

Ecotage, Ecodefense, and Deep Ecology

Over the past several decades, thousands of environmentally-motivated acts of sabotage—commonly referred to as “ecosabotage” or “ecotage”—have caused millions of dollars in damages to individuals, organizations, businesses and governments involved in projects with controversial environmental effects. Indeed, it is believed that between 1997 and 2006 one group alone, the Earth Liberation Front, has been responsible for \$100 million in property damage.¹ Much of this destructive activity has taken place in the United States, where Earth Liberation Front members claimed responsibility for two of the most highly publicized and costly acts of ecotage to date: an arson at a Colorado ski resort in 1998 that destroyed buildings and equipment worth an estimated \$12 million,² and another in 2003 at a California housing development, which resulted in roughly \$22 million in reconstruction costs and lost revenues.³

As such actions have garnered public and political attention, ecotage has sometimes been called “eco-terrorism,” a term generally at odds with those employed by eco-saboteurs themselves, many of whom consider what they do to be some form of “civil disobedience.”⁴ Either label, to be sure, can obscure important distinctions, for while ecotage does seem to differ from more conventional forms of civil disobedience, primarily insofar as eco-saboteurs tend both to act in secrecy and to be willing to destroy property, it also differs significantly from terrorism, since eco-saboteurs target property rather than people, and they do so discriminately rather than indiscriminately.⁵ Of course, precise classification of such a complex phenomenon is difficult. Here, however, as with so many other contentious issues, it often seems that what one calls ecotage is less an expression of conceptual clarity about what it is, than an expression of its moral censure or approval.

¹ Liddick 2006, 4, 65.

² Jarboe 2002, 2.

³ US Congress 2007, 28.

⁴ For references to ecotage as “terrorism,” see Jarboe 2002 and US Congress 2007. For discussion of ecotage as a type of civil disobedience see Manes 1990 and Foreman 1991.

⁵ More extended discussion of these and other points of comparison and contrast between ecotage, civil disobedience, and terrorism can be found in Martin 1990, Scarce 1990, List 1994, Taylor 1998, Hettinger 2003, and Liddick 2006.

Perhaps not surprisingly, popular opinion has tended to favor the former view: ecotage has been widely condemned, even within environmental and activist communities.⁶ Yet the philosophical literature has sometimes suggested that ecotage may actually be morally defensible, particularly if the defense proceeds on consequentialist grounds. In “Ecosabotage and Civil Disobedience,” for example, Michael Martin argues that although eco-saboteurs have not yet fully assessed the consequences of what they do, there is no reason to think that, if they did, they could not reasonably conclude that at least some acts of ecotage are morally justified.⁷ Thomas Young, too, whose essay “The Morality of Ecosabotage” explicitly builds on Martin’s work, proposes a form of consequentialism that he believes “is capable, at least in principle, of justifying some acts of strategic ecosabotage in a democratic society.”⁸

Still, philosophical consensus in this area is difficult to achieve, and recently Derek D. Turner has offered a perspective on the subject that diverges from the views of Martin and Young in several key respects. Not only does Turner arrive at considerably less favorable conclusions about the morality of ecotage than either Martin or Young, but his commentary also targets non-consequentialist arguments in favor of it, focusing specifically on versions of such arguments that are rooted in the philosophy of deep ecology.⁹ This latter aspect of Turner’s work is quite welcome, especially in light of the historical affiliation between deep ecology supporters and Earth First!, an activist organization well-known for having eco-saboteurs among its members. But it also indicates the need for an expanded analysis of the connection between ecotage and the philosophical views of deep ecologists, an analysis that, once completed, may lead to conclusions different from those that Turner himself has drawn.

My aim in this essay, therefore, is to take Turner’s reflections on this issue as an opportunity to re-examine the relationship between deep ecological philosophy and eco-sabotage. Concentrating on the texts of Arne Naess, I will attempt to show that there are two relatively distinct non-consequentialist lines of justification of ecotage that can be derived from his

⁶ See, for example, the joint statement issued by several major environmental organizations in US Congress 2007, 138. In addition, a survey conducted by Liddick found that while many environmental activists supported relatively minor acts of criminality done in defense of nature, the vast majority did not believe that property destruction is an acceptable means of promoting environmental causes (2006, 108-10).

⁷ Martin 1990.

⁸ Young 2001, 385.

⁹ Turner 2006.

writings, and that these are connected to two relatively distinct notions of “identification” that can be found therein. After discussing the first of these justifications, and Turner’s critique of it, I will detail the second, and argue that it is potentially less problematic than Turner’s commentary might be taken to suggest. All of this will lead to the conclusion that more work would need to be done to be able to claim definitively that deep ecological saboteurs are in the wrong. This examination will start, though, with a point of conceptual clarification about Naess’s eco-philosophy, one that will then serve as the basis for our ensuing discussion.

Belonging and Kinship

As we begin, it is important to keep in mind that the term “deep ecology” does not signify a single, unified philosophical position. Rather, it is meant to refer to a broad-based environmental movement whose members share certain beliefs and objectives without necessarily agreeing on their deeper philosophical or religious underpinnings.¹⁰ Nevertheless, many who have articulated the underlying reasons for their support of the deep ecology movement have followed the line of thought laid out by Arne Naess, who emphasizes the relevance of conceptions of the self for environmental ethics, and issues an associated call for human “identification” with nature. As I have argued elsewhere, though, the notion of identification has more than one meaning for Naess, and this is important to recognize when seeking to evaluate the conceptual strengths or weaknesses of his position. In what immediately follows, therefore, I will be describing two senses of identification that appear in Naess’s writings before returning to the discussion of ecotage in the next section.

In many places Naess argues that, traditionally, we in the West have not looked upon ourselves as part and parcel of the natural world, or viewed ourselves as members of ecological communities. Instead, we have taken ourselves to be either isolated individuals or, at most, members of human social groups.¹¹ Accordingly, Naess claims that we have become largely “alienated”¹² from nature: we regard ourselves as separate, discrete entities with no essential relatedness to ecological realities, as beings fundamentally disconnected from the world outside ourselves. Hence, in part because this

¹⁰ Naess 1995b, 76-9.

¹¹ Naess 1995a, 225-6.

¹² Naess 1985, 262; Naess 1995a, 227.

outlook is thought to be metaphysically false, and in part because it is believed to have highly undesirable ethical implications, Naess urges us to replace it with one that is appropriately ecologically-expanded. He urges us, that is, to develop our narrow sense of “self” into a far more inclusive ecological “Self.”¹³

As Naess explains it, the development of one’s ecological Self occurs through a process of “identification” with nature, and in the context just specified, it is not too difficult to see just what this process entails. In his words, identification involves “understanding and appreciating [one’s] relations with all other life forms and to the Earth as a whole”;¹⁴ it is a process whereby one comes to see that “everything is interconnected”¹⁵ or, as he put it in one of his earliest formulations, that all living things, including oneself, are “knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations.”¹⁶ What such passages are describing, of course, is the cultivation of a sense of one’s embeddedness in, or belonging to, the encompassing natural environment, and for this reason I have referred to this particular sense of identification as “identification-as-belonging.” Through identification of this sort, one expands one’s sense of self to include the natural world, ultimately becoming aware of oneself as intimately connected to nature, and aware of nature as an intimate part of oneself.

This characterization of identification is no doubt familiar to those acquainted with the writings of theorists in the deep ecology movement, as it is surely one of the most commonly expressed ideas therein. Moreover, it is also the conception of identification with which commentators have most frequently taken up. But there is another sense of identification to be found in Naess’s texts, one that he himself does not typically distinguish from identification-as-belonging but which is no less important to his philosophical system, and no less important to the discussion of ecotage to which we will soon turn.

In the essay “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World,” Naess recounts what he calls a “paradigm situation” of

¹³ Naess 1995a, 227. Though Naess himself does not always do so, many commentators distinguish between the more narrow, individualistic sense of self and the wider, more expansive sense of Self that Naess promotes by capitalizing the “s” when referring to the latter. In what follows I have tried to follow this convention.

¹⁴ Naess 1989, 166.

¹⁵ Naess 1989, 164.

¹⁶ Naess 1973, 95.

identification.¹⁷ One day while working in a laboratory, he witnessed the death of a flea that had jumped into some chemicals he was observing on a microscope slide. Watching the flea's struggle, he recalls, evoked in him a strong sense of compassion. But he believes that more basic than such compassion, and actually what made it possible, was his identification with the tiny animal, the fact that, as he says, "I saw myself in the flea." Elaborating upon this statement, he writes, "If I had been *alienated* from the flea, not seeing intuitively anything even resembling myself, the death struggle would have left me feeling indifferent."¹⁸ A similar account of identification is given in *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, where Naess describes a scenario in which an adult comes upon some children killing insects with bug spray, and poses to them the question, "perhaps those animals might, like you, prefer to live rather than to die?" Such a question could, Naess says, encourage the children to identify with the insects, to "see and experience spontaneously and immediately the insects as themselves, not only as something different but in an important sense like themselves."¹⁹

What is notable about these examples is that, in both cases, identification is portrayed not as a matter of recognizing *connectedness to* other-than-human beings, but as a matter of recognizing *commonality with* them. That is, they both portray identification as something that is less about seeing such others as a *part* of oneself than about recognizing that they are somehow *similar* to oneself, or "like" oneself in some way. This same understanding of identification is conveyed in Naess's most recent text *Life's Philosophy*, where he says that experiences of identification are experiences in which "we recognize something of ourselves in the other creature, or something of the other creature in ourselves."²⁰ What distinguishes this type of identification, then, is the stress it places on acknowledging continuity or likeness, and thus I have called it "identification-as-kinship": it is a form of identification that involves becoming aware of the basic similarities that obtain between oneself and others, the ways in which other-than-human beings are essentially akin to oneself.

Now although these two types of identification are undoubtedly compatible, there are at least two differences between them that are important to note. The first is that each addresses a different problem and, consequently, presents a different solution to it, something that can be seen when we observe that even though both types of identification aim at

¹⁷ Naess 1995a, 227. The same story is told by Naess in Rothenberg 1993, 178-9.

¹⁸ Naess 1995a, 227.

¹⁹ Naess 1989, 171-2.

²⁰ Naess 2002, 114.

overcoming “alienation” from nature, such alienation can itself be conceived in more than one way. On the one hand, alienation can refer to a sense of separation from nature, a failure to understand or appreciate the full extent of one’s interconnectedness with the natural world. As a response to this particular failure, identification shows itself to be a way of healing the human/nature divide, a means of re-establishing one’s connectedness to nature by re-drawing the boundaries of one’s self to include it. On the other hand, as Naess’s example of the children killing insects illustrates, alienation can be associated with what might be called careless attitudes towards other-than-human entities, an insensitive disregard that mistakenly sees them as completely “alien” or unlike oneself. Taken as a response to this sort of alienation, therefore, identification emerges as an affirmation of what self and others have in common, something that counters the mundane indifference with which one views other-than-human beings by providing an intimation of the various respects in which they are like oneself.

The second of the differences mentioned above is more axiological than metaphysical, and has to do with the fact that although each type of identification is said to function as what Naess calls “a source of belief in intrinsic values,”²¹ the way in which each does so is unique. Through the process of identification-as-belonging, nature’s value comes to be thought of as essentially identical to one’s own, since on this model nature comes to be thought of as a part of oneself. Hence, insofar as one believes oneself to have value independently of one’s usefulness to others, or intrinsic value, this form of identification leads one to see nature as having such value as well. A similarly non-instrumentalist value-orientation also issues from identification-as-kinship, yet here, rather than stemming from the expansion of an intrinsically valuable self, such an orientation stems from an expanded awareness of other-than-human others, an awareness that allows one to see that they, too, have a value irreducible to their utility. That is, through this type of identification one becomes aware of other-than-human beings as *entities* of the same sort as oneself, and thus one is led to ascribe to them *value* of the same sort as that which is ascribed to oneself. As Naess expresses it, this type of identification leads to the conclusion that “if *I* have a right to live, *you* have the same right.”²²

The “Ecodefense” Argument

²¹ Naess 1985, 259.

²² Naess 1985, 266.

The preceding remarks, while admittedly somewhat abbreviated, suffice to establish the conceptual background for our discussion of specifically “deep ecological” arguments pertaining to eco-sabotage. Having arrived at this point, let us proceed by looking at the relationship between deep ecology and ecotage as characterized by Turner, and at the objections he raises to justifications of environmental sabotage that draw on the philosophical principles just outlined.

In his analysis, Turner focuses on what he refers to as the “ecodefense” argument for ecotage.²³ This argument, he rightly points out, is one in which eco-saboteurs try to defend what they do by appeal not to the possible outcomes of their actions, but to a “higher law” that they believe justifies ecotage as a matter of principle. Of course, the idea that one moral law or principle is “higher” than another can be understood in several ways. As Turner explains, though, in this case calling a moral principle “higher” simply means that it can have priority over others, that it is, as Turner says, “more basic” and, as such, “trumps” or takes precedence over other principles if and when it comes into conflict with them.²⁴

In its particulars, the eco-defense argument is a variant of the position that asserts that while it is usually wrong to damage or destroy another person’s private property, it is also usually permissible to defend oneself against undue harm or violation, and if such self-defense ever were to require breaking the prohibition against property destruction, self-defense would take priority and the property destruction would be morally justified. Clearly, in this line of reasoning, the higher moral principle is the principle of self-defense, which is given precedence over respect for other people’s property in conflict cases. In the above formulation, however, the argument is not yet an argument for “eco-” defense. Where it takes on its expressly ecological cast is the point at which one introduces the notion of an ecological Self into the principle of self-defense, which effectively extends the range of actions that fall under that principle to include actions done in defense of nature. The thinking here, in other words, is that if nature is an extended part of oneself, then to protect it is to protect one’s Self, and thus property destruction on nature’s behalf is as permissible as property destruction on behalf of oneself.

²³ Turner 2006, 215.

²⁴ Turner 2006, 216.

In short, if one has identified with nature, then ecotage is every bit as justifiable as self-defense, because it is Self-defense.²⁵

It is worth mentioning that the basic structure of this argument is consonant with the views of Naess and other deep ecology theorists, many of whom state explicitly that when one identifies with nature and develops one's ecological Self, the defense of the natural world becomes a matter of Self-defense.²⁶ This is, furthermore, an argument that some of the most vocal advocates of ecotage have actually expressed. To cite just one example, in *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* Earth First! founder Dave Foreman provides a number of possible justifications of the actions of eco-saboteurs, among which is included the idea that "[w]hen we fully identify with a wild place," ecotage "...becomes self-defense, which is a fundamental right."²⁷

Such conviction notwithstanding, Turner voices several concerns about this pattern of argument, among which is the worry that construing the self, and consequently the principle of self-defense, so broadly appears to justify any property destruction whatsoever done on behalf of the environment. Since identification can be with any element of the natural world, it seems that any and all transformative uses of nature—even those that are sustainable, or that have minimal environmental impact—can be taken as transgressions against the Self and, as such, warrant property damage. Because of this, Turner says that it is "impossible for anyone who takes property rights at all seriously to endorse the expanded law of self-defence...."²⁸ In addition, Turner finds that higher law arguments face the general difficulty of explaining why one moral principle should be given priority over another, and he says that eco-saboteurs have not solved this difficulty.²⁹ He believes, however, that even if they were to work out this problem of principle-ranking, it is highly implausible that they could justify prioritizing a moral principle like the expanded law of Self-defense, which is

²⁵ The ideas summarized in this paragraph are found in Turner 2006, section 3 (especially pp. 220 and 223). Turner actually notes three variants of this argument, one of which is expressed by Edward Abbey in his "Forward!" to *Ecodefense* (Foreman and Haywood 1993, 3-4). Although Turner refers to all three variants collectively as the "ecodefense" argument, I am reserving this term for the position explained here, which I believe can be taken to include Abbey's variation of it. In section III, I take up with the third variant of this argument, which for the sake of terminological clarity I refer to as the "other-defense" argument rather than the ecodefense argument.

²⁶ Naess 1995a, 232; Mathews 1988, 354.

²⁷ Foreman 1991, 140.

²⁸ Turner 2006, 224-5.

²⁹ Turner 2006, 225.

premised on so controversial an idea as the ecological Self.³⁰ And it appears that at least part of the reason why he finds this idea to be so controversial is that he thinks it results less from rational deliberation than from some sort of ecological consciousness, that it is an outlook whose adoption is “more like a religious conversion than a decision based on careful consideration of reasons and evidence.”³¹

Surveying these comments, it seems fair to say that at the core of Turner’s critique of the ecodefense argument is an objection to the notion of the ecological Self upon which the argument ultimately rests. For although it is accurate to claim that prioritizing moral principles can be philosophically tricky, it is also the case that there are some situations in which doing so is typically regarded as relatively uncontroversial. This is especially true when the principle in question is self-defense, which is quite frequently thought to be so basic that it can outweigh even the prohibition against killing.³² Self-defense is, moreover, a principle that many people are inclined to rank higher than respect for property, particularly if the property in question comprises part of the threat to oneself, and if by damaging that property one is able to defend oneself without directly harming others. But still, even if these points were conceded, the issue pertaining to the notion of the ecological Self that Turner raises would remain, which is that thinkers like Naess widen the conception of the self so significantly, and articulate its details so vaguely, that it makes it difficult, if not impossible, to say that Self-defense could be given the same priority as its more narrow counterpart. Any “trump” power that may have been assigned to the principle of self-defense, it seems, is thrown into question when the entity to which that principle refers is the entity described by deep ecology theorists, when the “self” defended is the greatly modified, environmentally-expanded ecological Self.

Without doubt, there is much in this critique to which deep ecology theorists might want to respond. For our purposes, though, what is most crucial to recognize is that the sort of identification at issue in it is identification-as-belonging. Since it is identification-as-belonging that issues in an expanded sense of Self, it should be evident that it is this sort of identification that underlies the expanded principle of Self-defense and, accordingly, the ecodefense argument. Of course, acknowledging this point does not resolve the problems we have been discussing. It takes on special significance, however, in light of the somewhat surprising fact that Naess

³⁰ Turner 2006, 225.

³¹ Turner 2006, 224.

³² In the environmental ethics literature, this idea is discussed in Regan 1983, 287-90 and Taylor 1986, 264-9.

himself doubts that eco-saboteurs could always appeal to this sort of identification to justify what they do, or legitimately claim that their efforts to defend nature amount to Self-defense.

Not long after the publication of *Ecodefense*, the well-known guide to ecotage co-edited by Foreman, Naess wrote to Foreman outlining some of his thoughts about the book. In the letter, Naess cites the case of a Sami man who tried to blow up a bridge to prevent a development project that was encroaching upon his homeland. Clearly conveying his confidence that the man was acting on the basis of a deep sense of belonging to, and identity with, his local environment, Naess says that the man “defended a place *where he belonged*. He said it was *part of himself*.”³³ Shortly after making these comments, though, Naess adds that many eco-saboteurs in the United States live so far removed from natural areas that it is unlikely that they have developed such an intimate attachment to them. This circumstance, he claims, “makes the above-mentioned justification of non-violence or even violence not directly applicable.”³⁴

Although these remarks are brief, they are sufficient to demonstrate that while Naess does not disagree with the ecodefense argument in principle, he also feels that not all eco-saboteurs can make honest use of it. In the United States, at least, it seems that there would be many acts of ecotage that Naess would say simply could not be justified by an appeal to Self-defense. Yet, despite what he sees as their potential lack of identification with the landscape, Naess does not oppose everything that American eco-saboteurs do. Quite the contrary, in his correspondence with Foreman he says that tree-spiking is an “obviously justifiable” tactic to protect forests, and that the “Animal Defense” chapter of *Ecodefense*—which explains, among other things, how to destroy traps used to snare animals—is “very convincing.”³⁵ “Sabotage to fight the abominable practice in trapping,” Naess asserts unambiguously, “is clearly justifiable....”³⁶

Statements like these are important insofar as they show quite unmistakably that Naess admits arguments for eco-sabotage other than that which we have been considering, routes to the justification of ecotage other than that which leads through identification-as-belonging. Unfortunately, in his remarks to Foreman he provides little detail about what these alternate routes might be. Our initial analysis of Naess’s eco-philosophy, however,

³³ Naess 1999, 228.

³⁴ Naess 1999, 228.

³⁵ Naess 1999, 228.

³⁶ Naess 1999, 228.

surely suggests one such alternative: that which relies not on identification-as-belonging but, instead, on identification-as-kinship. Following Naess's lead, then, let us shift focus to consider how this other type of identification might function to justify ecotage, and whether or not such a justification would be vulnerable to the same sorts of criticisms that Turner levels against the ecodefense argument.

The "Other Defense" Argument

In order to understand how identification-as-kinship could serve to sanction ecotage, we need first to recall the distinctive axiological orientation it entails. As we have seen, the basic difference between identification-as-belonging and identification-as-kinship is that the former involves developing a sense of connectedness to nature while the latter involves recognizing commonalities with other-than-human entities. Thus, unlike identification-as-belonging, which finds value in nature insofar as it comes to be seen as an extension of an intrinsically valuable Self, identification-as-kinship expands one's awareness of other-than-human others such that they, like oneself, are seen to be intrinsically valuable. This last point could be encapsulated by saying that identification-as-kinship leads to a distinctively "other-regarding" value-orientation, and this value-orientation leads, rather straightforwardly, to a distinct rationale for the protection of nature. No longer a question of protecting nature as one's Self, the defense of nature that flows from identification-as-kinship amounts to seeking the protection of others with a moral significance comparable to one's own, trying to ensure that other-than-human entities receive the moral consideration this form of identification allows one to see that they, too, are due.

If, therefore, there is a "higher law" argument in favor of ecotage to be derived from identification-as-kinship, it would not be premised on the moral permissibility of Self-defense. It would be premised, instead, on the moral permissibility of the defense of others. More specifically, it would seem to build on the idea that one ought to protect morally significant others from undue harm or violation, and that if such protection ever were to require breaking the prohibition against property destruction, doing so would be allowable. What identification-as-kinship adds to this, of course, is an expanded sense of just who counts as "morally significant," an elevated appreciation of the moral worth of other-than-human entities. The resulting argument would be that just as the protection of human beings sometimes warrants breaking the prohibition against property destruction, so too does

the protection of beings who are other-than-human. Simply put, if sabotage on behalf of other morally valuable humans is justifiable, then so is ecotage.

To be sure, this more other-oriented argument for ecotage is, like the argument from Self-defense, not merely hypothetical. Rik Scarce appeals to it in *Eco-Warriors*,³⁷ as does Christopher Manes in *Green Rage*.³⁸ In some instances, even, its connection to identification-as-kinship shows through, as in the aforementioned “Animal Defense” chapter of *Ecodefense*. This chapter opens with a stark account of what Coyotes go through when caught in leg-hold traps, a harsh portrait of the intense pain and suffering they are typically forced to endure, and their sometimes drastic, most often futile efforts to escape.³⁹ Surely this is aimed at eliciting from readers identification with the Coyotes of the same kind that Naess experienced with the flea, along with a similarly empathetic reaction to their plight. And it seems clear that this is done in the hope that such identification will convince readers that, as Naess put it in his letter to Foreman, the sort of trapping discussed in *Ecodefense* is “abominable,” and that trap-line sabotage is “clearly justifiable.”⁴⁰

Very much to his credit, this particular defense of ecotage is also acknowledged by Turner, who mentions more than once that deep ecological eco-saboteurs could try to justify their actions by an appeal to a heightened sense of the moral significance of other-than-human entities.⁴¹ Regrettably, though, in his critical analysis he does not address this alternative line of justification separately from the ecodefense argument. We would do well to ask, therefore, if comments of the sort that Turner directs at the latter carry the same force when applied to the former, if the critical scrutiny applied to the ecodefense argument can be withstood by this other pattern of reasoning.

³⁷ Scarce makes this point quite clearly, writing that “Earth Firsters see ruining a bulldozer or spiking a 2,000-year-old redwood tree to deter its ‘harvesting’ as tantamount to taking the bullets out of the gun of Gandhi’s assassin *before* the shots were fired” (1990, 73).

³⁸ Manes cites several others who refer to this idea, including Roderick Nash, who according to Manes holds that “radical environmentalism attempts to claim a more elevated station for ecotage as part of the liberal tradition of the defense of minority rights, with the complication that the minority in this case is the unprotected animal and plant communities being destroyed” (1990, 176).

³⁹ Foreman and Haywood 1993, 158-61.

⁴⁰ Naess 1999, 228.

⁴¹ Turner 2006, 222, 223, 224.

We might start to reply to this question by observing that what many people would find most controversial about the argument under consideration is the scope of the moral community includes, and not the principle-ranking it involves. While one certainly could dispute the claim that other-defense ought to be given precedence over other moral obligations, it is also certain that there are situations in which it is commonly deemed acceptable to do so. Additionally, as eco-saboteurs would be quick to point out, one of the obligations over which such defense is likely to be given priority is the obligation to respect other people's property, especially in cases where the property in question constitutes part of the threat to others, and damaging that property allows one to defend them without directly harming their aggressors.⁴² If this is correct, though, then the real point of controversy here is not the priority assigned to the defense of others; it is, rather, the contention that others who are other-than-human are worthy of it.

What these initial remarks indicate, then, is that what is most problematic about this argument is not necessarily its appeal to higher law, but its claim about the moral significance of other-than-human entities, and after examining Turner's commentary, we might think that this claim is hopelessly problematic when based on identification-as-kinship. The reason for this is that this form of identification, like identification-as-belonging, is not so much a product of logical analysis as of lived experience, experience that Naess routinely portrays as more spontaneous and feeling than thoughtful and deliberative. In his words, identification is a "spontaneous, non-rational" process;⁴³ it is something that happens "completely spontaneously, without thinking at all," "without a trace of deliberation."⁴⁴ As Turner's work highlights, however, the trouble with this is that it implies that beliefs about other-than-human beings that are grounded in instances of identification are disconnected from rational discussion or critique. It implies, that is, that those who identify with nature in this way undergo a kind of "gestalt-shift" or change in their perception of other-than-human beings that is, to borrow Turner's analogy, similar to a religious "conversion" experience, something that is largely felt or intuited rather than being "based on careful consideration of reasons and evidence."⁴⁵ But if belief in the moral significance of other-than human others is in fact the result of such experience, then not only will this argument for ecotage be entirely unconvincing to those who have not gone through the process of identification, but it becomes increasingly

⁴² See Manes 1990, 176; Foreman 1991, 121.

⁴³ Naess 1985, 261.

⁴⁴ Naess 2004, 12.

⁴⁵ Turner 2006, 224.

difficult to see why anyone would allow the defense of other-than human beings to trump such a rationally agreeable principle as the principle of respect for property.

Obviously these are substantive points, and they touch on issues in the psychology and philosophy of human experience that go well beyond the scope of this essay. It should be noted, though, that the fact that identification-as-kinship is more experiential than deliberative does not mean that it is wholly uninfluenced by deliberation or thoughtful reflection. Indeed, in *Respect for Nature* Paul Taylor describes how scientists' careful study and observation of other living things can contribute directly to their deepening identification with them.⁴⁶ Similarly, in *Animal Rights and Human Morality* Bernard Rollin tells the story of a scientist who said that the more he studied micro-organisms "the more he understood their *telos* and their life, the more he could empathize with them, and the more loath he was to destroy them."⁴⁷ Accounts such as these indicate that reflection and deliberation play important roles in shaping experiences of identification, serving not only to encourage or inhibit them, but also to influence their scope and intensity. This being the case, it seems that identification should not be regarded as a completely discrete phenomenon, one that occurs entirely separately from other, more reflective dimensions of human life.

Moreover, even if actual instances of identification do not themselves entail logical analysis, this in no way forces the conclusion that the insights gained from these instances cannot be articulated coherently to others, and in a manner that at least some people would find rationally compelling. Consider, for example, the story told by Rollin of the time that he was fishing, and "for no obvious reason" suddenly realized that the fish he was catching were struggling against him not because of the thrill of competition, but out of panic and fear.⁴⁸ This experience, which Rollin himself describes as a "gestalt shift" in his relationship to fish,⁴⁹ was clearly spontaneous in character, but it is also one whose lesson about other-than-human beings is easily communicable to, and graspable by, others. Perhaps even more pertinent to the present discussion, however, is that such an experience of identification can be reflectively analyzed into certain component elements and expressed in more formal-logical terms as part of an argument for the moral significance of other-than-human entities, something to which Rollin's own work surely testifies.

⁴⁶ Taylor 1986, 119-21.

⁴⁷ Rollin 1992, 81.

⁴⁸ Rollin 1992, 81.

⁴⁹ Rollin 1992, 81.

Of course, it is possible that people who have not identified with other-than-human beings in this way would not find such an argument all that convincing. As the above examples illustrate, lived experience does seem to establish a context within which we make sense, or non-sense, of various moral claims, and thus experiences of identification-as-kinship would appear to provide a crucial background that illuminates or lends intelligibility to claims about the intrinsic value of other-than-human entities.⁵⁰ Given this, those who have not identified with such others, or who have not identified with them very deeply, may very well find arguments about their moral significance to be fantastic. But considering everything that we have said so far, it is not at all obvious that this type of identification is not a valid source of moral insight, or that the ethical context it helps to create is entirely illegitimate. Actually, it is arguable that experiences of identification-as-kinship are as important to inter-human ethics as Naess proposes that they are to environmental ethics. Yet if this is accurate, then unless we are prepared to discredit the experiential and affective dimensions of moral life in general, we cannot discredit beliefs about the intrinsic value of other-than-human beings solely because they are connected to experiences of identification-as-kinship, nor can we immediately resolve disagreements about the moral significance of these beings in favor of those who have not identified with them. In fact, deep ecology theorists like Naess could hold nearly the opposite, and claim that just as the moral attitudes of those who do not identify with other human beings are limited or deficient in some ways, so are the moral attitudes of those who do not identify with beings other-than-human.

The upshot of these reflections, then, is that the experiential character of identification-as-kinship, and the potentially controversial nature of the moral attitudes that may flow from it, are not in themselves reason enough to dismiss the particular value-orientation that we have been discussing. And this means, furthermore, that it is more difficult than it may at first have appeared to dismiss the defense of ecotage that rests upon it. If the claim that other-than-human entities are intrinsically valuable is not completely groundless when it is rooted in experiences of identification-as-kinship, then the other-defending argument for ecotage that deep ecology supporters like Naess might offer cannot be rejected out-of-hand simply because, in making that claim, it implicitly or explicitly appeals to such experiences. Needless to say, this is a fairly limited conclusion, and it does not settle the question of the morality of ecotage once and for all in favor of eco-saboteurs. But it does allow us to see that the matter is not yet settled decidedly against them, either. We may not yet be able to say that eco-saboteurs who proceed on

⁵⁰ Though he does not use exactly these terms, Rollin makes a similar point in *Animal Rights and Human Morality* (1992, 79-82).

this basis are absolutely in the right, but from what we have just seen, it would be too hasty to conclude that they are definitely in the wrong.

Concluding Remarks

As we bring our discussion to a close, we should clarify that by shifting focus away from the ecodefense argument and the principle of Self-defense, we have not meant to imply that nothing more can be said about that particular justification of ecotage or the concepts in Naess's eco-philosophy upon which it draws. Rather, our goals have been, first, to show that there is more than one non-consequentialist justification of ecotage that can be derived from Naess's work, and second, to follow up on his remarks to the effect that Self-defense may not be the most promising, or genuine, argument that deep ecological eco-saboteurs could offer on their own behalf. In doing this, what we have found is that the justification of ecotage that is linked to identification-as-kinship is, at the very least, stronger than Turner's critique of the ecodefense argument could be taken to suggest that it is, and that therefore it is yet to be established that other-defending acts of ecotage are morally impermissible.

To say that some acts of ecotage may be justifiable in principle, however, is not the equivalent of saying that they are easily justified in practice. As a number of other thinkers have pointed out, many if not all of the actions that would count as eco-sabotage bear a high burden of justification, and if they are acceptable at all, it could only be in situations where legal means of protecting nature have failed or are sure to do so, and where the same is true of more conventional forms of civil disobedience.⁵¹ Even in such situations, of course, important questions would remain to be answered, including questions about what constitutes unethical treatment of other-than-human beings, what are the circumstances in which their defense might warrant sabotage, and what forms of sabotage could be legitimate to employ on their behalf. In the end, though, it may be that in his remarks to Foreman about *Ecodefense* Naess was correct, and that in some instances deep ecological activists will indeed be able to find "a justification for using various mild forms of sabotage...."⁵²

⁵¹ Further discussion of these points can be found in Martin 1990, Singer 1993, and Hettinger 2003.

⁵² Naess 1999, 227.

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