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# Dominating Nature

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## ABSTRACT

Something is wrong with the desire to dominate nature. In this paper, I explain both the causes and solution to anti-environmental attitudes within the framework of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. I argue that the master-slave dialectic (interpreted as a metaphor, rather than literally) can provide reasons against taking an attitude of domination, and instead gives reasons to seek to be worthy of respect from nature, though nature cannot, of course, respect us. I then discuss what the social and economic conditions of moving to a post-domination philosophy appear to be.

## KEYWORDS

Hegel, master-slave dialectic, metaphorical recognition, surrogate recognition, deep ecology, domination

## 1. EXTENDING THE MASTER–SLAVE DIALECTIC

Something is wrong with the desire to dominate nature. A central complaint of environmentalists is that this desire is commonplace. Some trace the attitude back to religious traditions, for example, the Christian dictate that the Earth is a merely a tool (Passmore, 1995: 132). Others blame the attitude on humanism in general (Foreman, 1998: 449–453). Still others ascribe to the desire to dominate nature the same internal logic as the desire to oppress women (Warren, 1990: 125–146).

In this paper, however, I offer a different approach, one that does not deny any of the above ideas, but seeks, in part, to unify them. I want to discuss the attitude of domination within the framework of Georg W. F. Hegel's master–slave dialectic. A suitably modified version of the dialectic can describe the evolution of environmental thought. Additionally, if we reinterpret the master–slave dialectic as an argument against domination, i.e., as an argument showing that being a master is generally self-effacing, we can link non-dominating moral attitudes with prudence, showing that for personal happiness, the attitude of domination is not a good bet.

Traditionally, attempts to link respect for nature to prudence have proceeded by arguing that we are rapidly destroying the earth's ability to sustain life. Many, such as Paul Erhlich, have brazenly prophesied mass starvation because of our misuse of the environment (Ehrlich, 1971). Yet, economically speaking, conditions are improving, not worsening, and conditions are, in many respects, expected to continue to improve. Mark Sagoff, by no means an apologist for the status quo, suggests that for these reasons environmentalists should avoid defending environmentalism on such economic grounds and find moral or aesthetic grounds instead (Sagoff, 2002: 217). Thus, this paper tries to link the moral and aesthetic to the prudent much as Socrates tries to do in *The Republic*, by showing, in effect, that a certain disorder exists in the soul when one takes an attitude of domination. The question is not whether dominating nature will eventually kill us; it probably will not. The question is whether dominating nature will make life less worth living.

Below, I begin by briefly recapitulating Hegel's master–slave dialectic. I then explain its *descriptive* relevance by explaining how historical attitudes toward nature approximately fit the dialectic. In the remaining sections, I argue that we should draw certain *normative* conclusions from it. I ask how the dialectic can be healthily resolved. The Hegelian dialectic extended to describe our relationship with nature implies that an attitude of mastery over nature will not ultimately be satisfying. Just as in the original dialectic, a type of equality is what is needed. However, just what this equality amounts to, and what the conditions are for having it, are surprising.

## DOMINATING NATURE

## 2. MASTER AND SLAVE

Hegel's writings are treacherous waters. Thus, the summary below should be regarded as inspired by Hegel, but not an attempt at exegesis.<sup>1</sup> What follows is, I believe, good enough to explain why domination is not a good attitude. The master–slave dialectic is, among other things, a parable about the evolution of cooperation in society, one that figuratively explains the relationship between respect and equality.

Hegel begins *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* by describing two newly formed conscious beings encountering each other for the first time. A fight ensues between the two beings, because encountering another conscious being like themselves threatens their own self-understanding. In part, this is because a person cannot form a concept of 'self' without having a concept of 'other' – the two are interdefined. Since nothing differentiates the two at the first encounter, they cannot distinguish themselves. The only way to assert their personal identities is through differentiation, and thus they seek to form an asymmetric relationship. Each tries to dominate the other.

One wins the fight. He could kill the other consciousness. However, he realises that if he does so, he will not have any recognition as a person.<sup>2</sup> A crucial idea of Hegel's, here, is that one cannot really exist as a person unless one is recognised as such by others. (Exile and shunning are painful largely because they strip us of our identity or dignity.) Thus, rather than kill the other, the victor enslaves him.<sup>3</sup>

The master commands the slave while the slave lives for the master. However, the master, though he controls the slave, becomes dependent on him. In fact, the master becomes dependent because of his control; he needs the slave to survive. The slave, however, becomes independent, because the slave, forced to work, develops the skills to support himself. The master faces a major problem. He desires recognition from the slave as a person. Yet, in virtue of the slave's inferior position, the recognition he obtains is of low value. In virtue of being a slave, the slave is regarded as a thing, as property. But in order for recognition from the slave to be valuable, the slave must be regarded as an equal person. The slave also wants recognition from an equal. Indeed, they realise that this is what they wanted all along.

Accordingly, at the last stage, the slave is freed. Only by being independent and having recognition of his personhood by an equal can the master have his sense of personal identity secure. As such, domination ends, and the two become cooperative equals.

This is Hegel's master–slave dialectic. An initial conflict gives way to domination and then cooperation and an attitude of respect. Since I wish to extend this parable to describe attitudes to nature, some issues present themselves. First, the principal theme is obtaining recognition. The fact that the 'other' is another consciousness is part of what creates the problem. Thus, extending the

dialectic to describe our attitudes toward nature is problematic. Nature cannot literally recognise us as persons. However, the dialectic metaphorically describes our relationship with nature, in part because we can obtain a type of surrogate recognition from animals, and in part because of our innate tendency to *sympathise* with nature by anthropomorphising it. Second, we cannot really form a community with nature. However, there is a proxy for community. Just as domination of a slave breeds a bad type of dependence, the attitude that nature is something to be dominated breeds a bad type of dependence as well.

### 3. HISTORICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD NATURE

The Hegelian master–slave dialectic consists of three stages. In this section, I describe how human history, especially the history of our attitudes toward nature, can be seen to fit into this model. My historical analysis will be brief and simplified. To some degree, it is oversimplified, because I present predominant themes in environmental thought, though in each period there has been diverse thinking.

The dialectic begins with humanity's (hypothetical) first encounter with nature. Let us call this first stage the animistic equality stage. Early peoples project their psychologies onto nature. Their own actions are caused by intentional, desire-directed activity. They assume that natural activity flows from similar causes, and thus posit intentions in nature. Specifically, in the animistic stage, each river, rock, tree, meteorological event, and so on, is believed to have a mind behind it, and the actions of those objects is ascribed to the desires of those minds. This resembles the Hegelian master–slave dialectic, for in this initial stage, like the initial encounter of consciousnesses, there is a type of equality. At the earliest part of the animistic stage, humanity does not see itself as being different from nature. Importantly, though, this is because it does not see nature as being different from it. It projects its own purposive psychology onto nature. Nature is treated as a mirror of the psyche, of self-consciousness. In the original Hegelian dialectic, this mirroring occurs and is part of what causes the conflict.

At some point, humanity begins to view nature as something to be conquered. (Historically, this probably arises with the growth of agriculture and is strengthened by the growth of industry.) A conflict ensues in which humanity tries to assert itself against nature, to mould it to human preferences (Katz, 2002; Birch, 1990; Merchant, 1980). In the modern first world, this battle is largely won, while the third world is in the process of obtaining victory. Here we have the second stage, the humanistic mastery stage. Humanity searches for a 'technological fix ... [meaning] that natural processes [are to] be "improved"' to maximize human satisfaction and good' (Katz, 2002: 173). As Eric Katz has written, we do not recognise any in principle technological limitations on what we can do to nature. E.g., as I write this article, the Science Channel on American cable

## DOMINATING NATURE

is airing 'Owning the Weather', a programme discussing advances in *weather control technology*. It interviews scientists actively working on projects from hurricane deterrence to climate modification through X-ray manipulation of the ionosphere.

That many people are beginning to find the attitude of domination unsatisfying is not surprising, if our interaction with nature fits the master-slave model. First world countries are at the second stage of the dialectic. (A question for environmentalists is how to resolve the dialectic and move into the third, post-mastery, stage.) At least for many of us, modified, subdued nature is not admirable; it does not merit our aesthetic appreciation.<sup>4</sup> Mastery of nature is as unsatisfying as mastery of the slave, though the reasons for the dissatisfaction are not exactly the same. The master frees the slave in part because recognition and respect from an inferior is not worth as much as recognition and respect from a *cooperative* equal. In this story, is there an analogue of recognition and respect from nature, a good we cannot get while in the mastery stage? Additionally, the master is dissatisfied by his dependence on the slave. Is there an analogue of that vis-à-vis nature as well? There is; I will discuss this at length below.

## 4. SURROGATE AND METAPHORICAL RECOGNITION

A common commitment among environmentalists is that nature has some degree of intrinsic value. Nature can be respected or abused. When Aldo Leopold described the development of a 'land ethic', he was describing an ethic in which the environment is regarded as a moral *patient* in its own right (Leopold 1981: 237–265.) There were conservationists before Leopold, but a common theme among them was that nature ought to be preserved for purely instrumental reasons. Neither Leopold nor I deny the importance of such instrumental reasons, but we both deny these are the only reasons. I am arguing that domination is imprudent, because the type of recognition one obtains from an inferior is unsatisfying. Nonetheless, it is important to note that in the resolution of the master-slave dialectic, obtaining satisfying respect requires that the slave become an *independent, cooperative equal*. This entails that the freed slave must be recognised by the master *as an end in himself*, not merely as a means. Respecting others and receiving respect has instrumental value for one's psychological satisfaction; however, this instrumental value presupposes that one respects the other as having value in itself.

One problem is that recognition between nature and us is a one-sided affair. Nature cannot return recognition or respect. The natural world is a violent place, in which every animal is eventually eaten. As Mark Sagoff has put it, 'Mother Nature is so cruel to her children she makes Frank Perdue look like a saint' (Sagoff, 1984: 303). Mother Nature is certainly cruel to us. Malaria probably co-evolved with *Homo sapiens*, and historically has killed a huge percentage

of our species. Indeed, people in the 'equality' stage supplicate before nature gods in part because they feel victimised by nature. From our perspective, if we have been fighting nature, nature started the fight. If we get any sort of respect from nature, it seems to be disrespect.

I will divide my response to these problems into three parts. First, I will discuss our relationship with other animals. Many animals are conscious beings, some of which can approximate recognition and respect for us. Some animals respect each other's territory; such animals have a primitive property right regime. Next, I will consider non-conscious beings and nature as a whole. As for 'disrespect from nature', I tackle that issue in the penultimate section of this paper when I explain why primitivism is unacceptable.

People keep pets for surrogate friendship. While I can care about a tree, it cannot reciprocate. But animals can. Many animals have a complex emotional life, which includes emotions such as love and respect. I do not consider my cats my equals, but I also do not think of myself as *dominating* them. There are sadists who purchase pets for the purposes of having an animal *submit* to them. My cats and I, however, have a relationship of mutual affection, and my control over them is gentle.

If animals can provide surrogate friendship, they can also provide surrogate recognition. Being with certain animals can provide a feeling of respect and reinforce one's sense of personhood. To some degree, this is anthropomorphising, but not to an excessive degree.

From a Hegelian point of view, it is not surprising, then, that our esteem for animals increases as the animals approximate our form of consciousness. Dolphins and chimpanzees, highly intelligent beings, are normally regarded as having more moral standing than mice and worms (Schmidtz, 1998: 63). The value we place on animals seems to co-vary with their ability to provide surrogate respect and recognition. (We value animals that endanger us less, which is not surprising from the dialectical perspective.) If we interpret the master-slave dialectic as providing an argument for why other consciousnesses are valuable to us, then we can also use it to explain why we seem to have a certain common hierarchy of respect for animal species. The degree to which we value other animals is the degree to which their form of consciousness allows us to resolve the dialectic with regard to them.

What about trees, rocks, rivers, and ecosystems? These things are not conscious. We cannot attain even surrogate recognition from them. However, there is more to be said. There is a sense in which I can sympathise with a tree or even a mountain, though there is *no mind* present with which to sympathise. In reflecting on my capacity to sympathise with such things, I effectively ask myself the hypothetical question: Am I worthy of respect from nature? Asking if I am worthy of respect from nature is, in part, an indirect way of asking whether I am worthy of self-respect.<sup>5</sup>

## DOMINATING NATURE

David Hume and Adam Smith wrote extensively on human sympathy, which they believed grounded morality. Part of what prompts us to aid others is empathy; part of what corrects our own manners is our ability to see ourselves through others' eyes. We can extend these ideas to describe our ability to sympathise with nature. I can sympathise with a tree by imagining what its perspective would be like. Aldo Leopold can sympathise with a mountain (Leopold, 1981: 137–141). Certainly, this is anthropomorphism. I know the tree does not have feelings. (Sympathy does not require the existence of other minds. Were I on a zombie world, I would still experience sympathy for other people, much the way Leopold sympathises with mountains.) Even where there are not perspectives, we often invent them. (Inventing perspectives serves a psychological need. It helps us to feel at home in the world.) If I were to bore a tunnel capriciously through an ancient redwood, I can imagine what the redwood would think of me. I would look to the redwood the way a philistine looks to the art enthusiast. The redwood would tell me that it has survived eons against the odds, and my defacing it represents in part a betrayal of my own sense of life. It need not matter that this is imagined.

Given that I do sympathise with nature, this gives me one reason not to destroy it (Sagoff, 2002: 217). Someone might complain that this means that the person who cannot sympathise lacks any reason to avoid domination. I disagree: sympathy is not the only source of reasons. Still, it would not be particularly troubling to grant that the unsympathetic lack reasons. Sociopaths lack the capacity to sympathise with other people, and it does not really matter whether, as philosophers, we describe them as thereby lacking moral reasons or having moral reasons but being unmotivated by them. Either way, there is something wrong with sociopaths, even if the sociopaths do not agree. Similarly, we might argue that some people are sociopaths with regard to nature. Such people have no qualms with capricious destruction, but that does not make their position enviable. Some qualms are worth having.

Moreover, in nature we see our own values. Aesthetic valuing, in part the faculty of seeing our values embodied (in paintings, sculpture, dance, nature), is a deep and central part of human life. (At least, people who have these sorts of values tend to consider them deep and central.) When I imagined the redwood judging me, in part, this was because I see certain values embodied in the redwood: grandeur, success by struggle, strength, even wisdom. Perhaps this is merely projection, but even if so, this projection serves a vital human need – to see our values – and is worth protecting. Even if all we do in valuing nature is project our values onto it, we need to preserve it in order to have something onto which to project our values.

David Schmidtz suggests that destroying what we aesthetically value is a 'failure of self-respect' (Schmidtz 1998: 62). After we come to value nature, when we destroy it, we destroy our values (Schmidtz 1998: 62). Understanding this point explains why one can continue to 'sympathise' with inanimate objects.



I had argued that animals can provide us with surrogate respect and recognition, and this is why the master–slave dialectic can be extended to them. Now, we are in a position to see that nature can provide us with *metaphorical* respect and recognition, and this is valuable too. Metaphorical respect from nature is a conceptual placeholder for self-respect. To imagine that nature would respect me is to say that I would be worthy of its respect, and thus worthy of self-respect. In order for this respect to be satisfying, I cannot dominate nature, seeing it as a mere thing. Dominating nature lessens its value (Katz, 2002: 175). We want, on occasion, to encounter undominated nature.

That respect for the environment *normatively* rests on sympathy and aesthetic evaluation should not be surprising. *Descriptively*, it seems obvious that it does. Philosophical thought experiments and arguments have only slight motivational pull. Many non-environmentalists would describe my argument above as high-faluting nonsense. As Thomas E. Hill, Jr., has pointed out, a full description of the ecological facts is not sufficient to derive any ‘oughts’. It does not force a normative perspective upon us (Hill, 1983: 218–220). This is part of why narratives about nature are important; they impart and transform the aesthetic experience. They invite us to adopt someone else’s normative perspective. The gap from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ is closed only within normative perspectives. The value of narrative notwithstanding, nothing can replace actual experience. To make somebody value a mountain, you do not show her a philosophical argument. You show her the mountain. She either recognises the mountain’s value or not. If not, she has missed something.

I grew up in Hudson, New Hampshire, on the border of Massachusetts. Hudson, though less than 40 miles from Boston, is heavily forested. A hundred years ago, there were few forests. I know this not merely from looking at old maps and from studies confirming that the northeast has been reforested, but simply from walking, biking, and ATV-ing in the woods. The Hudson woods are striped with old stone fences that once formed the boundaries of farms. More than once I have found a giant pine growing in the former foundation of an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century farmhouse. Coyotes used to run through my yard at 5 a.m. (producing eerie but beautiful yelps). Those woods and hills form a part of my identity, of my consciousness of myself. To wantonly destroy them would be an act of self-loathing.

When I climbed Mount Moosilauke as a teenager, one of the best parts of the experience was thinking of the mountain as challenging me, a challenge that I accepted and met. However, I did not think of myself as having conquered the mountain. Rather, to analogise: certain teachers have challenged me, and I met the challenges, but I do not think of myself as having conquered the teachers. Mountains can be our teachers too, though they do not intend to be so. The thing is, we get to decide how to think about mountains. We get to decide how to think about nature and whether we will let it be our teacher.<sup>6</sup> We can think of

## DOMINATING NATURE

it as a thing to be dominated, but it is hard to justify this attitude, even in terms of self-interest, in cases where the attitude is unnecessary.

With some modification, the Hegelian master–slave dialectic can be used to describe our relationship to nature. It also thereby provides an argument against domination. However, even granted that we ought not to take an attitude of domination, we still need to know what attitude is appropriate. Thus, in the remaining sections, I discuss what the resolution (the third stage) of the master–slave dialectic is, and what attitudes we ought to take.<sup>7</sup> I conclude by noting that achieving this third stage has some economic preconditions.

## 5. COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY WITH NATURE

In the actual master–slave dialectic, the master and slave become equals again and engage in cooperative exchange. This, however, is not quite the resolution of the master–slave dialectic with regard to nature. One reason is that I cannot literally form a cooperative community with nature. Of course, in the preceding section, I argued that *being worthy of* respect from nature was a value though nature cannot actually respect me. One might think that if metaphorical respect is a value, metaphorical community is as well. I agree, with qualifications. In this section, I will discuss some limitations of the idea of a cooperative community with nature, and then argue for a slightly different resolution in the subsequent section. Community with nature of the type Leopold describes is important, but not the whole story.

Part of the objection to thinking about ourselves as part of a community with nature is that nature is not *naturally* a good community member to us. It often seems against us. Nature produces malaria, bubonic plague, and AIDS. Nature does not automatically provide me with what I need to eat; I have to reshape the land to support myself. Despite our romantic mythology to the contrary, technologically primitive peoples (those in the animistic stage) fear nature more than we do. Nature is just as likely to kill them as feed them. Only once economic progress begins can people begin to think of themselves as conquering a previous enemy. In economically advanced stages such as ours, the idea of community becomes plausible, because, having obtained some degree of dominion, we can consider loosening the chains. Better yet, we become capable of no longer thinking in terms of control; we overcome our tendency to think of nature as something that can literally be dominated. Before that, it is not surprising that we seek to dominate nature. This is not to say that it is impossible for societies with less technology, and thus more subject to the caprices of nature, to form communities with nature. Rather, it is to say that such communities have a natural tension that is likely, long term, to either dissolve them or transform them in a bad way.

Community as a source of obligation thus has its limitations. For one, it seems to license destroying that with which we do not form a community. Secondly, if nature is not a good community member in return, it seems to license dominating it, much as we dominate lawbreakers. Something is missing.

## 6. CARING AS RESOLUTION

Community emphasises reciprocity. I suspect the relationship that we need to cultivate with nature in order to resolve the master–slave dialectic is not completely reciprocal. Instead, the resolution involves an attitude of caring, even if that caring is one-sided.

Ecofeminist Karen J. Warren describes taking ‘a loving eye’ toward nature, where taking a loving eye entails appreciating a thing for what it is. She describes climbing a rock in a vein similar to my own, one that perfectly illustrates resolving the Hegelian dialectic:

When one climbs with a loving eye, one constantly ‘must look and listen and check and question.’ One recognizes the rock as something very different, something perhaps totally indifferent to one’s own presence, and finds in that difference joyous occasion for celebration. One knows ‘the boundary of the self,’ where the self—the ‘I,’ the climber—leaves off and the rock begins. There is no fusion of two into one, but a complement of two entities *acknowledged* as separate, different, independent, yet *in relationship*; they are in relationship *if only* because the loving eye is perceiving it, responding to it, noticing it, attending to it. (Warren, 1990: 132.)

In the original master–slave dialectic, the two consciousnesses resolve their conflict by becoming separate, independent individuals who are nevertheless in a relationship. With their attitude of mutual respect, they take on ‘the loving eye’. The conflict began between them because in their initial state of equality, they did not know the boundaries of the self. The dialectic is resolved when they are both differentiated and equal, rather than equal but undifferentiated.

Caring can take many forms. One form is maternal caring. This is rarely appropriate to nature, because maternal care is, well, patronising. Warren does not advocate this type of care with regard to nature. Rather, she emphasises caring *about* rather than caring *for* nature. Caring *about* something signifies recognition of its worth (Warren, 2000: 110). While Warren describes her ethics as an ethics of care, it emphasises cohabitation, respect, and avoiding abuse, rather than maternal oversight (Warren, 2000: 141). The ideas of respect, awe, and reverence expressed by Leopold, Hill, Schmidt, and Katz are actually ways of taking what Warren calls the loving eye.

It is not surprising that ecofeminists have already begun to understand the resolution of the dialectic, even if they have not been thinking of the problem

## DOMINATING NATURE

under that description. Ecofeminists' primary concern has been the attitude of domination. In particular, Warren argues, 'there may be nothing inherently problematic about hierarchical thinking, value dualisms, and...relations of power and privilege,' provided they are not used to license oppression (Warren, 2000: 47). The Hegelian dialectic does not remove such thinking or relations, but its resolution involves stopping their tendency to justify oppression.

## 7. PRIMITIVISM AND DEEP ECOLOGY: NOT THE RESOLUTION

I have been discussing attitudes toward nature, and explaining why an attitude of domination ought to give way to an attitude of respect. This has been placed within the framework of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. In this section, I want to note an important implication of that framework. Many deep ecologists advocate primitivism, the doctrine that we should live in a primitive technological state. Some extreme primitivists advocate a return to hunting and gathering. Others, more weakly, believe that hunter-gatherer societies are morally superior and lament that we cannot return to them. I believe this is mistaken. The stability of a philosophy of non-domination generally presupposes certain technological advancements. In order for me to have a good relationship with nature—for me to be able to care about nature—nature must not be a threat.

Environmentalists tend to come from the first world. This is actually another reason to place attitudes toward nature in the Hegelian framework. If our environmentalism is the *third stage* of dialectic, it is *post*-domination. First worlders have been dominating nature, with all of the problems that causes, so it is not surprising that they advocate the relinquishing of domination. We in the developed world are generally in the second stage of the dialectic, but we are shifting to the third. Environmental awareness is increasing. People are demanding more and better environmental protection than they did in the last century. People look to buy products that they perceive as having less of a negative environmental impact, such as organic foods and hybrid cars.

Advocating a return to the primitive will not resolve the master-slave dialectic. The ability to see nature as something to be loved requires a degree of *independence* on our part, an independence of the caprices of nature so that we can support ourselves and ensure our children will not die at birth. In the original master-slave dialectic, the master and slave become independent, self-supporting equals at the end, and engage in cooperative trade. Some, such as Emerson or Thoreau, describe such cooperative trade as a form of dependence, since it involves the mediation of tasks and the division of labour. This misses the way in which one is independent. In a modern liberal society, I have more independence than even a hermit, because I have more choices and opportunity. Thoreau was tied to growing his beans so that he could eat. I am not dependent on any particular vocation. The former master and slave are also independent

in the sense that they each pay their own way, producing as much value as they consume. In contrast, masters (or children) are dependent, because they do not pay their own way.

Those in the first stage, the animistic stage, have not obtained independence. Fluctuations in natural processes, such as droughts and storms, have a far greater impact on their lives. Wealth (liquid capital, technology, and so on) provides an important type of insurance and buffer against natural disasters. It is because my chances of dying of malaria, starvation, or dysentery are negligible that I can afford to respect nature, rather than simply fear it.

Similarly, it is useless (and offensive) to ask those in the developing world to protect the environment when this entails remaining poor and watching their children starve. Environmental quality seems to be luxury on the hierarchy of needs. Industrial development and environmental quality followed a well-known pattern. When industrial development began, pollution rose dramatically. Environmental quality was traded for increases in the standard of living (such as extending life expectancy by decades.) Historically, when a country's per capita GDP reaches about 9,000 dollars, environmental damage per unit of GDP decreases (Grossman and Krueger, 1995). This might be a historical accident, but it might mean that once people become secure in their ability *to survive*, they gain the incentive to protect nature. Environmental quality seems to be what economists call a 'superior good', i.e., a good that is pursued more strongly by those with higher incomes (Frankel, 2005). Technological, social, and economic advancement are not jointly a panacea with regard to environmental protection, as they cause many of the problems they have to solve,<sup>8</sup> but they are our only hope for the compossibility of human and natural flourishing.<sup>9</sup>

This is not to say that this pattern represents an economic law. It might be only a coincidence. Still, it tells us something. We should not expect poor third-worlders to accept dysentery and poverty to protect the environment. However, we need not expect that as countries develop, they will follow the developed nations' pattern of abuse followed (to some extent) by clean up. A good feature of economic catch up effects is that countries can skip certain stages and benefit from adopting advanced technologies. E.g., some developing nations that currently lack telephone services are expected to skip wire-based communication and move directly to wireless technology. This happened in Guatemala.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps environmentally friendly advanced technologies can be adopted as well, especially since the developed world has already paid for the infrastructure that can produce such technologies cheaply.

In many respects, advocating primitive lifestyles entails returning to a pre-dominance stage of the dialectic. Deep ecology is intended to be a *post*-domination philosophy, but whether it could succeed is questionable. Primitive lifestyles conjoined with deep ecological consciousness need not yield to domination. However, human nature being what it is, I suspect the internalisation and maintenance costs of such an ethic would be extraordinarily high. If people earnestly

## DOMINATING NATURE

returned to primitive lifestyles armed with a new environmental consciousness, this could perhaps be maintained for a few generations. However, I would expect such attitudes to eventually erode and the attitude of domination to reappear. Well-fed, disease-free societies are a better bet for long-term conscientious treatment of nature than technologically primitive societies.

What this all amounts to, practically speaking, is a complex matter. However, some themes should be evident. If the attitudes of respect and care for nature are to replace the attitude of domination, we must be secure in our belief that nature will not dominate us in return. This entails continued economic, social, and technological progress. It is no coincidence that environmentalists are mainly citizens of liberal capitalist societies. The attitude of respect for nature rests on certain material and social conditions. Whether these conditions could fade away without diminishing the attitude of respect is another issue, but we should be cautious.

My use of the Hegelian framework suggests that I think history follows the dialectic as a matter of law. I do not accept this. No laws would be violated if people passed from the first stage to the third without ever taking that attitude of domination. My point in employing Hegel, however, was to conveniently package what I see as predictable trends in human attitudes. The dialectic, as I describe it, is derived from human attitudes, rather than vice versa.

Deep ecologists sometimes complain that viewing oneself as distinct from nature is a failing of ecological consciousness. I disagree. Viewing oneself as completely unified with nature is arguably a failing of ecological consciousness. What makes respect for other persons morally interesting is that this respect involves *recognising* the boundaries and differences between others and us. Warren agrees – she says that an ethic that cannot countenance respect except by eliminating difference is arrogant.<sup>11</sup> I.e., respect between two people obtains not when the two think of themselves as one, but when they respect their separateness. Even in the most intimate of relationships between persons, this attitude should prevail. Kahlil Gibran expresses this sentiment in his poem, ‘On Marriage’: ‘... stand together, yet not too near together/ For the pillars of the temple stand apart’ (Gibran 1923: 16).

## 8. CONCLUSION AND REMAINING WORRIES

To summarise, Hegel’s master–slave dialectic aptly describes the evolution of thought toward nature and provides an argument against taking the attitude of domination against it. It provides us reasons for thinking that some purported solutions to the problem of domination are better than others. Lastly, it points to certain material preconditions that are important (though perhaps not absolutely necessary) for the attitude of domination to cede to the attitude of respect.

Some worries might remain. One might ask why one should accept the Hegelian master–slave dialectic in the first place. After all, it is embedded in a larger dialectical theory of history, a theory that the author of this essay rejects. Why think the analysis is worth accepting apart from Hegelian metaphysics, especially since the author avowedly rejects Hegelian metaphysics? Many assumptions have been made but not justified, such as the thesis that respect and recognition are important moral goods for the self. Perhaps it is an objection that Hegel himself viewed nature as a thing to be dominated, and did not extend his master–slave dialectic to it.<sup>12</sup>

I do not propose to have adequate answers to all of these questions or to other objections. I simply offer the master–slave dialectic as a useful perspective on the problem. If it is useful, perhaps its usefulness is not sheer coincidence.

#### NOTES

Thanks to Frank Chessa, Chris Freiman, Joel Martinez, Bob Scharff, David Schmidt, Elizabeth Willott, and two anonymous referees for helpful discussions and comments.

<sup>1</sup> My reading is based in part on Kojeve (1991) and Taylor (1977), though it both deviates from their interpretations and is much more simplified.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Their act is abstract negation ... which cancels in such a way that it preserves and maintains what is sublated, and thereby survives its being sublated. In this experience self-consciousness becomes aware that life is essential to it as pure self-consciousness.’ (Hegel, 1953: 404.)

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Willott brings it to my attention that the dialectic can go other ways. In George Elliot’s *Middlemarch*, Rosamond controls Lydgate through weakness. Mutual slavery is possible. This is different from, but not altogether foreign to Hegel’s conception. See Elliot, 1981: 647.

<sup>4</sup> However, there is a view that nature should be more like an extended garden. Not everyone appreciates the wildness of nature. However, it seems that the desire to see nature as a garden decreases as people become more secure in their well-being.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Hill, 1983. Hill argues that asking why one should respect the environment is not the central question. Rather, the central question is what type of person does one want to be. A person that can senselessly destroy nature is missing an importance perspective, and perhaps cannot achieve full self-acceptance.

<sup>6</sup> That does not imply that the choice is completely subjective. One can freely choose one’s values while being objectively justified. See Brennan, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> I am not the only person to analyse domination as being partly constituted by the types of attitudes the dominator takes toward the domination. See, for instance, Ladkin, 2005: 203–219, especially 204, 209.

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of how scientific innovations and property rights affect the environment, see Rose, 2002.

## DOMINATING NATURE

<sup>9</sup> The worry remains that the technological advancements and high standard of living can be maintained only by exploitative practices. If this is so, it is worrisome, not just for my analysis, but for the environment. If Frankel is right, environmental quality is a superior good. If the high standards of living that create the demand for this superior good are grounded in inherently exploitative practices, then the good is out of reach. Whether the high standard of living enjoyed by some countries is essentially exploitative is a complicated question, which deserves a paper of its own. However, I am optimistic here. I concur with Mark Sagoff (2002), in which Sagoff (again, by no means an apologist for the status quo) argues that the well being of the 'North' is not essentially based on overconsumption of natural resources or on the economic exploitation of the 'South'.

<sup>10</sup> Thanks to David Schmidtz for this example. He tells me that the small town of Quetzaltenango went from having three land-lines a decade ago to having an average of one cell phone per family today.

<sup>11</sup> Warren, 2000: 105. Furthermore, Warren says, even if the rest of nature and we are members of one biotic community, we are separate members with differences.

<sup>12</sup> For a summary of Hegel's views on nature, see Passmore 1995: 136–137.

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