationship and can lead simultaneously to social change and change of self.⁴¹

A corollary to the relationship between the embracing of an ideology and having a particular self-concept is the absence of ideology and self-concept. Ideologies are concerned, in part, with how human life, at least, ought to be in an ideal world. Only beings capable of conceiving of how their life *is* can conceive of how it ought to be. In a world without self-awareness, there is not even existence. As well, a self-concept cannot emerge in a vacuum. Some kind of conscious awareness of a social context is required, however inexplicit it may be. The self emerges only in terms of its social context.

George H. Mead explains,

The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁰ Peter Leonard. Personality and Ideology: Towards a materialist Understanding of the Individual. London. MacMillan Press, 1984, 171.

⁴¹ Ibid., 206-07.

⁴²George Herbert Mead. Mind, Self & Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934, 135.

The self-concept and ideology, however rudimentary (or sophisticated) either or both may be, are mutually contingent.

In the next section, I present discussions that address how some people construct their selves primarily as autonomous beings who strive for independence from the will of others, whereas some other people construct their selves primarily as interconnected members of a global ecology who seek justice for all members of that ecology and for the ecology as a whole.

Autonomous Selves vs. Interconnected Selves

What I am interested in, here, are moments in the development of peoples' self-concepts and, hence, through their understandings of their social contexts, moments in the development of their world views that incline them towards a sense of being either autonomous or connected. I am not suggesting that all self-conceiving beings are inclined one way or another nor that any such inclination is constant. I am interested, though, in understanding how one who is so inclined comes to be that way.⁴³

A reasonable first place to find such a moment seems to me to be during the emergence of self-awareness, whether in the development of a single being or when comparing self-aware beings with non-self-aware beings. The emergence of self-awareness is, of course, gradual. Also, it would be presumptuous to suggest that, once underway, it is a process that could ever be completed. For now, though, it is useful to

⁴³ I should make clear a distinction between conceiving of one's self as being connected and recognizing one's self as being an autonomous member of a social group. Connectedness refers to the self as being contingent upon one's context, as being mutually constituted with society itself, as recognizing that there is no entirely separate 'other'. Autonomy, on the other hand, refers to the self as being self-contained, individual, and wholly differentiated from all 'others', yet able, if willing, to participate as an individual member of a social group, including society itself.

consider differences between at least some degree of self-awareness and non-self-awareness.

Jacques Derrida has considered this. He argues that concepts such as 'self' are necessarily in reference to other concepts. A concept cannot be conceived in isolation. In his public speech, "Différance", Derrida discusses the notion of 'concept'. He says, "the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences."⁴⁴ The (signified) self, then, is not conceived of except in reference to that from which it differs. Even as a self may identify or be identified with a reference group, it differs from that reference group. Otherwise, it would not and could not be differentiated from that group. The group is similarly differentiated from the self and other groups. Contemplative beings (e.g., humans) can't and don't, then, conceive of the self or non-self independently of the other.

Neither can and do contemplative beings conceive of the self and non-self simultaneously. Drawing from Freud, Derrida says that *différance* is, on one hand, the detour from the pleasure or presence (or signified) that is necessary to establish the concept of the pleasure/presence/signified, the 'economy'. In other words, *différance* is the cognitive disjuncture from or contrast to the thing itself that facilitates the concept of that thing. It is, on the other hand, "the irreparable loss of presence,"/pleasure/signified, "the death instinct" that which absolutely interrupts the economy. "[T]he same and the

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida. "Différance." *Margins of Philosophy*. University of Chicago Press, 1982, 11.

entirely other, etc., cannot be thought *together*.”⁴⁵ (emphasis in original) They (we) necessarily conceive of self and other in co-relationship with each other, yet as potentially and contingently realized things or beings. Non-contemplative beings, such as most non-human animals, consider neither the self, the other, nor difference. Self-awareness involves difference-awareness.

The question remains as to how difference is constituted. According to Mead, meaning precedes or underlies awareness. Meaning arises through social action. He says,

Meaning is thus not to be conceived, fundamentally, as a state of consciousness, outside the field of experience into which they enter; on the contrary, it should be conceived objectively, as having its existence entirely within this field itself. The response of one organism to the gesture of another in any given social act is the meaning of that gesture.⁴⁶

And,

Awareness or consciousness is not necessary to the presence of meaning in the process of social experience. . . . The mechanism of meaning is . . . present in the social act before the emergence of consciousness or awareness of meaning occurs. . . . At the level of self-consciousness such a gesture becomes a symbol, a significant symbol.⁴⁷

It is at the level of self-consciousness that objects come to exist as objects, Mead explains. They are constituted through symbolization which occurs only through social activity and they are dependent upon or constituted by the meanings of the symbols.⁴⁸ It

⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁶ Mead. 78.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 77, 78.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 78.

is through such activity that the self (and, therefore, difference) arises. "The self," he says, "has the characteristic that it is an object to itself. . . ." ⁴⁹ One has a conception of one's self and that conception is imbued with meaning that emerges from one's social context. As Mead puts it,

The individual . . . enters his [*sic*] own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately . . . , but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved. ⁵⁰

The development of the self, according to Mead, occurs in two general stages. Both involve the cognitive organization of the attitudes of others. The first stage of development involves "an organization of the particular attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward one another in the specific social acts in which he participates with them." The second stage involves that and "an organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other or the social group as a whole to which he belongs." The fully developed individual thus reflects both the contextualized individual attitudes of others towards him/herself and the contextualized attitudes of her/his social group. ⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., 140.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 138.

⁵¹ Ibid., 158. It is worth noting that Mead's idea of the 'generalized other' pioneered the symbolic interactionist approach to reference group theory which holds, generally, that individuals assume the world view that is shared by the group (or by groups) in society within which they participate or are intellectually engaged.

This description is of the structure or framework of the self.⁵² Each individual's 'self-structure' reflects and is constituted by a unique perspective of the "human social process of experience and behavior" because each individual has his/her own unique standpoint and experience.⁵³ It follows that each individual's unique perspective also presents a unique meaning of the individual, the other, and basis for their difference. One's recognition of differences between ourselves and others, ranging from the minute to the profound, is a means of self-identification.⁵⁴

Mead's account of the emergence of the self explains how meaning enters individuals' consciousness. Meaning precedes consciousness but occurs only through communication via gesture in a social context. At the level of self-consciousness, meaningful gestures become significant symbols and objects come to exist, constituted in symbolization.⁵⁵ Selves are such objects. Selves reflect both the particular attitudes towards them and the attitudes of their social group generally. Yet, each self is also unique. Each person's social standpoint, each person's experience, is unique. One's understanding of one's self as a unique being arises through one's perceived differences between 'self' and 'other'. Self-identification requires a meaningful relationship with an

⁵² Ibid., 163.

⁵³ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 205.

⁵⁵ While my accounts of Derrida's explanation of 'concept' and of Mead's explanation of the emergence of self together serve to provide an understanding of the meaning of self in terms of its relation to non-self, their theories of meaning are different from each other. Mead's social behaviorism (pragmatism) holds that unconscious gestures in a social context are imbued with meaning that becomes symbolized at the level of self-consciousness. Derrida's post-Saussurian semiotics, on the other hand, holds that meaning is contingent upon connections to language and linguistic interactions, that there is no naturalistic or intrinsic connection to a referent (e.g., a gesture), and that, therefore, meanings are neither internally coherent nor self-referential and they cannot be fully present in one's consciousness. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy. Robert Audi, ed., 1995, s.v. "deconstruction," by Samuel C. Wheeler III.

‘other’. It should not be a surprise, then, that individuals understand their selves as autonomous beings, connected beings, or both. Only a little self-reflection brings about bases for both understandings. The dominance of a particular understanding seems to reflect the interplay between particular attitudes towards an individual and the attitudes of that individual’s social group.

This is one of the key social phenomena that compelled me to undertake this project: there are people in the community in which I live who seem to have understandings of the world and of their relationship with it that are entirely opposite to those of other fellow community members. The two positions that I have been describing – radical freedom and eco-social justice – denote the opposing world views that have, in particular, captured my attention. Further, I am interested that a significant element common to some of these people’s world views is that those people find meaning in their lives by working to bring the world as they experience it into conformity with their understanding of how it ought to be.

In the next section of this thesis, I describe the methodology I used to explore eight such activists’ world views and self concepts.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach: Interpretive Interactionism

As I earlier said, I elected to use a poststructuralist interpretive style of research for this project. In particular, I used Norman K. Denzin's 'interpretive interactionism', a research style that he explains in his book of the same name. Like the activists that I interviewed, I am motivated by a desire to help positively change the world. Interpretive interactionism attempts to facilitate this drive.⁵⁶ It enables the researcher to engage with the issues that concern the research participants. Denzin recognizes that "[t]he qualitative researcher is not an objective, politically neutral observer who stands outside and above the study of the social world. Rather, the researcher is historically and locally situated within the very processes being studied."⁵⁷

Interpretive interactionism is not for all qualitative researchers, Denzin cautions. He stresses that

*Researchers should use the approach advocated here only when they want to examine the relationships between personal troubles ... and the public policies and public institutions that have been created to address those troubles. Interpretive interactionism . . . works outward from the biography of the person.*⁵⁸ [Denzin's emphasis]

The focus of interpretive interactionism, Denzin says elsewhere, "is on those life experiences (epiphanies) that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to

⁵⁶ Norman K. Denzin. *Interpretive Interactionism*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001, x.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

themselves and their life projects.”⁵⁹ Drawing from Mead, those experiences are themselves meaningful. I used interpretive interactionism to help understand not only what those meanings are to each of the participants but wanted also to understand *how* those meanings are significant, how they are also epiphanies. This requires understanding the meanings of the participants’ background and peripheral, yet significant, experiences. For example, Arne Naess is said to have been inspired to conceive of and found the Deep Ecology movement while residing in his tiny mountain hut in Norway where he, as deep ecologists Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue put it, “developed a deep spiritual kinship with the hut and its surroundings.”⁶⁰ Similarly, Hayek says this about himself,

My mind has been shaped by a youth spent in my native Austria and by two decades of middle life in Great Britain, of which country I have become and remain a citizen. To know this fact about myself may be of some help to the reader, for the book [The Constitution of Liberty] is to a great extent the product of this background.⁶¹

Naess’ and Hayek’s experiences were no doubt profoundly important to the formation of their self-structures. Yet, merely knowing the facts of those experiences explains little. Had Naess and Hayek experienced each others’ given experiences instead of their own, we may never have heard of either of them. Interpretive interactionism

⁵⁹ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998, 335.

⁶⁰ Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, eds. The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology. Berkeley: North Atlantic books, 1995, xxiv, quoted in Noel Sturgeon. Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action. New York: Routledge, 1997, 42.

⁶¹ Hayek. The Constitution of Liberty, viii.

employs methods that enable the researcher to understand the meanings that the participants find in their experiences.

The particular method that I used is, again, in-depth, one-on-one interviews. Denzin calls such interviews, 'interpretive materials'.⁶² It was my task as a researcher to elicit the historical, relational, and processual significance of the phenomena or 'objects', in Mead's terms, inhering in these materials as they pertain to the participants' lived experience.⁶³

Denzin's approach emphasizes examining the relationships between the participants' "personal troubles" and "the public policies and public institutions that have been created to address [them]" in order to help to identify the meanings that are at play in the participants' social contexts.

It is primarily interpretive interactionism's central concern with participants' *interpretations* of their experiences and of their social contexts that led me to employ it for this project. At one point, I had considered using Grounded Theory. The idea of possibly developing even the beginnings of a generalizable theory of activists' world views appeals to me. For several reasons, though, I decided against using this approach. First, I realized that, based upon my own experiences with activists, the sort of information that might lead to such a theory is contained deep within the activists' concepts of self and 'other' that inform their world views. The scope of the research from which might emerge a verifiable, replicable, and generalizable theory, the aim of Grounded Theory, is far beyond what I could accomplish in a Masters thesis project.

⁶² Denzin and Lincoln. 335.

⁶³ Ibid.

Second, I don't subscribe to the Grounded Theory assumption of transcendental realism, that, in Denzin and Lincoln's words, "social phenomena exist in the objective world and there are lawful relationships among them."⁶⁴ I believe, instead, that we construct both whatever social phenomena that we perceive and any lawful relationships among them that we may discover. A Grounded Theory-based project might produce a theory that identifies and describes the relationships of factors that explain how certain types of activists emerge in society. However, such a theory would be unable to facilitate the depth of understanding that I am pursuing through this project. The meanings that the individuals give to these factors and that might have a hand in the construction of the relationships between them would be beyond the scope of both the research's ability to elicit and the theory's ability to address. Even if meanings and interpretations were themselves identified as factors, their being treated as such would miss the point of this project. Merely identifying and describing such factors would fall short of this project's central aim, which is to gain a deep understanding of how the participants understand their selves as participants in their respective worlds. Interpretive interactionism is better suited to this type of in-depth probing. Finally, Grounded Theory's positivist aim to theorize a presumed objective world itself presumes an objective observer or researcher. I take the interpretive interactionist position, instead, that the researcher is an inextricable participant in the research and that the interview is a social event and an agent of social change. This is even more the case for this particular project, because it concerns people who self-identify as agents of social change, people who may approach their participation

⁶⁴ Ibid., 40.

in this project as a strategically beneficial experience (because my thesis provides another venue for the expression of their views).

Because gaining an understanding of how the research participants understand their selves is a focus of this project, I took Manford H. Kuhn's and Thomas S. McPartland's advice and asked the participants that question directly. Employing an adaptation of their Twenty Statements Test, I asked the participants, at the outset of their interviews, to provide up to twenty different statements in answer to the question "Who am I?" Influenced by Mead, Kuhn and McPartland devised this test in 1954 as an instrument to identify and measure self-attitudes. Briefly discussing the "conscious conceptualization of the self as a set of attitudes," Kuhn and McPartland point out that

this conceptualization is most consistent with Mead's view of the self as an object which is in most respects like all other objects, and with his further view that an object is a plan of action (an attitude).⁶⁵

Understood this way, the expression of a person's conscious conceptualization of her/his self is a lens through which a researcher can glimpse that person's world view and ideology. Additionally, during each interview, following the participant's completion of the Twenty Statements Test,⁶⁶ I asked her/him directly to describe/explain her/his world view and ideology. Though Kuhn and McPartland recommend using some form of

⁶⁵ Manford H. Kuhn and Thomas S. McPartland. "An Empirical Investigation of Self-Attitudes." *American Sociological Review* Vol. 19, 1 (Feb. 1954): 68.

⁶⁶ One might wonder why Kuhn and McPartland decided that the test should ask for twenty statements and not more or less. Kuhn and McPartland do not offer a reason. They point out only that, when the test was first administered in 1952 to 288 undergraduates at the State University of Iowa, the median number of statements provided was seventeen and ranged from one to the twenty requested.

content analysis of the Twenty Statements Test results,⁶⁷ I, instead, undertook a discourse analysis of those results folded into the interviews. Whereas content analysis is appropriate for producing a quantitative description of content in a text, it "cannot interpret the content's significance."⁶⁸ Discourse analysis, on the other hand, is better suited to this task. It can facilitate an understanding of how this project's participants make sense of their actions and of how they locate themselves in the world as they perceive it.

In addition to eliciting focussed expressions of the participants' self-concepts, the Twenty Statements Tests provided a psychological context for our conversations. (These associations and the contemporaneity of the Twenty Statements Test with the interview allow me to include it whenever I henceforth refer to the interview.)

Michael Billig offers some useful, interesting, and important insights that helped me both to develop conversational themes for the interviews and to analyze the participants' comments. In his work, he discusses consistency theories, contradictions that exist within them, the "coexistence of opposites" that relates "to the nature of ideology in contemporary capitalist society,"⁶⁹ the importance of ambivalence,⁷⁰ and the irresolvability of contradictions. "[C]ontradictions might be resolvable 'in theory'," he

⁶⁷ C. Addison Hickman and Manford H. Kuhn. Individuals, Groups, and Economic Behavior. New York: Dryden Press, 1956, 243.

⁶⁸ W. Lawrence Neuman. Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. 4th ed. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon, 2000, 293.

⁶⁹ Michael Billig. Ideology and Social Psychology. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, 136-37.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 168-69.

says, "but this serves merely to show the limitations of theory, when it comes up against real practise."⁷¹

In order to gain, for both the reader and myself, more than a mere intellectual understanding of the participants' world views, it is important, even crucial, that I be empathetic with the participants' experiences of their lives as they present them. Denzin's method requires that the researcher calls up in her/himself feelings similar to those that the participants experienced. He calls this 'true' or 'authentic emotional understanding' and it corresponds to 'emotional interpretations'. 'Cognitive understandings' and 'cognitive interpretations' alone deal with the bare facts and are based on thin descriptions. "Emotional interpretations overflow with emotion and feeling."⁷² To this end, Denzin prescribes that I must enter into and be a part of the experiences that I write about. I must write those interpretations "in a way that elicits emotional identification and understanding." I must bring "alive the world of lived experiences in the pages of the text" and I must compel the reader to willingly "enter into the . . . text and the world of lived experience that it depicts."⁷³ Denzin's approach at once challenges me and provides me with the means to empathize with the participants and to induce empathy, in the reader, with the participants.

Research Process

The research comprised a set of one-on-one interviews with eight social activists. Of the activists, four are proponents of some aspect(s) of radical individual freedom and

⁷¹ Ibid., 209.

⁷² Denzin, 139

the other four are proponents of some aspect(s) of eco-social justice. None of the activists expressed their advocacy for the benchmark positions exactly as I presented them earlier. However, all of the activists identified closely enough, to varying degrees, with one or the other of those two radical positions such that, in my opinion, both positions were satisfactorily represented. I will describe the participant selection process presently.

the interviews

Denzin explains that, “the focus of interpretive research is on those experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects.”⁷⁴ And, “[i]nterpretive researchers collect personal experience stories and self-stories that focus on key, turning-point moments in people’s lives and then fit these stories to the personal histories of the storytellers.”⁷⁵ These turning-point moments can be major (or singular), cumulative, minor (or underlying), or relived (a recurring major turning-point moment). All, however, “occur within the larger historical, institutional, and cultural arenas that surround an individual’s life.”⁷⁶ It was my job, then, to link the participants’ turning-point moments, central personal issues, problems, and troubles with larger social, public issues. This is especially the case with activists because their personal issues, problems, and troubles figure centrally in their acute engagement in social and public life. An important objective of the interviews was, therefore, to elicit

⁷³ Ibid., 141-42.

⁷⁴ Denzin. 34.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 37.

stories from the participants that capture the 'epiphanies' that changed their lives with respect to their connection with society. I sought what Denzin calls 'thick descriptions' of these experiences.⁷⁷ This involves learning the historical, temporal, and social contexts within which the participants' stories are set. I sought expressions of their self and 'other' concepts, how those concepts were formed, and how they may have changed. I asked the participants to articulate how their histories, self-concepts, and activist work are related.

The interviews were open-ended and conversational in style. In my mind and, occasionally, physically, I referred to a general list of issues and concepts that I wanted to discuss with the participants. While I had intended to be explicitly up-front with the participants about my own views on the issues we discussed, I realized at the outset of undertaking the interviews that such a move would unduly influence the activists' attitudes and dialog. The eco-social justice activists might perceive and treat me as an ally and tend to not be as careful in their arguments or critiques as they would be otherwise. The radical freedom activists might perceive me and treat me as an opponent and tend to be more guarded and less expressively passionate about their beliefs and positions as they would be otherwise. I decided, instead and on the fly, to allow my bias to be evident only implicitly, that is, through the nature of my project which I believe inherently reflects a bias towards eco-social justice and through any other clues that the activists might perceive, such as my appearance, language, and relative familiarity with their issues and ideologies. Also, during the interviews, when I did express my opinions,

⁷⁷ The term 'thick description' was introduced by Clifford Geertz. See his essay "Thick Description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture," in Clifford Geertz, The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays. New York: Basic Books, 1973, 412-53.

I tended to do so only when they agreed with the activists' views. I probably did not once express my disagreement with any of their views, though I did challenge them. I did so in order to draw out the activists' explanations for their views and the foundational beliefs and assumptions upon which those explanations rest. I believe that this non-antagonistic approach helped the activists to perceive me as somebody to whom they could safely and comfortably express and explain their views without their assuming or worrying that I would unfairly represent them in this project.

The interviews took place in a location of each participant's choosing. One interview took place on the University of Victoria campus, beginning in a quiet, outdoor location and finishing in a warmer, vacant classroom. Three interviews were held in small restaurants, two were held in the activists' own homes, and two were held, back to back, in a home belonging to a mutual acquaintance of the three of us. Previous to the interviews, I had never met any of the participants. As soon after each interview as possible, I transcribed the tape-recorded interview verbatim.

Each interview typically proceeded as follows. After introducing ourselves, I briefly described the project and explained the participant's rights with respect to the project. In particular, I explained that s/he may participate anonymously and/or in confidence, or neither. In the end, each of those options was exercised by at least one of the participants. I also advised that the participant may withdraw from the project, without question or consequence, up until they sign a document, that I provided, indicating that s/he had the opportunity to review and amend the verbatim interview transcript. The purpose of asking the participants to review the transcript was to ensure that they were satisfied that the transcript clearly and correctly reflected their views as

they wished to express them. Some participants amended their transcripts and others chose not to even review them.

After the preliminary formalities, including the signing of appropriate documents, I asked the participant to undertake the Twenty Statements Test. This involved my giving the participant a pen and a single sheet of paper with the following written instructions (adapted from McCrae and Costa, Jr. and from Kuhn and McPartland):⁷⁸

In the spaces below, please give twenty different answers to the question, "Who am I?" Answer as if you were giving the answers to yourself, not to somebody else. Write the answers in the order that they occur to you. Don't worry about logic or 'importance'. Go along fairly fast; you will have twelve minutes to provide the answers.

Originally, I had intended to use the participants' answers as a reference during the balance of the respective interviews. In practise, however, because I felt, at the time of the interviews, that referring to the participants' written statements would be disruptive to the interviews and possibly be uncomfortable for the participants, I decided not to do this. The statements were still useful in setting up a psychological context for each interview and for later analysis in conjunction with the transcripts. As it turned out, one of the participants declined to 'take' the Test, explaining that the information would come out in the interview. Another participant stopped the Test after providing only a couple of statements, citing the same reason. Following the Test section of the interview process, we immediately moved onto the interview proper.

After the first interview, I felt that the best way to begin the post-Test portion of the remaining interviews, was to ask the participants to explain what they believe would

⁷⁸ Robert R. McCrae and Paul T. Costa, Jr. "Age, Personality, and the Spontaneous Self-Concept." Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences Vol. 43, 6 (1988): 179.

be their ideal world. Their responses opened up many pertinent issues and concepts that we could subsequently examine. Key discussion areas that I made a point to cover during the interviews were: their activism – objectives and practises; their world view – notion of self, and assumptions and beliefs; their ideal world; commodification of nature; obstacles and opposing views – who/what they are and how they deal with them; epiphanies/life-changing events; and their prognosis for success. These discussion areas together comprised the interview schedule to which I referred during the interviews and of which is found in Appendix 4 of this thesis.

Through the course of the interviews, I tried to play ‘devil’s advocate’ whenever I felt it appropriate. I tried to challenge the participants’ views and assumptions and tried to draw out their underlying reasons or conditions for them. When possible, I would highlight possible inconsistencies or gaps in their logic or activism. Of course, I wasn’t always as quick or perceptive as I would like to have been.

participant selection

The eight participants of this research project constituted a theoretical sample. Four participants are experienced and knowledgeable activists in the pursuit of some aspect(s) of radical freedom. The other four participants are experienced and knowledgeable activists in the pursuit of some aspect(s) of eco-social justice. The participants also expressed in some media, either explicitly or implicitly, their general concepts of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the course of their activism, thereby enabling me to select them, in good part, on that basis. (I did not, in other words, select activists of radical ideologies to discover, in part, how they conceive of their self and ‘other’. I selected

activists who, in the course of their activist work, have explicitly or implicitly expressed, at least generally, their concepts of self and 'other'.) The closer these activists' concepts of self and 'other' are to the theorists' concepts that I described earlier, the more ideal these activists are to this project.

Finding willing participants was more difficult than I had anticipated it would be. First, there is no relatively accessible population from which to draw such a sample. This was more the case for radical freedom activists than for eco-social justice activists, the former being far fewer in number than the latter in southwestern British Columbia, where I live, and all being few in number relative to the general population. Second, radical freedom activists seem to be far more secretive and wary than eco-social justice activists. This is likely mainly because their politics are less well received generally and especially in southwest British Columbia than are the politics of eco-social justice activists, though they, too, are a fringe group of the general population.⁷⁹

Being sympathetic with the environmental and social justice movements, I already knew who some of the local movements' activists were. I had only to ask an activist friend to recommend some activists who might be particularly suitable for this project. While meeting with one of these activists, she, in turn, recommended several other potential participants. Soon, I had a list of twenty potential eco-social justice activist participants, including several with whose work I was already familiar.

I then wanted to ensure that the activists whom I would ask to participate were as ideal as possible in terms of their being proponents of the ideological benchmark

⁷⁹ Some freedom activists and non-activist proponents of individual freedom may be secretive and wary also because they resist and object to surveillance of any sort, believing that visibility facilitates control. This fact could have led to the exclusion in this project of freedom activists who feel that way. the participation in this project of freedom activists

positions that I described earlier. In all cases, prior to contacting any prospective participants, I familiarized myself with their work that I found in various media, including the internet. As a result, I eliminated from the list some activists who weren't suited well enough to participate in this project. I also removed from the list activists, some of whom I would like to have interviewed, who were beyond my physical, financial, or timely reach. Eventually, I had a ranked short-list of ten or so potential eco-social justice participants. Via phone and/or email, I contacted the four, most ideal activists, including the aforementioned activist who was recommended to me. I explained who I was, how I came to contact them in particular, what the project was about, and what exactly I was asking of them, and I asked them if they would be interested in participating, pending my providing them with further information. All four said that they were interested. Except for one activist who said not to bother, I sent them a follow-up, formal 'request to interview' letter (see a sample letter in Appendix 1) that reiterated what I had already informally communicated to them. All four activists agreed to participate.

Finding four radical freedom activists willing to participate in this project was more difficult. Almost all of the radical freedom activists of whom I was aware were beyond my physical, financial, or timely reach. Fortunately, some people, relatives of mine, whose involvement in this movement first drew my attention to it, were able to recommend several freedom activists whom they thought I might consider to be suitable participants for this project. This was fine except that I didn't want to interview activists whose work is closely tied together. Within each of the two groups of activists, I strove for as much diversity as possible. Each of the eco-social justice activists focus on issues

that the others don't focus on, though they all later stated that all environmental and social justice issues are interrelated. At first glance, all of the prospective radical freedom activists were concerned with economic freedom. However, as I probed deeper into their work, prior to contacting them, I found that their concerns were more sophisticated and varied. I contacted one of the radical freedom activists who subsequently agreed to participate. At my request, he recommended another activist who also later agreed to participate. Both of these people live in BC's lower mainland and I traveled there, from Victoria, to interview them. All of the other interviews occurred in the Greater Victoria area. Finally, after some investigating through word of mouth and in various media, especially the internet, and after more emailing and phone conversations, two other suitable and interesting radical freedom activists agreed to participate in this project. With one exception, my initial contacts with these activists were like and approximately concurrent with my initial contacts with the eco-social justice activists. Via the phone and email, I explained who I was, how I came to contact them in particular, what the project was about, and what exactly I was asking of them, and I asked them if they would be interested in participating, pending my providing them with further information. The exceptional case was the interviewee who was recommended by the first freedom activist with whom I spoke. I didn't directly communicate with this person until we met to conduct the interview. Up until that time, s/he allowed the other activist to speak on her/his behalf.

After the four radical freedom activists agreed, over the phone, to participate in the project, I sent them each a follow-up, formal 'request to interview' letter (see a sample

letter in Appendix 2) that reviewed what we had discussed. All four activists agreed to participate.

With respect to diversity among the participants, there is diversity in some ways and not so much in other ways. With so few activists in this geographic area whose public expressions of their world views reasonably match either of the two aforementioned benchmark ideological positions, finding diversity among them is near impossible. Finding *any* four activists representative of each benchmark position was difficult enough. Nevertheless, efforts to obtain some diversity were fruitful. Most importantly and as I already mentioned, each activist has a unique focus or group of issues of which s/he is concerned. More obviously, there is some gender diversity. Of the eco-social justice activists, two are male and two are female. Of the radical liberalism activists, three are male and one is female. The youngest participant is around 30 years of age and the oldest is around 50 years of age. The range of activist experience is from about six years to thirty years. One is a full time student, another a city bus driver, several seem to earn a good portion if not all of their income through their activism – holding seminars, consulting, publishing, etc., one ekes out a marginally subsistence-level living, and another works in a government office. Beyond that, all of the participants are quite similar. All are passionate in their activism. All are well-informed and articulate. All live in and work primarily in the same sociopolitical context and geographical area. All are Caucasians. None belong to a visible minority.

I purposely did not probe into the participants' education levels or financial status either while searching for prospective participants or during the interviews. Simply, in this in-depth exploration of eight people's world views whose differences hinge generally

on their concepts of self, I didn't want to make any inferences from or give any significance to any differences in levels of education or financial status.

Analysis: Interpreting

In the 'Interpretations' chapters, I try to convey the meaning that the participants give to their activist work, their lives, and the worlds in which they live. Using Denzin's interpretive interactionism research method, I attempted to understand the participants' experiences that explain how they came to be activists for radical freedom or for eco-social justice. This involved interpreting their experiences which, in turn, required that I know the contexts of their experiences. I, therefore, examined the descriptions given by the participants as they related their turning-point events or epiphanies. I also examined the participants' expressed self-concepts, for these are a major element of their experiential context. Through discourse analysis, I examined and interpreted their self-concepts and experiences in order to try to understand how they are mutually constitutive.

Particular points of analysis that I focussed on are similarities and dissimilarities that came to light between the experiences, self-concepts, and world views of the activists of the two generally opposed ideologies. For example, I tried to discover and understand differences (and similarities) in overarching self-concepts between the two groups. Additionally, I compared and contrasted the participants' expressions and identified differences and similarities that I found between them.

I am especially interested in understanding how each activist constructs both an internally and externally consistent self-concept and ideology even as s/he recognizes that her/his self-concept and ideology are explicitly opposed to those of some other activists

who, themselves, have constructed internally and externally consistent self-concepts and ideologies. I looked for, then, among other things, how these activists bracketed off, rationalized, or minimized issues that their ideological counterparts emphasize as being problematic. Essentially, I tried to understand how each activist constructs conceptual and ideological conceptions of the good.

In Denzin's terms, I tried to gain 'authentic emotional understandings' of the participants' world views and to impart those understandings to the reader. To that end, throughout the project, I allowed myself, as well as I could, to freely and unjudgingly assimilate the views and emotions that I perceived were associated with the individual participants. That is, I tried to be empathetic with each participant. The extent of my effort to do so was limited to minimizing my own resistance to aspects of their world views with which I might be in disagreement. I don't think that authentic empathy can be coerced, though, possibly, it can otherwise be induced or increased (or decreased or eliminated). I don't know. The point is that I tried to gain an empathetic understanding of each participant's world view and I tried to instill those understandings in the reader.

Gaining some understanding of these two groups of activists' world views, their objectives and motivations, their similarities and differences, helped me to consider implications in society-at-large of social change projects and movements whose objectives conflict.

Ethical Issues

Because my research centered on interviewing people, I could not have proceeded without the approval of the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Committee

(HREC). The HREC granted its approval on February 3, 2004. The research qualifies as 'minimal risk research', as defined by the HREC, and no other ethics approvals were required for this project.

Upon receiving HREC approval, I began to contact the participants to schedule the interviews. All eight interviews were undertaken between February 10 and March 19, 2004. It was another four months, on July 19, though, that the last of the participants had formally agreed to allow me to use his/her interview for the project. Two other participants withheld their permission until only nine days earlier. The sticking point was the issues of participant anonymity, confidentiality, and the right of the participants to withdraw. As directed by the HREC, I gave each participant the opportunity to review and amend the verbatim transcript of her/his interview. This was done to ensure that the participants were confident that I would be working with material that accurately, clearly, and reasonably completely reflected what they wanted me to know. The participants would indicate their confidence by signing a form that I prepared for them. (See Appendix 3.) Their signing of the form would also mark the end of their opportunity to withdraw from the project. Some participants signed the form immediately upon completion of their interview, and without pressure from me, I should add. All of the others signed the form some time after I provided them with their interview transcript. Two of those participants told me, after two months, that they were concerned that the information they gave me during their interviews would somehow come back on them in a harmful way. Part of the problem was that, in both cases but for two different reasons (intermittently faulty audiocassette and frequent extremely quiet speech – all but inaudible whispers – compounded by noisy roof repairs), the recordings of their

interviews had quite a few brief audio drop-outs. These drop-outs ranged from one syllable to several words (and were noted as such in the transcripts). The participants wondered how I might make sense of the transcripts with all of this missing information. After assuring them that there was plenty of useful information in the transcripts and that I would present their views and comments in a respectful and professional way, they agreed to sign off on the forms, but under the condition that I guarantee their confidentiality. No problem.

Another participant also took a long time to return the signed form to me – nearly two months, but otherwise without issue except that he, too, wished to remain anonymous. All three of these participants are activists for radical freedom. The fourth radical freedom activist signed the form at the end of the interview and waived his right to anonymity and confidentiality. Only one of the four eco-social justice activists wished that his comments be confidential but didn't mind that his identity be known. Because maintaining his confidence was possible only through his anonymity, I ensured that that activist participated in this study anonymously. Only two participants, both eco-social justice activists, amended the transcripts and only for the sake of clarity.

This experience with the post-interview phase of the participant involvement process raises the question as to the benefit of having the participants assure, in writing, that they are satisfied with the representation of their views in the interview transcripts. On the one hand, it's a nice gesture. Some ideas can be clarified or enhanced and it results in more and better potential quotes. On the other hand, many participants might be so comfortable with what they said during the interview that they feel that they need not spend more time in the project. Other participants could develop cold feet and

withdraw some or all of their input to the project. They could also take some months to reach that decision. That latter problem could be averted, of course, by stipulating a time frame within which to respond, a step that would have saved me some grief had it occurred to me to implement it. I suggest that this participant interview feedback loop be used at the well-considered discretion of the researcher.

Concerning safeguards and other uses of this data, as I advised the participants and the HREC, I will permanently safeguard all of the interview data, including interview recordings and transcripts, from access by anybody other than me. Additionally, I will permanently guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of participants who did not waive that guarantee. I reserve the right to use the interview data, subject to these safeguards, for any future projects that I may undertake or in which I may participate.

Finally, in a Reflexive Account, I provide a brief discussion of some procedural ethical issues, such as my personal bias, that I believe have unavoidably influenced the outcome of this research. (See Appendix 5.)

Now, I introduce the activists.

4. ECO-SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISTS' ACCOUNTS: INTERPRETATIONS

In this chapter, I introduce the four eco-social justice activists and present their accounts or stories of key aspects of their lives as activists and my interpretations of those accounts. In the next chapter, I analyze those interpretations. In the two subsequent chapters, I repeat the account presentation, interpretation, and analysis process, with respect to the radical freedom activists. Following that, I undertake a final, overarching, comparative analysis of the two activist groups. I do all of this, using Denzin's interpretive interactionism research method, the first phase of which he calls 'bracketing the phenomenon'. First, I "[l]ocat[e] within the personal experience story or self-story key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question." Next, I "interpret the meanings of these phrases" and obtain, "if possible," the "subject's interpretations of these phrases."⁸⁰ For presentation purposes, I intermix these two steps. For each participant, I subdivide the phrases, statements, and interpretations into the following topics:

- problem/issue of concern
- epiphanies
- concept of self and world view
- commodification/use of nature

Within each topic, I first present the phrases and statements and then my interpretations of them.⁸¹ Additionally, for both brevity and greater depth of understanding, I sometimes incorporate already presented interpretations of an activist's

⁸⁰ Denzin, 76.

⁸¹ Occasionally, participants made factual errors. I did not comment on these unless they were pertinent to the study. Also, for conciseness and clarity, I edited the participants' quotations in this chapter so that they are devoid of non-words (e.g., "uh", "um") and redundant, repetitive words (e.g., and and, I, I, I).

account under one topic, into interpretations under subsequent topics, for that same activist, without re-presenting the earlier phrase or statement. As well, I introduce each activist by briefly describing aspects of their lives that are pertinent to this exploration. I provide lengthier and more in-depth representations of all of the activists, using their own words and language, as much as possible, in Appendixes 6 and 7.

Here, now, are the eco-social justice activists' accounts and my interpretations of them.

Janine Bandcroft (See Appendix 6 - *Janine*, p. 180)

Janine's activism concerns the interrelated issues of environmentalism, social justice, and peace. She traces her first steps towards activism back to when, as a young adult living in a simple, comfortable apartment and working at a well-paying job, she felt that there was "something missing" in her life. So she quit her job and put herself through college and university, during which time she experienced numerous "awakenings". The awakenings revealed to her the many ways in which humans oppress each other, non-humans, and nature generally. She believes that all living things are spiritually interconnected, that one's present life is just one of an infinite number of lives that one lives, and that each life provides a unique learning opportunity through which to spiritually grow. The extent that we harm, destroy, or otherwise oppress nature is the extent to which we deprive other beings of the opportunity to grow spiritually. Through karmic justice, we necessarily do ourselves a similar injustice, as well. Janine works, therefore, using various media, to inform people of the ways that we harm each other and nature and of the options that we have for alternative, more caring behavior.

key phrases and statements, interpretations

problem/issue of concern

- “I’ve struggled with peace and justice in many different lifetimes.”
- “I am a spirit energy connected to all other energy in an unknowable and infinite universe.” “We’re all [living things] evolving in different ways.”
- “I don’t believe anybody should have the power to act on those types of beliefs” [that] “are [negatively] affecting all the rest of creation.”
- “I think that the ultimate driving energy is survival. And, in order to have survival, there has to be sustainability. And, in order to have sustainability, there has to be some form of justice. So, the people who are destroying the planet, they can’t get away with that.”
- “We didn’t have a lot but we certainly had enough – I never felt deprived.”

interpretation

The depth of Janine’s present-life struggles for peace and justice and her belief in karmic reincarnation are mutually reinforcing. These issues are all the more important to her because she must engage with them in order to evolve as a spiritual being. Spiritual energies, though interconnected in a universe that is at once timeless and infinite, can evolve only if they survive and interact as living entities. Survival, therefore, is the ultimate driving force. It is wrong and self-devolutionary, Janine believes, to deprive other spirit beings of the opportunity to evolve. To ensure the survival of all living entities, all must live sustainably, by definition. Reincarnation dispenses a natural form of justice, ensuring that people will bear karmic consequences for jeopardizing some entities’ survival by not living sustainably. Deeply experiencing her connection with all living things, Janine is in sympathy with this system. She is comfortable and feels right with her lifestyle in which she is vigilant about minimizing her impact on the natural environment.

epiphanies

- “There’s been a lot of those moments.”
- “I’ve gone through my life stumbling.”
- “I like my job and I like these people I’m working with. But there’s something else. There’s something else that I don’t understand and I need to go find that and that’s when I went to college and then to university. . . . I knew there was something missing.”
- “So, that was a real awakening process: the difference between small, locally owned business where you’re in the same building with, the people who founded it, to part of an international corporation that’s really impersonal.”
- “We were supposed to be afraid of the Communists. And then I moved to Vancouver and Gorbachev came along. And there were peace treaties and I started to think, ‘Well, wait a minute, this Communist guy isn’t too bad, he seems reasonable.’” “I [went] to a Communist meeting. I was really afraid. . . . But it was just a meeting in a book store and there was a black woman speaking about universal health care and education and I thought, ‘Oh, what’s scary about that?’ At that point, I realized that the myth that I’ve been taught about Communism was a complete lie.”
- “I was supposed to hate all these Iranians, but here was one of my friends from there and she was nice. So again, I had a realization that I was being lied to.
- “I realized that there was more going on than I was being told. So that really got me going.”
- “There was a speaker [at college] who was telling us about vegetarianism, veganism, and how much land is used to feed a cow compared to how many people you feed with the same amount of grain and water. And at the same time, I was taking a course on nutrition. So, putting those two things together, I became vegetarian.”
- “[Becoming vegan] was another of the best decisions I ever made and a real awakening to how many animal products are in so many different materials. I had no idea.”
- “That was an awakening that maybe it’s not democracy, what’s going [on] in the big house [BC Legislature]. They’re not necessarily representatives. They’re looking after their own interests and there’s something else going on.”
- “I lived in a housing co-op in Edmonton. . . . That really opened my eyes to a different way. I realized I don’t have to be a home-owner.”
- “During Women’s Studies, at the University of Victoria, somebody asked the question, ‘Who are women dressing like that for?’ I realized I didn’t *know* who I was doing that for. I wasn’t doing it for me ‘cause it’s uncomfortable. I don’t like doing all that stuff. And, so I quit doing that.”

interpretation

Janine’s epiphanies are of the type that Denzin terms the ‘illuminative or minor epiphany’. They illuminate underlying tensions and problems in Janine’s situation,

revealing what has been missing in or not quite right with her life as she experiences it in this culture and society.⁸² Her numerous ‘stumbles’ compel her forward, as they are the moments of her ‘awakenings’, her ‘realizations’. Each of these moments give her new understandings, more knowledge and awareness, of the more important concerns that she must face in this life. She wasn’t aware of these things before, but she incrementally became aware of their absence. The numbing comforts, the controlling myths and lies, and the hidden oppressions that she discovers, are all set in opposition to a healthy, sustainable, and just lifestyle that is necessary for long-term survival and the spiritual evolution of all living things, including herself. Each new awakening increasingly illuminates, for Janine, our world as it ought to be and can be. Each awakening also instructs Janine of the value of both pursuing and providing knowledge.

concept of self and world view

- “I am a spirit being inhabiting a human body. . . . Although I am connected to everything, everywhere, I am distinct and unique, an accumulation of my own experiences and learnings. . . . I am eternal and will live forever.”
- “I believe that every living entity is a spirit that moves from physical reality to physical reality and carries with it its experiences and memories of previous existences in different physical realities.”
- “I believe that everything is a lesson, that constantly there are tests being thrown at me and that everything is a potential lesson.”
- “And I really believe in karma, that what I give, comes back at me.”
- “I see the Earth as this wonderful learning ground.”

interpretation

Janine's present life is but one of an endless number of experiences into which she has been and will be thrown. Her present situation, as all others, both reflects and

⁸² Ibid., 37, 146.

dictates the challenges that she must face in order to evolve spiritually. And they are challenges in so far as they are difficult for her to deal with. She could ignore them. But karma would not be kind to her. As well, Janine would be uncomfortable with her guilt, knowing that she wouldn't be compromising only her own spiritual evolution. Even though she is a unique and distinct energy spirit, she is also connected with all other energy in the universe through all time, including the energy spirits that are expressed as living things in her present physical existence. One doesn't evolve in isolation. The taking up of her responsibilities to face the challenges of this/her life helps all living things to evolve. This is why acting upon this knowledge is so important and why Janine so enjoys every opportunity to learn.

commodification/use of nature

- “Water is a resource, but it’s more than that. It’s not *just* a resource, I don’t think, to be bought and sold, that someone owns and then determines who can have it. . . . It’s a naturally flowing entity on the planet that has its own intrinsic value and deserves a right to be there, but at the same time, I need it. So, it’s kind of a resource, in the sense that it’s something that I need to have access to.”
- “I think that any essential resource, like water or energy, ought to be publicly owned. There ought to be a democratic process around how we’re going to use it sustainably, based on what people agree on. We ought to have unbiased information, not scientific reports that are sponsored by corporations who want results that fit their [profit-driven] agenda. . . . [I]f you could remove the hierarchical structure . . . from political and corporate and business institutions, then people wouldn’t be in those positions of power.”
- “[W]e live in a world where money exists and, while I don’t like the profit motive, I don’t see a mainstream alternative [to] . . . some people feel[ing] that they have a right to determine the value of something that’s essential to all other beings.”
- “I believe in personal ownership. I have my toothbrush. I want my own space, and I want people to respect that. I’m not afraid to share. I’m community oriented, but it’s important to balance the personal with the collective.”
- “We’re all [living things] evolving in different ways. So, while I don’t see a hierarchy, . . . I feel that there is a difference, in terms of the types of experiences and the number of experiences that our energy has had.”
- “Isn’t it enough just to survive?”

interpretation

The use of resources seems to present a continuous, fine balancing act for Janine. She finds that she must be ever watchful for instances of humans, herself included, knowingly or unknowingly serving their needs or desires without due regard for the rights of other living things and natural 'resources', such as water, to exist undisturbed. On the one hand, she recognizes no hierarchy in nature and, so, no natural basis for the domination of one thing over another. On the other hand, we need to survive. But we need *only* to survive. The minimum amount of resource use maximizes the potential for the spiritual evolution of all living things. Every living thing is the expression of some spirit energy that is evolving, learning, in its own way. The concept of property, also, poses a question of balance. While Janine is not concerned about owning a toothbrush, she objects that individuals can own things and assign monetary value to things that are necessary for the survival of others. All who have a life-sustaining stake in the use of a thing, such as an essential resource, should share in its ownership and should have an influence, through a democratic process, in how it is used. People such as Janine, not recognizing a hierarchy in nature, would argue for the equal right of non-humans to use the resource. They could further argue for the right of the resource to be undisturbed, it having intrinsic value merely by existing, to be weighed against the need of other things to use it for their survival. This would be hard to achieve, though, in a society dominated by profit-driven politics and business. In sum, Janine advocates being ever-vigilant in working to reduce our use of resources, arguing that using any more than is required to survive is using too much. She also believes that how a resource is used, including whether it is used at all, ought to be democratically determined by all those who have a

survival stake in its use, with consideration given to those things that can't speak for themselves, including the resource itself.

Ingmar Lee (See Appendix 6 - Ingmar, p. 184)

Ingmar is famously and infamously well-known to the “giant, American clear-cutting corporation Weyerhaeuser,” InterFor, Timberwest, Vancouver Island politicians at both the provincial and city levels, Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and the environmental movement generally, both on Canada's west coast and in Europe where he gave 20 public lectures, on a single tour, concerning the plight of Vancouver Island's old-growth forests. The lecture tour was an anomaly. He is more a direct-action protester. Since he was a young child, he played, lived, and worked in his beloved, magnificent forests. He is appalled that humans, having evolved the capacity to recognize the suffering that we inflict upon nature, nevertheless can't overcome our animalistic hedonistic cravings that cause that suffering. When he sometimes despairs, he comforts himself with fellow environmentalist Betty Krawczyk's wise words, ““every single heartfelt action that's based on a good intention . . . contributes to the collective human consciousness.’ . . . and I really believe that,” he adds.

key phrases and statements, interpretations

problem/issue of concern

- “That's the paramount priority. We must stop the logging of primeval forests.”
“With 20% of the world's ancient forest cover left, that's the priority, is to stop the clear-cutting of that.”
- “We have no business even doing the finest, state-of-the-art eco-forestry in those primeval forests, any, at this time. Can't accept even one stick of old growth being cut down, anymore.”

- “Roading, gutting, and clear-cutting, and ripping just destroying. You know, so, I can’t accept that.” “A hundred and fifty years ago; those forest, like a hundred, . . . thirty meter space in between trees. It was just unthinkably beautiful. You can still see the stumps. But, there’s nothing left. The entire primeval forest in the Cowichan Valley.”
- “Everybody on this planet needs to be working towards minimizing their ecological footprint in every way.”
- “When I talk about forests, I’m also talking about the world’s wildlife.”

Interpretation

Ingmar single-mindedly and uncompromisingly opposes the logging of primeval forests anywhere on the planet, but especially on Vancouver Island, where he lives. Directly related, he opposes the clear-cutting method of forestry which results in both the logging of whatever type and age of trees that grow in the clear-cut area and the destruction of habitat of whatever other wildlife resides or traverses there. He opposes clear-cutting forests, as well, for the damage it causes to the rest of the Earth’s ecology and for the unnatural climate change it brings about. But it is the grand old trees themselves with which Ingmar is primarily concerned, in a twofold way. First, they are magnificent living beings deserving, in their own right, to be left alone to continue their lives in a cooperative relationship with humans, if in a relationship with humans, at all. Second, the trees symbolize nature itself, the Earth’s ecology, and all its constituent parts. The trees’ destruction symbolizes the devastating human attitude towards our planet. Ingmar is incensed that some humans arrogantly assume that they have some right to destroy these trees, treating them as mere commodities to convert to cash.

epiphanies

- “As a child, I was brought up, you know, every minute we got, we were out camping or out in the forest, and traipsing around, . . . my earliest memories were out in the wilderness in the Boreal forests.”
- “Never talked about environmental issues, really, with my family. . . . I don’t think I picked it up from my parents.”
- “I gravitated to work that would get me out in the woods. . . . And through that, I’ve come to recognize the scale of devastation that’s going [on] out there.”
- “The most important thing is to be motivated by having been steeped in the magnificence of being in primeval wilderness and purity and hygiene and cleanliness of nature. And drinking that water and walking around in that forest and trying to relate to that as a participant, rather than as an alien, you know. I mean, that gives an incredible depth of strength and it’s really nourishing. . . . I’m still moving from what I was able to acquire in six months of being in the woods last year. . . . It just gives you a huge boost of energy and, you know, moral servitude.”
- “I listened to [Al Gore’s] recent speech . . . and it is the most powerful mainstream messaging that I’ve ever heard. Like it just literally brought tears to my eyes because what I realized watching that is that, this is mainstream. Al Gore was able to articulate to the mainstream, to the average American Joe, what is going on with global warming. . . . We don’t need more education. Everybody knows about it.”

interpretation

Ingmar doesn’t recall a particular experience that he could identify as the turning point in his life that led to his environmental activism. His earliest memories, though, are of “being out in the wilderness of the Boreal forests.” Such is his connection with the wilderness that he not only has made a 2+ decades long career of tree-planting. He also, when he finds himself away from the wilderness for too long a time, returns to it to regenerate himself by gorging his psyche on the “magnificence” of being there “as a participant.” Denzin terms this type of experience a ‘relived epiphany’, one in which “the individual relives, or goes through again, a major turning-point moment in his or her life.”⁸³ In Ingmar’s case, the moment isn’t defined, but the emotion and context of the experience(s) *are* recalled. The immense pleasure that Ingmar relives with each

wilderness experience contrasts all-the-more with his horror of experiencing/witnessing the damage that humans inflict upon the wilderness. Ingmar experiences life emotionally and directly. And when he heard Gore's speech, he realized that emotion is what moves people to action. Gore verified what Ingmar subconsciously already knew, that knowledge means nothing without heartfelt understanding and empathy. This awareness is reflected in Ingmar's activist efforts to share with others his love of the trees and the wilderness generally.

concept of self and world view

- "I'm an atheist. . . . I don't believe there's some kind of overpowering, overwhelming universal force that guides the way we behave or the way nature unfolds or anything like that. . . . There's nobody out there that can really help me with the suffering that one faces in every day life and I just, you have to work this, that out for yourself." "[I'm just a] buzzing mass of subatomic particles."
- "[The primeval forests] hold the secrets of humanity's once and now lost connection to the ecological functionings of the planet. Human beings were part and parcel of the natural ecology of the planet and we've become alienated to that."
- "What, more or less, differentiates human beings [from animals] is [humans'] capacity to get past the immediate gratification pursuit." "[T]he human consciousness has evolved beyond that to where there's this opportunity to recognize that there is the seed of suffering in catering to those, you know, pleasurable experiences or there's the obvious suffering of the unpleasant experiences." "We can't satisfy our potential as human beings by going the hedonistic route."
- Ingmar relates Betty Krawczyk's 'wise' words, "[T]here is a collective consciousness in human life Every single heartfelt action that's based on a good intention contributes to the collective human consciousness.' . . . I really believe that."
- "I love animals and I really believe that, in so many ways, they feel love of their children. They feel pain. They feel frightened. . . . They get stressed when there's danger and that sort of thing. . . . They want to have fun."
- "I just talk about forestry because I know that context, you know, but when we have anti-globalization demonstrations, when we demonstrate against human rights abuses, social issues, all that, we're all talking the same language."
- "I can spot somebody who's on the same page from half way down the block, you know, regardless of what language they speak, which country they're at. . . . And

⁸³ Denzin, 37, 146.

when I talk to somebody whose motivation is against giant multi-national corporations and the George Bush, neo-liberal globalization movement, and within two minutes, we've sort of sussed each other out. . . . I can almost immediately implicitly trust that person. . . . These people will immediately sympathize with the issues that I'm working on and we understand them in the same way. We have the same obstacles, the same problems, the same dinosaurian greed that's driving the destruction that we're up against."

- "I'm just a pathetic little mosquito next to this Leviathan [the corporate world]."
- "We don't need more education. Everybody knows about it. But we just need the catalyst. . . . I pray, actually pray for a nuclear power plant failure in the United States. . . . Unfortunately, that's what it's going to take to bring those people to action."
- "Nature is an incredible self-healer."
- "To tell you the truth, my gut instinct tells me that it's over. I honestly believe that it's too late. . . . [I]t's just the stupidity of humanity with these great powerful toys living as, basically animals, the hedonistic, selfish, desire-oriented lifestyle; it's too late. . . . [N]evertheless, it's worth the effort."
- "When you see a disaster happening, life starts to develop . . . we evolve towards, you know, getting around that. Our evolutionary nature is to somehow survive. And it looks like our survival is looking pretty grim, you know. So maybe that's what's happening. There's a global shift in human consciousness to a survival instinct."

interpretation

Ingmar sometimes despairs that "it's over. . . . [I]t's too late." The damage is too great. While we, by virtue of being humans, have the "capacity to get past the immediate gratification pursuit," the quality that separates us from animals, we don't have the moral fortitude to do so. We have evolved the capacity that enables us to recognize the suffering that our hedonistic lifestyle engenders and the capacity to ever-better serve our hedonistic cravings but not the will to control our cravings to stop the spiraling suffering. We seem unable to rise above behaving merely as animals. Anymore, that is. We once were connected to the wilderness, as participants, like the animals, but additionally, were able to rejoice in the experience as aware participants. Now we are aware, apathetic aliens to the wilderness. And we are destroying it. Unfortunately, it seems that people won't consider the consequences of their actions unless they are the ones to suffer. Yet,

there are some humans, like Ingmar, who do care and have the will to work to stop the destructive behavior. “And nature is an incredible self-healer.” So, Ingmar has some hope, slim as it is, that the very grimness of our chances for survival is generating a more caring global shift in human consciousness. We are on our own, there are no rules except those that we make, and there is no cosmic plan. The fate of our struggling paradise is in our hands.

commodification/use of nature

- “And just having that understanding of just how little is left and how . . . vicious and voracious the clear-cutting is. . . .” “I went out to the Walbran Valley . . . and found that the giant American clear-cutting corporation, Weyerhaeuser, had, in 2003, mowed down a thousand year old cedar forest.”
- “[After the clear-cutting has stopped], I’d be happy to talk about eco-forestry in the second growth, in the forest lands that have already been converted, let’s say, by clear-cutting to plantations. That’s where eco-forestry belongs.”
- The animals that are going extinct are largely going extinct due to, you know, logging, clear-cut logging.”
- We don’t need to eat animals. It’s pretty clear that the ecological footprint of producing meat is so vastly greater, enormous, compared to producing vegetarian food.”
- “[W]hat we need to do is everybody on this planet needs to be working towards minimizing their ecological footprint in every way.”

interpretation

Ingmar vehemently opposes the logging of primeval forests for any reason. He opposes any use of nature that harms it or the Earth’s ecological system. Whether one perceives nature or some element of it as a thing to convert to cash or one has some other reason to harm or destroy it, Ingmar opposes that action. He condemns, in particular though, the rampant “dinosaurian greed” that reduces primeval forests to clear-cut fields of stumps, that destroys habitats and thereby threatens the existence of numerous animal

and plant species, and that damages the whole of the Earth's ecology through unnatural climate change. Nor should animals be used as food, both for their own sake and for the hugely reduced harm to the environment that would result from converting to a vegetarian diet. Ingmar doesn't have a problem with applying state-of-the-art eco-forestry practises, when and where appropriate, and otherwise using our best ecologically-minded methods of interacting with each other and sustaining ourselves, so long as we have ceased our most destructive behaviors. With a focus on minimizing our collective ecological footprint for the benefit of the ecology itself, the notion of the Earth and everything on it as being a resource to commodify would be displaced by an understanding that we are participants with all of the other constituents of the Earth's ecology.

Marisa Herrera (See Appendix 6 - Marisa, p. 188)

Marisa "recognized injustice from early on." As a young child in Mexico, she witnessed racial discrimination, bullying, and animal cruelty. It was when, at 18, she learned what goes on in slaughterhouses, that she began to take purposeful steps towards working to end cruelty to people and animals. She eventually became involved in other social justice and environmental issues, all of which are linked. Her activism involves 'becoming informed, disseminating information to people, expressing her opinions via protesting and writing letters, supporting different social groups, and living as simply as possible.' The greatest threat to the environment, she believes, is human greed. Also, our propensity to delineate ourselves from everything else, including other humans 'create[s] all these environmental, social problems, and political problems. We are all

connected at the atomic and spiritual levels. Further, we are all living systems living together in a living world. "And for me to disassociate myself from that living world would be to disassociate myself from my own being."

key phrases and statements, interpretations

problem/issue of concern

- "First, I was very concerned about animals. . . . And then neglect towards the other issues, again the environment, and then social issues. I mean, the factory worker, the slaughterhouse worker. I mean, I care about them. . . . And again, the forests. Obviously, I care about the forests. These are our living systems and all the creatures that depend on that forest for their survival, our own survival. . . . habitats. The same with fishing. I mean, they're doing the same clear-cut in the oceans."
- "I will not eat anything from which they have to kill an animal. And then that led to becoming vegan, where I'm not consuming animal products. 'cause I'm saying, it's not just the killing of the animal. It's the suffering involving the whole process. The animal is maintained alive, but under what conditions?"
- "I'm with environmental issues, mainly, and with animal rights issues, as well. . . . [And] some [social justice issues]. Yes, because it's interrelated. . . . And you cannot separate one without the others being affected."

interpretation

Marisa is concerned with the suffering and harm that humans inflict upon the Earth's living things, including other humans. She is upset with the pain and suffering that sentient things experience at human hands, whether directly, such as in slaughterhouses and in dairy food production, or indirectly, such as via the destruction of habitats both on land and in the seas. She is upset, too, with the natural environment's human-caused systemic degradation, such as of the waterways and atmosphere, both for the environment's own sake and for the risk to the survival of Earth's living things that the degradation brings about. And Marisa objects to social injustices, such as the harsh lives systemically imposed upon certain groups of peoples.

epiphanies

- “[A]s a kid, I could understand that things were not always fair and just. And I could see the discrimination, racial discrimination, social discrimination, and although I didn’t understand why, I could see that it was not right.”
- “[In school], I would protect those who were being bullied. So, that led to a thinking process, ‘This is not right. I don’t like manipulation. I don’t like injustice.’ So, yes, I could recognize discrimination, because I was brought up in Mexico. . . . So, as a child, you know what’s going on even though you don’t understand why this is happening. But you understand that there’s . . . injustice. . . . I was receptive, I guess, to . . . people . . . pressuring others to do things that they don’t want to do, in a negative way, forceful way, or a destructive way. The same with animals. I would see people being cruel to animals, hitting animals on the street.”
- “My turning point into getting more involved with the various destructive and exploitative practises came around when I was . . . eighteen, yes.” “[My brother] was just starting studies for veterinary medicine. And for a class or project, he had to go to a slaughterhouse. . . . And, so, when my brother told me what he saw, I was in shock. I said, ‘How . . .’ I was in disbelief, total disbelief. So, I said, from that moment on, I will not eat anything from which they have to kill an animal. And then, that led to becoming vegan, where I’m not consuming animal products.”
- “So that led to the process; it’s been a process. I mean, a gradual process of awakening and understanding and implementing change within myself.”
- “As I say, it’s been slow. I mean, nothing happened over night.”

interpretation

Marisa’s suddenly acquired knowledge, at the age of eighteen, that animals experience nightmarish torture and horrible deaths so that she and others can later eat them, was the single-most important influence on her becoming an activist for animal rights. Even though she didn’t witness the animals’ suffering, the suddenly acquired knowledge of it alone was enough to profoundly affect her. This type of turning-point best fits what Denzin terms the ‘major epiphany’; its “effects are immediate and long-term.”⁸⁴ This is not to say that Marisa wasn’t already predisposed to being so affected. She was. She recalls how she, as a child, protected bullied children from their tormentors. She also remembers that she, early on, was aware of social injustices,

especially in the form of racial discrimination, and of how badly she felt for the animals that were cruelly treated on public streets. The slaughterhouse knowledge, however, and being the age she was when she received it, hit her hard. From that moment on, Marisa was on a purposeful trajectory of increasing awareness and understanding of and participation in animal rights, social justice, and environmental issues. Simultaneously and inter-relatedly, she was and still is on a course of self-discovery. A not unexpected outcome of the nature of Marisa's turning-point moment is her emphasis, in her activist work, on the importance of providing knowledge. The same moment, though, provided Marisa with the knowledge that there are people who perpetrate those shocking atrocities. She recognizes that some people have little choice in the matter and would choose alternative ways of living, if they were made available to them and if they could become aware of them. But there are many others who simply don't care about the suffering of others, humans or non-humans, and a few others who enjoy it. Marisa understands that these people won't be influenced by her knowledge. They must either experience some deep, moving feeling, as she did, or they must be overcome by people who do care.

concept of self and world view

- “[S]ince human history, there’s always been some kind of exploitation and abuse and corruption.”
- “[W]e have these forces, very powerful forces, comprised of industry, government, and conglomerates who have no other interest but to be in control and to acquire more money, more power regardless of the consequences.”
- “It’s all about money, the greed factor.”
- “I’m with environmental issues, mainly, and animal rights issues, as well. Some [social justice] issues. Yes, because it’s interrelated. Everything leads to one thing which leads to the other. So, it’s a circle. And you cannot separate one without the others being effected.”

⁸⁴ Ibid., 37, 145.

- “Granted, we need to live. We need to be a thriving species.”
- “Never mind that we care about nature. I mean, our own sustainability is going down the drain. . . . We have reached the carrying capacity a long time [ago]. Now we’re going down, very quickly.”
- “[T]he hunters will tell you, ‘Oh, we’ve always been hunter-gatherers.’ Well, no. And it’s not what happened before but what is happening now. There’s no need now, in society, to do this kind of activity. ‘Cause it’s no longer necessary for survival.”
- “[F]rom the same family, you have your siblings who were brought up the same way under the same circumstances, same benefits, whatever, and they turn out to be completely different.”
- “A hierarchical system is a very exploitative system because it imposes it’s prejudging, it’s discriminatory.” “The point I’m to bring forward here is that they bring the excuse that, yes, it’s the system and it’s written in the Bible, right? . . . Well, how do we argue with that? Why do you believe that? Why does any single individual believe that? Because it’s self-serving.”
- “I still believe that there’s an element of empathy in peoples’ mind that, if given the opportunity, we will reject our current actions and try to do something better.”
- “And we are not here alone. We are not unique but we put a line or a division where we say, ‘Oh, this is us, people, humans, and everything else doesn’t count. ‘Cause the moment we do that, and we’ve done that, and we continue to do that, we create all these problems, environmental problems, social problems, political problems. . . . ‘Cause we fail to understand that they’re all the same. It’s a big living system. And with a living system, you have entities that represent the structure and function of different systems, all different organisms, and the diversity. It’s all connected. And the moment you remove one element, you are disrupting that system.”

interpretation

Marisa understands humans’ participation in life on this planet generally as being oppressive. Historically, we have, in the aggregate, been unkind to each other, to other life forms, and to the planet generally. Humans, for the most part, are greedy. We are greedy for power, wealth, and status. The effects of human greed overshadow our expressions of empathy. Greed even overpowers any survival instinct we might have. Overwhelmingly, humans satisfy short-term desires at the expense of long-term needs, our very survival as a species being the greatest need that we jeopardize. We are aware of this and, yet, on the whole, we maintain our destructive and suicidal course. Marisa believes that the pervasive attitude of superiority towards non-humans is the chief reason

that they suffer so badly at human hands. She denies the truth that some people substantiate on religious grounds or popular understandings of anthropology that humans *are* naturally superior in a hierarchical relationship with non-humans and all other elements of nature. Such claims are merely self-serving fictions. Instead, all living things are interconnected and there is no natural hierarchy. Each plant, insect, fish, and human is itself a living system that is interconnected with every other living thing and they together comprise an all-inclusive living system. There are no discrete, autonomous beings. There is no separation between humans and non-humans. There are, instead, diverse interconnected elemental living systems and the plight of one necessarily affects the plight of all. The same interconnectedness pertains among humans. There is no natural hierarchy among humans. Therefore, oppression among humans cannot be legitimized. Additionally, all of the different social injustices and abuses of nature are groundless and are interrelated through their serving of some human's or humans' selfish desires. Marisa believes, though, that the present oppressive state needn't persist. Humans are empathetic, as well as self-interested. She doesn't know why people are predisposed one way or another. But the fact that people can change, especially as the result of some deeply moving experience, gives her hope that we can participate with each other and the rest of nature more peacefully and fairly.

commodification/use of nature

- “[W]e all need to eat in order to survive. We need some of the resources.” “Granted, we need to live. We need to be a thriving species. And we have to consume some of the resources. But that does not mean that we have to destroy everything in the process.”
- “Well, look at politics. Well, the resources. They see animals as resources. They're there to be killed, to be hunted, for the pleasure of the sport, the sport of hunting.

How can anyone derive pleasure, killing another being? That's beyond, yes, that's beyond my understanding. And these hunters call themselves conservationists. It's conserving animals so that they have a ready supply of animals to be hunted." "I can understand, I mean, you have nothing else and that's your only means of survival. I can understand that. But this is not the case, here."

- "It's like the animals used in laboratory research, vivisection. They're seen as tools, scientific tools."
- "[T]he masses have been led to believe, well, that this is the way. You know, we need to clear the forests, have more jobs, right?"
- "So it was first through the concept of food, then understanding that to produce the animals used for food, the environment is being degraded and denuded, and destroyed which is not sustainable, not ecologically, economically, nor socially."
- "There are alternative sources without destroying complete habitats."

interpretation

Marisa objects to the use of resources beyond what we need to thrive as a species. Further, such use is "ecologically, economically, [and] socially" unsustainable. Even more, such use is abuse. It not only isn't necessary and sustainable; it is oppressive and cruel. The pain, fear, and distress that sentient beings experience are ignored or sometimes even measured or encouraged as they are forcefully used for research or sport. The supposedly higher goods that such activities serve are none other than short-term financial bottom lines of business and industry, political aspirations, and sadism. If this were not the case, the energy and creative thought that go into maximizing these goods would, instead, be directed towards the creation and development of sustainable and kind alternative means of ensuring the long-term, healthy survival of humans as well as of all other living things. The greater tragedy is that some of these means already exist and are known by those who nevertheless prefer to behave unsustainably and cruelly for their own personal gain. Animals and the rest of nature should not and need not be used this way.

Bernard (See Appendix 6 - Bernard, p. 192)

Bernard [not his real name] is an activist for social change in two social contexts, one imbedded within the other. The immediately obvious, imbedded context is our physical living situation – our environment. He believes that we are facing “the most severe environmental consequences of any era in the whole of existence apart from a few asteroids.” The other context is our present scientific paradigm that reflects the values and vision of its architects who lived some 500 years ago. Appropriate for its time, it is no longer so. It explicitly relegated spirituality to the inconsequential and that, together with its lack of a conception of a limited nature, created global environmental and sociopolitical problems. Bernard believes that we are entering a new paradigm that recognizes the twin evolutions of material and spirit or consciousness. But we must work at the evolution of the latter. Bernard’s activism and life project, that he undertakes primarily through writing and giving talks, are both to raise awareness of the seriousness of the global environmental problems that immediately confront us and to revitalize interest in our spiritual evolution. Our evolution towards a unified global consciousness, the new paradigm, will enable us to successfully negotiate our global future.

key phrases and statements, interpretations

problem/issue of concern

- “I’m *not* coming at my environmental activity in a defensive position. ‘Oh my god, we’ve got to save the forests. We’ve got to save the fish. We’ve got to save the ocean. It’s all falling apart.’ I’m coming at it from a visionary position, knowing how the world could be when we are beyond capitalism, beyond global corporations, managing the world as stewards in a whole new era of stewardship and beyond that into an evolutionary wholeness, with a unity of consciousness beyond culture, beyond race, beyond stuff we can’t even imagine.”

- “Drifting are people who just commute to work in their SUVs and just go on [being complacent] consumers. . . . They have to be *shaken* out of their [complacency].”
- “[*M*]y challenge is to get people thinking positively about [the global climate change problem].”
- “[T]here is] a really severe global urgency to stop the way we’re living at the moment because it’s having the most severe environmental consequences of any era in the whole of existence apart from a few asteroids.”
- “Climate change is a global problem. [P]ollution is a global problem. We’ve got to have global solutions to address these issues.” “You gotta *claim* globalization . . . and even more globalization.”

interpretation

Bernard works to instill in people serious concern about the catastrophic climate change that we are inducing through our unrestrained, materialistic lifestyles. If we don’t, en masse, drastically and immediately curtail our behavior to minimize, if not eliminate, our negative influence on our climate, we will continue to reduce the planet’s ability to sustain life such that, within decades, tens of thousands of species will become extinct and the lives of the planet’s remaining inhabitants will be increasingly jeopardized. There is no more perilous a risk to life on Earth than the present rate of climate change. Bernard believes, though, that, rather than taking a defensive stance against this already underway disaster, we have an opportunity to approach this situation as a challenge and with a globalized mind-set. Just as this global predicament could not have arisen in earlier times, neither can old-style thinking resolve it. We humans have entered a new era wherein we are global citizens, commonly responsible for the welfare of the planet as a whole. Only by embracing rather than resisting globalization, by giving rise to a “unity of consciousness”, can we proceed successfully through to the other side of this global dilemma. Thus, Bernard’s mission is twofold: to shake people into an awareness of the climate change crisis so that we can work together to avert it; and to

usher us into a new era of global citizenship, global consciousness, stewardship, and more.

epiphanies

- “I trace [my activist work] back to, I was, when I was at boarding school, I was on the receiving end of being bullied-about. And I trace *that* back to [that my father] and my mother were both [abandoned], two abandoned people coming together. So, it was issues in *their* marriage that caused things to go awry. And my two sisters and I ended up being sent off to orphanages for three months, so when I was three years old, which is a long time for a three year old. . . . It’s a pretty traumatic [experience].”
- “I *was* on the receiving end of bullying. And I *know* that that instinctively gave me sympathy for people on the receiving end [of] oppression. Just, it’s natural. The knowledge of having been there myself.”
- “So, my original drive was, ”Why is the world a mess?” I had inside me an instinct that the world was a total unity. And also an instinct that it had the potential for being an incredibly harmonious compassionate [place].”
- “And I had a love of nature, . . . I mean, just the diversity of nature. I just [had] been out having done Biology and I was just like amazed. . . . So, I was studying like, why are humans living in such conflict and most of nature seems to be getting along so peaceful? That was the way a 17 year old [thought]. And that’s what basically set me on my path.” By the time I was 21, I basically cracked the problem.”
- “[S]o my goal then was to express that clear vision of [my evolution theory, about how] spirit and matter interacted. I was unable to, had a publisher up to do a book on it. I had a grant to do it, all my own I was unable to do the book. I was too immature to do [it]. I was also unemployed because I had a car crash . . . I had a broken back, was hospitalized, I was off, out of the scene for a while and so, just go on with doing my evolutionary research and writing and was unemployed.”
- “And when I failed to write a great book on the whole of human evolution, a little voice said, ’Well, why don’t you try writing a book on the experiences of an unemployed person?’ Like, that’s what, you do *know* that. So, I did that. And it turned into my first book. And everything has been step-by-step-by-step, one bigger stage. And at some point, I took on the whole environment and now, I’m also, I’m constantly moving into new realms.”

interpretation

Bernard didn’t experience any great, momentous epiphany or turning-point in his life that suddenly compelled him to activism to save the world. Instead, he ‘traces’ his

course to activism back through a series of formative experiences in his young adulthood and back to his early childhood. Moreover, the experiences themselves weren't as significant in their own right as were his ongoing meditations on them and the world as he perceived it. By the time he was 17, Bernard's experiences as an occasionally abandoned and bullied child and his love of nature and his elementary knowledge of biology had already led him to conclude that humans lived in conflict whereas nature was peaceful. It wasn't enough just to know this, though. Bernard was interested in understanding how this came to be so that he might be able to discover a way out of this mess that we humans have made of the world. At age 21, he had "basically cracked the problem." But, owing to being "too immature" and despite having a grant and a waiting publisher, Bernard "failed to write a great book on the whole of human evolution." Instead, he wrote a more modest, different, book. And he continued on this way, "step-by-step-by-step," researching, turning out other books, 'taking on the whole environment', and expanding his interests into "other realms." Denzin calls this type of ongoing reflection and meditation on the "underlying tensions and problems" in one's life the 'minor' or 'illuminative' epiphany.⁸⁵ Bernard's activism emerged through his increasingly explicit desire to bring about social changes that his research and meditations showed were possible.

concept of self and world view

- "I perceive that all social and critical change [is] part of an evolutionary process towards greater wholeness."
- "[T]he society we have is a reflection of our consciousness and not the other way around. This is the opposite to Marxism."

⁸⁵ Ibid., 37, 146.

- “[The Enlightenment] dream turns into an ecological nightmare for today’s [world]. So, you see, my dream may turn into a spiritual nightmare, some other kind of nightmare for a hundred years ahead.”
- “[T]he goal is to be more compassionate and more understanding all the time. So, in that sense, there is an evolution happening towards [that]. . . . [W]hat’s driving it is this fundamental evolutionary process within all of us. Every human I’ve ever met in my entire life only has positive ideals.”
- “I just steer myself around troublesome relationships. And it’s partly because my whole direction is based on serving the planet, people, planet, and species, serving an unfolding vision of what the planet can be. And it’s my experience is that, if you try to seek happiness, you never find it. ‘Cause that’s a selfish motivation. The only way to get happiness is to seek the happiness of others. Then it comes along and sits on your shoulder like a little bird.”
- [In opposition to this are] "people who primarily cannot get beyond their desire to their personal gain. . . . The whole Alliance Party, now the Conservative Party, seems to be just set on this thing that we need to have less taxes, less government services, more private gain. . . . It's all selfish, selfish, selfish."
- “[T]he desire for freedom came out of oppression.”
- “[E]liminating homelessness should be seen at the level as abolishing slavery. . . . [T]hose are fundamental steps we took – abolishing slavery, stopping child labor, being able to have a trade union. . . . To me that’s an evolutionary process. The paradox is that scientists, if you’re a proper scientist and you defer to proper neo-Darwinian orthodox theory of evolution, all that stuff is totally irrelevant, meaningless, random rubbish. ‘Cause there’s no evolution in the past 100,000 years. . . . I do believe [cultural evolution] *is* part of the evolutionary process. But the evolution continues at the level of consciousness, once it’s got the material level stable, like our bodies and our brains.”
- “I totally rejoice in my evolutionary connection to all species. . . . I just find it amazing to look at another animal and I’ve got the, my claws, my two eyes, and two nostrils, a skull . . . the more you look, the more we’re the same. Then the genetic information just backs that up. . . . So we have a *total* affinity.”
- “[I]t was very recently when the belief was animals couldn’t feel any pain. They had no feeling at all. . . . And you gotta think, ‘How cut off from your instincts are you to have thought?’ Of course they feel pain. Of course they have consciousness. Of course they feel, you know, we’re all part of the same, we *evolved* from them. “
- “[T]o separate yourself from the animal world means you can think humans are better. . . . There’s almost a *deeper* level of self-esteem from our definition of who we are as humans, aside from whom I am as me, Bernard.”
- “[W]e have not made a connection with driving and climate change. . . . That’s the same as people with slaves not seeing outside the slaving worlds, or the people or the beaver hunters, you know, can’t see outside of beaver hunting. So, in that sense, it’s an evolution of our rational understanding have always has limits. And it takes shocks to get us beyond.”
- “And I think we’ll evolve beyond eating meat.”

- “[W]ar will be eliminated. . . . It’s because we’ll realize that I just, you can have so much more happier life cooperating with your neighbors on stable, agreed boundaries we’re constantly pushing and fighting at.”
- “But I’m proposing that the whole material basis of scientific thinking, founded in the fifteen hundreds, is itself a paradigm And the hidden assumptions of our scientific paradigm have it, anything you cannot touch or measure is not part of the picture. . . . I *do* believe that there is a spiritual existence outside of matter. I *do* believe that this is there’s a spirit that leaves the body and can exist [separately]. . . . I have experienced this stuff. It’s not belief. It’s like based on knowledge. It means knowing rather than scientific knowledge. It’s knowing which is a different knowledge. . . . It’s experiential knowing, yes. And that is *fact*.”

interpretation

The most important feature of Bernard’s world view is that we are both spiritual and material beings whose respective evolutions are not only not necessarily connected, but also operate through two different mechanisms. Whereas biological evolution operates as Darwin described it, through adaptation (and mutation), spiritual evolution or evolution of the consciousness must be worked at. During the past four hundred years or so, the pre-eminence of science has relegated to irrelevance that which science explicitly brackets off, namely things spiritual. Consequently, our spiritual selves have been virtually neglected while we have focussed on making marvelous and extraordinary technological advances and have constructed an increasingly globalized society, complete with a diversity of negative global consequences, chiefly: pronounced climate change. The Enlightenment progenitors of this society could not have foreseen the ecological downside of their vision. The evolutionary state of consciousness in that era was appropriate for freeing people from the oppressive grip of aristocratic and papal rule. But it is inappropriate for today’s world. Consciousness, Bernard explains, evolves from 'selfish'ness towards greater wholeness and it is precisely a unity of consciousness among those who are alive today that is required to resolve our global problems. Animals and

all other living things are included in this unity of consciousness, as well. The differences there are between the species are less significant than the similarities. After all, we are evolving together and we can trace our lineage back to the same root. The notion of a hierarchy among species is a remnant of the orthodox science paradigm and the superseded paradigms before it. Further, oppression is borne out of the hierarchical separation of things and this is opposite to the trajectory of spiritual evolution. This is why moving into this new paradigm is so important. Oppressions and “ecological nightmares” cannot be negated by the mindsets that created them. The more compassionate and empathetic attitudes that would prevail in the world in Bernard’s vision would bring about greater freedom through the virtual absence of oppression and would resolve the global ecological problems that were previously unimaginable.

commodification/use of nature

- "I own property which is a pretty good way to be free." "[P]rivate property ownership is the very bastion of freedom against oppression." "Property-owning is freedom."
- "[A]s soon as scarcity arises, ownership arises."
- "[T]o separate yourself from the animal world means you can think humans are better. 'We're *not* just animals.'"
- "The impulse at the moment is to commodify everything, everything, our genes, everything. And so, there has to be a strong counter impulse. . . . A piece of land comes up for sale. It's a beautiful area. It's got Garry Oak trees on it. And developers are saying, 'Let's have it. I can make some money off it.' And the environmental community has to rally round quickly and raise \$600,000 to buy it, the public good, get their money into a trust that's forever public. It will never be commodified again. . . . Works well, works fabulously. 'Cause otherwise, [the] developer will come along [and] privatize it, cut it all up."
- "Kahil Gilbran, the Lebanese prophet, . . . says really clearly, 'Your children are not your children. They're the arrows of time.' . . . You've got a free individual. In that sense, if you have an animal, whether as a farmer or as a, you know, pet owner, you *choose* to become a steward of that animal's life."
- "I'm personally vegetarian. Although I do use milk, so I'm not full vegan, . . ."

- [T]hrough the whole of humanity, as soon as we left the hunter-gatherer and the pastoralist age, when there was no need for ownership because there was a surplus of everything, we didn't [need] to sell it, you just got, took some more. And even then we had traders. . . . And the only thing we're not trading [now] is the air."

interpretation

The terms 'commodification' and 'nature' are too blunt to use to relate Bernard's view with respect to the commodification of nature. Depending upon what are considered commodities and the motivations for making them such, he may or may not object to their ownership, sale, or trade. He acknowledges that the concepts of property and ownership arise naturally in conditions of scarcity. He himself owns land and he considers land ownership, generally, to be "the very bastion of freedom against oppression." He objects, though, to greed, to the selling or trading of things merely for the selfish pursuit of profit-taking. He applauds efforts to protect land from such pursuits. Some things, though, ought not to be commodities. Bernard uses the extreme example of children to make his point. One ought not to consider that one owns one's children or, worse, that children can be bought, sold, or traded. And despite Kahlil Gibran's admonishment of the practise, they are still traded commodities. Of course, neither should any other human be a commodity. Nor should any other animal be a commodity. Bernard doesn't hierarchically differentiate between humans and other animals. All of us animals are evolving together, including at the level of consciousness. It is our obligation, therefore, and to the extent that we interfere with the other animals' normal and free ways of life, that we look after them, be their stewards, and not to profit from them or otherwise use them to our advantage.

5. ECO-SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISTS – RECURRING FEATURES

In this chapter, I examine the interpretations just presented. Following Denzin, I “[i]nspect [those] meanings [as interpreted] for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon.”⁸⁶ My aim here is to gain an understanding of the meaning(s) that these activists, as individuals and, more generally, as a group, give to their world(s), to others with whom they coexist, and to their relationships with those others. First, I investigate their common understandings and then their activist formations and practises.

Common Understandings

As we have learned, despite that these eco-social justice activists' lives and their foci of concern are unique, they all generally agree on many points and they are all concerned with preserving or protecting some aspect of the Earth's ecology. Their concerns include humans, but their focus is on non-humans. They are known as and self-identify as environmental activists. However, they all at least implicitly acknowledge that environmentalism, animal rights, social justice, and peace issues are interrelated. A compilation of their common understandings and significant, unique features of their world views is on Table 1.

The overarching common understanding among these activists is that humans are damaging the Earth. As a species, they believe, we are using the Earth's resources unsustainably and oppressively and are destroying Earth's ecology. The activists are committed to minimizing or altogether stopping the negative consequences of human

⁸⁶ Denzin, 76.

table 1
ECO-SOCIAL JUSTICE PROPONENTS
Essential, Recurring Features of the Phenomenon
COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS

<i>Janine</i>	<i>Ingmar</i>
focus of concern	
advocates that we all live sustainably so that all living things have an opportunity to evolve spiritually over countless lifetimes	defends the forests, especially the majestic old-growth forests, from destruction at the hands of the selfish, corporate logging industry and the government that supports it
key beliefs/assumptions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - life is a learning experience - each living thing is a spirit/energy - all living things are interconnected in spirit/energy, yet each is unique - karmic reincarnation facilitates justice and spiritual evolution - there is no natural hierarchy - the notion of hierarchy is unnecessary for survival - political and corporate institutions are corrupted by power and profit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ingmar is an atheist - everything is a "buzzing mass of subatomic particles"; humans are self-aware particle masses - there is an evolving "collective human consciousness" - human hedonism inflicts suffering on and alienates us from nature - multinational corporations and the neoliberal globalization movement are complicit in destroying nature
opinion on the commodification of nature	
<i>(def. - valuing nature as a resource to exploit for financial gain)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we should use only what we need to survive and, even then, that should be democratically weighed against the needs of the 'resource' - dislikes the commodification of nature but, given that we live in a world with money, sees no mainstream alternative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no harm whatsoever should be inflicted upon the Earth's ecosystem - animal food production should cease - otherwise, the economic use of nature is ok (e.g., state-of-art forestry is ok, but not of old growth)

table 1 (continued)
ECO-SOCIAL JUSTICE PROPONENTS
Essential, Recurring Features of the Phenomenon
COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS

<i>Marisa</i>	<i>Bernard</i>
focus of concern	
objects to the suffering and harm that humans selfishly inflict upon Earth's living things and upon the natural environment itself	works to encourage us to spiritually evolve to usher in a new era of global consciousness and stewardship that is necessary to address global problems such as the catastrophic climate change that we are exacerbating
key beliefs/assumptions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all living things are interconnected living systems together comprising an all-inclusive living system - all living things are interdependent - there is no natural hierarchy - the notion of hierarchy is self-serving - powerful industry, government, and conglomerates are interested only in acquiring money regardless of the consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all living things are physically and spiritually interconnected - we evolve both physically and spiritually, but must work at the latter, to evolve towards an all-inclusive wholeness - selfishness in conservative govts. and individuals works against this - there is no natural hierarchy - the notion of hierarchy leads to oppression and the lack of freedom
opinion on the commodification of nature	
<i>(def. - valuing nature as a resource to exploit for financial gain)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we should not use nature beyond that what we need to thrive as a species - any use of nature should aim for a sustainable, healthy ecology and kindness to all living things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the ownership, trade, or sale of things is ok except for mere profit-taking which is selfish and wrong - neither humans nor any other animal should be considered as property or a commodity - envisions future without capitalism - we should be nature's stewards

behavior and each focuses on the particular range of oppressions or harm that most concerns him/her.

Underlying these people's common concern for the environment is their belief that all living things, at least, are interconnected and, so, are interdependent. For Ingmar and Marisa, the connection is physical: Ingmar's "buzzing masses of subatomic particles" and Marisa's 'living systems within a big living system'. Ingmar, an atheist, believes also, that there is a "collective human consciousness". Bernard, too, believes that we are interconnected both physically and through our consciousness, though he equates consciousness with a spirituality that exists independently of the physical. Janine believes that all living things are interconnected as spirit beings that, through reincarnation, inhabit innumerable physical bodies, one at a time, forever. Yet, however interconnected and interdependent these activists believe that we are, they all also agree that we are all unique beings.

Relatedly, all share the belief, implied, in Ingmar's case, that there is no hierarchy in nature. Theirs is not only a normative stance. They deny that there is a naturally occurring hierarchy in nature. In nature, everything is equal in value and importance. Consistently, none of these activists are deists. All would likely agree with Marisa's view that the positing of a hierarchy is self-serving. All see no natural justification for humans to dominate any element of nature, including other humans, and nature itself. While each of these activists is drawn to some particular eco-social injustice or predicament, as they understand it, they all recognize that they are a part of the same overarching social

movement. In fact, all four occasionally contribute to and/or are referenced, as cohorts, on the Peace, Earth, & Justice web site.⁸⁷

Another view that they share in common is, generally, that government and big business are enemies of nature. Their views are nuanced, but the activists generally agree that provincial and federal governments, at least, and big corporations, especially the multinationals, are preoccupied with jointly implementing their neo-liberal regime to accumulate ever more power and wealth and care little, if at all, about the negative consequences of their actions and programs. And the consequences are dire, the activists believe. To Ingmar, they are the 'evil, despicable destroyers' of the old-growth forests. Bernard says that their collective mindset is "selfish, selfish, selfish" and is opposite to the spiritual evolution towards wholeness that is needed to resolve the global problems that their way of thinking brought about. Marisa blames them for allowing their greed to cause so much suffering in nature. Janine believes their dominance in society is undemocratic and environmentally unsustainable.

Relatedly, the activists have views generally in common concerning the commodification of nature,⁸⁸ though there are some differences among them. None question the acceptance of the practise of commodification which is, of course, an inherent feature of capitalism. Bernard did express his hope that we would, one day, move beyond capitalism, a move that would make the concept of commodification nonsensical. All agree that the use of natural 'resources' ought to be sustainable and, so,

⁸⁷ <http://pej.ca>

⁸⁸ Again, for this project, the 'commodification of nature' refers to valuing nature as a resource to exploit for financial gain.

be greatly reduced from the present, unsustainable rate of use. All also agree that resources ought to be used more respectfully.

The differences in the activists' views lay in what they feel are acceptable degrees of use and on what may and may not be considered commodities. What accounts for the differences seem to be variances in the types and intensities of relationships between the activists' subjects of concern and the practise of the commodifying nature. As far as Ingmar is concerned, old growth forests should not be considered commodities. Period. Nor, ideally, should animals be used even for food, let alone as a commodity. Otherwise, so long as no harm is inflicted upon the Earth's ecological system, Ingmar doesn't explicitly oppose commodifying nature. Bernard's main environmental concern, climate change, is only indirectly connected to trade and is more of an effect of, among other things, *how* trade is done (i.e., irresponsibly) than it is of *what* trade is done. Similarly, he is generally favorable, conditionally, towards commodifying nature. Though, again, he is concerned with *how* it is done. Trading in nature for profit alone is unacceptable. Marisa, too, is more concerned with the how, than with the fact of commodifying nature. For her, it is most important that any use of nature is done with kindness, without harm or suffering, and sustainably. Janine would severely limit the use of nature. Any use of any living thing, especially if it results in its death, interferes with the ability of its associated spirit-being to evolve. Even inanimate objects have a right to exist undisturbed. We should, therefore, use nature only enough to ensure our survival. But given that we live in a world in which money exists, she says, she doesn't see a mainstream alternative to assessing value to things that we use. Some commodification is inevitable.

All of these views leave some, but greatly reduced, room for the commodification of nature. That term, though, seems incongruent with these activists' general position. In their ideal worlds, and more so in some than in others, in which would perhaps prevail the notion that we are participants in nature and not separate from it, the concept of commodification would be nonsensical.

Another common understanding among these four activists is the limit to the equality that they profess exists in nature. While all four activists would have us significantly minimize our ecological footprint, even if to varying degrees, none question the necessity of our survival. In fact, Ingmar and Bernard expressed their belief that we will somehow find a way to survive far into the future, though not necessarily without grief along the way. Marisa and Janine explicitly assumed that we *must* survive. The limits of equality within nature are reached, it seems, at the point of the survival of our species. Millions of species have gone extinct, without our help. Likely few, if any, of them consciously tried to survive forever and, apparently, none of them needed to survive. Absolute equality, it seems to me, would force us to recognize that we also don't need to survive. We, being self-aware, merely want to. These four activists, though, variously commented that some minimal use of 'resources' is necessarily allowable for human survival, indicating that their desire for our species to survive is greater than their desire for other species to survive.

Activist Formations and Practises

Each of the four activists told quite different stories of the turning-point moments or epiphany experiences in their lives that set them on their present and unique, though

similarly intentioned, activist paths. Table 2 outlines the characteristics and effects of those experiences. As different as the activists' experiences are from each other, they share a number of characteristics.

First among these characteristics is that the life-changing experiences actually occurred. All of the activists identified certain experiences that they believe were responsible, in great part, for their becoming activists. The number and types of experiences differ widely, among the group, yet each person was unequivocal about the significance of their experiences. Perhaps some other activists might have had difficulty recalling pertinent life-changing moments, their activism being the only future available to them, such as through a strong family tradition. Perhaps some other activists somehow just 'fall into' their activism as one might 'fall into' his/her profession or career. But not these four people. They all attribute their activism to certain life-changing experiences or epiphanies.

Another significant commonality among these experiences is that they center on some aspect of life that the individual considers to not just contrast with her/his preferences, but contrast negatively. That is, the epiphany experience was not a good news experience. Through the experience, the individual became aware of some aspect of life that s/he preferred wasn't so. A third characteristic common to the epiphany experiences is that the unpreferred aspects of life of which the individual became aware concern the well-being of others. For these activists, the 'others' variously include beings and even non-living things. While these activists each tend to focus on certain groups or even systems of 'others', such as Ingmar's forests and Bernard's climate, they are all concerned with the well-being of all 'others', including other humans. Thus, while they

table 2
ECO-SOCIAL JUSTICE PROPONENTS
Essential, Recurring Features of the Phenomenon
EPIPHANY EXPERIENCES

<i>Janine</i>	<i>Ingmar</i>
characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a series of "awakenings" or "realizations" that she experienced throughout her adult life after embarking on a quest to learn what was 'missing in her life' - noticed contradictions between what she has been led/told to believe and her own experience - learned facts that are not widely known (e.g., more resources needed to raise cattle than to raise crops) - experienced alternative ways of living that appeal to her - learned of the oppressive and unsustainable strain that individuals and humanity put on the Earth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - earliest memories are of 'being in the wilderness' - continued and repeated experiences in the wilderness, through his tree-planting career and as a lifestyle, led him to "recognize the scale of devastation . . . out there" - experiences the wilderness as a "participant" and not as "an alien" - motivates and nourishes himself by 'steeping' in "the magnificence of being in primeval wilderness" - was overcome by realization that people already know the facts but lack the empathy and fortitude to deviate from their hedonistic ways
effect	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - doesn't believe mainstream media - doesn't trust our leaders - developed a set of values that differs from that 'given' in society - developed concern for humans and non-humans who are oppressed - incrementally changed lifestyle to minimize her 'ecological footprint' and to question/criticize status quo - motivated to encourage others to do the same 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experiences the devastation to the wilderness as if to himself - spends as much time as possible - weeks/months - in the wilderness - uncompromising in his mission to save the old growth forests; is unallied to environmental orgs. that deal/compromise with industry and government - dedicated to saving the forests and encourages others to do the same
activist practise	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - informs and raises awareness via media (esp. newspaper, radio, web) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - engages in direct action protests; talks and writings appeal to emotions

table 2 (continued)
ECO-SOCIAL JUSTICE PROPONENTS
Essential, Recurring Features of the Phenomenon
EPIPHANY EXPERIENCES

<i>Marisa</i>	<i>Bernard</i>
characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as a child, recognized oppression, racial discrimination, and animal cruelty as being morally wrong - at 18, was 'shocked' to learn of the cruelty in slaughterhouses, the shock having a profound, immediate and life-long influence on her life - "a gradual process of awakening and understanding and implementing change within myself" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as a child, experienced oppression first hand (being bullied) - by 17, perceived that "the world is a mess," that humans live in conflict whereas most of nature gets along peacefully - by 21, had "cracked the problem" - felt need to express his theory - injury and immaturity forced him to undertake more research and writing, "step-by-step-by-step, one bigger stage" eventually taking on "the whole environment" and "into new realms"
effect	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - incrementally changed lifestyle to minimize the harm to humans, animals, and to nature generally - understands that human greed is the underlying cause of suffering among humans and nature - believes that many people will change their behavior once they learn of its harmful effects - motivated to change human behavior to be kinder to each other and nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lifelong view that humans have made a mess of the world and that he must understand why and explain to others so that we may be better stewards and not oppressors of nature - developed a theory of spiritual evolution, a realization that we are in a paradigm transition to a global consciousness/spirituality needed to resolve global problems - motivated to share this knowledge
activist practise	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - informs and raises awareness via written media; engages in protests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - informs and raises awareness via media (books, web), talks, seminars

self-identify as environmentalists, they all believe that environmental, social justice, and peace issues are interrelated. If there are environmentalists who are concerned with only non-human nature, who may even be misanthropes, they are not among this group.

A sort of negative commonality among the epiphany experiences that the activists identified is that there is nothing about them that explains why the four people were compelled to action. Some other people with the same experiences might take little or no notice of them. Others who would reflect on them and on the society and world in which they live and who might even find themselves concerned with the well-being of the 'others' in question might not be moved to change things for the better. Only a relative few people would turn to activism. The experiences don't themselves explain the different behaviors. Nor do the individuals' backgrounds, though one might reasonably expect them to have some influence. Not everybody who shared these activists' early backgrounds became activists. Likely, the causes of such diverse behaviors have to do with a combination of personal experiences, reflexivity, genetics, culture, and individuals' will or agency, and are beyond the scope of this thesis to consider.

A final commonality concerning the activists' epiphany experiences is their similarity to the activists' practises of activism. Janine's life is all about learning. Life is a learning experience; she was/is on a quest to learn what lies beyond the obvious. She educates people through a variety of media. Both Ingmar's connection with nature and his epiphany experience are centered on emotion. He emphatically eschews the idea that education is the solution. He directs his activist energies to people's emotions, to their (dormant) love of nature. Marisa's epiphany experience was a sort of hybrid learning and emotional experience. Her innate empathy was heightened with her shocking learning

experience. She informs people of how their behavior oppresses and harms nature and she presents them with options, hoping that their emotional responses will move them to choose kinder behavior. Bernard's activist method is educating – through books, other media, and talks. He describes his epiphany experience as a series of youthful intellectual explorations of social problems that he eventually published. In this way, he and the other activists link their epiphanies with their activism.

The significance of this observation is that these four people seem to try to share the essence of their epiphany experience with others who don't have the benefit of a similar experience. Of course, any epiphany, by definition, has both an emotional and intellectual component to it. Presumably, the same holds true for any form of activism. There seems to be here, though, a sameness between how these activists experienced their epiphanies and how they try to share the fruit of those experiences with others. But another characteristic of the epiphany is that, also by definition, it packs enough punch to alter one's life. These activists try to achieve the same impact with lesser means. Not coincidentally, then, did three of them say that it takes 'shocks', 'catalysts', or "something [that] affects them personally, and very deeply" to get people to change.

There are differences among the participants' understandings that are worth discussing, as well. For example, while all of these individuals believe that all things or, at least, all living things, are interconnected, they don't all agree on the details of that interconnection. Janine and Bernard explicitly declare that we are connected spiritually, as well as physically. Ingmar is an atheist, though he believes in a collective human consciousness, as does Bernard, as well. During the interview, Marisa seemed to

downplay the notion of a spiritual connection and, instead, emphasized her belief that we are living systems within an all-inclusive living system.⁸⁹

Another significant difference is that, even as Bernard thinks that to "separate yourself from the animal world" is arrogant, only he introduced the idea that humans ought to be stewards of the Earth. Stewards are in charge or, at least, are in control, a notion that implies the imposition and/or acceptance of a hierarchical relationship. This contrasts with a world in which all are no more than co-participants in relation to one another and, so, is devoid of a natural hierarchy. Similarly, only Bernard champions property ownership, provided that the trade of property does not involve mere profit-taking. Janine opposes the private ownership of anything that has a survival stake in it for some being. Ingmar and Marisa didn't address the notion of property ownership.

All of these and other differences of details of beliefs and opinions reflect the reality that nobody's world view is completely internally consistent nor aligned with some posited ideology or philosophy.⁹⁰ Drawing from Derrida, no concept is conceived in isolation. Ideas are formed in relation to one another and are dynamic. Not only, then, would it be impossible for any two people's world views to be identical, for even a moment; it would also be impossible that any person's world view doesn't somehow reflect all the world views of which that person has ever been aware. I will say more

⁸⁹ Marisa acknowledged her acceptance of a spiritual aspect of existence only after I raised the possibility. She then immediately moved to a different subject. I didn't present this brief exchange in the statements/interpretations chapter.

⁹⁰ I'm not suggesting that Bernard's 'connected with but stewards of' understanding of the human relationship with non-humans is necessarily inconsistent. He may have a common logic to both ideas. Yet, while this logic might not be entirely consistent with that of the other eco-social justice activists in this study, neither are their views entirely internally or 'intranally' consistent. Their views are all consistent enough, however, that the individuals view themselves and are viewed by others as environmental activists and don't mind my labelling them as eco-social justice activists.

about this in chapter 8. People's world views are similar to or different than each other's by degree. The differences among the world views of the four eco-social justice activists and, indeed, among the radical freedom activists, are less significant than the similarities that I use to group those individuals together.

Summary

Having now identified and examined significant recurring elements of the meanings that the four eco-social justice activists give to their lives, to others, and to their relationships with others, here is a summary of my observations.

1. All believe that humans are somehow interconnected with each other and with other living things. This goes beyond social connections. The connections are at the level of consciousness, spirituality, or energy. In addition, two of the activists posited that there are interconnections at the atomic and biological levels.
2. The individual, human or otherwise, is nevertheless a unique, self-determined being.
3. Three of the activists (not Marisa) explicitly posited spiritual evolution (Janine and Bernard) or the evolution of a shared human consciousness (Ingmar and Bernard).
4. Consistent with our interconnectedness, all reject that there is a hierarchy in nature, inclusive of humans (though Bernard's advocacy of stewardship seems inconsistent with his own view that we are connected with other animals).
5. All species, beings, and individuals are, therefore, equal in nature. There is no 'super' natural deity.
6. There is, therefore, no legitimate basis for domination or oppression.
7. There is one exception to points 4 through 6: the human desire to survive is understood, by all four activists, to supersede the desire of any and all 'resources' to survive, including any constructed desire that we attribute to those beings or things that can't speak for themselves.
8. Environmentalism, animal rights, social justice, and peace issues are all interrelated.
9. The corporate world and governments are major oppressors of nature.
10. The chief, real-world implication and message of all of the above points is that humans need to drastically reduce our ecological footprint and give our co-participants in nature and nature itself the same respect that we give to our favorite humans.
11. Concerning the commodification of nature, it is unavoidable, given our capitalist economic system, but can and should be considerably curtailed.
12. The activists attribute, in great part, their activism to certain epiphany experiences or epiphanies in their lives.

13. Their epiphany experiences brought into relief aspects of life that they would prefer were not the case.
14. These aspects of life concern the well-being of others, the others including humans, non-humans, and nature itself.
15. The activists' epiphany experiences don't explain the compulsion to act.
16. The activists' epiphany experiences are similar in nature to the methods that the respective activists use to try to bring about social change.
17. The differences among the world views of the four activists are less significant than their similarities, at least with respect to their self-identification as and by others' perception of them as environmental activists.

Having now examined my interpretations of the eco-social justice activists' statements, I now turn to the statements provided by the radical freedom activists.

6. FREEDOM ACTIVISTS' ACCOUNTS: INTERPRETATIONS

In this chapter, I introduce the four radical freedom activists and present their accounts or stories of key aspects of their lives as activists and my interpretations of those accounts. I do this in the same manner as I did with the eco-social justice activists, in chapter 4. Likewise, I provide lengthier and more in-depth representations of these activists, using their own words and language, as much as possible, in Appendix 7.

Here are the radical freedom activists' accounts and my interpretations of them.

Corey Stanchfield (See Appendix 7 - Corey, p. 197)

Corey works to help people free themselves from living as slaves. He realized that he was a 'slave', one day in his early adulthood, when he learned that he was forced to give more than half of his hard-earned wages to the government. On that day, he vowed to find a way to become free of 'slavery' to the government. For some years, he researched and experimented with a variety of schemes, but none fit well with his Judeo-Christian-based morality. Along the way, he learned that dishonest and irresponsible government, the corrupt corporate world, and banks jointly manipulate and control us by coercing us into myriad contracts through which we relinquish responsibility for and control over our lives, in exchange for being cared for and pampered. Ultimately, we become complacent, mentally numbed 'slaves' who contribute the greater part of our energy and lives to our masters. Eventually, Corey learned that we may extricate ourselves from those contracts through the Canadian Constitution's recognition of the supremacy of God and that God has granted each of us the right of individual freedom.

Corey now educates people about how they are 'enslaved' and helps them to take steps to become free, just as he is doing.

key phrases and statements, interpretations

problem/issue of concern

- “[M]y particular activism is founded on the essence of . . . what does the truth say? What does statute say? What does this country have to absolutely obligate me to do as an individual?”
- “People would be economically rewarded and still be depressed inside who do not have the spiritual connection.”
- “[Ideally,] where a custom or principle or some sort of religious sect collided with godly Judeo-Christian principles, the Judeo-Christian principles would supersede everything else for the *benefit* of society.”
- “Sabbath is not honored. Freedom of speech is obviously transferred over into the aspect of being able to say blaspheming things. Covetedness is definitely not looked on because the you look at the TV and the commercials and everything else. So, slowly, it’s eroding. The aspect of marriage has been already eroding. Honoring thy parents. Kids are right now just doing what they want and telling the parents to go, you know, screw themselves. . . . What I’m saying is that you can see how the degradation of the foundations of truth have been eroded away and the just opposed action that’s causing a society [to deteriorate]. Abortions are legal.”
- “[T]here is a little bit of an illusion being portrayed on [people], . . . taxes. It goes into health care. It goes into everything else, law and everything else. . . . they’ll see that the media, the manipulation of media and the biases, how there’s a focussed agenda to push people . . . [towards] a one-world government, what have you.”
- “You know, you take this country like Canada and most people are being taxed 40% or more, plus service charges and all these other, there’s 160 some-odd taxes seen and hidden. . . . And it behooves me to see why a country so small as it is, population-wise, but on a resource aspect, we’re so wealthy, but the people suffer.”
- “I’m going down a road to try and change policy and focus; I can see myself getting in a little bit more involved with the courts and in forcing certain institutions to change their policies. I’m not talking so much government. Banks . . . they’re beasts. Their focus is profit. There’s no concern for the person.”
- “[W]e’re looking under the individual right to travel, domestically, right now and maybe nationally, where we should be able [to] have the right to travel without getting permission with licenses and registration, whatever. . . . ‘Cause travel is a right, not a privilege. . . . So, we’re going to be looking at the freedom of travel and see where that goes.”

interpretation

Corey is concerned with two issues. One issue is the general lack, in our society and around the world, of awareness of and concern for the truth as laid out in the Judeo-Christian Biblical scriptures. Concern for the truth and the godly principles that guide how we ought to live have long been eroding. Commitment to educate our young and others who are not yet aware of the truth has similarly been eroding. Everywhere around him, Corey sees signs of decaying values and the ignoring and even denial of spiritual concerns or obligations. The most obvious sign that Corey sees is the prevailing unhappiness. One can attain true happiness only when one is aware of and lives according to the foundational truth, as presented in the scriptures. Corey's other concern is the 'slavery' to the government and banks into which virtually all Canadians have been duped. We have been and continue to be maliciously led to believe that we are free citizens, while we are not. We are obligated to obey laws, respect treaties, regularly pay huge sums of money to the government and its agents, and otherwise involuntarily serve others and restrict our behavior, all at the risk of facing financial penalties or imprisonment if we resist, and all without our informed consent. This is all the more personal to Corey because this 'slavery' is instituted through legal devices that deviate from the godly principles upon which Canada's Constitution was founded.

epiphanies

- “Ok, it started when I was, I guess I was young. I was, my thinking always said, when someone said, ‘No,’ there was always a way. . . . I was one of those guys that didn't know *how* to but knew that there had to be another way.”
- “I was making thirty bucks an hour and I remember working two weeks when I first went there I was a T4 wage earner. . . . I got my T4 check. I put 90 hours in, no 180 hours in in two weeks. And I think I grossed something like 58 or 59 hundred bucks.

... I was 21, 22. It was quite a bit of money, right? And I remember looking at my check and I was left with like 24 hundred dollars. And that was my epiphany. Because right then I felt like I was violated. ... And to me, I looked at the check and I actually said this to myself, 'Corey, this is [the] cost of ignorance, right there. And every paycheck is going to be like that. It's ... staring you in the face. You *must do* something about this.' ... [T]he harder I work, the more I was penalized for it. And there's no way, if you want to get ahead of this system, that you can continually do that. And I avowed that I'd find a way."

- "So, I was destined to go see [Russ' of Paradigm Education Group] information. I went there, listened to the information and that was my second epiphany. Because all the information I learned about taxes and everything else ... wasn't incorrect but there's a still foundation aspect because in my heart of hearts, I knew it was wrong. . . . And Russ, to me was the angel putting the pieces of the puzzle down before me and they were connecting so beautifully. And I started to see it and, without a doubt, I didn't need anyone to tell me that he was right. ... And I remember going up to Russ and saying, 'I don't care what it takes. I want to be a part of this organization. ... I want to teach this stuff. I'm driven.' ... [A]nd I thought, 'This was the Achilles heel. ... We understand how the system works and now we can take advantage of that and start freeing this country from its economic slavery.'"

interpretation

Corey experienced two of what Denzin calls 'major epiphanies' wherein "an experience shatters a person's life, making it never the same again."⁹¹ Denzin's description, through the use of the word 'shatters', connotes the experience to be a negative one. That was certainly the case for Corey's first epiphany. But his second epiphany was a very positive experience for him. Also, the second epiphany was the response or solution to the problem revealed by the first epiphany. The problem was, of course, that he had been forced to hand over more than half of his hard-earned wages to governments and programs through arrangements of which he was an involuntary participant either through ignorance or coercion. Not being one to suffer control well and immediately recognizing that his disadvantage was his lack of the correct knowledge, Corey embarked on a quest to find that knowledge through which he would gain his

⁹¹ Ibid., 37, 145.

financial freedom. After some years of researching and testing, with mixed results, he was finally fated to receive, in a glorious moment, the knowledge that perfectly fit his needs. So perfect was the fit that he felt an affinity with the organization, Paradigm, that provided him with the knowledge. Further, the knowledge is consistent with and based upon the foundational truth of the scriptures, even if the teaching of that particular aspect of the truth is outside of Paradigm's mandate. Finally, through Paradigm, Corey can help to undertake more research and testing to produce more knowledge that can be passed on to others to help them maximize their freedom.

concept of self and world view

- "I'm a human being. Flesh and blood. . . . I'm an individual who really feels that freedom is the essence and foundation of everything."
- "We all have duties and responsibilities."
- "[N]o, I don't believe we're interconnected at all. I believe that we're created for a sole purpose and that sole purpose is to conform to the image of Jesus, to make through with the salvation of Jesus Christ and I believe that everything here on this planet has been created for our purposes and our enjoyment, as per Genesis."
- "Some would argue that we're all carbon and we're just different DNA . . . and you know, whatever. But I don't see us as just a bunch of random, slapped together, you know, matter. I do believe I see a creator and I see designs. And I can't ignore it. Okay?"
- "There's slaves and there's [free people]. And some will definitely be slaves and some . . . and it's by choice."
- "[H]umanity is lazy and they will abuse everything they can get."
- "There's people who can't work and that's . . . the hard fact of life that, you know, there is, obviously have to be some support system."
- "[To] me, it seems like the social activists are extremists. You know you can't even shit in the bush without causing ecological damage for millions and millions of years. . . . I don't know enough about it to comment fully other than the fact is that . . . there definitely needs to be a balance. Everything has to be balanced. . . . You can't go extreme one way or the other. You can't go extreme sovereign. You can't go extreme socialistic. You have to find a middle road somewhere."
- "[I]t's already been proven through history, that it's those [Judeo-Christian] principles are what made our country free. You look at any other country that didn't have those foundations and they're not free. Russia's not free. India's not free. Asia's not free."

- “[M]y belief has a very fatalistic aspect. This world will end. . . . And God will [appear] after and intervene. . . . I do believe that we’re gonna nuke ourselves eventually. . . . There’s no question about it. They don’t spend millions and millions of dollars for it not to be used. It’s a power play, power control. Somebody somewhere wants to be king. And they want a world, rule the world with an iron fist. And I believe that will come. That will happen for a short time. And then, eventually, we’ll all be tangled into these treaties and this one-world government will all come winding out, you know, because of our individuality.”

interpretation

The order of things is as described in the Book of Genesis in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Corey is not quite sure how the scientific understanding of nature can be finessed to fit with this view, but the Biblical explanation and description of life is the foundation to which all other explanations and descriptions must fit. Deviations from scriptural truth are errors, deceits, or signs of ignorance and are steps away from freedom and into 'slavery'. The notions that humans and non-humans are interconnected and that there is no hierarchy in their relationship are deviations from the truth. Corey suspects that some people are taking advantage of other people's naivete by concocting these ideas and others, such as global climate warming, for their own financial gain and dominance over others. As well, humans, generally, are lazy, inconsiderate of others and of the planet, and are prone to either taking advantage of others or to being taken advantage of. There will always be willing slaves just as there will always be oppressors. And there are also those, Corey among them, who try to live according to the truth. Life consistent with the truth requires that there be balance in how we get along with each other and resolve our social and environmental problems. A balance can be achieved between extreme individualism, wherein one's interests are served without regard for those who are unable to fend for themselves, and extreme socialism, wherein lazy, irresponsible

people destroy the freedom of others by forcing them to support them and their self-abusive habits. While Corey hopes that his efforts will have some positive effect, he knows that, ultimately, we will do ourselves in. At that point, God will intervene and pass judgment.

commodification/use of nature

- I believe that everything here on this planet has been created for our purposes and our enjoyment, as per Genesis. The animals were here [to] provide our enjoyment and food and so are the plants . . . and what have you. I do believe that we have a social responsibility for stewardship. We can't completely be ignorant of the fact that, if you don't take care of what we have, it won't be there. That's pretty standardized."
- "Yeah, everything in the Earth has been given to us and we're the stewards of the Earth. And that term 'stewards' obviously poses a responsibility to take care [of] what was given to you."
- "I don't know enough about clear-cutting. I don't know enough fish harvesting to know what's good or bad. I do respect the fact that there has to be some sort of boundaries for that. But in the same thing, I do see manipulation to all that. Changing weather patterns and greenhouse gases and all that. To me, that sounds like pseudo-science, slapped together stuff so they can put another tax on something. . . . So, I have my suspicions about this greenhouse philosophy. . . . I don't know the answers to that. All I know is that there has to be some sort of balance between rights and the individual and protecting what we have. Obviously, I'm not for, you know, cut slash and burning, let's live for today and worry about tomorrow. I'm not that, either. So, but, just [be] reasonable."

interpretation

Corey doesn't have a problem with commodifying nature, *per se*. As per Genesis, all of the world's creatures and plants are for us humans to rule over and to use for food and enjoyment. But to do so requires that we care for them. We have been given the responsibility of stewardship over them. Corey does have a problem with irresponsible use of these resources. He believes that there ought to be limits to quantities taken. Otherwise, the freedom of others to enjoy and use them will be

jeopardized, if not extinguished. On the other hand, he has a problem with overprotection. He doesn't believe that global ecological catastrophe fear-mongering isn't intended to line the pockets of the powers that be. Corey admits that he doesn't know enough about these issues other than that he knows that our stewardship should be balanced and reasonable.

Audrey (See Appendix 7 - Audrey, p. 202)

Throughout her life, Audrey [not her real name] has asked questions. Mainly, she questions control, the status quo, and authority. Having lived under her father's tyranny, as a child, and escaped it, as a youth, she has, ever since, questioned and rejected the oppressive authority of and control by the corrupt government and corporate world. Even our system of democracy is manipulated to sap us of our energy so that we have none left with which to challenge the status quo. The proper order of things, she says, is: "creator, people, *then* government, and then corporations." Yet, we find ourselves controlled by both corporations and government. So, Audrey has relentlessly searched for an answer to this puzzle. Finally, she learned that we ourselves have been corporatized. "*I don't have a social insurance number,*" she says. "*A statutory-created entity, a corporate entity that the government created does.*" The government has the authority to control it because the government created it. With this and related knowledge, Audrey has begun to disassociate herself from her corporate doppelgänger and thereby free herself from government and corporate control. Concurrently, she shares her knowledge with others and encourages them to free themselves, as well.

key phrases and statements, interpretations

problem/issue of concern

- “[T]he monetary system, in my opinion, is a method that they control.”
- “We have to smarten up. We’re being intentionally, I believe, from the health side of it, intentionally, they’re trying to make it so that we don’t think as clearly. I mean, that’s why you get all this food that we get that they think . . . I mean, the stuff we pump into kids.”
- “So once we know who we are, then we go to our government and say, ‘Roll back the charters. We’re not putting up with this anymore. We’re not putting up [with] our credit being raped.’”
- “[T]here’s nothing you can do, if you don’t know who you are. You’re actually, you’re basically disadvantaged. And the system is set up to take *care* of the disadvantaged. Therefore, the person who’s taking care of the disadvantaged has authority to set policy for the care of the disadvantaged.”
- “I’m talking about the global elite haves. Pharmaceuticals know bloody well their poison is killing people.”
- “[T]hat’s why those regulations are put up there. It’s not because they’re trying to protect the public. They’re protecting their monopoly.” “It’s old. We’re talking old. . . . I don’t know how old, but I mean, you go back to a couple of centuries [ago]. . . . [B]anking is definitely a problem, the way it’s set up. ‘Cause you go back to the Rothschilds, the Rockefellers, . . . and you just got to follow the money.”
- “[T]here’s areas that . . . are definitely corrupted, that need to be fixed; i.e., the monetary system is definitely one of them that needs to be fixed.”
- “So when you actually understand, then you’re no longer the slave, you’ve got to get ‘you’ to go there, not the slave and say, ‘I’m the master. *You’re* the slave, government, and it’s time you understood this.’ But, if you don’t have the process to get there, the procedure to get there, by default, you come in as a slave.”
- “[W]e’re self-induced prisoners. Where are you? At home, in front of your TV. Great, don’t have to put up any gates around us or structures around us. We go voluntarily to our little prison.”
- “[W]hen you see what they leave for us is supposedly a democratic way to make a change, it’s not a democratic way to make a change. It’s the way they take our energy again, do the petitions, do the forms, do that, and then they know that those people, when they go through this, they lose and they’re gonna go . . . [feins despair], like that.”

interpretation

We are 'slaves'. Worse, we are unwitting 'slaves'. Our masters are our governments and banks and corporations. More precisely, we are unwitting 'slaves' to the global elite whose ancestors, a couple of centuries or so ago, manipulated the government

to corrupt the monetary system and form banking and corporate systems that, together, would thenceforth force virtually all citizens, almost from birth, into legal financial 'slavery' to them. The scheme owes its effectiveness to its orchestrated deception of the citizens that they are free. So complete is the illusion, that people willingly, labor daily for this elite and obey the laws and regulations of the institutions and social systems that are in place to take care of them and, then, at the end of each day, return to their gateless prisons where they eat mind-numbing food and watch mind-numbing television. Should some people feel that some social changes need to be made, they may use the energy-draining democratic procedures that are provided to them. The people likely won't get what they had hoped for, but at least they can rest assured believing that their freedom of expression is preserved and that the democratic processes are fair. The key to how this deception was accomplished and is maintained and, therefore, also to how freedom can be regained, is the knowledge that individuals allowed themselves and continually allow themselves to be responsible for their corporate doppelgängers created by the government in order to control the individuals. Once we become aware that we are not those fictional selves but beings who preceded them, we can withdraw from the arrangement. Until we do this, we are 'slaves'.

epiphanies

- “You know, and if you're a thinking kid, well, you're a hyperactive. Well, we'd better put you on Ritalin. . . . And why do the kids that are thinkers are the ones that they want on Ritalin? 'Oh, your kid's hyperactive 'cause he asks too many questions?' And see, that's something that's happened to me my whole life. I've been always a question-asker. . . . [I]f I had been a child, the child that I was, a child now, I would have been on Ritalin because I was that kind of kid. And I'm still that kind of adult. Henceforth, that's why I'm sitting here before you. [laughing] 'Cause at 45, I still ask questions. And I will never stop.”

- “I *lived* under tyranny. I *lived* under oppression from my father and so I *know* what it’s like to have everything checked and for unfair. Ever since I was a little girl, I was always in check. . . . I never got money . . . always been about money. . . . whatever. Grew up that way. . . . It was just awful. I ran away from home. Never to return because it was just a horrid way to live. So, it’s just been a part of my being that just strives very much for my freedom to conduct my affairs accordingly, but with respect. . . . I was so oppressed and so unable to say anything . . . [W]e were so shut down as children, now as adults, we’re making up for it.”
- “I just knew in my heart, what was going on had to be changed, somehow. So, I searched, searched, searched. I mean, that’s how come I know Russ [of Paradigm Education Group]. . . . And that was the piece.”

interpretation

Audrey connects her adult life preoccupation with the pursuit of freedom and her associated activism to the oppression she experienced and her inability to express herself during her childhood. Additionally, her childhood oppression was at the hand of a tyrant, her father, and not by misfortune or some other innocent cause, just as her adult oppression is at the hand of an identifiable, blamable authority. An underlying tension has accompanied Audrey through her life from its origin in her horrible childhood to the present where it is at once revealed and suppressed in her assertion of power not only over her own life, but over the authority that nevertheless still tries to dominate her. Denzin would consider her present experience an ‘illuminative or minor epiphany’, it not being a turning-point moment, but an experience that points to a highly significant, traumatic period of time in her past.⁹² Even after finding “the piece,” Audrey’s questioning and searching is unabated. The methods of control are everywhere. The pursuit of freedom allows no rest.

⁹² Ibid., 37, 146.

concept of self and world view

- “Until we get educated enough to recognize that so, instead of us *relying* on their system, we collectively come together and say, ‘Let’s just . . . out there.’ Which is happening. I mean, you know, you have instances of that popping up all over. We have to step up to the plate.”
- “[I]t’s getting easier and easier to talk to people now.”
- “When all of a sudden we recognize we *are* powerful. We *can* make a difference.”
- “[W]e’re all sovereign, when you think about it, deep down. You’re sovereign. I’m sovereign. . . . [A]ll sovereigns had come together and said, “Let’s all live together in Canada.” . . . [But] running around yelling, “sovereign’, is not the answer.”
- “[T]here’s all kinds of groups out there. It’s just a lot of them are disadvantaged because they don’t know who they are. And every time they run to the courts, the don’t ever necessarily get the remedy they want because when they run to that court, they automatically transform you into that entity, that corporate entity over there. . . . So, until you really understand it, then you can go in there and knowing who you are. But if you don’t, you keep, like the slave going to the master demanding freedom.”
- “[T]hat’s why those regulations are put up there. It’s not because they’re trying to protect the public. They’re protecting their monopoly. . . . Now we got rules and regulations that apply to you and I but that don’t apply to them.
- “I *do* believe we’re all interconnected. I have no problem with that. Like a holograph, that we’re all part of it. We’re all joined to whatever it is, there’s a web. . . . I mean, science has proven, that this vase is not this vase. In actual fact, there is, you’re *there*. You’ve got quantum physics. So, I do believe we’re totally connected to everything that is.”
- “What it is is it’s a collective consciousness which means that web. We are all interconnected.” “[S]o I really do believe that we are connected that way and I think that’s why it’s so important for us individually to behave in a proper manner because we’re a sending/receiving transmitter. So, what I do here, and I don’t mean just [outwardly], inwardly, too, from the heart. What my intent is and that manifests its way out. It’s like a stone in a pond. And that goes out. And you get more, so, you up the frequency and then I believe that’s how you’re gonna make a collective change.”
- “[Creator], people, government, corporation." "We, the people, create the government. The government can’t rise above us, if we created it. So it had to create corporations, corporate images of us that they *can* control. That’s who they get to control. . . . Because we don’t know who we are, we think it’s that. So we get beat up by it because we don’t know who we are in some legal system. . . . I don’t have a social insurance number. A statutory-created entity, a corporate entity that the government created *does*. And [the government has] the authority to control him ‘cause he, they created him.”
- "I don't know how people don't believe that there's a greater power."

interpretation

A 'greater power' created us, the Earth, all of Nature, and everything else. Everything that exists in Nature, at least, is interconnected at both the consciousness and sub-atomic levels. Through this interconnectedness, everything necessarily both influences and is influenced by everything else. This is why it is especially important that we be moral, positive, peaceful, and otherwise have good intent. Not only does our intent and attitude, let alone our behavior, influence that of everyone and everything else, the influence is additive, in the same way that coordinated waves build upon each other. Unfortunately, it works both ways. Some self-centered people worked together, long ago, to set systems into motion to control a pacified public, for their own gain. The public was duped into living placidly, under the risk-free care of these new rulers of the world at the cost of a share of each individual's income and compliance with certain restrictions on their freedom. Those systems of control are entrenched today and Audrey and many others experience this way of living as oppression. The entrenchment of those systems and the public's general acceptance of them and of this sheltered lifestyle make it all but impossible for these disparate resisters and activists to bring about the respective changes they seek. But Audrey has learned how to become free of this control. And she is witnessing increasing numbers of people who express their disapproval with the selfish way the world is being run and with their own, consequential, personal financial hardship. Rather than demanding the system to loosen or relinquish its control, like a slave demanding her master to free her and as virtually all of these people are variously doing, Audrey sees victory only through the people and activist groups working together from outside the system. They must first free themselves as sovereign individuals and

then, together rebuild their world, cooperatively and without oppression. And this is possible, without violence, once they understand, how they became 'enslaved' in the first place, that they *are* powerful, and that the sheer magnitude of their concerted waves of energy would return control of their lives and the world back to them.

commodification/use of nature

- “If our thinking was different, I believe we’d collectively come together and I believe there’s plenty of technologies and things out there so that we could actually have a sustainable society without harming Mother Nature. . . . sustainable forestry, sustainable agriculture, you know, free, actually, if we only had more respect back to what we’re doing, put some respect back into our actions and regards to the planet, with regards to the environment, we can have, there’s enough out there for all of us”
- “I think with regards to the animals, the whole thing, it’s just gotten *so*, you know, agribusiness. . . . We have to realize that we’re not the sole everything on this planet, that all everything deserves respect and caring and if we’re going to take the life of something so that we can further ours, we’ve got a duty, a moral duty to treat that which we’re taking with the respect and love that it deserves. Otherwise, what kind of energy are you actually taking in, to your body?”
- "I actually very seldom eat meat and it's not because of the health side of it. It's because it's my personal protest for how we treat them."
- “We’re all here, gathered, and we have a lot of connections, together and I believe it’s time . . . for us to be good stewards of [the Earth], everything that’s on it. And if we were blessed with the ones to be able to think and reason and do things, then we have a duty to take care of things rather than . . . pleasure for us . . . and rape and pillage and destroy for the sake of destroying. You know, wipe out somebody’s . . . place to live or the animals’ place to live and clearcut and, I mean, it’s just, I mean, again, how does your logic allow you to do that?”

interpretation

Audrey opposes the selfish, non-caring use of nature. Our whole general attitude towards nature is wrong. It doesn’t exist for business purposes, to generate wealth, as so many seem to think. To treat nature as a mere commodity is disrespectful and it overlooks our inherent connections to it. Such treatment is a misuse of our powers of thinking and reasoning with which we are blessed. Rather

than constantly devising the most efficient and effective ways to rape and rob Mother Nature for our personal gain and pleasure, we should be ensuring that she comes to no harm, that she remains healthy forever. We should be nature's stewards. Our uses of nature should be done with care and respect. The taking of an animal's life, for example, demands that it not be done frivolously and that we not just recognize that it sacrificed its life for our benefit, but that we empathize with it, as well. Embracing this attitude is all the more easy and important when we recognize our connection with nature, that how we treat nature is ultimately how we treat ourselves. Also, such an attitude, especially together with our ever-improving technologies, will ensure that our use of nature will be sustainable and will facilitate a healthy relationship with it forever.

Owen (See Appendix 7 - Owen, p. 206)

Owen [his preferred pseudonym] works to help people free themselves from their financial debt and otherwise to free themselves from the control of banks, the corrupt monetary system, corporations, and so-called 'experts'. He believes that the banking and monetary system are organized to commit people to grossly unfair debts and that lenders manipulate the debts such that they become worth many times the actual amounts 'borrowed', independently of any payments by the 'borrowers'. Owen first became interested in this topic when he heard a recorded presentation that explained the unsavory history of the USA Federal Reserve. Since then, he has passionately researched the monetary and banking systems and has affiliated himself with a network of activists who, himself included, research, experiment, and communicate their findings with each other.

The main objective is to help people to eliminate their debt and, in the longer term, to force the monetary and banking systems to change.

key phrases and statements, interpretations

problem/issue of concern

- “[W]e’ve been so trained by the media in North America, probably world-wide, but especially North America, to be reliant on somebody else to do it for you. You know, they drill it into us all the time that we’re not smart enough to do it ourselves. You need to get someone else to do it for you. And, like, you have to use a lawyer. You have to use [an] accountant . . . And all of those purported professionals are trained by one entity and that entity, the government, is controlled by the global banks. And so these so-called professionals are all trained in one way to lead us into their servitude. And, if people take more of a hands-on approach to finding out what works, what doesn’t work, and why, there’s no end to what we can do or accomplish.”
- "I just think that the media, the banks, and everything have tried to dumb us down so much and take away our desires. . . . It's taken generations to get us to where we are - dumbed down."
- "A money system that's based on real value [like silver or gold] is ok. . . . But the fiat money system that we generally used is based on nothing, is only good for one entity and that's for the global bankers, and it has no good points for us. Convenience is all. . . . [T]hat started 500 years ago."
- "I'm teaching people how the monetary system works, how the banks and government are tied together, with this monetary system, and the controls they've been placing on us more and more. And as we educate people as to what's really going on, . . . and freeing up some of their debt load so that they have more time to think about what's going on and grow internally, you know."
- "[H]elping people get out of debt is, has been my primary focus now for over three years. And that's huge."
- "[I]t's empowering for people to learn that they have some strength. And that they can take control of things rather than feeling like they're underneath this huge weight."
- "[M]y passions are all kind of blending with each other and I share information about the debt and about health and all these things; they tie together. And they're all about nature and tuning into ourselves."
- "I'm interested in learning how we can take better care of ourselves and be more healthy and productive and *feel* better about it. And, you know, so I try and give people the power of knowing that they can do that."

interpretation

Owen is concerned with the sense of impotence that people have with respect to taking charge of their own lives and participating in society. He is concerned especially because this situation is purposeful. Since around 500 years ago, a small elite group of people has been manipulating Canada's and the USA's governments and monetary systems to their advantage. They set up systems of control that coerce people to be subservient to and dependent upon 'experts' who know precisely how people should legally and properly go about their affairs. Their expert knowledge comes at a price, of course, in the form of fees and taxes that are remitted to the experts, banks, and governments, and through them, ultimately, to the elite masters. Also included in the cost are people's independence, self-reliance, confidence, and opportunity to "grow internally" as individuals. Owen's primary focus of interest is people's debt, though he is also interested, secondarily, in health, the environment, personal growth, and other issues, all of which are interrelated. Eliminating one's debt, though, is a key move towards regaining one's personal freedom and autonomy. Owen is interested in learning how people, himself included, have become subservient to these elite and in how people can regain their independence and control over their own lives.

epiphanies

- "A friend of mine, a good friend of mine, handed me a tape. . . . And it is the history of the Federal Reserve and it goes into great detail of the history of it and an explanation of how central bank works. . . . Edward Griffin, it's a 90 minute presentation and I only got about five minutes into it and this light bulb went on inside me. And it's like, 'Oh, wow!' I turned around and drove back and asked my friend how I could find out more. I hadn't even heard the whole presentation. And

that was six years ago and I've listened to it probably a thousand times since then and I still enjoy it every time I hear it."

- "It was so neat for me to be able to tell [Edward Griffin] that he literally changed my life and that he is helping me change other people's lives."
- "But there's just something in *me* that, when I learned the truth about that, I've always been interested in money."
- "But it was just when I heard this and felt that it was truth that had been hidden from us. It was, it's kind of just like an explosion, for me."
- "And when I found that I could help [a financially suicidally-distressed woman], and empower her to stand up for herself and know that she can do something about it, like that *really* affected me."

interpretation

Owen can't explain why he was so profoundly struck by listening to Edward Griffin's story of the Federal Reserve, other than to say that he had always been interested in money. But it is most significant that he felt that some deeply hidden, important truth had just been revealed to him and that he couldn't get enough of it, that it interested him to no end. At that moment, Owen understood that we, as a society, have been duped by certain, identified financial leaders and that our government and banks were and still are complicit in this. Now he needed to understand his life and our society in terms of this new truth. He knew that only a small portion of the truth had been revealed to him, that there was much more to learn, and he wanted to understand it in all its detail. Further, the material implications of this truth were and are that the people have been and continue to be robbed and controlled. Owen's realization of all of this instantly changed his life. He needed to learn more, including how to free himself from his fabricated financial obligations and his subservience to these evil manipulators of society. He had, also, to share this knowledge with others, so that they, too, may similarly free themselves. Their freedom will enable them to discover and pursue their

own passions. So affected was Owen by his major epiphany, as Denzin would call it,⁹³

that it is his passion to help others experience passions of their own.

concept of self and world view

- “The nature of life is always going to be one’s more dominant than other.”
- “And the more educated people get, the stronger they are.”
- ”And more and more people are starting to complain about taxes. They’re complaining about interest and definitely more of them are becoming involved. They believe what some of us are doing and they’re actually testing it, utilizing what we’re providing, and changing their own lives, and changing some others. And the numbers are *way* increased over what it used to be.”
- “I share information about the debt and about health and all these things, they tie together. And they’re all about nature and tuning into ourselves.”
- ”I just find that everything is tied together. . . . I’m just a part of [nature] and I totally believe we’re all connected. . . . In some kind of an energy way. . . . You know, we’re all just energy and how that energy interacts with other energy, I think we’re all connected on an energy level. . . . [W]e’re all [us, plants, and animals] connected and all part of it. And if we take care of it, like everything in the circle of life is all connected. And if you wreck one part of it, chances are you’re going to wreck all of it.”
- “I believe that we need our vegetables every day and that they’re on this Earth to, you know, for that purpose and that we’re here for some other purpose.”
- “I absolutely believe in spirituality and miracles and that we’re every one of us is here for a purpose. And that there’s no coincidences. You know, everything happens for a reason. . . . I believe in God and learning about that spirituality.”
- “There seems to be [people who are inherently evil]. . . . [T]he people that have put these systems in place, you know, really did it to manipulate other people. . . . And I definitely believe that some of these so-called professionals know what they’re doing is wrong and still do it. Most of professionals just think that they’re doing the right thing.”
- [T]hose that try and control others, you know, they . . . you’ve probably noticed that the people that head like unions and political parties and stuff like that, they’re the same type of people. . . . And unfortunately, it just seems to be that way, that 99% of the population just let those ones do the controlling. And so it’s unfortunate that [some] really seem to have the evil ideas about how to control people and there’s never enough. They’re always looking for new ways to control people and in our North American society, they trick us into believing that we’re in the land of the free. But they’re really controlling us as much if not more as the [other] cultures.”

⁹³ Ibid., 37, 145.

interpretation

Central to Owen's understanding of life is that everything is purposeful. "Everything happens for a reason" and everything and everyone has a purpose. It is our challenge to try to discover what our individual and collective purposes are. Relatedly, everything is connected. All the different issues – health, the environment, freedom, personal growth – are interconnected. All physical things, too, are connected "in some kind of energy way." There is a spiritual aspect to us, as well, and a God. Therefore, it is important for us to consider our actions and inactions and our behavior towards one another and towards all the other participants in this circle of life. Our behavior towards anyone or anything has repercussions for everyone and everything. And they go deeper than just surface, material existence. Yet, there seem to be people who are genuinely evil. Certainly, some people know that what they are doing is wrong. The most significant evil, or wrong, thing that people do is control others. While the domination of others may be an acceptable fact of nature, in humans, it is wrong. While many plants are here for us to use as food, nobody's purpose is to be controlled. Unfortunately, most people allow themselves to be controlled. They are not serving whatever their purpose may be. Nevertheless, Owen has noticed that increasing numbers of people *are* throwing off their yokes. They are educating themselves and each other and they are asserting their free will. By influencing each other and allowing themselves to be influenced, they are discovering their collective strength. And they are each discovering their purpose.

commodification/use of nature

- "Canada could be the richest country in the world, with all our natural resources."

- “I just think that people could manage the resources better than just consuming everything like they do right now. You know, we’re going to run out of oil. . . . We’re going to run out of trees, fish, you name it, the way we’re going.”
- ”[W]e’re all [us, plants, and animals] connected and all part of it. And if we take care of it, like everything in the circle of life is all connected. And if you wreck one part of it, chances are you’re going to wreck all of it.”
- “I don’t believe in hurting anything, but I like meat. [both laugh] So someone has to hurt that poor cow to create that meat for me to eat. And I don’t focus too much energy on that. I don’t believe in damaging anything or restricting its right to life without a purpose. I love vegetables. I believe that we need our vegetables every day and that they’re on this Earth to, you know, for that purpose and that we’re here for some other purpose.”

interpretation

Owen’s attitude towards the world’s resources, including animals and plants, is that, in great part, they are here for us to use. That is their purpose. But there ought to be restrictions to their use and Owen opposes the malicious or thoughtless destruction of nature and the similar harming or killing of living things. Restrictions to the use of resources should be based upon our recognition that we are overusing them and that they and we are connected as co-participants in the “circle of life.” Clearly, we are not exercising sufficient care in our use of them. At the present rate, they will disappear. And that will have obvious detrimental effects upon our own existence. On the other hand, if we *were* to exercise greater care in our management and use of nature’s resources, our country could be among, if not actually be, the richest in the world, properly reflecting the richness of our resources assets.

Steve (See Appendix 7 - Steve, p. 211)

Steve [not his real name] rejects the notion that he is an activist. To him, an activist is someone who has a particular social objective, who is aiming for some

particular social change. Steve is not. Instead, he is pursuing truth. The truth that he is seeking is whether he is a free person or a slave. So far, he has found, and indications are that he will continue to find, that he is free. He wondered whether he and others were 'enslaved' when he considered the forced labor, in the form of taxes, that we all seem to be required to pay to the corrupt and irresponsible government. Biblical scriptures tell us that God gave all of us the inalienable human right of freedom. Steve's research revealed that the Canadian Constitution agrees. If that is the case, then one should be free to withdraw from any contracts that one may have previously entered into that require one to pay taxes, provided that one no longer has reciprocal expectations of the government. He tested his thesis in court and came out a free person. Consequently, others have heard of his success and have asked him to help them do the same. Steve has since produced booklets on the subject and presents the information to small groups of people.

key phrases and statements, interpretations

problem/issue of concern

- “There is a . . . duality within the world. . . . [T]he real essence that it comes down to [is] either you have inalienable human rights and freedoms given to you by your creator, whoever that may be, by God; you were born with them; the fact that you are, you are; it just happens. Or you have no inalienable rights and freedoms and all your rights and freedoms come from the governing bodies.”
- “I guess if you look at it as a movement or activis[m], that is the thing, is to, the sincere search for the truth, regardless what it is. That allows you to keep an open mind, doesn't have any prejudice or prejudgments on anything because you just want whatever is at the end, as long as, when you get to the end, you know, you turn around and it all makes perfect sense. It's all clear. And that's really what we've done with income tax. We've got to the end. We've turned around. We said, like it's just a game over. Right? And now that's happening to these other things. So the picture that is coming up is like, wow, the more we look, the more we're confirming that we are free. It's just an illusion of slavery out there.”
- “The ones who are going to have a hard time is the ones who have bought into the promises of the corporation. . . You know, thinking everybody else is going to take

care of it. Total lack of responsibility. . . . [A]nd you see it even today. It's like people who have relied on certain pension plans that have been wiped off . . . you know, stuff like E.I. of C, you know, all these people are going to have a rude awakening."

interpretation

Steve is concerned with learning whether we are free or 'enslaved'. God created humans as free beings with inalienable rights and freedoms. Subsequently, at different points in time and pretty much the world over, humans have variously devised social systems that 'enslave' their citizens. In Canada and the rest of the western(ized) world, citizens are 'slaves' to their governments and the corporations that manipulate the governments. We are deluded into believing that we are free, even freer than the rest of the world. In fact, all of our movements, all we know, all the fruits of our labor, all of our opportunities, even all of our desires are monitored, programmed, and controlled. The question remains: What is the nature of the transition from God-given freedom to human-devised 'slavery'? The answer to this question is Steve's quest. So far, he has discovered that, in Canada (and not in some other notable countries, e.g., the USA and Australia), citizens are born free and almost immediately afterward enter into 'slavery' to their government and the corporate world. We are, thus, free beings living in 'slavery'. Steve is concerned with discovering the ways in which we allow ourselves to live that way. His motive is, of course, to release himself from 'slavery' and to provide the information to others so that they may do the same, if they wish, if they are willing to take on that responsibility.

epiphanies

- “Conflict. . . . It was a spiritual conflict. I came out of studying religious scripture. . . . [T]here are certain verses in the Bible that say ‘submit to the authorities.’ And there’s the other part, . . . ‘Pay unto Caesar what is Caesar’s.’ So, when you start looking into our society and seeing the havoc that sort of concept of income tax that goes on to people, literally, it’ll destroy lives, and yet, in the other breath, we’re supposed to submit to the authority and basically let them kick the snot out of us. It’s like, the conflict is: No, if there is a God, this is not what He wanted. It cannot be. This just cannot be. . . . This was the motivation, the internal conflict of ‘This cannot be’. And just, it’s that feeling you know something’s wrong. You listen, in your heart, you knew it was wrong. But in your mind, you said, I can’t figure it out.”
- “[H]ere’s reality of God. And if this is where we all start and by taking that at face value, from either the Bible or from the legislation standing on that and walking through this system that seems so inequitable and so unfair and in watching that system protect you regardless how ignorant you were in other things, then you start seeing like, *wow*, we do have a good system. Because I *was* ignorant. I knew the one thing: the foundation of this country and who I was viewed within, how I was recognized within the country. And that just showed us the simplicity. I mean, when we went against CCRA with no knowledge, no defense, no nothing, walked in, walked out. The judge talked for 45 minutes and we were acquitted. No appeal. So you go, okay. But by doing that, it allows you to appreciate the greatness of the foundation of our country. It shows you the missing key. The missing key was not the system. The system did protect when you knew who you were. The missing key was us.”

interpretation

In his heart, Steve knew that something is wrong with the way our society is being run. It runs contrary to his spiritual values. This great disconnect between how Steve believes God would want us to govern ourselves and how we actually do govern ourselves compelled Steve to investigate how this came to be. By what authority are we oppressed and our lives destroyed? Steve already had a good grasp of religious studies, of the Bible, in particular. He directed his attention to Canada’s legal underpinnings. There, he was pleased and relieved to find that they acknowledge the supremacy of God and that individuals have inalienable rights and freedoms that precede any that are legislated through any organizations or institutions that they may contract into, including

Canada itself. With this knowledge alone, Steve challenged his contract with the CCRA that required him to pay income taxes. He wound up in court, but the judge acquitted him of any wrongdoing. At that moment, Steve's discovery that *we* are the authority of our persecution was confirmed. We enter into contracts with the government and corporations that lead us to believe that the contracts are for our own good and/or for the greater good and are nevertheless mandatory. But they are neither. Steve realized that fact, earlier on, during his research, but it needed to be tested. He won his case because Canada's foundation is sound, because it is itself founded on the same truth that the Bible teaches. Canada's structure is faulty, but that can be fixed. So, Steve's epiphany, to try to categorize it à la Denzin, can be said to be a hybrid cumulative/illuminative epiphany. The cumulative element refers to Steve's "internal conflict of 'This cannot be'" that eventually 'motivated' him to risk the wrath of the law in his search to resolve the conflict. The illuminative (or minor) element of the epiphany refers to Steve's prolonged experience of the two-part resolution – the discovery and the confirmation – to his internal conflict.⁹⁴

concept of self and world view

- "Valuing your fundamental human rights and freedoms. If you value them in yours, you actually start seeing them in others. And, therefore, you'll value them and you realize that, if you deny them theirs, . . . you denied your self."
- "We are all living here and we are all equal. And that's where this whole idea and awareness of human rights is, we are all equal in dignity and rights. There is no difference."
- "We created a system that says, ' . . . here, you sign up for my program and I'll cover you. I'll cover some of the, soften up the blows for you.' That only created a downward spiral of the system that turns into an addictive mentality system."

⁹⁴ Ibid., 37, 145-46.

- “I really believe [in] humanity, when you look at it as a whole, already has the fundamental pieces there. They just need to be awoken to who they really are.”
- “[G]reed and power [-based system], *that* is collapsing on itself. Because it knows no bounds. Power knows no end. Greed knows no end. . . . Let it run its course.”
- “[I]f we legislate freedom, then it’s not true freedom. . . . The fact that [people] are living, breathing, thinking human beings shows that they have that inalienable right of free will.”
- “[W]e live in probably one of the most purest structures of a country that literally in the whole world. . . . [T]his is *the best structure* of a country. It couldn’t be freer in any other country.”
- “[T]here [is] another sort of system that’s higher than [the governing bodies], is the one of the recognition of human rights which really has to rise above those system[s]. Those systems, as I said, have to be contracted into, because you are naturally higher than those systems.”
- “But if you believe that there’s a creator of all [things] and I guess that’s where I lean, it’s like, everything has a design to it. All plants, all, we are designed things. So, how can something with a design be in existence without a designer?”
- “[W]e bought into the illusion [of] the benefit of the control. And when we leave that, natural commerce will find its place again. And that’s what we see within the underground economy. It is nothing more than natural commerce reviving itself. So, again, that’s why I see the hope is, ‘cause I know human nature will take over and reset the thing back to where [we were once before].”

interpretation

All humans are born with inalienable rights and freedoms. We are, therefore, all born free and equal. Steve believes that God created us and gave us these rights and freedoms but he sees room for the atheist view that we can have these inalienable rights and freedoms even if we came to exist by some other means. When one denies these rights and freedoms in other people, one is also denying them in one’s self. This is because there is no basis, except one constructed by humans and that is not basic enough, for one person to be denied them and not another. If one person is deigned to not have inalienable rights and freedoms, then everyone is so deigned. Nevertheless, any such denial would be a factual error. One may, however, abandon one’s rights and freedoms or hold them abeyance. Most people have done one or the other. In the former case,

people in some countries have entered into social contracts that, by granting the government more rights than its citizens have, provide them with no legal recourse to leave the contracts. In the latter case, such as in Canada, people entered into social contracts in which their fundamental rights are recognized but are set aside. Through those contracts, we transferred and continue to transfer certain of our personal responsibilities to our government, such as for our health and livelihood, thereby transferring control of our lives. Unfortunately, for more than a century, this arrangement has served the government and the corporate world increasingly well and at the increasing expense of the citizens virtually all of whom have forgotten or are not aware that the contract can be terminated. Eventually, though, the insatiable corporate greed will collapse the present system and a system of natural commerce will replace it. The transition will be eased somewhat through both Steve's work in educating/awakening open-minded and fed-up citizens who are willing to reassume their personal responsibilities, and the increasingly prevalent underground economy which is "nothing more than natural commerce reviving itself."

commodification/use of nature

- "Like the animal kingdom. . . . It has a scriptural base. It could also be a reality base aspect of it, too. . . . [I]f humans are the highest form of conscious thinking, rationale, and balance, and if we can use that, in balance, say scripture, we were given dominion over the animal kingdom and the sea. But I look at it as more as a stewardship. Because if we were truly aware of who we really were . . . the responsibility we really had, not relying on these corporations to take care of us, we would start viewing the whole ecology, everything in balance. See, . . . the animal kingdom and everything gets abused and destroyed for nothing more than mere profit."
- "[I]s it wrong to fish? No. Is it wrong to harvest logs? No. Ok, well, where is that balance? . . . [T]hey *deliberately* create shortages strictly for nothing more than money. We have wheat boards, egg boards, milk boards . . . every [kind of] boards;

we can flush half of it so we can [get] the price up on the other half. Right? Yet, if we would release the control and the greed of someone, we would find natural commerce. . . . I don't have any scientific data proof for that, but it's like natural commerce has been taking place since the beginning of man."

interpretation

It is ultimately our collective responsibility, as humans, to care for the whole ecology. That responsibility is given to us by God, but, for those who prefer not to use a spirituality-based rationale, it also derives from the fact that we "humans are the highest form of conscious thinking, rationale, and balance." Through our awareness of our effect on nature, we know when we are abusing and destroying it. We even know that this effect is due primarily to the greed of the corporate world and its control of our lives and of the world generally. Yet, our humanness also tells us that we ought to be nature's stewards. That is our proper and once historical role. The chief problem is that we bought into the promises of the corporate world to conveniently assume our responsibilities. We handed over our responsibility of stewardship of the world over to corporations that view the world as nothing but a commodity. Corporate commerce has supplanted natural commerce. Under corporate commerce, the trade of commodities and the commodities themselves are manipulated to generate the greatest return on investment, with no other concern whatsoever. Under natural commerce, resources are used in balance with their health, availability, and effect on the rest of nature of which they are a part. Greed is checked. Ultimately, when the corporate system collapses in on itself, natural commerce will prevail, it having all the while maintained a presence in the form of an

underground economy. Nature will cease to be commodified. It will be valued in and of itself.

7. RADICAL FREEDOM ACTIVISTS – RECURRING FEATURES

In this chapter, I examine the interpretations just presented. My aim is to gain an understanding of the meaning(s) that these activists, as individuals and, more generally, as a group, give to their world(s), to others with whom they coexist, and to their relationships with those others. First, I investigate their common understandings and then their activist formations and practises.

Common Understandings

The four individuals who have allowed me to interview them as co-participants in the individual freedom movement share a number of understandings, opinions, and beliefs, despite that their lives and experiences are quite unique from one another's. I'll examine their lives and experiences, as they described them to me, shortly. Here, I examine their common understandings, a compilation of which and of significant, unique features of their world views are on Table 3.

The overarching common understanding among these activists is that virtually everyone are 'slaves' to certain self-organized groups, comprising the government (principally the federal government), the corporate world, banks, so-called experts, and, ultimately, a global elite who owns and/or manipulates them all. People's 'enslavement', the activists agree, occurs through being coerced into participating in any of the myriad social systems that pervade our society. We allow ourselves to be controlled. What is most objectionable about this is that people seem willing to accept limitless abuse and oppression. They quietly abide by the ever more laws and regulations and the enforced requirements to contribute ever larger portions of their time and labor to benefit persons

table 3
RADICAL FREEDOM PROPONENTS
 Essential, Recurring Features of the Phenomenon
COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS

<i>Corey</i>	<i>Audrey</i>
focus of concern	
works to free people from slavery to governments and banks and to reverse the moral decay in our society, all of which are due to ignoring the truth and godly principles as they are laid out in Judeo-Christian scriptures	works to free people from their naively self-maintained slavery to governments, banks, and corporations
key beliefs/assumptions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Canada is a free country because it is founded on Judeo-Christian principles - humans have deviated from the truth and have created master/slave relationships; we can be free again - humans are not interconnected and there is a hierarchy in nature - most humans are too lazy to take responsibility for their lives; they are contented slaves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we are all interconnected atomically and via a collective consciousness - Creator => people => government=> corporations; so it's wrong to allow corporations and governments to control us, their creators - individuals must reassert their freedom from outside the system - we can rebuild the system later - all activists/movements' success will be limited until they realize this
opinion on the commodification of nature	
<i>(def. - valuing nature as a resource to exploit for financial gain)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - God created everything on the Earth for our food and enjoyment - humans have the responsibility of stewardship over the Earth - we must be balanced and reasonable in our use of resources - has no issue with commodification of nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - agribusiness is wrong; we have a moral duty to treat the animals and other resources that we use with the respect and love that they deserve - we can collectively devise respectful technological ways to live sustainably without harming nature - we should be respectful stewards

table 3 (continued)
RADICAL FREEDOM PROPONENTS
 Essential, Recurring Features of the Phenomenon
COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS

<i>Owen</i>	<i>Steve</i>
focus of concern	
works to help people out of their debt and servitude to experts, government, and the global banks that control them	works to help people discover that they are free and helps them to assert their freedom and regain control over their lives from the hands of government and corporations
key beliefs/assumptions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "We're all connected on an energy level;" humans are a part of nature - issues about debt, health, nature, "tuning into ourselves" are all tied together - there is a God, spirituality, miracles, no coincidences, and we are each here for some purpose - some 'professionals' wilfully do wrong, but most are just ignorant - the 'land of the free' is a myth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we are <i>a priori</i> free beings who signed onto a system that takes care of us in exchange for being able to control us; we agree to slavery - Canada's structure is probably the freest of all nations because it recognizes the supremacy of God and that God granted us all inalienable human rights and freedoms - the present greed and power-based system is collapsing in on itself
opinion on the commodification of nature	
<i>(def. - valuing nature as a resource to exploit for financial gain)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the purpose of nature is for us to use so that we may discover and pursue our own purposes - we are managing our resources unsustainably; we should do better - Canada's resources could make it the richest country in the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - per scripture, humans were given dominion over the animal kingdom and the sea - we need to be responsible stewards - greed abuses and is destroying the animal kingdom and all of nature - 'natural commerce' will displace greed-based capitalist commerce

unknown. Some people, such as these activists, reject this oppression. They believe that people are numbed into complacency. They know that, because the 'slavery' system was legally instituted, one can legally extricate one's self from it, even if by just one sub-system at a time. The key is to leave the system as one entered it, as a free person. All of the activists have independently challenged some aspect of the system with varying degrees of success.

Underlying these people's common belief that we are 'enslaved' is that we are, at bottom, free beings. We are each born with the inalienable, fundamental right to freedom. All four activists believe that this right was given to us by our creator. For Corey, Owen, and Steve, the creator is the Christian God, as described in the Judeo-Christian Biblical scriptures. God created all humans as equals among each other, answerable only to Him. Corey, whose view of the scriptures is that they are the truth to which science and philosophy must defer, rejects the notion that humans are interconnected. We are, instead, individual natural persons both in law and in reality. It is upon that fact that our individual freedom lies. Steve doesn't emphasize the scriptures so strenuously, but does applaud Canada's Constitution for recognizing the scriptural truth of the supremacy of God and that humans are free individuals prior to any social agreements they may enter or be coerced into. Owen's understanding of the scriptures isn't as literal as Corey's or Steve's. He believes that "[w]e are all connected on an energy level" and that we are all a part of nature. But he believes that we are each here for a purpose and that our 'slavery' to the global elite prevents us from discovering our purposes and from 'growing internally'. Audrey referred to a creator or "greater power". However, the fact that the creator created humans is the basis for our right to freedom

from being controlled by government, banks, and corporations. The creator created humans who created governments that created corporations. And only by being free sovereign individuals can humans come together to create such entities. Further, the created cannot rightly control their creator, except by their creator's agreement. Yet, Audrey believes that we are both sovereign individuals and beings who are interconnected with each other and all of nature at the atomic level and via a "collective consciousness". We are free beings who nevertheless unavoidably interact with and influence each other.

As is evident, all of these activists believe in a natural hierarchy. At the top is the creator or God. Immediately below are humans. Below humans are nature and all of its constituent elements. Corey, Owen, and Steve accept the Biblical teachings that God created all of these things for human use and enjoyment. Audrey doesn't question that nature is a resource for humans to use, as we are higher in nature by virtue of our being "blessed with the ones to be able to think and reason and do things." The same reasoning, though, obligates us to respectfully and intelligently care for nature. As a personal protest to the cruel way that humans treat animals, Audrey seldom eats meat.

Her view with respect to commodifying nature is consistent. She dislikes the notion and practise of agribusiness. Beyond advocating sustainable stewardship, Audrey would have us consider that these other creatures and living things have their own lives and habitat. She believes that we have a "moral duty to treat that which we're taking with the respect and love that it deserves."

Both Owen and Corey admit to not having given this issue much thought. And to be fair, the issue of commodifying nature is not one with which a group of freedom

activists can be expected to be familiar. Nevertheless, they have their opinions. Owen believes that, if we manage our resources properly, "Canada could be the richest country in the world." But he recognizes that this isn't what is happening and that, at our present rate of resource consumption, we will eventually run out. He also believes that all living things are connected in a "circle of life" and that damaging one part of it likely damages all of it. He and Corey both believe that the purpose of animals, plants, and the rest of nature is to serve as a resource to enable humans to fulfill our own purposes. It is our responsibility, though, to practise sustainable and healthy stewardship of our resources.

Steve does take issue with the commodification of nature. Under our present, profit-driven, corporatized economic system, everything is a commodity. This wasn't always the case. "Since the beginning of man" and up until the onset of big business and the invention of corporations, people engaged in 'natural commerce', a natural economic system in which objects are valued for what they are and not for some economic equivalent. Nature was considered a resource, but not to use as a means to acquire capital or to acquire as capital. Steve believes that natural commerce has not disappeared but is actually the underground economy. After enough people have freed themselves from the control of the greedy elite and their corporate institutions, natural commerce will re-emerge to supplant capitalist commerce. This goes hand-in-hand, of course, with a return to responsible, sustainable stewardship over "the animal kingdom and the sea" over which we have been given dominion, a point on which all of these activists agree.

Another common understanding among them is their general dislike of the concept and practise of social justice. As earlier discussed, theorist advocates of individual freedom oppose social justice programs and some, such as Hayek, reject the

very notion of social justice. The imposition of such programs is at the expense of individuals' freedoms, they say. In Corey's ideal world, no government-run social safety net whatsoever would exist. The government would be out of the social justice business. Only churches would provide any minimal such services. Individuals who are so inclined may assist, through their churches, those who truly are unable to fend for themselves. The present system forces hard-working citizens to support free-loaders.

Owen, Audrey, and Steve also expressed a dislike of social programs. Those programs' 'softening of the blows' of responsible living "turns into an addictive mentality system," says Steve. Audrey points out that those who are 'disadvantaged' are further disadvantaged by being controlled by the policies of the care system. And, says Owen, after people reject being cared for, they begin to take charge of their own lives, they feel vigorous, healthy, and driven to discover and pursue their passions. As with any slave, the four activists agree, we have been dumbed down and taken care of, to our detriment.

Nevertheless, Owen, Steve, and Audrey aren't as emphatic in their opposition to social justice programs as Corey is. It just happened that his initial turning point towards activism centered in discovering how much of his hard-earned pay was forcibly given to government as taxes and for social safety-net programs. The four activists oppose *all* forms of social control, private as well as public.

Finally, the four freedom activists have similar views as to why the individual freedom movement is so marginalized in society. Principally, most people don't recognize that they are not free. They believe what their masters tell them, that they are free. The activists point out that most people have transferred the responsibility for their

lives over to governments and 'experts' in exchange for being cared for. As well, most people uncritically accept the reality that the corporate world creates for them.

"Humanity is lazy and they will abuse everything they can get," says Corey. "It's taken generations to get us to where we are, dumbed down," laments Owen. Audrey points out that, "[People] don't want their world rocked." "It's the lowest form of existence - survival, security. I mean, people sacrifice their whole life to get a job for security," says Steve. So, people deny and resist the idea that people live the lives and think the thoughts that others give to them. This is in addition to the denial and resistance by society's masters.

Activist Formations and Practises

As did the eco-social justice activists, the four radical freedom activists arrived at their activism by way of quite different life-changing experiences or epiphanies, though there is some commonality among even these. The general characteristics and effects of those turning point experiences are outlined on Table 4.

Again like their eco-social justice activist counterparts, all of the radical freedom activists were able to identify certain experiences that they believe were responsible, in great part, for their becoming activists. Using Denzin's definitions of turning points or epiphanies, Corey experienced two such events (see pp. 94-96) and Steve experienced a hybrid of two types of epiphanies, by my own interpretation, that occurred in two steps (see p. 115-17). For all four radical freedom activists, their first or only epiphany experience was a negative one or, in Owen's case, concerned a negative revelation.

table 4
RADICAL FREEDOM PROPONENTS
Essential, Recurring Features of the Phenomenon
EPIPHANY EXPERIENCES

<i>Corey</i>	<i>Audrey</i>
characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - while young, whenever was told 'no', would always find a way; could not take 'no' for an answer - as a young adult earning \$30/hr. an having worked 180 hrs in 2 weeks, felt 'violated' when \$3400 of his \$5800 paycheck was deducted, leaving him with just \$2400; he vowed to find a way to get ahead of a system that penalizes one for working hard - after years of searching, learned, through Paradigm, how Canada's system of economic slavery works and how to beat it; also, the solution fits his Christian moral principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ever since a child, never stopped asking questions - ever since a little girl, "lived under tyranny"; always in check and treated unfairly; "always been about money" ; a horrid way to live" ; "was so oppressed and unable to say anything . . . [W]e were so shut down as children" - consequently, strives very much for her freedom - as an adult, is preoccupied with the pursuit of freedom from oppression of authority - after years of searching found 'the piece' through Paradigm
effect	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is freed of any obligations to CCRA - is an educator for Paradigm - researches ways to legally challenge the profit-focused policies of other institutions in society that control people, institutions such as banks and auto insurance and licensing authorities - motivated to help people help themselves be self-responsible/free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - still asks questions and challenges authority, unabated, but now has some answers - is an educator for Paradigm - motivated to help people free themselves end their lives of to corporations, banks, and government
activist practise	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - educates for Paradigm and through personal encounters; research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - educates for Paradigm and through personal encounters

table 4 (continued)
RADICAL FREEDOM PROPONENTS
 Essential, Recurring Features of the Phenomenon
EPIPHANY EXPERIENCES

<i>Owen</i>	<i>Steve</i>
characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "always been interested in money" - 6 years previous, listened to a tape of Edward Griffin explaining the history of the Federal Reserve and how the central bank works; it "literally changed [his] life"; felt as if he'd learned "truth that had been hidden from us" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - was perplexed by "a spiritual conflict" with the way our society is run: 'Pay unto Caesar what is Caesar's' vs. people's lives being destroyed by the authorities, e.g., via income tax; he knew that the latter is wrong - after learning that Canada's Constitution aligns with his religious knowledge of scripture, he challenged CCRA in court and won, leaving court as a 'natural person', free of CCRA - realized that the problem was not the system, but not knowing who one is in relation to it
effect	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - immediately overcome with the need to thoroughly understand how the banks manipulate the monetary system and how to fight them - researching, learning, teaching, and info sharing is a passion - challenged the mortgage on his house but lost the house; undaunted as he continues on - motivated to help people free their selves to pursue their own passions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - realized he understands how government and corporations enslave people and how people can regain control over their lives - motivated to share his knowledge with those willing to help themselves become free
activist practise	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - researches, teaches, presents, and helps individuals challenge their debt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - researches, teaches small groups, writes small publications

Corey's second epiphany experience, however, was a very positive one for him. Steve's second part of his two-step epiphany was also very positive. Those later experiences affirmed the convictions that the two individuals formed after their first epiphany experiences.

Interestingly, Audrey described an experience very similar to Corey's, in which she found 'the piece', after years of searching. More, the 'piece' was the same piece of information that Corey was seeking and found. Yet, Audrey didn't describe the event as an epiphany as Corey did when he experienced the event. This illustrates the significance of the meaning that one gives to an experience, in terms of both the degree of significance and the type of meaning.

Another characteristic common to the four activists' epiphany experiences is that the negativity associated with them directly involved the individuals themselves. At first glance, this might not seem to be the case for both Owen and Steve. However, the truth that Owen learned about banks, how they have manipulated the monetary system and engineer massive profits from normal citizens' stifling debts, led him to later challenge his own mortgage in court. Likewise, Steve challenged the laws that require him to pay income taxes to the government, after he found that he could not morally support the government's behavior. However, while the four individuals were victims in the circumstances of which they became aware through their epiphany experiences, they all realized that they weren't the only victims. For them, the central, common implication of all of their experiences is that virtually everybody is a victim. I suggest that, had the four individuals perceived that only they themselves were the victims, their experiences would

likely not have been so significant to them and they would probably not consider them to be epiphanies. More, the individuals would probably not have become activists.

A related commonality among these individuals' epiphany experiences is that they all involve social control. Each person felt that s/he was being controlled. Owen, Corey, and Steve objected, in particular, to others controlling their money, essentially to support government-run programs with which they knew nothing of or disagreed, or to outright claim it was owed debt that they felt is excessive. Audrey objected generally to the control by authorities that she felt have no legitimacy and exist only to benefit a few elite. Each of these individuals researched the issues connected with their epiphany experience and all reached the same conclusion - that virtually everyone in our society is 'enslaved' by government, corporations, and banks, all of which are owned and/or controlled by a small, global elite.

Reaching this conclusion is one thing; to act on it is another. These four individuals acted on it. As with the eco-social justice activists, there doesn't seem to be an obvious explanation for why they became activists, considering that others who have the same knowledge or opinion do not act. Perhaps a clue lies in the likelihood, as I suggested, that had the individuals perceived only themselves as being victims in the circumstances of their epiphany experience, they would not be motivated to help others to become free. That is, and it seems like stating the obvious, having empathy might be a necessary condition for activism. Still, it isn't a sufficient condition.

Finally, there seems to be a similarity between the characteristics of the activists' epiphany experiences and their methods of activism, just as there seems to be with the eco-social justice activists. Corey works to help people free themselves by trying to

replicate in them some sense of his own epiphany. He says, for most people, the button is when they realize, “‘You mean, I can take home my whole paycheck?’ . . . That’s the kicker.” Audrey’s epiphany resides in her ongoing inner tension between her need to question everything and the oppressive resistance to it in society. Now, though her questioning is never-waning, she provides the sort of answers that she was looking for to other questioning people, as an educator for the Paradigm Group. Owen’s world turned around when he heard a recording of a talk, presented at a seminar, that revealed ‘hidden truths’ about the monetary system. He immediately began to gorge himself on all related information and he educates others individually and at seminars and he helps people to become free of their debts so that they may pursue their own passions, just as he is now doing through this work. Steve’s epiphany comprised his recognition of a conflict between his spiritual beliefs and his experience as a citizen as well as his discovery, after much research, of the truth behind the conflict, which thereby resolved it. His research and court challenge wasn’t an attempt to change some aspect of society, but to learn the truth of his standing as a person.⁹⁵ He is still not trying to change anything. It will change of its own accord. In the meantime, in response to other people’s interest, he informs them of the results of his research, helping them to learn the truth and act on it, as they see fit. From his perception, he is not, therefore, an activist, but a researcher and educator. All four of these individuals, then, practise their activism (or non-activism, per Steve) in ways that are related to how they experienced their epiphanies. If they can’t induce an epiphany, they try to at least convey some of its character.

⁹⁵ Unfortunately, I cannot provide any details of Steve’s court challenge without risking violating his preference for and right to anonymity.

There are some notable differences among these activists, too. Audrey, for example, is alone in not believing in a Christian God and in not deferring to the scriptures for the 'truth'. While she believes in a creator, she shares the belief with the eco-social justice activists that we are all somehow connected with each other and nature. Owen, too, believes that we are interconnected "on an energy level", but he also believes in the Christian God and studies the Bible.

Similarly, while Corey and Owen see no problem with commodifying nature, provided that we manage nature sustainably, both Audrey and Steve expressed that nature ought not to be valued as a commodity but as 'the things that they are', and that agribusiness is just another example of the profit-maximizing corporate mindset. Steve went further. He looks forward to the day when 'natural commerce' will displace our present capital-based economic system. When that happens, animals, fish, and trees will be viewed as the things that they are and not as their cash equivalents.

As I said earlier, with respect to differences among the eco-social justice activists' beliefs and opinions, in a society such as ours in which people are exposed to many diverse philosophies and theories of life, there is bound to be a significant amount of cross-over and influence. People's world views are informed by everything people learn and experience and they are in flux. Indeed, this is, in great part, what activists rely on as they work to affect social change.

Summary

Having now identified and examined significant recurring elements of the meanings that the four radical freedom activists give to their lives, to others, and to their relationships with others, here is a summary of those meanings.

1. Virtually all humans, in our society, at least, are slaves or live as slaves. Our masters are the government, the corporate world, banks, so-called experts, and, ultimately, a global elite that owns and/or manipulates them.
2. The two predominant means of control are the corrupt monetary system and social support and social justice systems.
3. Most people resist the idea that they are slaves because they uncritically accept the world and thoughts that their masters give them.
4. Because the control systems were legally instituted, requiring that people voluntarily, even if unwittingly, contract into them, people may legally extricate themselves from them and thereby regain their freedom.
5. The basis for this fact is that humans are *a priori* free individuals, so-called 'natural persons', that status having been granted to us by our creator (Owen, Corey, and Steve: Christian God; Audrey: 'greater power').
6. Canada's legal underpinnings are sound and support the recognition of the *a priori* free individual.
7. Humans, born free, are, therefore, equal. There is, therefore, no hierarchy among humans.
8. Consequently, there is no legitimate basis for domination or oppression among humans.
9. Owen and Audrey believe that everything is interconnected through a collective consciousness (Audrey) or in 'some kind of an energy way' (Owen). (Corey rejects that notion and I didn't obtain Steve's opinion on this.)
10. Humans are higher in a hierarchy than non-humans whether by virtue of our placement there by God or via our superior intellect and reasoning capacity.
11. Concerning the commodification of nature, Audrey urges that we develop a more caring and loving relationship with nature. Through such a relationship, we will consider things in nature for what they are and not as a commodity. Steve looks forward to the re-emergence of a 'natural commerce' system that will render the notion of 'commodity' meaningless. Things will be valued for what they are and not for some monetary equivalent. Neither Corey nor Owen has a concern with commodifying nature.
12. We are the stewards of our world and we are responsible for its health.
13. Our society is irresponsible in its management and use of nature. Our use of nature is wildly out of balance.
14. The chief real-world implication and message of all of the above points is that, being slaves, we are not only not free. We are not looking after our world. It is being run by an uncaring, greedy, corporate system in common with manipulated governments

and a corrupt monetary system that together recognize only the financial bottom line, and all on behalf of a financial elite that put it all in place for the elite's own gain. We each have a moral duty to regain our freedom and to take back control of our lives and the world and to bring both back to health. Indeed, we can regain control of our lives and the world only by first becoming free

15. The activists attribute, in great part, their activism to certain turning-point experiences or epiphanies in their lives.
16. All first or only epiphany experiences were negative or concerned a negative revelation. Both Corey's and Steve's second epiphany experiences were positive.
17. All of the epiphany experiences concerned the activists themselves. They realized that they were victims of control by others.
18. The activists realized that all of society shared the same victimization. Virtually everyone in society is a victims of social control.
19. The activists' epiphany experiences don't explain the compulsion to act.
20. The activists' epiphany experiences are similar in nature to the methods that the respective activists use to try to bring about social change.
21. The differences among the world views of the four activists can be attributed to the cross-over or influence of the diverse philosophies and life theories that abound in our society. Also, the differences are less significant than their similarities.

I have now examined the common understandings of each of the two groups of activists. I have also examined commonalities in the activists' epiphany experiences. Additionally, I have noted some differences among the activists in each group as well as some similarities between the activists' epiphany experiences and their activist methods. Now I can bring my observations of the two activist groups together.

8. ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I hope to facilitate a deeper understanding of and an appreciation for the activist groups' efforts to bring about their respective and, in many ways, conflicting visions of a better world. I begin by addressing differences between the activists' world views and the theory benchmark positions that I established early on. I then examine the activists' world views - understandings of the self, the self's relationship with the non-self or 'other', the activists' views concerning the commodification of nature, and differences in these understandings and views among the activists within each group and between the two groups. I next examine whom and/or what the activists consider are barriers, opponents, or resistant forces to their endeavors. I then explore the activists' epiphany experiences and the relationships between those experiences and the activists' methods of activism. Finally, I discuss some social implications of this analysis for social change projects more generally.

World Views vs. Theory Benchmark Positions

Though the activists' world views and their respective theory benchmark positions that I established in chapter 2 are not in perfect unison with each other, they are not greatly divergent. Of the radical freedom activists, Corey's and Steve's world views align well with Hayek's understanding of freedom, nuanced by pre-Lockean 'natural law' understandings, that, for the purposes of this study, I established as the benchmark extreme freedom theory position. Both Corey and Steve believe that humans are 'natural persons' possessing the inalienable right to freedom. Audrey believes this, too. Owen didn't articulate a theory but his activism involves appeals to 'natural law'. However, both

Owen and Audrey believe that we are all interconnected at an "energy level" and via a "collective consciousness", respectively. This connectedness implies that we must accept some responsibility to ensure the well-being of others. Corey emphatically rejects that we are connected at all. He also believes, with Hayek, that social justice is incompatible with freedom. Unlike, Hayek, though, he and the other radical freedom activists explicitly oppose the corporate world, the elite few who own and/or control it, and, implicitly, neoliberalism. Steve described the system of 'natural commerce' that he expects will eventually displace capitalism. These activists are not libertarians, as Hayek is. Essentially, they are populists who are active in society at the grass-roots level. Their focus is not anti-government or anti-social justice, but anti-control. Their views are consistent with natural law. Except for Owen's and Audrey's belief that we are somehow interconnected, the four activists' world views are reasonably consistent with the radical freedom theory benchmark position.

Of the eco-social justice activists, Janine's, Marisa's, and to a lesser extent, Ingmar's world views are approximately aligned with the ecological feminism-informed eco-social justice theory benchmark that posits that humans and all of nature are interconnected, interdependent, mutually contingent, yet unique, inherently social and political subjects who constitute a dynamic, ecological whole. Ingmar's belief in a collective human consciousness doesn't quite fit with this all-inclusive view that, as I understand it, wouldn't exclude non-humans from the collective consciousness. Ingmar's intense sense of connection with nature and particularly the wilderness, though, is consistent with the benchmark position. While much of Bernard's world view coheres with the benchmark position, his championing of property ownership - "Property-owning

is freedom" - and his advocacy for stewardship over the Earth do not. The notion that one thing can legitimately own or manage another thing, however benevolently, is incompatible with the notions that all things are mutually contingent and interdependent and that speciesism is yet another form of oppressive discrimination.

There are several possible reasons for the world view/theory divergence in both activist groups. First, I could have misinterpreted some activists' activity and/or their expressions in the media and, equally, I could be misinterpreting the theories. Second, the activists may emphasize or suppress certain aspects of their world views in their activist work and in the media. Third, the small number of activists who are accessible to me made it difficult to find activists who are ideally suited to this project. Fourth, I don't believe that it is possible for any theory or world view to be internally consistent for even a moment, let alone to be mutually consistent over time. Theories, world views, and the world all interact and change at different rates, all the time. To learn of a total mutual consistency between a sociopolitical theory and the world views of a segment of the population, however small, would be cause for concern, as it would indicate a situation that Laclau and Zac call a 'society effect', a state of total domination in which there is no dispute or resistance to the dominant theory or world view.⁹⁶ A fifth possible reason for world view/theory divergence is the inadequacy of the theory to explain or describe reality, as Billig points out (pp. 33-34). Undoubtedly, it is some combination of these reasons that accounts for the world view/theory divergences that are evident in this study.

⁹⁶ Ernesto Laclau and Lilian Zac. "Minding the Gap: The Subject of Politics." In The Making of Political Identities, ed. Ernesto Laclau. London: Verso, 1994, 17.

World Views

Notwithstanding some significant variances (that I'll discuss presently), the two groups of activists tend to understand themselves and their respective worlds in two different ways. Generally, the eco-social justice activists understand themselves predominantly as active co-participants in an immensely complex eco-system comprising a seemingly infinite variety of interacting and interdependent life forms and habitat. They feel connected to it and have empathy with it. At the same time, they recognize that they and virtually all humans have become separate from it, that we, as self-aware beings, have become 'other' to the ecosystem. They are aware of their own and other humans' effects in nature. They recognize themselves as individuals who, simply by existing, necessarily affect others and the world itself. Thus, they are aware of themselves in terms of others, in terms of the 'other'. But they are not just aware. They are also sensitive to, empathetic with, and, so, concerned for the other. More, they express their concern through action. While other humans are included in that 'other', these activists are concerned primarily for the non-self-aware 'other' that is unable to defend itself against the destructive and otherwise oppressive effects of human activity. Their active concern for the non-human other is a central part of their lives and of how they understand themselves as co-participants in this world.

The radical freedom activists tend to understand themselves and their world quite differently. Their predominant understanding emphasizes their sense of being individuals in a society of individuals who ought to be free to interact with one another in a variety of ways as they pursue their own ends, both individually and collectively. Thus, the four activists are sensitive to restrictions on their freedom to pursue their own ends

and to being coerced or manipulated to serve the will of others. They deny the legitimacy of any presumed authority that tries to control people against their will. The people themselves are the only, true authority, save the god/greater power that created them. Over the past few centuries, some people have manipulated governments to create organizations - principally banks, and corporations - that, together with the governments, have coerced and tricked citizens into together building a safe, secure, comfortable society, in exchange for the fees needed to finance that society and for compliance with the laws and rules that are necessary to maintain order and control. The freedom activists understand this as a great con and a life of slavery and they reject it. They preoccupy themselves with learning the myriad ways that people are 'enslaved' so that they may reverse the processes and gain their freedom, all the while sharing their knowledge with any others who also wish to become free.

One can better understand the two different world views in relation to each other when one considers their respective underlying logics upon which turn how the activists understand how things relate to one another. For the radical freedom activists, everything inhabits a place on a hierarchy. God or a 'greater power' is at the top. Humans are just beneath. Beneath humans are the animals, plants, and the rest of nature - resources for our use and enjoyment. Audrey explains also that the 'creator' created humans; we created governments; and governments created corporations. And the created cannot control its creator (unless the creator allows it to). Humans, being created as equals and subservient to only our creator, are otherwise free. It is wrong, therefore, for humans to live as slaves. These activists, perceiving that they and others do live as slaves, work to right this wrong. But they are concerned with the 'slavery' only of humans. The notions

of freedom or slavery simply don't apply to non-humans. Instead, we must exercise responsible stewardship over them.

In contrast, the eco-social justice activists' world is devoid of hierarchy. These four activists don't hierarchically differentiate between humans and the rest of nature. To posit a hierarchy is self-serving, says Marisa, and overlooks the fact that we, too, are animals, says Bernard. Nor are they deists. The two who believe in a spiritual existence don't associate that spirituality with some 'higher plane'. Rather, it is a part of us that we share with all living things and through which we are all interconnected. Still, these activists recognize that others perceive a hierarchy, with humans situated above nature. But instead of using the terms 'Freedom and slavery', 'master and slave', the activists use the terms 'oppression' and 'domination'. Bernard is the exception, though. He both uses the term 'steward' and advocates property ownership as being the "bastion of freedom". Apparently, despite that he "totally rejoice[s] in [his] evolutionary connection to all species," for him, there is a duality in nature. As I said earlier, his world view doesn't quite align with the benchmark eco-social justice theory position. But it does help to illustrate both the association of the concepts of hierarchy, freedom, and stewardship with each other, and the eco-social justice view that, without those concepts, there is no legitimate basis for domination or oppression.

There is a point, though, at which these eco-social justice activists subordinate non-humans to humans. Humans, they all agree, must survive. When it comes to whether it is us or them, and especially at the species level, it is us. The activists' desire for our species to survive is greater than their desire that other species survive. Perhaps some other radical environmentalists might erase the human/non-human distinction at the

point of survival. Or perhaps that is another difference between theory and the real world. Of course, these activists work to prevent the making of such decisions and to minimize the occurrences and levels of any harm that humans inflict on nature.

These different concerns of the two activist groups and the differences in how they generally understand how humans interact with each other and with our natural environment reflect their general understanding of human nature. The eco-social justice activists tend to be critical of humans as a species. They work to raise awareness of the damage and oppression caused by our 'hedonistic tendencies', as Ingmar puts it, to generate or increase empathy with nature, and, where that fails, to persuade or coerce the government to legislate environmental protections. The freedom activists, on the other hand, direct their harshest criticisms to only the relatively small group of self-interested people and their organizations whom the activists maintain have enslaved the rest of civil society. The activists are critical of people who refuse to 'awaken' to the truth of their 'slavery', but these people are understood more as victims than as people with ill intent.

With respect to the commodification of nature, both groups of activists have a range of views. Interestingly, the eco-social justice activists' range of views fits within the radical freedom activists' range of views. Ingmar is concerned that the old growth forests and other endangered species are kept off the list of things to commodify. Marisa is concerned with how things are treated, whether they are commodified or not. Neither she nor Ingmar oppose commodifying nature, *per se*. Bernard is conditionally favorable towards commodifying nature. Land can be purchased, for example, to protect it from greedy developers. As well, neither people nor animals should be commodified, he says, and trade for profit alone is morally wrong, too. He looks forward to a time when we

move "beyond capitalism". Only Janine calls for a severe reduction of the use of nature. She opposes the commodification of nature, but, as she puts it, given that we live in a world in which money exists she doesn't see a mainstream alternative. As I pointed out in chapter 5, these activists' positions on commodifying nature seem to vary according to how the practise would directly impact the aspect of nature with which they are most concerned. None, except perhaps Janine, seem to have previously considered possible less obvious linkages between humans' attitude towards nature and commodification.

Radical freedom activists Owen and Corey admit to not having given any serious consideration to the use of nature. Simply, it isn't an issue with which freedom activists are concerned. Both were explicit, though, that nature's purpose is to provide food and enjoyment for us. In contrast, Audrey and Steve disapprove of the commodification of nature. Audrey dislikes that the use of nature is now just agribusiness. She believes that, instead, we have a "moral duty to treat that which we're taking with the respect and love that it deserves." Steve agrees. He reverently refers to "the animal kingdom and the sea" as he expresses his expectation that humans will one day practise responsible and sustainable stewardship over nature. Of all the participants in this study, only he specified an economic system in which commodification plays no part. Through 'natural commerce', a system of commerce that has been in practise, he believes, "since the beginning of man," and is actually the underground economy, objects are valued for what they are and not for some economic equivalent. After enough people have freed themselves from their economic 'slavery' to government and the corporate world, natural commerce will arise.

Such a system would presumably please the eco-social justice activists to the extent that they perceive improved human behavior towards nature. For eco-social justice theorists, however, as long as there remains a hierarchical relationship - inequality - between humans and the rest of nature, there is domination and oppression. Valuing the 'other' for what it is and understanding one's place in nature as being above the other, even if one is its benevolent steward, are two incompatible ideas. Commodifying nature and stewardship are two independent, though sometimes overlapping, forms of oppression.

Resistances and Oppositions

While the radical freedom activists oppose some of the programs, regulations, and institutions that the eco-social justice activists might propose, the two groups don't perceive each other as sociopolitical opponents. For the most part, the freedom activists support the aims of environmentalism. But they object both to being forced to finance their implementation and maintenance through, for example, taxation, and to being forced to blindly comply with any associated regulations and laws. From the eco-social justice activists' perspective, until their involvement in this project, they weren't even aware of the individual freedom movement, except as expressed by libertarians and, even then, it was of little or no concern to them. However, being associated with or involved in the social justice movement, they all agree that nobody should be oppressed and, so, nobody should live as slaves. Indeed, generally, they work to extend that imperative to include all of nature.

Both groups do share a common opponent, though, namely, the apparent partnership of government and big business. The eco-social justice activists believe that the government's and corporations' joint efforts to selfishly maximize profit at any cost are paid for by the oppression, suffering, and destruction of our natural environment. The activists often directly oppose government-endorsed development and other public and private projects that they believe negatively impact the environment. Rarely do they gain meaningful concessions for the environment and virtually never without compromise. This is not to say that they are opponents of the state *per se*. They are, rather, opposed to actions by the state that favor business and profit at the expense of the environment. These activists would support a more enlightened state that would extend the consideration and, therefore, delivery of social justice programs to the natural environment.

The radical freedom activists, however, are focussed directly against the collaborative government and corporate control of their lives and of society generally. Their methods involve researching how this control is accomplished and then reversing the process. Their success varies and is achieved at the level of the individual. When there is success, it is clear and irrefutable. These activists, then, have a better understanding of their opponents and of their relationship with them than do their environmentalist counterparts. Audrey says that the numerous groups in society who approach the government to bring about social change "are disadvantaged because they don't know who they are" in relation to the government. They have the status of slaves. To paraphrase Audrey, the eco-social justice activists are like 'the slaves going to their master to demand better treatment of their fellow slaves.' Like the eco-social justice

activists, though, the freedom activists' intent is not to dismantle government. Rather, as articulated most clearly by Steve, they seek to reduce it to its sound foundations and then safeguard it from self-interested individuals and groups who would seek to manipulate it to their advantage, as is happening now.

The two activist groups also share resistance to their efforts throughout society. Both find that most people are apathetic and comfortable with the status quo. The radical freedom activists perceive that most people are comfortably numb, living in self-imposed 'slavery', unwilling to take responsibility for their own lives. The eco-social justice activists find that it is too easy for people to consume the nature-unfriendly products that the corporate world tells us that we need. Society is fully engaged with improving the so-called 'living standard', despite that maintaining even the present level is unsustainable and unreplicable globally. Too few people are willing to reduce their ecological footprint.

So resistant is mainstream society to these activists' messages that the activists are somewhat marginalized. While there is more public acceptance of the work of environmental activists, both groups must be careful. Activists from both social movements have been imprisoned. Owen lost his house. Consequently, some of the activists, especially the radical freedom activists, prefer to keep a low profile. Except for Corey, all of the freedom activists and Bernard, of the eco-social justice activists, wished to remain anonymous.

Both activist groups, then, have their work cut out for them. They are trying to change the world views of people who are resistant to change and they are working

against powerful forces in society and in the world, in whose interests it is that the prevailing world view that they imposed is maintained.

Epiphany Experiences and Activist Practises

Despite the odds against these activists' world views displacing or significantly influencing the world view of mainstream society, the activists are nevertheless persistent and, except for Ingmar, hopeful for change, though even he says, "Nevertheless, it's worth the effort." Also, Ingmar is the only one of the activists who has concluded that, at least concerning the environment, having knowledge of a situation that one agrees is undesirable is not enough to compel one to act to change it. Consequently, he works ultimately to change the situation with or without public support, though he does also try to gain that support.

Certainly there are others in society whose world views are similar to those of the activists in this study. There are few, though, who feel strongly enough about certain issues to center their lives around them and work to bring about sociopolitical change concerning them. The eight activists in this study do feel that strongly about these two particular issues - environmentalism and individual freedom. And, following Denzin, as a means to understand their world views, I am interested in any epiphany experiences that the activists associate with them and their activism.

When I asked each of the eight activists if they could describe any significant epiphany experience(s) in their lives that they could link to their present-day activism, they all did so. I don't mean to suggest that there necessarily are causal relationships between these experiences. For example, the epiphanies didn't cause these people to

become activists or even to think in a certain way. In fact, the epiphany experiences could be such only if the individuals' mindsets were already a certain, appropriate way.

In all cases, the activists' first epiphany experiences made them aware of some situation or fact that they considered to be negative or that they preferred weren't the case. Further, for all the eco-social justice activists, the negativity concerned the well-being of some 'other(s)', predominantly non-human others. To the extent that the activists feel connected or empathy with these others, they experienced the negativity with respect to themselves, as well. For all the radical freedom activists, the negativity directly involved themselves: their lives were being controlled by governments, banks, and corporations. They also realized that virtually all people were being similarly controlled. These realizations - of some negativity experienced by others and their selves - informed their activism and their world views. But as I said, the realizations, or empathy experiences, did not cause their activism, though they might be necessary conditions for activism.

The activists' empathy experiences do seem to have some other, not necessarily causal, correlations with the activists' world views and their approaches to activism. Their epiphany experiences brought into relief for them some situations or conditions that they strongly believe are unfair, immoral, or otherwise wrong. The activists want others to experience as much passion in their lives about those wrongs as the activists feel in theirs about them. To do this, they use methods that are similar to those through which their own passions were ignited. Except in Ingmar's case, just as the activists' epiphany experiences involved awakenings, realizations, and/or learning, they try to induce in others similar pseudo-epiphany experiences principally by raising awareness and informing people. Only Ingmar, whose epiphany experience - being an aware participant

in the wilderness - was centered on emotion and did not involve an 'awakening' or an acquiring of knowledge, rejects the idea that education is the solution. Instead, he appeals primarily to people's emotional connection with nature.

A significant difference between how the two activist groups generally try to raise passion in others is in about the welfare of whom or what they want others to be passionate. The eco-social justice activists raise awareness and inform people about the various plights of nature, such as endangered trees or cruelly treated animals, hoping that people's empathy with them will motivate them to change their behavior. The radical individual freedom activists, on the other hand, inform people about how they themselves are being manipulated and controlled, hoping that their self-interest will motivate them to learn how to become free. In this way, the freedom activists work to free society one person at a time.

While both groups report successes, all of the activists expressed some frustration with public apathy. Two activists in each group commented that people need to experience some 'cataclysmic event', 'shock', 'disillusionment', or 'personal pain' - some epiphany experience - to mobilize them. Yet, even if events such as these may stir people up and compel them to act, there is nothing about those events that dictates or suggests a particular trajectory of action. For example, a nuclear power plant failure would likely mobilize vigorous support both for increased budgets to improve nuclear power plant safety and for the abolishment of nuclear power plants. Further, the vigorous support would likely wane and give way to status quo complacency until another 'shocking' event occurs.

Clearly, more than shocking events are needed to implement the lasting social change that these activists would like to see. Their own passions haven't waned. On the contrary, after many years, even decades in some cases, they are just as passionate or more so. They are also more knowledgeable about their respective issues and have learned from their various successes and failures. Most of them, too, have explicitly expressed their awareness that lasting social change will come about only after prolonged activist work. Corey, Owen, Audrey, Bernard, and Marisa all spoke variously of their hope or expectation that, once a 'critical mass' of like-minded people is reached, a shift of social consciousness to one aligned with their respective world views will come about. They understand that it is their task to help build that critical mass. And they must do so without the benefit of most of those people having experienced their own epiphany experiences, try as they might to induce them.

This understanding of social change fits well with Communist activist Antonio Gramsci's writings on the subject while imprisoned in Italy between the two World Wars. Both activist groups, particularly the radical freedom activists, have become aware of contradictions within their 'common sense', "the uncritical and largely unconscious way in which a person perceives the world," as Roger Simon explains Gramsci's term.⁹⁷ The activists have become aware that their respective understandings of the world in which they participate and live their daily lives often do not accord with and sometimes contradict the dominant understandings of the world that they have theretofore assimilated without question. It is the task of (Marxist) intellectuals to criticize 'common sense', to bring into relief its oppressive aspects that are attributable to the dominant

⁹⁷ Roger Simon. *Gramsci's Political Thought* 2nd ed. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991, 64.

ideology, and to develop its positive aspects, thereby transforming peoples' common sense into a more coherent understanding of the world.⁹⁸ Through this work arises a social bloc, potentially a critical mass, that is united by a common world view.

With respect to the two groups' approaches to activism, the radical freedom activists have a more savvy relationship with the dominant forces of society. While they are only informally part of a social movement (working, instead, individually or in small independent groups), their individual ideologies share an underlying political logic, namely that people are free beings who have, for a variety of reasons, entered into slavish relations. The eco-social justice activists, on the other hand, are immediately engaged with society's dominant forces. Instead, they focus principally on influencing the attitudes and behavior of mainstream society. This is the 'disadvantage' that Audrey speaks of when she refers to social groups who try to change society from within the system. Both approaches may ultimately have some impact, though Gramsci would give better odds to an approach that combines a site-centered strategy for change with a civil-society-oriented strategy - his so-called "dual strategy".

Gramsci would also agree that a 'critical mass' approach to success is appropriate for the aspirations of these two activist groups. In well-developed civil societies, such as ours, he prescribes what he terms 'a war of position', the building up of an alliance of diverse social forces, united by a common will.⁹⁹ Of course, this requires organizing. However, though the activists in this study may be members of activist communities, the communities are not organized as such. For example, they have neither an organizational

⁹⁸ Simon, 25, 65.

⁹⁹ Simon, 25.

structure to tie them together nor a forum to facilitate coherent interaction among their selves. Instead, whether as individuals or in small groups, they act independently. Also, while their present approaches may be able to take advantage of life-changing events that occur in the world or of personal epiphany experiences, those events and experiences can't be relied upon to occur opportunistically. Organization, according to Gramsci, is key.

Implications for Social Change

The foregoing analysis and this project generally have enabled me to formulate some insights that have implications for projects of social change. Briefly, here they are.

oppositional vs. mainstream social views

Taking an oppositional position on an issue necessarily places one at odds with the mainstream view, by definition. It also opposes one to those in power positions who own and/or control the dominant institutions and organizations that dictate the status quo world view. Those dominant institutions and organizations are the enemy-in-common to those who hold non-mainstream views, regardless of how those views may conflict with each other.

coalition-building

Gramsci recommends it. The large successful multi-interest group protests that we have seen during this past century - labor, human rights, peace, anti-free trade - have proven its effectiveness. Both of the social movements that are represented by the

activists in this study would benefit from coalition-building or at least a sharing of knowledge and insights. For example, social change groups would be more successful if they understood, as the radical freedom activists do, their legal relationship with the government and otherwise had a good understanding of sociopolitical theories that would support their real world aspirations. Similarly, the radical freedom movement could learn from the more progressive environmentalists (and feminists) of the inherent oppressiveness of liberalism. They might thus be receptive to considering how their understanding of a hierarchical nature facilitates nature's 'slavery', that nature's lower standing, relative to humans, is just another form of discrimination. Generally, social movement groups seem to tend to limit their coalitions to groups comprising like-minded others and tend not to consider as possible allies those with concerns they are relatively unfamiliar. A broadening of coalition spheres would likely prove to be mutually beneficial.

empathy and knowledge

Activists are, by definition, empathetic with certain 'others' in society. If they were concerned with only their own well-being, they would not be activists. As well, their empathy has both limits and different intensities. Some of the radical freedom activists, for example, have empathy with animals. But they are concerned primarily with the welfare of other humans. Though the eco-social justice activists, too, are concerned with the welfare of other humans, they are more empathetic with non-humans and the rest of nature, at least more so than the freedom activists. Yet, each eco-social justice activist focusses on a particular segment of nature. Some other people seem not to

have empathy with anybody or thing beyond a few friends or relatives. Also, it seems apparent that one's knowledge that a person or thing is in dire straits is of little or no consequence to one who has little or no empathy with that person or thing. Reciprocally, one who is empathetic with a person or thing but who has no knowledge of the dire straits that that person or thing may be in is unable to remedy the dire straits. Where there is empathy but a dearth of knowledge, knowledge is needed. Where there is knowledge but a dearth of empathy, empathy is needed. Can empathy be induced or increased? I will answer that question in the conclusion. But to respond to Ingmar's realization that 'everybody knows what's going on,' and, so, education isn't the answer: *not* everybody knows and many people need reminding. But it is true that not everybody cares.

difference

No two people's world views are the same, no person's world view is constant over time, and no person's world view is either internally or externally consistent. This is precisely why sociopolitical theory cannot wholly explain, let alone prescribe, reality. Reality and people are too complex and dynamic to reduce an understanding of them to a static, generalized explanation or to expect them to fit into some design for an ideal social resolution. Theory is, nevertheless, a great guide and analytical tool. As well, the gap between theory and reality can never be crossed, though the effort to cross is always worthwhile. Similarly, it is always worthwhile to try to understand other ways of thinking. But it is more important, perhaps, to realize that one can never fully understand any other way of thinking. Whose own world view, even, is internally consistent? It must necessarily be, then, that there are inconsistencies and differences within any given

social movement, just as the social movements themselves are inconsistencies within greater society. Inconsistency and difference are signs of health. They make social movement possible.

9. CONCLUSION

The world views of the two groups of activists who participated in this study generally correspond with my initial perceptions of the grass-roots ideologies of the two social movements of which the activists are respectively a part. This is not surprising, since I selected the participants based *upon* my initial perceptions that were informed by the activists' views as they expressed them through various media. Accordingly, the activists' world views generally correspond also with the two benchmark theory positions that I established as being oppositional theory positions representative of those two social movements. On the whole, the two groups of activists do indeed understand the world differently from each other.

Leaving aside significant differences within the group and ignoring complexities even within each individual, the eco-social justice activists understand their selves as beings who are interconnected, on an equal level, with all other beings and with nature itself. They tend to think of the self and 'other' as being mutually constitutive. There is no 'other' to which the self is wholly differentiated. Concomitantly, these eco-social justice activists have pronounced empathy with nature, especially with the certain elements of nature that particularly concern the individual activists. They reject the notion that non-humans and the rest of nature are less than human and are mere resources for our use and enjoyment. They believe that speciesism is just another form of oppression and that social justice should be extended to all things.

Similarly leaving differences and individual complexities aside, the radical freedom activists understand their selves and all humans as individuals with the god-given inalienable right to freedom. All humans, therefore, are equals among each other

and none has a legitimate right to dominate another. Humans are bound ultimately by 'natural law', though we may enter into agreements with each other, as we wish, such as with which to govern ourselves as we interact with each other. While two freedom activists believe, respectively, that humans and all things are interconnected, they all believe in the preeminence of the autonomous, free, individual. This freedom is predicated on the differentiation of the self and the 'other' and on the equality among them. The equality isn't extended to non-humans. Accordingly, the freedom activists don't share the same intensity of empathy with nature as do their environmentalist counterparts. Nature is hierarchical, they believe. Humans, having the faculty of reason, are the highest form of life, next to the 'greater power' or God that/who created us. Beneath humans are all the creatures of the Earth for us to use and enjoy. It is our responsibility, though, to exercise responsible stewardship over these gifts.

All eight activists are concerned with human behavior that doesn't conform to how they believe the world ought to be. The eco-social justice activists oppose the cruel and oppressive treatment and unsustainable use of nature. They work to protect nature by raising awareness of this harmful human behavior, informing people of their options, and pressuring the government to legislate appropriate and effective protective measures. The radical freedom activists oppose being controlled by government, corporations, and banks. They work to free themselves and others by researching and understanding thoroughly how this legitimized 'slavery' was and is accomplished, legally challenging the government, corporations, and banks, and by informing interested others of their research and experience. Thus, the eco-social justice activists tend to be more critical of humans as a species than do the freedom activists who direct their criticism

predominantly to the small group of self-interested people and organizations that have 'enslaved' civil society.

Both activist groups, the freedom activists especially, find themselves marginalized in society. Their world views and activities don't conform with mainstream ideology and, so, are at odds with the dominant forces in society in whose interest it is to generate and maintain mainstream ideology and with the complacent and apathetic masses in society who effortlessly assimilate that ideology. Yet, in terms of what they want to accomplish, the two activist groups are opposed to each other, as well. Whereas the eco-social justice activists advocate that social justice, with its requisite rights bestowments and government-backed institutions, be extended to the natural environment, the freedom activists work to free themselves and help others to free themselves from being obligated to support social justice initiatives and programs. The two social movements don't face off in the public arena, but some of their defining objectives oppose each other.

Yet, there are important overlaps between the two groups and differences within them. The most significant overlap is their views on the commodification of nature. Though none of the eco-social justice activists condemned commodifying nature outright, all did implicitly or explicitly specify particular elements of nature that ought not to be commodified and two of the activists expressed their preference for, respectively, the absence of money and a shift to an economic system beyond capitalism. Two of the radical freedom activists have no objection to commodifying nature. The other two, however, explicitly asserted their preference for a system in which people value things for what they are and not for some economic equivalent. One of them, Steve, said that

'natural commerce' is such a system and that he is hopeful that it will one day replace the present capitalist system. Natural commerce will rise from its present underground economy status when enough people free themselves from 'slavery' to live as 'natural persons', and return society to the rule of 'natural law'. While the commodification of nature would be outmoded in that system, eco-social justice activists and theorists would still object to the remaining inherently oppressive logic of liberalism and the concept of a hierarchical nature.

Other overlaps among the two activist groups include that two of the freedom activists believe that humans and everything else are interconnected (though unequally) and that one of the eco-social justice activists, Bernard, advocates owning property as a means of being free (as well as a means to save it from greedy developers). Because these views are secondary to and do not get in the way of the main thrust of the activists' work, they might provide some common ground for discussion between the two groups, but they don't undermine the activists' sense that they are solid proponents of their main objectives.

These overlaps identify differences within the activist groups. Not all of the activists' cohorts share these views. There are other differences among them, too. Ingmar, for example, is alone among all eight activists in believing that education is not the answer to bring about social change because everybody already knows the facts. He is alone, also, in his opinion that efforts to save the environment are hopeless, that the damage is just too great and that not enough people care. He nevertheless persists, though he appeals primarily to peoples' empathy with nature and he educates people as a secondary activist strategy. Other differences among the activists include beliefs in how

and/or whether we are interconnected and beliefs in the nature of a spiritual existence and whether or not there is one. These and other differences are insignificant relative to the central agreements among the activists in each group that each activist uses to identify him or herself with a particular social movement.

'Differences among similarities' also describes the meanings that the participants give to the experiences that they identified as being epiphany experiences or turning points in their lives. The experiences themselves were markedly different, even in type, per Denzin's typology. Some of the experiences were sudden and momentary, each lasting only as long as it took for the realization of the significance of the event to occur. Others are ongoing experiences and still others were of two parts, separated by years. All, though, were identified as being important, life-changing events. Still, they did not necessarily cause the individuals to become activists. The individuals were already predisposed to giving to their experiences the particular meanings that they gave to them. The experiences were significant to them because the individuals were already predisposed to experiencing them that way.

Through the epiphany experiences, each of the participants became aware of some situation or fact that s/he preferred weren't the case. For the eco-social justice activists, the situations or facts concerned the well-being primarily of non-human 'others'. For the freedom activists, the situations or facts directly concerned themselves, though they also realized and were concerned that virtually everyone (human) experienced the same negative conditions. This concern for others is a central, if not defining, characteristic of these eight activists. Their epiphany experiences seem to have brought their concerns into relief for them.

The epiphany experiences also resemble the means by which the activists work for social change. Those whose epiphany experiences were primarily learning experiences (all but Ingmar) try to influence people primarily by providing them with pertinent knowledge. Ingmar, and to some extent Marisa, whose experiences were more emotional, try to appeal to people's emotions to bring about change. Similarly, the eco-social justice activists try to generate in people empathy with the particular aspects of the environment with which they are respectively concerned. The freedom activists try to free society, one person at a time, by appealing to individual people's own self-interests. Each in their own way, the activists try to induce epiphany experiences in others that would be similar to the one(s) that they experienced themselves.

Having now gained an understanding of the world views of some activists for the two social movements whose generally contrasting ideologies captured my interest, I am in a position to comment on implications for social change projects generally and on topics for future study that I think would help to further understand the interplay of these and other social movements with each other and with society itself.

Further to my foregoing brief discussion on implications for social change (pp. 153-56), one observation of the activists' world views that I found most striking is that, despite that the individual activists strongly identify with their particular social movement, they nevertheless hold views that indicate that the activists are influenced by a wide variety of ideas, concepts, and ideologies that are found in society. Certainly all of the radical freedom activists were at least familiar with the basic arguments of environmentalism. While the eco-social justice activists hadn't heard of the individual freedom movement, they were acquainted with the general aims of conservatism with

which the movement shares some beliefs. Simply by participating in society, the activists and everybody else are exposed to a myriad ways of thinking. The activists' world views reflect this. Recalling Derrida, 'no concept is present in and of itself alone' and 'every concept refers to other concepts' "by means of the systematic play of differences."¹⁰⁰

In her book, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, Donna Haraway emphasizes the dynamic aspect of this mutual reference system. She describes a theory of immune system self-regulation, otherwise called 'the network theory', that was proposed by Nobel Prize-winning immunologist, Niels Jerne, in the early 1970s. Key to the theory is the notion of the 'internal image'. "It entails the premise," she says, "that every member of the immune system is capable of interacting with every other member." Further, it "would always be in a state of dynamic internal responding." Additionally,

It would never be passive, 'at rest', awaiting an activating stimulus from a hostile outside. In a sense, there could be no exterior antigenic structure, no 'invader' that the immune system had not already 'seen' and mirrored internally. 'Self' and 'other' lose their rationalistic oppositional quality and become subtle plays of partially mirrored readings and responses.¹⁰¹

While Haraway is describing a way of understanding the individual or the 'self', the description applies equally well to concepts and world views. Their always "dynamic internal responding" necessarily always creates opportunity and is necessary for purposeful social change. The relatively sedimented ideologies, including the mainstream ideology to which activists find themselves opposed, did not arise in a vacuum. Their 'success' and/or dominance relies on the capacity of people's world views

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, 11.

¹⁰¹ Donna J. Haraway. Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature. New York: Routledge, 1991, 218.

to interact with every other world view. Beyond that, it is just a matter of being persuasive and having an ability to appeal to people's interests. Because of the dynamic nature of this system, this work must be ongoing; it always has to be worked at. For the dominant ideologies, this is the work of those in power and is accomplished through their public institutions, the education system, media, and the corporate world. For the marginalized alternative ideologies, this is the work of theorists and activists who use their own organizations and institutions, mainstream and alternative media, and direct appeals to people's real-world-informed common sense. Typically, those who are less organized or who are marginalized and/or oppressed are less influential in society. Yet, because their points of view are nevertheless reflected in the dominant ideology, even by merely being designated as outside of it, they always have some potential for greater presence and influence.

Understanding how other people's world views can be influenced, particularly at the level of society, would be an important asset to many social movement activists. Central to this understanding, I believe, would be the knowledge of the workings of empathy. There exists in society a broad diversity of senses of empathy, including virtually zero empathy (such as exhibited in those who are regarded as being psychopathic personalities), seemingly universal empathy (i.e., having empathy with all of nature), one's-group-only empathy, and every degree of empathy in between these. Unless empathy is determined by genetics only, one's sense of empathy can change within one's lifetime. It can, therefore, probably be increased and extended, though it can also probably be decreased and contracted, from both within and outside the individual. Understanding how this can be done would be a boon to social movement activists. It

can also be a dangerous tool in the hands of those, such as racists and imperialists, who could benefit by there being less empathy in the world than there is now. A philosophical question remains, concerning manipulating people to increase their empathy, such as environmentalists might wish to do. Working to increase or extend another's sense of empathy implies that her/his previous sense of empathy was deficient, wrong, or possibly even immoral. Only the more empathetic person would make such a judgment, though. The person who, for example, is not empathetic with the live crab she drops into the boiling water prior to eating it, will not likely care to become empathetic with it. The question is further complicated when one considers that this person could be intensely empathetic with certain 'others', such as her children, a pet, or social group. Perhaps, as well, the more empathetic person is too empathetic, if that is even possible. Obviously, there is no correct answer to this question. But the problem and the mechanisms of empathy could bear further study for the benefit of social movement theorists and activists.

Also of interest to them would be research on the theory and practise of the complex of natural commerce, natural law, and the natural person, especially as a possible replacement for capitalism. Hayek notes that natural law was displaced by the rule of law during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Steve suspects that "natural commerce has been taking place since the beginning of man" and believes that it is the current underground economy. Perhaps, as Steve hopes, it is viable in the mainstream . Perhaps, with its operating logic that things 'are valued for what they are' and not in terms of a monetary equivalent, it could be made to be compatible with a non-hierarchical social system that includes all of nature.

In sum, I hope that this study contributes to a better understanding of how two contrasting world views can coexist in society particularly when they are those of people who work to implement them for the benefit of society. Social movement theorists and activists can hopefully recognize that, while there may be gulfs in the terrain between their world views and those of their ideological opponents, there are also bridges that they can build, allowing them all to be more influential in society than they could be on their own. Those who study social movements and activism can hopefully better appreciate the dynamic interplay between the sometimes seemingly contradictory and inconsistent world views that is facilitated by the social interaction of their activist proponents. Without this interplay of world views, social change would not be possible.

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APPENDIX 1

Eco-Social Justice Activists - Invitation to Participate**MARK REED**

1748 Cedar Hill Cross Rd, Victoria, BC, Canada V8P 2R3
(250) 477-7138 markreed@uvic.ca

March 12, 2004

Addressee

x
x
x

Request to interview you for a Sociology Masters thesis research project

Dear [participant],

I am a Sociology Masters student at the University of Victoria. For my Masters thesis project, I will present an analysis of interviews with eight social activists, four of whom pursue individual freedom/liberty and the other four of whom pursue ecological social justice. The purpose of this project is to investigate the aspects of these activists' lives that inform their understandings of themselves and their stances towards the commercial use of nature.

As I know you are aware, the commercialization of nature is a widespread practice, yet it is also an increasingly contentious issue. I am interested in exploring how individuals on both sides of this issue integrate their positions on it with their world views.

I have become aware of your activism in pursuit of ecological justice through the internet. Your experience as an activist, implicit reference to an ecosocialist (i.e., connected) notion of self, and implicit indication of a stance opposed to the commercialization of nature indicate to me that this project would benefit by your participation in it. I am asking you, then, if you would be willing to participate in a single, one-on-one interview in which you would explain your concept of self, world view, views on the commercialization of nature, activism, and significant turning-point or issue in your personal history that may be pertinent to these aspects of yourself. The interview will take 60-90 minutes and will be scheduled to occur sometime during the next few weeks, at a time and place that are suitable to you.

If this interests you, please contact me at your earliest convenience. Please understand that I am not immediately able to confirm your participation in this project, should you express your desire to be involved. However, I hope that you can be involved. We can discuss the details of your participation as this project progresses. Thanks for your time. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Mark Reed

APPENDIX 2
Radical Freedom Activists - Invitation to Participate

MARK REED

1748 Cedar Hill Cross Rd, Victoria, BC, Canada V8P 2R3
(250) 477-7138 markreed@uvic.ca

February 2, 2004

addressee

x
x
x

Request to interview you for a Sociology Masters thesis research project

Dear [participant],

I am a Sociology Masters student at the University of Victoria. For my Masters thesis project, I will present an analysis of interviews with eight social activists, four of whom pursue individual freedom/liberty and the other four of whom pursue ecological social justice. The purpose of this project is to investigate the aspects of these activists' lives that inform their understandings of themselves and their stances towards the commercial use of nature.

As I am sure you are aware, the commercialization of nature is a widespread practice, yet it is also an increasingly contentious issue. I am interested in exploring how individuals on both sides of this issue integrate their positions on it with their world views.

I have become aware of your activism in pursuit of individual freedom/liberty through your publications that a mutual acquaintance of ours has allowed me to read. Your experience as an activist and your reference to a liberal (i.e., sovereign, autonomous) notion of self indicate to me that you would take a stance in favor, at least to a significant degree, of the commercialization of nature and that this thesis project would, therefore, benefit by your participation in it.

I am asking you, then, if you would be willing to participate in a single, one-on-one interview in which you would explain your concept of self, world view, views on the commercialization of nature, activism, and significant turning-point or issue in your personal history that may be pertinent to these aspects of yourself. The interview will take 60-90 minutes and will be scheduled to occur sometime during the next few weeks, at a time and place that are suitable to you.

If this interests you, please contact me at your earliest convenience. Please understand that I am not immediately able to confirm your participation in this project, should you express your desire to be involved. However, I hope that you can be involved. We can discuss the details of your participation as this project progresses. Thanks for your time. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Mark Reed

APPENDIX 3
Waivers of Confidentiality and Anonymity

Sociology Masters Research Project
“Nature: Me or Mine? Ecological Self or Sovereign Self?”

WAIVER OF CONFIDENTIALITY

before the interview

By signing below, you agree to release the researcher of this project from any obligation to protect the confidentiality of any statements that you will make and of any information that you may provide during your participation in the project. If you do not sign below, all personal information and data associated with your participation in this project will be permanently safeguarded from access by all persons other than the researcher.

I waive the researcher’s obligation to protect the confidentiality of any statements that I will make and of any information that I may provide during my participation in this project.

Signature Name Date

after the interview

By signing below, you acknowledge that

- you have had the opportunity to review and clarify the information that you provided about yourself, including the opportunity to review and clarify the interview transcripts, in order to ensure its accuracy and interpretation;
- you have had the opportunity to withdraw any information that you do not want to include; and
- you understand that your opportunity to review and clarify and/or withdraw the information as described above terminates upon the date of your signing this waiver.

Signature Name Date

Sociology Masters Research Project
“Nature: Me or Mine? Ecological Self or Sovereign Self?”

WAIVER OF ANONYMITY

By signing below, you agree to release the researcher of this project from any obligation to protect your identity with respect to your participation in this project. If you do not sign below, neither your name nor any identifying information will be published or otherwise presented in any way that associates you with this project.

I waive the researcher's obligation to protect my identity with respect to my participation in this project.

Signature

Name

Date

APPENDIX 4
Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- activism (objectives, practises)
- demographic (implicit and apparent)
- world view, notion of self, and assumptions and beliefs
- ideal world
- transition from ideal world to real world (how, what?)
- resources and property/ownership
- opposing views
- obstacles
- epiphany/events
- absence of epiphany/events (what would be different?)
- hopeful or hopeless?

APPENDIX 5
Reflexive Account

REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT

It is unavoidable that my participation in this project as researcher and writer influences the understanding that readers take away of the social phenomenon I explore here. That I draw attention to it or even consider it to be one, colors one's understanding of what I write. And, of course the reader will take away her/his own, unique understanding of this thesis. Here, I briefly point out some of the ways that I have unavoidably colored it.

First, I am a proponent of eco-social justice. It is because I am that I found it interesting that others, including close relatives of mine, would have so contrary world views. Nevertheless, I tried to write the thesis in as balanced a manner as I can. But I recognize that I probably wouldn't have undertaken the project, at all, had I not been inclined towards the eco-social justice world view. I don't think that a proponent of radical individual freedom would have written on the subject, let alone have written a thesis like this one. Having said that, I believe that the radical freedom activists have made some valuable discoveries from which individuals and social movements could benefit.

As well, while I didn't hide my bias during communications with the participants, I didn't declare it, either. I felt that the participants would have responded in some way that would be less natural and open for them than had I declared my bias to them. I know that there is no such thing as an objective interview and I didn't aim for one. I wanted naturalness. I figured that the participants would pick up on my bias through my language, demeanor, and by the fact that I raised the issue of the commodification of

nature. I also figured that they'd respect that I was trying to get an honest, balanced, and respectful interview out of the process. Having said that, I realize, of course, that I could have unconsciously favored the environmental position. It is possible, also, that I unconsciously overcompensated for that bias. I don't know.

Additionally, as I worked with the information that I received from each of the activist participants during our one hour or so long interviews, I was aware of the limited amount of material with which I had to work. At the same time, I was aware that I was unable to use much of the material that the activists provided. I felt self-conscious and somewhat presumptuous as I assembled that material into a shape that had never before existed but that is intended to fairly represent a meeting of the minds of eight real people. Now that it is completed, I am left with some perfectly good and interesting pieces of material that I didn't use but could have had I shaped the thesis differently. (Much of it can be found in the extended interview summaries in Appendixes 6 and 7.) As well, there are some small gaps around which I had to work because, during one or another interview, I never thought to ask for the appropriate materials. So, throughout the project, I was preoccupied with trying to be fair to the participants while recognizing that this thesis is only one of many imperfect interpretations that could have been produced from those eight interviews.

Relatedly, recognizing that each participant and I met only once and for only an hour or so, the participants themselves may have not said things that they would like to have said and said things that they would rather they hadn't. For example, I suspect that, on another day, Ingmar might not have felt that the environmentalist project is hopeless. On the other hand, another of the activists might also have said, on another day, that s/he

felt that his/her activist project is hopeless. I don't know, of course. Not all of the activists took advantage of the opportunity to examine the interview transcripts before I used them. By mentioning this, I'm merely pointing out the limitations of the one-time, one-hour interview.

With respect to the participants' social status and demographics, I purposefully provided little information. Further, I never sought nor explicitly received this information. My logic was that I felt that, with so few participants (8), I could not generalize nor otherwise identify patterns related to that information. In hindsight, I realize that the information would have been valuable not to reveal trends but to improve the understanding of each participant's world view. For example, knowing the participants' class origins, affiliations, and political leanings, especially in conjunction the other aspects of their lives that they did report, would have provided deeper insights into how they give meaning to their selves, others, and their experiences.

APPENDIX 6
Eco-Social Justice Activists

JANINE BANDCROFT – “Isn’t it enough just to survive?”

“[B]eyond trying to live a lifestyle of sustainability and being a good citizen to the Earth,” Janine Bandcroft publishes a weekly activist e-newsletter¹⁰² and a street news newspaper¹⁰³, co-hosts a weekly alternative radio activist news show¹⁰⁴ and produces a weekly alternative radio poetry show¹⁰⁵, co-edits an activist website¹⁰⁶, and is herself the occasional subject of local left-leaning mainstream print media. Additionally, Janine volunteers at the YM/YWCA Child-minding service and at various Folk Festivals, and is a Victoria Car Share Cooperative board member. In these and other ways, and with a BA in English, a BEd, and a Teacher’s Certificate from the University of Victoria, Janine passionately works to both educate people about and change the destructive sociopolitical structure within which we live. Now in her early forties, she has been active in the social justice, peace, and environmental movements for more than fifteen years. And while her full time activism virtually ensures that her “ability to collect enough money to pay the rent and buy food . . . is always a challenge,” she feels that it is her “obligation to try to build a world that’s healthy and sustainable and peaceful for myself and all other people.”

¹⁰² One can subscribe to the “Left Coast Newsletter” by emailing <eternity@islandnet.com>.

¹⁰³ One can purchase “Street Newz” directly from street vendors in downtown Victoria. One can contact the paper by emailing <streetnewz@cedco.bc.ca> or <streetnewz@pej.ca>.

¹⁰⁴ The “No Name News” airs on CFUV 101.9 FM every Thursday, 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

¹⁰⁵ The “Winds of Change” airs CFUV 101.9 FM every Thursday, 1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

¹⁰⁶ The “Peace, Earth & Justice News” website URL is <<http://pej.ca>>.

That Janine's concerns encompasses the whole of the natural environment, stems from her belief that all living things are interconnected. "Each living thing," she says, is "an independent individual" who is "connected to all other energies in the universe." "[E]very living entity is a spirit that moves from physical reality to physical reality and carries with it its experiences and memories of previous existences in different physical realities." These beliefs reflect and rest upon two, more fundamental, interrelated beliefs: that all living things interact with each other through karmic reincarnation; and "that the ultimate driving energy is survival." From these fundamentals also necessarily arise a form of justice inherent in nature and the innate equality of all living things. As Janine explains it, "[I]n order to have survival, there has to be sustainability. And, in order to have sustainability, there has to be some form of justice." Justice, in this sense, responds to behavior that influences survival; and it is delivered via karma. Peace prevails among living things that coexist in non-hierarchical relationships. Hierarchy is unnatural. "[T]he people who are destroying the planet," Janine says, ". . . can't get away with that because it's not conducive to survival and the planet won't let that happen, one way or another."

How does this world view fit with Janine's sense of 'obligation to try to build a healthy, sustainable, and peaceful world'? Why activism? "[O]nce we have the knowledge," she says, "then we have the responsibility to act on the knowledge that we have." Activism is a duty. "Otherwise," she says, "I'm just living in denial. Alice Walker says that 'Activism is my rent for living on this planet.' . . . I couldn't sleep at night, if I didn't act and change my life, now that I have information about how my life style is impacting others." Janine accepts that "other people have different ideological

beliefs [and that] they're entitled to their beliefs, . . . I just don't think they should have the power to implement their belief[s], if they're going to be damaging to others."

Someone who would have known Janine during her post-high-school years or earlier could not have predicted her later life. Nor did she aspire to it. She arrived at her current world view and developed her convictions incrementally, through a succession of significant experiential moments over some years. The first "real awakening process" occurred when the small, family-like computer software company in Vancouver that had provided her with a comfortable living, was purchased by a larger corporation. "And suddenly, I didn't know who the president was and I was just another employee and everything was changing." Already sensing that there "was something missing" in her life, Janine decided to obtain a Liberal Arts degree in California. Other "awakenings" followed.

At a "Communist meeting" that she had fearfully attended for a course credit, Janine "realized that the myth that [she'd] been taught about Communism was a complete lie." And Janine learned that the nice Persian woman she had befriended was an Iranian whose country the USA was bombing and whom the media says she should hate. Janine had realized "the power of the media – in shaping [her] perception of what was going on."

Courses on nutrition and biology and a guest-speaker on vegetarianism and veganism together inspired Janine to eventually become vegetarian. Later, after reluctantly trying veganism in order to satisfy a condition to share an apartment, Janine was able to proclaim that becoming a vegan "was another of the best decisions I ever made and a real awakening to how many animal products are in so many different

materials. I had no idea.” Simply sharing space, a novelty to a lone child on prairie acreage, coupled with a more recent co-op living experience, “really opened [Janine’s] eyes to a different way.” “I realized I don’t have to be a home-owner,” she says.

These and other experiences “awakened” Janine to the destructive sociopolitical structure that humans have constructed and to her obligation to work to build a healthy, sustainable, and peaceful world. When I asked her if she thinks it’s possible that such a world can be built, she immediately replied, “I think it’s essential.”

INGMAR LEE – “I’m just a pathetic little mosquito next to this Leviathan.”

In BC’s Legislature and recorded on Hansard, Ingmar Lee has been called the worst form of bacteria. The Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection called him an environmentalist zealot and the mayor of Nanaimo has called him a despicable fear monger. Ingmar is, of course, pleased that his activism reaches so far and so deeply into the minds of the “despicable destroyers” of the natural environment. He is also pleased that he is influencing increasing numbers of people who are sympathetic to his message.

While Ingmar occasionally writes (e.g., for the *Martlet* and on the internet) and sometimes lectures (e.g., in November 2003, he took a month leave of his university studies to give 20 public lectures in Europe), he is more of an on-site, direct protester. He organizes and participates in tree-sits and demonstrations, raises a pro-wilderness voice at corporate and public meetings, and was an independent MP candidate in the Victoria riding during the 2005 Federal election.

His greatest challenge and central focus is to save BC’s old growth forests.

That’s the paramount priority. We must stop the logging of primeval forests. They’re just too precious. They’re too important. They hold the secrets of humanity’s once and now lost connection to the ecological functionings of the planet. Human beings were part and parcel of the natural ecology of the planet and we’ve become alienated to that. And so, with 20% of the world’s ancient forest cover left, that’s the priority, is to stop the clear-cutting of that. And then I’d be happy to talk about eco-forestry in the second growth, in the forest lands that have already been converted, let’s say, by clear-cutting to plantations. That’s where eco-forestry belongs. We have no business even doing the finest, state-of-the-art eco-forestry in those primeval forests, any, at this time. Can’t accept even one stick of old growth being cut down, anymore.

This non-compromise position and that he is such a solitary and passionate figure are just a few of the characteristics that set Ingmar apart from the more mainstream forces in the environmental movement, of which he says,

I'm really disgusted with the Sierra Club. I'm disgusted with Sierra Club, with Forest Ethics, with Greenpeace, because what they're doing is they are sitting there, at the table, negotiating with Gordon Campbell and Interfor and Weyerhaeuser and these evil people or corporations. . . . When they make these deals, . . . what they say is "well, in exchange for this, Greenpeace agrees that we won't have anything to do with anybody or we won't conduct any Weyerhaeuser-bashing. We won't attack Weyerhaeuser markets. We won't go after Interfor. If Ingmar comes to Europe with his Gordo-bashing, Weyerhaeuser-bashing lecture tour, we can't support that because he's going to say bad things about Weyerhaeuser." That sort of thing. That's what's going on. That's why there's absolutely not one of these groups has anything going on on Vancouver Island. They completely abandoned Vancouver Island to Weyerhaeuser and Interfor; given up on it.

So, what lays behind Ingmar's passionate efforts to save Vancouver Island's old growth forests? Certainly, his personal history is consistent with his activism. Now 45 years of age (in 2005), Ingmar is a 21-year veteran professional tree planter. He estimates that he has planted over a million trees and has supervised the planting of ten million more throughout BC. He has been around the world eight times and has "done major treks in Nepal and the Indian and Pakistan Himalayas." At the time of this writing, he is completing his Asian and Environmental Studies undergraduate degree at the University of Victoria (UVic) where he also was elected to the UVic Board of Governors in 2001-2002. He was elected to a two-year term on the Green Party of BC's Provincial Council. Also, he is a Buddhist and an atheist and states that he is "motivated by anger and love of nature." However, when pressed to try to explain his underlying motivations, Ingmar can only surmise that it comes from his earliest experiences, as a

child. His “earliest memories were out in the wilderness in the Boreal forests of north of [Lake] Superior and, yeah, so, I think that’s where it came from and I always had this, just this real love of wilderness.” Then, while out on his own, he “gravitated to work that would get [him] out in the woods.” It was while working in the woods that he “[came] to recognize the scale of devastation that’s going on out there.” And it deeply affected him. He believes that “our evolutionary nature is to somehow survive” and so, “[w]hen you see a disaster happening, . . . we evolve towards, you know, getting around that.”

Ingmar also frequently recharges his passion. “I certainly need to spend as much time as possible out in the woods, you know,” he says.

[T]he most important thing is to be motivated by having been steeped in the, in the magnificence of being in primeval wilderness and purity and hygiene and cleanliness of nature. And drinking that water and walking around in that, that forest and trying to relate to that as a participant, rather than as an alien, you know. I mean, that gives an incredible depth of, of strength and it’s, it’s really nourishing. . . . I’m still moving from what I was able to acquire in six months of being in the woods last year. You know, I was really, the peace, the silence, the stressless . . . just being out in a tent for six months in East Creek in the Walbran. It just gives you a huge boost of energy and, you know, moral servitude, I guess.

As to how it is that Ingmar came to direct his energies to activism, he says, “It’s action that’s required.” The Buddha’s “teaching was all about action” rather than passivity. Ingmar’s love of nature, of the living planet, “and the recognition that all this consumption and hedonism and greed of, of especially western so-called civilization is . . . rampantly destructive,” compel him to action.

Also, Ingmar is emphatic that education is not the answer. “We don’t need more education. Everybody knows about [our destructive behavior].” He doesn’t expect to change people’s minds. “That’s not part of my obsession – to win over the hearts and

minds of the average Joe. I mean, I'll chip away at that and, ultimately, one wants to do one's best in that direction. But, I believe that it's too late."

At bottom, that is how Ingmar feels.

To tell the truth, my, my gut instinct tells me that it's over. I honestly believe that it's too late. . . . When you look at having idiots like Gordon Campbell, George Bush, and Tony Blair running the planet, and that these people continue to get elected, I mean it's just the stupidity of humanity with these great powerful toys, living as, basically animals, the hedonistic, selfish, desire-oriented lifestyle. It's too late. . . . The damage is so enormous and the momentum of damage is exasperating and . . . feeding itself. . . . But, you know, nevertheless, it's, it's worth the effort. The community, the progressive community, the environmental . . . movement that I'm talking about. It's really a pleasure hanging out with all these, these great people, you know.

MARISA HERRERA – “It’s hard for me to understand how people can just ignore these things.”

Marisa Herrera works, ultimately, to eliminate the abuse, exploitation, and destruction of animals, including humans, and the environment, that is, of all of nature. She also necessarily involves herself in social justice issues, “because it’s interrelated.” A critical problem that she faces in her activist work is the range of harmful attitudes towards other people and things and towards nature generally and that there is a variety of reasons for those attitudes. She works to undermine some of those reasons and to overcome the others.

The most prevalent harmful attitude that concerns Marisa is malicious self-centeredness. Since the beginning of human history, she says, “[t]here’s always been . . . the element of exploitation and self-gratification or greed, where it’s ‘me’ before anything else, disregarding the consequences or impacts upon the rest of the inhabitants, on the system as a whole.”

She is optimistic, though, that many people *will* change their behavior when they realize the consequences of their actions, provided that they are also aware of their options. This hope is a key motivating facet of her activism.

As an activist, . . . first of all, I try to keep informed on different issues so that I know what are the options. . . . So, knowing what options are available that present different ways to try to have less of an impact on the already existing problem. So, first: keep informed. Second, disseminating information to people so that they, as well, have access to information and can act upon it, if they so choose.

Despite her belief that most of society’s leaders are steadfast in maintaining the destructive status quo, Marisa continues to express her views to

them, as a third prong of her activism, through participating in demonstrations, writing letters, phone calls, and supporting different social interest groups. The fourth prong is her own “personal action, in terms of [her] own behaviors. Trying to live as simply [as possible] and try to create less of an impact on the environment.”

Marisa’s all-inclusive empathy is directly associated with her belief “that there’s more beyond self, that everything’s connected.” She says,

[W]hat I do, who I am, my presence here is not isolated. I’m just not on my own. I depend on the Earth, depend on the water, depend on the soil. I depend on others for my subsistence, my existence.

Additionally, everything is connected at the atomic level and at the spiritual level. “It’s not just a piece of brick.” Further, everything participates in a living system. “We’re living in a living world. . . . And for me to disassociate myself from that living world would be to disassociate myself from my own being.” Unfortunately, she continues, it is our propensity to delineate ourselves from everything else, including other humans, that “create[s] all these problems, environmental problems, social problems, political problems.”

Marisa acknowledges that even the realization of this connectedness will not deter most people from destructively pursuing short term gain. The majority of people will change their behavior only when “something affects them personally and very deeply.” Nevertheless, she works to help influence enough people to choose less destructive behavioral options such that they become the majority, even if they choose those options for short term gain.

Of course, Marisa isn't an activist for short term personal gain, nor for any long term material gain. What then, explains her passion, her activism? "I don't know," she says, "I have no idea. The only thing I know is that I recognized injustice early on and I did not like it, at all." "How young?" I asked.

As a child. Yeah, as a kid. I mean, I could understand that things were not always fair and just. . . . [I]n school, I could see abuse taking place with the bully factor. 'I'm bigger and stronger and I don't like you. Therefore, I'm going to pressure you into doing things I want you to do.' So, I recognized that in school. I'm quite the opposite. I mean, I fought that. I was in disagreement with it and I would protect those who were being bullied. So, that led to a thinking process, 'This is not right. I don't like manipulation. I don't like injustice.' So, yes, I could recognize discrimination, because I was brought up in Mexico. There's a lot of racial discrimination, although it's not really recognized, you know it exists. There's a caste system. No one will admit to it, but nevertheless, there's discrimination. . . . So, as a child, you know what's going on even though you don't understand why this is happening. . . . The same with animals. I would see people being cruel to animals, hitting animals on the street. . . . How can you not be sensitive to all these things, all the exploitation and destruction, abuse?

Marisa's "turning point into getting more involved with the various destructive and exploitative practices came around . . . eighteen." Her brother, who was just beginning his studies for veterinary medicine, described to her his field trip to a slaughterhouse. [W]hen my brother told me what he saw, I was in shock. I said, 'How . . . I I I was in disbelief, total disbelief. So, I said, from that moment on, I will not eat anything from which they have to kill an animal. And then, that led to becoming vegan.'" Thus began "a gradual process of awakening and understanding and implementing change within myself." Over time, she gradually understood the interconnectedness of everything.

[I]t's been slow. I mean, nothing happened over night. . . . First, I was very concerned about animals. . . . And then neglect towards the other issues, again the environment, and then social issues. . . . So, if it's all related, but yet not all come at once, where I understood all the crosses and the circle of the connectedness.

When I asked Marisa if she thinks she would be an activist now, had her brother not described his slaughterhouse field trip, she responded,

It's difficult to answer. I think eventually, I would have been exposed to information one way or the other that would have revealed the truth about factory farming. So that would have, I have no doubt, ignited my awareness for change and for opposition to this cruel and destructive industry. . . . I would have started eventually, I know, because I, I'm inquisitive and, as I said, I recognized injustice from early on. . . . So I know, eventually, I will have been exposed to the truth. And knowing what I know, I cannot ignore it. I cannot pretend it doesn't exist. The reality's there. Very grim reality.

BERNARD – “Comfort is the most insidious [and] subversive [state]. It subverts creativity. It subverts action.”

Bernard [not his real name] is an activist for social change in two social contexts, one imbedded within the other. The imbedded context is our time in history in which Bernard works to move people to visualize and implement solutions to the environmental problems that we face. The other context is the prevailing scientific and popular understanding of the evolution of life. Bernard works for the scientific and general acceptance of a redefined evolutionary theory, that he is developing, that conjoins Darwinian evolution with the evolution of consciousness.

Many people resist or don't consider at all the notion of evolutionary consciousness or spirituality, Bernard argues, because they are bound up in the immediate social context. The social status quo, marked by blind, self-serving consumerism and the commodification of everything, including genes, all aimed to maximize comfort, reflects a complacent social consciousness. Myopic consumers are unaware of or are not interested in examining the paradigm that they inherited, the scientific paradigm, established nearly 400 years ago, that relegated the spiritual to the inconsequential.

That paradigm reflects a vision that is no longer appropriate. Of its architects, the liberal-minded intelligentsia of the Enlightenment, Bernard says, “[T]hey had a really clear sense of an ideal society. But they had *no* context of nature having any limits. That was not part of the picture. . . . [T]heir dream turns into an ecological nightmare for today's [world].” Bernard works, therefore, both to establish a more appropriate social paradigm, wherein the spiritual and material are twin concerns, and to reverse the ecological damage wrought by the unchallenged perseverance of an out-of-context social paradigm.

This project of Bernard's is

driven by two things – by a really severe global urgency to stop the way we're living at the moment because it's having the most severe environmental consequences of any era in the whole of existence apart from a few asteroids. . . . And I see humans becoming more and more unhappy, as result of living in a sort of consumer age. We're not, the very thing we're not achieving, this is what America sets out to achieve which is life, liberty, and happiness. We're living longer. But we're not living more happily.

While Bernard is concerned with both of those issues, his activism focuses more directly on the first one, the urgent environmental situation that immediately confronts us. His approach is to shake people, the 'drifters', out of their complacency. His tactics have changed over the years. "When I was younger," he recalls, "I did in-your-face stuff, you know. I was out there, in your face. I had to do in-your-face." But now, "Only in my speeches. . . . totally in my speeches and writing. I absolutely shake people up." His aim is to gradually change people's attitudes and he does this by subverting their comfort, by trying to make them uncomfortable with the prevailing paradigm.

Bernard traces his will to activism to his childhood. Both of his parents' own childhoods, traumatic due to being abandoned, contributed to "issues in *their* marriage that caused things to go awry." Consequently, when he was three years old, he and his two sisters were sent to orphanages for three months, "which is a long time for a three year old." Later, after his return home and after being "restabilized", he was sent "away to boarding school". He was always "shy and withdrawn" and at boarding school, he was "on the receiving end of bullying." "And I *know*," he says, "that that instinctively gave me sympathy for people on the receiving end [of] oppression. Just, it's natural. The knowledge of having been there myself."

At the same time, though, Bernard explains, he came from a “relatively comfortable, middle-class family.” “And it’s the ‘60s, remember. So there are much bigger goals than earning money in the ‘60s. [laughs] And so I was off travelling and changing the world.”

His was not the mainstream path. Bernard believes that his childhood experiences made him different from the others with whom he grew up and that, had he not had those experiences, he would probably not be an activist.

I remember conversations at my boarding school, with the other boys, and they were all going to be bankers and lawyers. They were all, the Daily Telegraph which is like the most right-wing paper in Britain, [going to] work for their fathers or, How can they do that? Like, I was the only one, effectively, among them that thought [for himself]. . . . Why aren’t they thinking for themselves? But, there you go. I had been traumatized at an earlier age, which shook something up, rewired my brain. They hadn’t. They had comfort all along. And comfort is the most insidious, the subversive, subverts creativity. It subverts action.

While a student, Bernard perceived that the world is a mess. “So my original drive was, ‘Why is the world a mess?’” Also, he says, “I had inside me an instinct that the world was a total unity. And also an instinct that it had the potential for being an incredibly harmonious compassionate [place]. And I had a love of nature, in the sense of, like, I look at all tidal [phenomena] by the beaches. I mean, just the diversity of nature.” As well, the study of biology had left him amazed. So, at 17 years of age, he wondered, “[W]hy are humans living in such conflict and most of nature seems to be getting along so peaceful?” All of these experiences and ideas ‘set him on his path’. “By the time I was 21,” he says, “I basically cracked the problem. . . . By combining evolutionary theory, from Darwin, with spiritual understandings from the church, Catholic Jesuit, . . .

both reinterpreted evolution theory, teaching the growth of consciousness and spirituality.” Much of Bernard’s work, since then, has been the developing of this early breakthrough of his, that evolution concerns both spirit and matter. Contextualized within this, of course, is his activism aimed at managing the world “in a whole new era of stewardship.”

What would such stewardship entail? Bernard greatly values our biological connection to other species and he speaks disparagingly of those who argue that we are separate from and superior to other species. “I totally rejoice in my evolutionary connection to all species,” he says. Accordingly, he rejects the notion of ownership of animals. Nor should one use animals for food, though he confesses that he is “guilty” of not being a vegan. As for the stewardship of inanimate nature, Bernard is pleased and impressed when environmental groups organize to buy land that is at risk of development and “[t]ake it off the market forever by putting it into a trust. . . . Works well. Works fabulously.” In seeming opposition to this, though, he has come to realize that “private property ownership is the very bastion of freedom against oppression. You know, you have no landlord to pay off.” He believes that everyone ought to have this security, that that should be a social goal.

Given the qualitative magnitude of the paradigm shift and associated behavioral changes that Bernard advocates, particularly in the face of humans’ reluctance to deviate from comfort-maximizing behavior, even in the face of increasing scarcity and environmental degradation, what hope does Bernard hold for the future? “[T]he only things that would really wipe out humans are the total destruction of the ozone layer. We got close to that. Total nuclear winter. Um, massive asteroid. . . . And we *played* with

the first two. But we learn by trial and error.” And, even if we orchestrated some devastating ‘enormous disasters’, humans will survive. “There *will* be humans on the Earth in 10,000 years time. We’re so incredibly adaptable and versatile and intelligent. . . . Evolution has given that absolute advantage to us.”

APPENDIX 7
Radical Freedom Activists

COREY STANCHFIELD – “We understand how the system works and now we can take advantage of that and start freeing this country from its economic slavery.”

Corey Stanchfield’s activism focuses on educating people about the truth of their existence as individuals. He teaches two primary lessons. One concerns the economic truth. This involves informing people of what their rights, duties, and obligations are, as individuals, as ‘natural persons’ as defined in federal statutes. The other lesson concerns the foundational truth, as set out in Judeo-Christian Biblical scriptures and upon which Canada’s and the USA’s federal statutes are established. Essentially, though, there is only one truth, *the truth*.

A central theme that runs through Corey’s lessons and belief system is that understanding and living according to the truth is the key to being free. Under God’s law, he says, we human beings are free, natural persons. To the extent that our statutes are founded on natural law, we can be free. That freedom is eroded to the extent that our laws, institutions, and other social structures fail to preserve the integrity of their scripture-based moorings.

Corey recalls his first awareness, as a young adult, of being a slave.

I was working in the logging industry in, Fort Nelson, British Columbia and I climbed the ladder quite quickly. And I was doing, running a button-top machine. I was making thirty bucks an hour and I remember working two weeks when I first went there. I was a T4 wage-earner, not knowing any difference; didn’t have a clue I was a slave. and basically, I got my T4 check. I put . . . 180 hours in in two weeks. And I think I grossed something like 58 or 59 hundred bucks. . . . I was 21, 22. It was quite a bit of money, right? And I remember looking at my check and I was left with like 24 hundred dollars. And that was my epiphany. Because right then I felt like I was violated. I was victimized because I *knew*, I was smart enough to [know] that, it’s not about fair. It’s about

who you know or what you know. And to me, I looked at the check and I actually said this to myself, "Corey, this is [the] cost of ignorance, right there. And every paycheck is going to be like that. It's . . . staring you in the face. You *must* do something about this." Because in the social aspect, the harder I work, the more I was penalized for it. And there's no way, if you want to get ahead of this system, that you can continually do that. And I avowed that I'd find a way.

Over the next few years, Corey investigated and experimented with ways to minimize or avoid altogether paying income taxes. Yet, he hadn't yet found a system with which he was comfortable. "Because all the information I learned about taxes and everything else . . . wasn't incorrect, but there's a still foundation aspect because in my heart of hearts, I knew it was wrong. There was something not right with it." And then he met Russell Porisky.

At first, Corey resisted going to see this person who reportedly spoke about "natural persons and stuff like that." Corey had heard the 'natural person' argument before and thought, "What more can I learn?" But he was persuaded to go. "So, I was destined to go see his information," he says. "I went there, listened to the information and that was my second epiphany."

Russ, to me, was the angel putting the pieces of the puzzle down before me and they were connecting so beautifully. And I started to see it and, without a doubt, I didn't need anyone to tell me that he was right. I knew in my heart that he had it. He had figured it out and [it] made so much sense to me.

Eventually, Corey became an educator with Russell's organization, the Paradigm Education Group (Paradigm).¹⁰⁷ Now he feels right about his approach to gain his

¹⁰⁷ Paradigm's comprehensive web site is found at < <http://www.naturalperson.com> >.

freedom. “This was the Achilles heel. This is the, the, we found out their weakness. We understand how the system works and now we can take advantage of that and start freeing this country from its economic slavery.”

A fundamental teaching of Paradigm’s is the concept that humans are, by law, sovereign individuals who, thereby, are answerable to no person or thing except that which created them, their god. Thus, they have the right to choose whether or not, and to what extent, they participate in the ‘social contract’ with each other. Few people are aware of this fact. Virtually everybody is unwittingly coerced, principally by governments, to participate in this contract. Paradigm provides people with the knowledge they need to extricate themselves from this contract to the extent to which they are comfortable. Corey is especially pleased that Paradigm’s teachings are founded upon and consistent with the scriptures, even if the teaching of them is outside of its mandate.

The scriptures also provide Corey with his understanding of what humans are and of what our relationship is with the natural environment. Humans are not, as some would have it, interconnected with animals, insects, trees, and each other, an understanding that Corey describes as “a form of religion, new-age religion, Mother Earth kind of thing”.

Corey says,

No, I don’t believe we’re interconnected at all. I believe that we’re created for a sole purpose and that sole purpose is to conform to the image of Jesus, to make us through with the salvation of Jesus Christ and I believe that everything here on this planet has been created for our purposes and our enjoyment, as per Genesis. The animals were here [to] provide our enjoyment and food and so are the plants and plants, what have you. I do believe that we have a social responsibility for stewardship. We can’t be completely be ignorant of the fact that, if you don’t take care of what we have, it won’t be there. That’s pretty

standardized. You know? And it just really comes back to doing what is right and just, right?

With respect to caring for the disadvantaged, Corey says,

I don't believe it should be a federal government mandate to take care of the poor and innocent or disadvantaged. I believe it should be the church's responsibility. . . . Secondly, is, . . . I don't believe in socialism. Never did. I really don't. Now, there are certain cases and causes for supporting people who are mentally not there, like, who really cannot work, cannot support themselves and do need care. And in that aspect, there obviously has to be a social safety net for that. But I'm coming back to a Biblical term where, if you don't work, you don't eat. I don't believe in the social safety net because, technically, or I look at, humanity is lazy and they will abuse everything they can get. And when you have a con-continual abuse, what you just do is you make it unfair for everyone else who's honest. I really firmly believe that, you do an honest day's dollar, you get what you want. And you should be focussed on doing good for your community and giving back.

Over the years, Corey has experienced a wide range of responses to his teachings. Some people are understandably fearful of opposing the government in their bid to withdraw from the income tax system. Some believe that to do so is irresponsible. They have no basis for that claim, Corey says, because they typically neither are willing to hear him out nor have they ever investigated income tax law for themselves. Others, who realize the truth of Corey's teachings, nevertheless elect to remain in the system because they are "so tied with the system that the benefit of leaving doesn't offset the potential reward for [them] continuing through being . . . victim[s]." But there are also many "from different walks of life" who are open-minded "and willing to have their foundation shaken of how they perceive the . . . world" and who are willing to live according to their new knowledge.

So, Corey is encouraged and hopeful that his efforts are making some kind of positive difference. Slowly, he is working towards “the point to where you can get a . . . critical mass; that is what’s going to change the system. ‘Cause the more and more people who know that who they are, they can’t be easily manipulated through the media and the propaganda that comes through.”

Yet, when asked if he thinks that the objectives of his work will actually come to fruition, Corey replies, “No.” But he explains why he carries on.

Just because I’m a fatalist and . . . I already know according to scriptures how it’s going to end, doesn’t mean I’m gonna stop doing what I’m doing. ‘Cause who knows? My work may extend what we have before the end comes. I don’t know. . . . And I enjoy educating people [of] who they are. And to me, I’m like, it’s a great gig. I like it. I really do.

AUDREY – “I mean, we *are* the power. We just have to wake up.”

Audrey [not her real name] has always been one who asks questions. And our society doesn't like people asking questions, she says. “The system is smart.” It wants people to be complacent and comfortable, so that we don't question the status quo, so that we don't question at all. Those who are in control of the system use a variety of means to accomplish this. They manipulate the government. “They operate what people call democracy, where they keep everybody just comfortable enough.” They manipulate the media. “[I]t's somebody's opinion published in a newspaper and we say, ‘Oh, it must be so.’” And they control us through the health system.

We're being intentionally [controlled], I believe, from the health side of it; they're trying to make it so that we don't think as clearly. I mean, that's why you get all this food that we get, . . . the stuff we pump into kids. ‘If you're a thinking kid, well, you're a hyperactive. Well, we'd better put you on Ritalin.’ Well, what's Ritalin all about? Making a zombie out of your kid, so you don't let them think, anymore.¹⁰⁸ And why do the kids that are thinkers are the ones that they want on Ritalin? ‘Oh, your kid's hyperactive ‘cause he asks to many questions.’ And see, that's something that's happened to me my whole life. I've been always a question-asker. . . . I would have been on Ritalin [as a child] because I was that kind of kid. And I'm still that kind of adult. Henceforth, that's why I'm sitting here before you. ‘Cause, at 45, I . . . *still* ask questions. And I will never stop.

What sort of questions does Audrey ask? What are the objectives of her activism?

Essentially, Audrey works to help others realize how they are unwitting voluntary slaves to the malevolent elite. She provides those who will listen with the information that they need to gain their individual freedom. She provides them with the answer to the underlying, implicit question that she asks and has always asked since a child: ‘how can

¹⁰⁸ Ritalin is a prescription medicine given to individuals, usually children, who are diagnosed as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

we escape the oppression and sense of helplessness that she and others experience in their daily lives?’

Audrey has discovered, after years of all-but-fruitless activism, that the answer to that question is to ‘know who you are.’ What does that mean and what is Audrey’s understanding of who she is and who we all are and how did she come to that understanding? Audrey’s earlier years of activism were spent under the government-manufactured illusion that she is a free citizen with access to democratic means to bring about social change. She experienced only continued relative unsuccess. She says,

I built the health thing [health freedom movement]; I saw that and we didn’t win on that. But I still didn’t go away and that’s what they hope. You gotta remember their, when you see what they leave for us is supposedly a democratic way to make a change, it’s not a democratic way to make a change. It’s the way they take our energy again, do the petitions, do the forms, do that, and then they know that those people, when they go through this, they lose and they’re gonna go . . . [feigns despair], like that. Well, I don’t quit. I went, ‘Ok. That didn’t work. There’s gotta be another way.’ So that just pushed me into my seven years of looking at all the different organizations . . . that were out there and finding a way, knowing there had to be a way. I just knew in my heart, what was going on had to be changed, somehow. So, I searched, searched, searched. And that’s how I come to know [the people behind Paradigm]. . . . And that was the piece.

Audrey explains that Paradigm Education Group (Paradigm), for which she is now an educator, has revealed what we people seem to have forgotten, that we are each sovereign individuals who have agreed to “have a collective of rules and regulations that we can all abide by.”¹⁰⁹ The literal order of things is this: “creator, people, *then* government, and then corporations.” What has happened, though, a hundred or so years ago and before, is that certain self-interested people, such as the Rothschilds and

¹⁰⁹ Paradigm’s comprehensive web site is found at < <http://www.naturalperson.com> >.

Rockefellers, among others, modified the monetary and banking systems in partnership with the national governments. This had profound negative effects on the citizens of Canada and the USA. Essentially, the governments created a system of control whereby sovereign individuals participate in numerous government programs, such as the income tax system, through 'corporate images' of themselves. Sovereign individuals unwittingly make themselves legally responsible for the obligations that their corporate images incur. For example, Audrey points out, "I don't have a social insurance number. A statutory-created entity, a corporate entity that the government created *does*. And he, [the government], they have the authority to control him 'cause he, they created him. Just like we have the authority to control the government, if we'd all get together and figure it out." Governments can control corporate images because governments created them. But governments can't control sovereign individuals, their own creators.

If humans are sovereign individuals who may knowingly and willingly or otherwise enter into diverse, binding relationships with each other, then what is our relationship with the rest of nature? Audrey believes that science has proven that humans, other life, and even inanimate objects are interconnected. "I *do* believe we're all interconnected," she says. "We're all joined to whatever it is, there's a web. . . . [W]e're totally connected to everything that is." Therefore, in an ideal world, she says, we humans would live more simply, sustainably, and with greater care and respect for the benefit of the "collective good".

Accordingly, Audrey objects to the emergence of agribusiness, that because of the economic bottom-line decisions of marketing boards, "we're throwing milk away," and to the general "commercial dynamic" of the use of natural resources. She would prefer

that we live simpler lifestyles that are more respectful of nature, such as “like the natives, . . . if you think back to the native life before we came over here.” Additionally, Audrey believes that we humans have the responsibility to be “good stewards” of the Earth. “[I]f we were blessed with [being] the ones to be able to *think* and *reason*, . . . then we have a duty to take care of things.”

Movement towards a more respectful and responsible society is possible, Audrey believes. But good intent alone is not enough to free a deceived society from the oppressive machinations of corrupt governments and corporations. Proper education is also required. And that is Audrey’s main work. “You know, it’s just, . . . it’s education. . . That’s what [we’re] trying to do. Get educated to understand where we are on this picture and, hopefully, if we can get enough people educated, . . . we *can* collectively come together and make changes.” “I have to believe,” she says, “I have faith that we have that ability to do it. . . . Why would I [work at this] if I didn’t have the faith? . . . I’m not a martyr. I do this because I really do believe it. And I think . . . it’s necessary. . . [I]t is the right thing to do.”

OWEN – “I think you’re just always going to have those types of people in society that believe that they have to control people. And we’re never going to change them. But it’s up to us to believe whether they control us or not and let them or not.”

Owen [his preferred pseudonym] works to help people become more self-sufficient, self-reliant, and less dependent upon others to live their daily lives. In particular, Owen helps people to free themselves from the oppressive control of banks and other corporate entities, of government, and of the so-called ‘expert’ elite. He believes that these groups wield control through their, to varying degrees, collaborative manipulation of the economy and of the monetary system itself. His objective is to help people to understand the monetary system, how they are controlled, and how they can become financially independent. Once empowered with this knowledge, they will be able to control their lives and use their new-found freedom to ‘explore themselves’ and “grow internally”, rather than focus on how to service their debts. “When people are that worried about that small part of life,” he says, “they’re not open to exploring themselves and trying to grow.”

When I asked Owen how he came to be interested in this field and where his motivation came from, he said that he’s always been interested both in money and in helping people. Years ago, for example, he worked for H&R Block, calculating people’s income taxes. “I was interested in that and, again, helping people,” he says. That job lasted only a single season, though, because “you’re so confined when you do H&R block. You know, you’re trained down a very narrow little path. [feigning a supervisor’s voice and laughing], ‘You have to fold these things out *this* way.’ And, I, man, I just *can’t* follow that narrow a path.”

What sparked Owen's interest in helping people to become free of their oppressive debt was his first hearing of an audio recording about the history of the U.S. Federal Reserve. The recording was of E. Edward Griffin's live presentation of a summary of his book, The Creature from Jeckyl Island.¹¹⁰

It's a 90 minute presentation and I only got about five minutes into it and this light bulb went on inside me. And it's like, "Oh, wow!" I turned around and drove back and asked my friend how I could find out more. [laughing] I hadn't even heard the whole presentation. And that was six years ago and I've listened to it probably a thousand times since then and I still enjoy it every time I hear it.

And I got to meet him. I got to meet Edward Griffin, last July and I did a presentation at a conference and told everyone that Edward Griffin's presentation got me started on all of this. And when I met him, I said, "Your presentation, six years ago, got me started in all of this." And once, and that was, that was a really really cool feeling for me to be able to shake his hand and say, "Thank you. You changed my life."

Owen couldn't explain why he should be so immediately and deeply effected by Griffin's message, except to repeat a saying that he had heard and that he says describes the responses he receives from those whom he tries to enlighten: 'When the student is ready, the teacher appears.' When he heard Griffin's presentation, he "felt that it was truth that that had been hidden from us. It was, it's kind of like just an explosion, for me. . . . I could hear the passion in his voice, in that presentation, and I just felt that I was getting a truth that had been hidden."

The passion that ignited in Owen six years ago continues to burn undiminished. For example, even as he helps people in his 'day job' – "Like, my day job, I'm a city bus

¹¹⁰ E. Edward Griffin. The Creature from Jekyll Island, 4th ed. Westlake Village, California: American Media, 2004.

driver. . . . I'm helping people, in a way, get from 'A' to 'B', less expensive than a car."

Owen is learning, 'listening to four hours of cassette tapes a day.' "I found out about conference calls. I got on the conference calls and I would tape them. And I'd be driving my bus down the road with a [laughing] with a earpiece in one ear, listening to conference calls and educational tapes."

While Owen's research is mostly an exploration of others' research and writings, he also learns through applying his knowledge. At one point, with the help of another financial freedom activist, he decided to challenge his debts. "[I]t was just something that I could focus my energy on and I could see that it could make change my life. And then, once I saw how it worked and knew that it worked, then I could help other people." While not all of Owen's challenges turned out as he had hoped – he lost his family's house in a court battle with a bank over a mortgage –, he would share the results and lessons learned with other researchers.

And Owen's wife, who shares his experiences, has been supportive all along. After five court appearances over two years, "we lost our house," he says.

I lost our house and hadn't made anything. That was pretty hard on our marriage. [laughs] But, we've got a great marriage. We're committed to each other and she stood by me. As tough as that was, and she stood by me up there telling the judge what we believed and, you know, so I give her *huge* credit. And now we're finally making some money. We got to go to Disneyland last March. That was an awesome trip. It was great for the kids and stuff.

Throughout the interview, Owen expressed concern for other people – his family, a friend, another person's friend, and all financially enslaved people generally. He also expressed concern for the health of the world and nature itself, noting that everything is

ultimately interconnected. “[W]e’re all connected on an energy level,” he says. We’re all [plants and animals] connected and all part of [nature]. And if if we take care of it, like everything in the circle of life is all connected. And if you wreck one part of it, chances are you’re going to wreck all of it.” Given that, I asked Owen as to what criteria he believes determines a right or wrong use of nature. “Yeah, that’s a tough question,” he replied.

I don’t believe in hurting anything, but I like meat. [we both laugh] So someone has to hurt that poor cow to create that meat for me to eat. And I don’t focus too much energy on that. I don’t believe in damaging anything or restricting its right to life without a purpose. I love vegetables. I believe that we need our vegetables every day and that they’re on this Earth to, you know, for that purpose and that we’re here for some other purpose.

Owen “absolutely believe[s] in spirituality and miracles and that we’re every one of us is here for a purpose.” Also, he says, “I believe in God and learning about that spirituality.” His spiritual convictions derive principally, he says, from his feelings about things he’s seen and from his experiences. He rejects religion as “something that man created to control people.”

Seeing beyond such contrivances and trying to discover our individual and collective purposes are ongoing challenges that Owen would like to see all of us embrace. Positive change, though, can be achieved by fewer numbers of us. “The Civil War was won with only 3% participation”, he says. “[I]f people realize that a critical mass is only 3% of the population to actually make a change in what’s going on . . . we can make a positive effect on this world.”

Nevertheless, Owen doesn't expect significant change to come about soon, nor easily, and "we're definitely not going to change *everyone's* attitudes." Working for change is an ongoing process. When I asked Owen if he thought that there would be any end to this work, will we ever get 'it' right, he replied,

No. Always a work in progress. You know, I believe, I'm always going to be a work in progress . . . will always be a work in progress. Life will always be changing, you know, going in circles. Sometimes good, sometimes not good and . . . and I just I just want to have a positive effect. And as long as I can do that, I'll be happy.

STEVE – “If we legislate freedom, then it’s not true freedom.”

Steve [not his real name] rejects the notion that he is an activist.

I don’t view myself as an activist because I’m not doing this by free will [laughs]. . . . It’s a by-product of the path that we walk. We try to go back to our quiet life and people say, “Hey, How did you get down there? How did you get down there?” And there’s more and more and now it it developed into a movement where there’s, you know, a growing number of people helping teach other people and [so on]. . . . An activist to me has a predetermined conclusion they’re trying to achieve. Yet, when you come from the point of “I don’t care what the end is as long as the end is the truth”, [that, to me, isn’t activism].

So, what is the path that Steve walks and that enough others now also walk that Steve doesn’t have a problem with calling this shared quest for truth a ‘movement’? The path concerns the truth about individual freedom. The nature of the activity associated with the movement is the questioning and, if need be, the challenging of authority, authority so pervasive and taken for granted by virtually all citizens that it is all but invisible to them. The authority comprises government, corporations, and the power and money-hungry elite. Their success in controlling the lives of the people of Canada, the USA, and elsewhere rests on peoples’ unconscious predisposition to be taken care of, on their enjoyment of mind-numbing comforts, and on their seeming willingness to live as contented slaves rather than as the free-born individuals they truly are, the fact of which has been kept from them.

Steve, too, lived the life of a contented slave, for a while. “[W]e [Steve and his partner] were able to live in this illusion very comfortably,” he says. “We were okay.” But he experienced a “spiritual conflict” that “came out of studying religious scripture.” The conflict was between certain verses in the Bible and life in our society. The Bible says to “submit to the authorities” and to “pay unto Caesar what is Caesar’s.” But Steve

felt that God surely didn't have in mind to endorse the damage and life-destroying institutions that our governments have implemented.

So, Steve embarked on an investigation of the legitimacy of the oppressive government institutions. He wanted to know whether and how he was obliged to be a slave to the authorities. For a time, he involved himself with Detax, an organization and system focused on helping individuals withdraw from their perceived obligation to pay federal income taxes.¹¹¹ "I was involved in one small one [Detax effort], but I never personally really got involved in much of the big profile Detax stuff." Instead, he undertook his own research, analyzed it, and acted upon it. The outcome convinced him that we don't have to be slaves if we don't wish to be, that we *are* free beings, after all.

On their own, quietly, without fanfare, Steve and his partner challenged Canada Customs & Revenue Agency (CCRA), in court, over its demand that they pay income taxes. They had refused to pay the taxes. Yet, they were acquitted. "I mean, when we, we went against CCRA with no, no knowledge, no defense, nothing. Walked in, walked out. The judge talked for 45 minutes and we were acquitted. No appeal." Steve's research had led him to the truth.

The truth turned out to be that Canada's legal foundation establishes that Canadian citizens are free. Essentially, it does this by acknowledging the supremacy of God. Steve discovered, then, that there is no conflict between Biblical scriptures and Canada's Constitution. The Constitution recognizes that people, created by God, have God-given inalienable, fundamental human rights and freedoms prior to their entry into

¹¹¹ Information about Detax, Untax, and other similar systems is presented at the web site <<http://www.cyberclass.net/untax.htm>>.

any social contract. They may, therefore, legally withdraw from any contract, doing so with requisite care, and remain free persons.¹¹²

Steve discovered that the reason virtually all Canadians live as slaves is that Canada's sound structure has been abused. "We do not have to knock it down and rebuild it," he says. "We just have to renovate it. And half of it is, we just have to get educated *about* it." And the most important knowledge that Steve provides to those who will listen is the knowledge of who they are in relation to the system. "To appreciate the the greatness of the foundation of our country," he says, ". . . [t]he missing key was not the system. . . . The missing key was us. We did not know who we were, in this system."

What does it mean to regain one's freedom? Primarily, says Steve, it means to be personally responsible. In an ideal society, people would have a "balanced awareness of . . . our fundamental human rights and [the] responsibility that comes *with* those." In particular, "[t]he fact that [we] are living, breathing, thinking human beings, shows that [we] have that inalienable right of free will." Also, Steve considers the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "a milestone in human evolution" that "we really need to build on", recognizing that we haven't yet accepted the responsibilities required to bring it to fruition.

If the "inalienable right of free will" is necessarily granted to all "living, breathing, thinking human beings", how do non-humans fit into this picture? Here, again, Steve appeals to Biblical scriptures. He also believes, though, that there "could be a reality base aspect of [this issue], too." That is, according to scripture, "we were given

¹¹² The Paradigm Education Group (Paradigm) presents arguments and facts that are similar to Steve's own research and conclusions. Paradigm's web site is found at <<http://www.naturalperson.com>>.

dominion over the animal kingdom and the sea.” But Steve understands this as meaning that we were given the responsibility of stewardship over the whole ecology.

The balanced stewardship of “the animal kingdom and the sea” is a defining feature of what Steve calls ‘natural commerce’. Steve believes, though admittedly without scientific proof, that “natural commerce has been taking place since the beginning of man.” He also believes that when we leave behind our self-interested belief in the benefits of the control of nature, “natural commerce will find its place again. And that’s what we see within the underground economy. It is nothing more than natural commerce reviving itself.”

And “that’s why I see the hope,” Steve says. “[C]ause I know human nature will take over and reset the thing back to where [we were once before]. . . . So, that’s where my hope comes from, is knowing our human nature will be our own salvation. Uh, but it will be [an] easier road if we become more aware of it.” Steve believes that, with or without his help, people will eventually become aware of ‘who they are’ and discover that they are free beings with fundamental rights and responsibilities. He tries to educate people to help ease their self-discovery, their awakening, as he puts it. Some people will wake up easily and others will wake up hard. But, he says, “one day, you will wake up.” And it doesn’t matter how. “[W]e’re not here to drag you out [of your bed]. You’ll wake up when your time is right.”