# Table of Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Introduction

1. Universalist Environmentalism

2. Land and Sovereignty

3. Natural Vitality

4. Reconceptualising Sovereignties

References
Abstract

Environmental issues are being increasingly considered in political theory, particularly in the emerging subfield of environmental political theory, yet issues of colonialism continue to be ignored in this scholarship. I assess deliberative democratic and republican environmental political theories, arguing that they fail to respond to the anti-colonial challenges of Indigenous political thought on issues of both ontological views of the natural world and political sovereignty as it relates to land and dispossession. I then review the vital materialist proposals of Jane Bennett and William Connolly, arguing that they provide potential ways forward for the formulation of an environmental politics which takes colonialism seriously. Specifically, I argue that the affirmation of non-human value and the openness towards considering a diversity of perspectives which is proposed by vital materialism provides an alternative to proposals which systematically exclude Indigenous perspectives. Moreover, I argue that vital materialism’s arguments concerning sovereignty, although in need of further development, nonetheless hold potential for the development of an environmental political theory which can take into consideration Indigenous affirmations of the connections between the non-human and Indigenous sovereignty.

Résumé

Les enjeux environnementaux sont de plus en plus abordés au sein de la théorie politique, particulièrement dans le sous-domaine de la théorie politique environnementale. Par contre, le colonialisme n’y est peu discuté. J’évalue des théories politiques environnementales ressortissantes du républicanisme ainsi que la démocratie délibérative, soutenant qu’ils ne répondent guères au défi soulevé par la pensée politique autochtone en matière des perspectives ontologiques sur la nature et sur la souveraineté politique en ce qui concerne les terres et la dépossession. Par la suite, j’aborde les propositions dites “vital materialist” de Jane Bennet et William Connolly, soutenant qu’ils fournissent des possibilités pour aller de l’avant dans la création d’une politique environnementale qui prend le colonialisme au sérieux. Spécifiquement, je soutiens l’affirmation de la valeur du non-humain et l’ouverture envers vers la prise en considération d’une diversité de perspectives qui est proposé par le “vital materialism” fournit une alternative aux points de vue qui excluent de manière systématique les perspectives autochtones. De plus, je soutiens que leurs argumentaires sur la souveraineté, bien qu’ils méritent du perfectionnement, disposent également de potentiel pour une théorie politique environnementale qui peut prendre en considération les affirmations autochtones de l’interconnexion du non-humain et de la souveraineté autochtone.
Acknowledgements

The research and writing of this thesis was carried out on occupied territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka, the Keepers of the Eastern Door of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. I am incredibly grateful for the knowledge that has been shared with me by many Indigenous activists and scholars over the years.

This thesis was, in no small part, made possible by my supervisor, Yves Winter. I would like to thank him for nearly three years of support, insightful criticism, and unfailingly pushing me (with great kindness) to continually improve upon my work. Thanks are also due to Jacob Levy, who not only served as a proposal reader for this thesis, but has also provided a great deal of support and encouragement over the past five years of my academic career. I also thank Will Roberts, who also served as a proposal reader, and Hasana Sharp, who acted as external examiner.

Finally, I would like to thank the many family members and friends who have encouraged and supported me during graduate studies. More importantly, they have always served as a welcome reminder that there is always already a world post-theory.
Introduction

Environmental matters have emerged as one of the crucial contemporary political issues. And correspondingly, environmental issues are increasingly debated in political theory, such that environmental political theory has emerged as a distinct sub-field of the discipline. There exists a vast array of theoretical perspectives and debates in the field, just as a long list of ecological issues demands political attention. In this thesis, I focus on an issue which is too little discussed in both political and theoretical discussions of the environment: the relationship between environmental issues and colonialism.

As Indigenous authors have noted, climate change has become a mechanism for the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Yuchi/Muscogee environmental scholar Daniel R. Wildcat writes that

sadly, some of us [Indigenous peoples] now face another removal…this removal is not simply a government social policy imperative of the non-indigenous majority population. This relocation is mandated by a much deeper, more fundamental crisis: the way we live…as ice sheets and glaciers melt, permafrost thaws, and seacoasts and riverbanks erode in the near circumpolar arctic, peoples indigenous to these places will be forced to move, not as a result of something their Native lifeways produced, but because the most technologically advanced societies on the planet have built their modern lifestyles on a carbon energy foundation” (2009, 4).

Even before the most serious effects of climate change emerge, the widespread environmental destruction caused by the carbon economy is having a devastating impact on Indigenous peoples. To cite but one example: the Lubicon Cree have for decades resisted the development of the Alberta tar sands and associated pipelines on their unceded sovereign territories- development
which has already led to massive oil spills on their territories (Amnesty International Canada, n.d.) and led the Lubicon Cree to file a lawsuit against the Government of Canada seeking an immediate end to resource development and $700 million in royalties from tar sands extraction (Lubicon Lake Nation 2013).

In general, discussion of Indigenous perspectives and concerns in regard to the environment are absent from political decision-making on environmental matters. In a contribution to a report critically reviewing the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, (including goals relating to sustainability), Tsalagi scholar Jeff Corntassel writes that, for example, the Millennium Development Goals’ monitoring and implementation processes have largely excluded indigenous nations and peoples, leading to profound misunderstandings regarding indigenous sustainable practices and place-based relationships…increasingly, researchers recognize that the same forces that threaten biodiversity also threaten indigenous peoples’ long-standing relationships with their homelands and the health and well-being of Native nations. However, amidst calls for a “green economy” and carbon trading schemes such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), it is evident that there are competing conceptions of what sustainability entails. For example, in 2013, the Vancouver-based mining company Goldcorp donated CDN$500,000 to the University of Victoria’s School of Business in order to fund the Centre for Social and Sustainable Innovation (2014, 65)

Corntassel then goes on to list examples of Goldcorp’s violence against Indigenous people in Latin America in pursuit of its business objectives. Two points are clear: environmental destruction poses specific threats to Indigenous peoples--in particular, Corntassel notes, because
of their spiritual relationships to their land--and secondly, actions taken in the name of sustainability are often far from being good news for Indigenous peoples. More recently, Indigenous activists have expressed frustration towards proposals at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) climate change summit to remove human rights considerations from the international agreement under consideration. According to Andre Carmen, executive director of the International Indian Treaty Council and spokesperson for the Indigenous delegation to COP21, “we know that our lands, or way of life, our food sources will once again be on the table” if human rights, and particularly Indigenous rights, are not included in the climate treaty (Rowling 2015). In other word, although political leaders at least claim to be concerned about ecological issues, they continue to ignore both Indigenous peoples’ connections to the natural world, as well as the ways in which they are particularly affected by environmental destruction.

In this thesis, I evaluate how these issues have been addressed by political theory, and how it might better address them. The central question I seek to answer is how Western political theory might contribute towards an anti-colonial environmental politics. I begin by considering proposals from republicanism and deliberative democracy which, I argue, do not adequately address the connection between environmental matters and colonialism. The criticisms I offer of these proposals over the course of the first two chapters, however, do not simply serve to reject these proposals. Rather, they illustrate the manner in which such proposals fail to take colonialism into account. In so doing, I also elaborate the key steps environmental political theory must take to properly account for colonialism. The final two chapters then consider an alternative: the emerging field of “vital materialism”. I explore the potentials and limits of this theoretical framework for considering environmental issues in light of colonialism, arguing that
it may serve as useful tool, but that much further work is still necessary if environmental political
theory is to take colonialism seriously.
1. Universalist Environmentalism

The next two chapters critically review the work of Stephen Slaughter and Robin Eckersley, leading voices in republican and deliberative democratic environmental political theories. I draw on anti-colonial Indigenous perspectives on environmental politics to argue that both Slaughter’s and Eckersley’s work have colonial blind spots that are emblematic of republican and deliberative democratic environmental political theories more broadly. As theorists of environmental politics, their concern for the environment in general is not in question. Rather, I identify ways in which these two theorists propose approaches to environmental politics that not only fail to acknowledge, but in many cases stand in stark opposition to, Indigenous perspectives on the natural world.

The central problem I identify in the accounts of non-Indigenous environmental political thought I discuss is a failure to account for calls for decolonization from Indigenous peoples. In fact, the majority of perspectives I review scarcely mention Indigenous political struggles at all. While this omission is both telling and serious, it is not my primary line of criticism. Rather, I further explicate the perspectives in question to show that they are fundamentally at odds with the manner in which both Indigenous ontological perspectives and Indigenous sovereignties are integral to Indigenous engagements in environmental politics. In other words, I argue that the overriding problem is one of theoretical incompatibility, rather than incompleteness.

This chapter and the following one deal in turn with two key axes of incompatibility I identify between Indigenous perspectives and the non-Indigenous environmental political theories I discuss. In this chapter, I focus on what I term ontological matters. By this I mean the fundamental ways in which we conceive of the nature and value of the non-human world, and

---

1 In light of the diversity of contexts in which this literature has been written, I refer to it as “non-Indigenous”. In discussing my proposals, however, I refer to “settlers” as a group, given that I see settler-colonial states as the context to which my arguments are most relevant.
our relationship to it. The non-Indigenous political theories considered here, I argue, base their proposals on an assumed possible consensus across human societies on these ontological matters, and thus do not attend to the existing diversity of ontological views on the natural world, including diversity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, and amongst different Indigenous views. In the following chapter, I argue that the structures of political sovereignty through which the environmental political theorists I review propose to take environmental action stand in opposition to Indigenous political sovereignty. In so doing, I draw in particular on Glen Coulthard’s critiques of the politics of recognition.

I now turn to my consideration of ontological matters, considering Slaughter and Eckersley in turn. Recently, theorists of republicanism have connected that theoretical tradition to environmental issues. Philipp Pettit makes an argument for the importance of securing a sustainable natural environment, but does not explore this consideration in great detail (2012, 110-2). A more detailed account of this matter, and one which seems to me to be generally in accordance with Pettit’s views, has been given by Stephen Slaughter, who grounds the republican commitment to environmental protection in terms of securing liberty and non-domination for all, arguing that environmental destruction threatens human liberty (2008, 28).

Slaughter begins his account by arguing that though questions of global governance are highly relevant to environmental matters, to little attention is being given to the important role the state can play in such matters; Slaughter believes this role centres around the way in which states organised according to neo-republican principles can effectively draw citizens into global environmental governance (2008, 25).

Slaughter notes some of the ground his account does not cover, writing that ‘republicanism is a humanist perspective that is not animated by a philosophical conception of
environmental ethics’. In so doing, Slaughter sets aside a crucial element of ecological questions, namely, that our considerations of such issues necessarily take human conceptions of our relationship to the non-human as their starting point. Although he does not devote much time to constructing such a conception, Slaughter’s arguments do, in fact, imply such an account by framing the politics of environmentalism as the prevention of harm to humans. This entails that human—non-human relationships are essentially transactional in nature, i.e. the relevance of harm to non-human rests on the impact on humans of such harm, and questions of including the non-human in politics in some way are precluded by this humanist orientation. This means that accounts such as Slaughter’s preclude a range of potentially salient political scenarios pertaining to the non-human, for example, situations in which there are ecological concerns despite the absence of direct deprivation of human liberty, or else situations in which the harm to humans is smaller, but might be supplemented by a perspective which accords more weight to non-humans.

I characterize Slaughter’s account as risk-based universalism. It is risk-based in the sense that human actions in relation to the non-human world are to be derived from a calculation of the risk they pose to human life, and universalist in the sense that it presupposes that there is an understanding of, or relationship to, the natural world that we can all agree on. Since Slaughter does not offer a sustained explanation or defence of his view of human—non-human relations, my aim here is not to systematically argue against his conception of the non-human as such. Instead, I criticize the manner in which Slaughter fails to consider conceptions of the non-human which diverge from his risk-based universalism. On my reading of Slaughter, any disagreement over human duties regarding the natural world results from insufficiently republican political structures that preclude proper risk-based decision-making.
This line of thinking is seriously flawed, as I will illustrate in what follows by drawing on examples of political conflict over environmental matters. Specifically, I show first of all, that there exists a diversity of Indigenous perspectives on the natural world, which Slaughter’s assumed universalism cannot take into account. However, my concern on this point stems not simply from the divergence between Slaughter’s perspective and Indigenous perspectives; of course, disagreement is not in itself problematic. Rather, I show that failing to take Indigenous perspectives into account serves to perpetuate colonial patterns of the exclusion of Indigenous people. As a result, this diversity is not an abstract concern, but constitutes an important political issue for anti-colonial struggles which seek to confront this pattern of exclusion.

A full examination of this issue would require a consideration of the ways in which truth-claims made by Western science are understood and taken up politically. This is not a subject which I discuss in detail here. For the purposes of the present endeavour, however, it is important to make two points. Firstly, the rejection of Indigenous perspectives cannot be perfectly mapped onto decisions made based on Western scientific inquiry. In both of the cases I will discuss in this chapter, there was in fact no fundamental conflict between the conclusions reached by Western science and Indigenous knowledge, e.g. that a mining project would cause harm to the environment. Secondly, the determination that a certain form of knowledge production will be taken as the definitive basis for decision-making does not appear out of thin air: rather, it flows from the development and maintenance of political and social norms. As a result, I take the position that in considering divergences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives in settler colonial contexts, the crucial consideration in determining our course of action is not an epistemological discussion about truth-claims. Instead, the issue to be considered in the first instance is the set of colonial political relationships which have led to Indigenous perspectives
being dismissed. In other words, the determination that Indigenous perspectives are to be excluded from politics forms one element of settler colonialism.

This point can be illustrated with reference to political debates concerning science and religion in the United States and elsewhere. Proponents of, for example, the teaching of intelligent design in science curricula are, in spite of criticisms of such perspectives, able to make such arguments in political arenas, and in some cases, see policies in line with their views adopted. Their ability to do so, while Indigenous perspectives on environmental issues are excluded from political discussion, lies not in a consensus that one set of views is true, and another false, but in the fact that Indigenous people are systematically excluded from politics because they are Indigenous, in a manner that the generally white Christian proponents of teaching intelligent design are not. Attempts to end settler colonial power structures, then, must abandon this exclusionary attitude towards Indigenous worldviews, a project which has little to do with questions of truth-value. Moreover, they must abandon ontological outlooks which, by focusing exclusively on the impact of environmental harm on humans, reproduce colonial patterns of the appropriation of Indigenous land and resources for the benefit of settlers.

Marisol de la Cadena relates the case of Indigenous protest action against a proposed mine in Cuzco, Peru.² In addition to concerns about the proposed mine harming livestock pastures, residents of the area also articulated that ‘Ausangate [a large mountain in the area] would not allow the mine in Sinakara, a mountain over which it presided. Ausangate would get mad, could even kill people.’ (De la Cadena 2010, 339) According to de la Cadena’s account, the Indigenous population of the area’s worldviews have clear implications for their engagement in

---

² This thesis focuses primarily on settler colonial contexts; Peru is arguably not a settler colonial state in the same sense as, e.g., Canada, the US, or Australia. However, it is my view that the political conflict arising from ontological diversity described in this case is very similar to situations in the aforementioned settler colonial states.
ecological politics. This example calls into question the risk-based universalist approach favoured by Slaughter, challenging his human-harm-centred republican account. In this particular example, there is a prediction of human harm. But the predictive claim is unlikely to meet the standard of universally acknowledged harm that Slaughter seems to establish. Although Slaughter does not say so explicitly, it is fair to assume that he intends the measure of harm to humans to be based on scientifically accepted standards. But irrespective of how exactly Slaughter intends to ascertain potential harm to humans, he does not consider situations in which there is a deep ontological disagreement over the nature of the non-human world. While Slaughter’s universalism may address disagreement arising from a few discredited climate change deniers, it is not equipped to take into account disagreement stemming from an alternative ontological perspective rooted in specific relationships to the natural world of the sort set forth in the example above. In addition to the fact that such perspectives may be pointing us in the direction of crucial insight into the natural world missed by Slaughter’s comparatively narrow perspective, Slaughter’s position retains colonial power dynamics of exclusion discussed above by disallowing a role for Indigenous perspectives in determining what political action ought to be taken in regards to colonized land.

Indeed, this very problem is likely partially responsible for the conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people de la Cadena describes as frequently arising in the Andean region: Indigenous worldviews are often treated as inadmissible in political discussions which involve the non-human. This denial of validity, importantly, extends to non-Indigenous

---

3 Although I refer to this as an Indigenous perspective on the non-human, it is important to note that in this instance, this perspective was also widely agreed upon by non-Indigenous members of the local community (De la Cadena 2010, 339).

4 Throughout this thesis, I use terms such as ‘environmental,’ ‘ecological,’ or ‘non-human’. These terms largely derive from Western conceptions of the world beyond the human, and thus often presuppose worldviews or dichotomies not present in non-Western worldviews. In general, I try to not apply such terms to accounts for which they are inappropriate. At the same time, since a core aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the need to strive for ways
environmental activists who nonetheless claim to have common cause with Indigenous peoples. (2010, 349-50; 354-5)

A similar dynamic can be observed in the on-going opposition of Indigenous Hawaiians to the Thirty Meter Telescope project, a case which is of further interest since it concerns a project connected to scientific research, rather than matters of resource extraction perhaps more commonly associated with environmental politics.

The Thirty Meter Telescope project (TMT) involves the University of Hawaii’s proposal to construct one of the largest telescopes in the world on Mauna Kea, the tallest mountain in Hawaii. In addition to concerns over the project’s impact on the local ecosystem, Indigenous groups such as Mauna Kea Hui are considered about the project’s interference with the mountain’s place in Indigenous Hawaiian cultural and spiritual practice. In particular, the viewplanes (specific lines of sight) from various points on the mountain are integral to cultural practices essential to a variety of matters. Kealoha Pisciotta, a member of Mauna Kea Hui, writes that

The ceremonies…are specifically dependent upon our ability to observe and track the motion of the sun and other celestial bodies in order to find our way and to determine when and how to perform certain things for the care of the land and sea. Our traditional resource management models are dependent on these ceremonies. Our ancient knowledge relating to our relationship to other Pacific peoples are also a part of this knowledge. And lastly our sacred prophesies are based in this knowledge. (2011)
In a manner strikingly similar to the study of Peru discussed above, an important element of the politics of this matter has revolved around what kind of ontological views matter. Pisciotta explains that

When the University makes accusations against us as Petitioners, by referring to us as backward thinking, the messages they are also conveying is that what the Hawaiians are doing, including our traditional practices, are antiquated and hence irrelevant. These comments combined with their assertions that modern astronomers are just doing what our people did in the past are offensive as well, and add further insult to the injury. These assertions insult both modern astronomy and traditional astronomy all in the same breath. The two disciplines in no way can be compared because they are like apples and oranges. (2011)

These examples illustrate cases where, at a fundamental level, there is political conflict over what kind of ontological views are admissible in political discussions concerning environmental matters. In both cases, a colonial power structure is deployed in order to maintain the status quo on what views are acceptable; there little possibility for the ontological bounds of environmental politics to change in a manner which moves away from colonial patterns. By at once implying an ontological view of the natural world broadly consistent with these colonial patterns, and by failing to provide any structure by which ontological divergences can be met with a response other than exclusion, Slaughter fails to provide an alternative to the colonial dynamics at play in the examples I have just cited. Before continuing, it is worth noting what may prove to be a positive outcome in this case: after several years of resistance to the TMT by Indigenous Hawaiian activists, including direct actions to prevent further construction work from taking
place, the project has been suspended following a ruling from the Hawaii Supreme Court that proper land use permit processes were not followed (Overbye 2015).

Thus far, my criticism of Slaughter has centred on the disparity between the Indigenous perspectives on the non-human discussed in the above cases and what I describe as his risk-based universalist view of the natural world. Rather than address this disparity, Slaughter’s formulation of environmental politics reproduces colonial power structures. Nonetheless, although I have extrapolated an environmental perspective from Slaughter’s arguments, it is true that he claims not to take a particular view on the natural world’s value: might it then be possible for his republican account, then, to simply be adapted to ensure that the Indigenous perspectives at issue in the Andes and Hawaii be incorporated into republican environmentalism? I argue that they cannot, due to both the realities of colonial asymmetries of power, and the universalism I argue forms a core part of Slaughter’s position.

On the first point, it would be inaccurate to consider the differing worldviews as engaged in something like a fair debate. Rather, there is a lop-sidedness in the manner in which worldviews relating to the non-human are taken up which is often premised on colonial power structures. The suppression and delegitimization of Indigenous perspectives on, and relationships with, the world beyond the human - for example, ‘social relations…held with plants, rivers, or mountains’ - has, been a central part of processes of colonialism and racism. (De la Cadena 2010, 345) Further evidence of this phenomenon has been observed in the context of the Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, where, for example, an Akwesasne Mohawk elder’s oral testimony was not taken seriously until government-produced maps communicating the same information were discovered; as Ransom and Ettenger write, ‘the printed map, the science of non-Native society, carried more weight than the science of Native society, the oral
knowledge of the elders.’ (2001, 225) The problem, then, is not only that certain perspectives are not heard, but that they are pre-emptively discredited.

The political impact of this pattern can first of all be illustrated by returning to the case discussed by de la Cadena. She makes clear that a significant element of the political conflict over the proposed mine stems from fundamental disagreements over perspectives on the non-human and their place in politics:

A reading of the Andean ethnographic record along epistemic lines shows that earth-practices are relations for which the dominant ontological distinction between humans and nature does not work. Earth-practices enact the respect and affect necessary to maintain the relational conditionality between humans and other-than-human beings that makes life in (many parts of) the Andes. Other-than-humans include animals, plants, and the landscape. The latter, the most frequently summoned to politics these days, is composed of a constellation of sentient entities known as *tirakuna*, or earth-beings with individual physiognomies more or less known by individuals involved in interactions with them. The “things” that indigenous movements are currently “making public” in politics are not simply nonhumans, they are also sentient entities whose material existence—and that of the worlds to which they belong—is currently threatened by the neoliberal wedding of capital and the state…I propose that these objects are contentious because their presence in politics disavows the separation between “Nature” and “Humanity,” on which the political theory our world abides by was historically founded. (2010, 341-2)
The matter of what are, in this instance, termed earth-beings, is an insurmountable problem for
the risk-based universalism, and more broadly the republican position, exemplified by Slaughter.
Even if such a perspective were to be fundamentally amended so as to incorporate the relational
perspective on the non-human described above (an outlook radically different from Slaughter’s
anthropocentrism), a political conflict over ontology would result, for which the republican
position provides no solution. It is notable that, in the Andean context, the Ecuadorean
constitution does provide for rights for the non-human world, with direct reference to the
Indigenous ontological concept of Pachamama, but this has been rejected as inappropriate in the
political realm by non-Indigenous politicians (De la Cadena 2010, 335-6). By assuming that,
with the correct republican structures and adequate information, we will all be able to agree on
what ought to be done in relation to the non-human world, Slaughter fails to provide any political
solution to this problem.

To address colonial power structures, what is needed is a political context in which a
plurality of ontological views is seen as valuable. Slaughter’s account fails in this regard by
prioritizing some worldviews over others and leaving no room for a diversity of outlooks on the
non-human. Furthermore, his risk-based measure of the value of the nonhuman perpetuates the
colonial dynamic of excluding Indigenous people and their views from politics.

To underscore the importance of this criticism, I will now turn to a final example that
highlights the limitations of Slaughter’s perspective. In the Andean and Hawaiian cases
discussed above, some environmentalist arguments arguably fit Slaughter’s criteria of
environmental discourse, i.e. they could be formulated in terms of cost-benefit analyses and
trade-offs between non-renewable resource extraction and other economic interests. This
economistic framework breaks down in the context of what has come to be known as the “Oka Crisis”.

This event, which involved the deployment of massive numbers of police and soldiers against the Mohawks of Kanehsatá:ke seeking to block the expansion of a golf course, arose because “the land that was to be used to extend the golf course nine more holes was and still is precious to the Mohawks of Kanehsatá:ke because it held both the bodies of their dead as well as Pines that were sacred to them.” (Simpson 2014, 151) In the first instance, this is of course simply another example of a colonial state appropriating land against the wishes of Indigenous peoples. But what I also wish to draw from this case is the fact that Indigenous peoples’ concerns for, and relationships to, the non-human are not simply Western environmentalists’ concerns expressed through different means. Rather, they are distinct perspectives based on specific relationships with the natural world. It is hard to imagine, for example, a large environmental NGO turning the expansion of a small municipal golf course into an international campaign. For the people of Kanehsatá:ke, however, this issue was serious enough to engage in sustained resistance against military forces. Attempts to understand these kinds of issues purely in terms of existing Western conceptions of the natural world, or worse still, to evaluate their importance in such terms, serves only to re-entrench colonial power structures of the political exclusion of Indigenous people.

The scenarios I have raised above, in which there is some ecological concern which cannot be addressed by accounts such as Slaughter’s, are not simply abstract counter-examples. They are plausible ones, and they are plausible because there really are individuals and groups who do attach value to the non-human- or conceive of human—non-human relationships- in ways which exceed or contradict Slaughter’s view. I see this as a problem for two reasons. First,
the place of the non-human in politics is necessarily defined by human conceptions of the non-human. Slaughter appears to offer no means by which to address divergences in such conceptions, yet prescribes certain political actions premised on a specific such conception. Second, this is doubly problematic since Slaughter argues that in advancing his vision of a political solution to environmental questions, a significant burden to speak and act in favour of such a vision lies with individuals, rather than in a systemic change to how environmental matters are taken up politically (2008, 29). The expectation that individuals, who quite possibly have divergent conceptions of human—non-human relations, ought to take on an individual responsibility to bring ecology into politics, without any consideration of how such divergences ought to be addressed, constitutes a significant theoretical deficiency.

I now turn to a second account of environmental politics: the green strain of deliberative democracy proposed by Robin Eckersley. Here, I evaluate Eckersley’s proposals on the same criteria concerning Indigenous worldviews, and their connection to colonialism, as I have done above with Slaughter. I will return to both of these accounts in the next chapter, which moves from ontology into the realm of political sovereignty.

Robin Eckersley has been a prominent proponent of a broadly deliberative account of “green” politics. Although working within the deliberative tradition, Eckersley begins her account by identifying a crucial shortcoming of existing deliberative democratic theories when it comes to considering environmental matters: their anthropocentrism. Eckersley explores this problem through a critique of Jürgen Habermas’ views on the place of the non-human in deliberative democracy. Firstly, Eckersley argues that the non-human possess agency such that it ought to be accorded moral worth, and that Habermas’ deliberative account fails to properly
address the problem of how nature is therefore to be represented in political discourse (1999, 34-7); she then goes on to argue that Habermas’ principle of universalization is, in fact, applicable to the non-human (1999, 43-4).

Nonetheless, Eckersley recognises both the necessarily representative nature of the consideration of the non-human in politics, as well as the justified differentiation between human and non-human interests (1999, 43-4). She argues that declaring nonhumans to be included in political discourse is an insufficient proposition, given the inability of such entities to participate in public discussion in the manner proposed by theorists of deliberative democracy. She also argues that “representative thinking”- i.e. human political actors considering the potential perspectives of the nonhuman world- is not a sufficient guarantee that non-human concerns will be properly considered (1999, 25; 33; 44). Furthermore, she makes clear that human actors can never claim to truly know what is in nature’s interests (1999, 46).

To remedy this, Eckersley proposes the “precautionary principle,” which states that “where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, then lack of certainty should not be taken as a reason for postponing or avoiding taking measures to prevent the damage.” (1999, 46). However, in light of her deliberative framework and because we cannot know what is in nature’s interests, the implementation of this principle rests on the universal acceptance of deliberative democratic rules of procedure (1999, 46).

This account first of all presents advantages as compared to Slaughter’s. Most notably, Eckersley argues for the recognition of the value and interests of non-human entities independent from the impact on human interests, thus making an important contribution on an issue which is under-addressed in Habermas’ account of deliberative democracy. This in turn leads her to reconsider existing patterns of political membership and decision-making, a move I view as
essential to a greater consideration of the non-human in political decision-making, and one which Slaughter also does not make. And finally, Eckersley offers a promising contribution to addressing the problem of how non-humans are to be represented in politics in light of the insurmountable communicative gap between human and non-human.

I certainly agree with Eckersley’s calls for the recognition of non-human agency and moral worth in political contexts; nonetheless, I do not think that the manner in which she proposes to do so is satisfactory in colonial contexts. Before turning to my criticism of Eckersley, however, it is vital to outline what I see as the key features of her account of how the non-human is to be accorded a greater place in politics. Though Eckersley declines to argue for a specific relationship between humans and non-humans, she does so for different reasons than does Slaughter. While Slaughter seems to avoid this issue at least in part due to the humanist nature of his proposals, her reluctance stems from an acknowledgment of ignorance regarding the intrinsic value of non-human entities: much as we may sincerely wish to do what is best for the non-human world, “we humans have no vantage point outside our historically constituted human selves and human communities from which to understand nature’s needs and interests.” (1999, 45) Where Slaughter presents a humanist perspective on the environment, Eckersley puts forth what I term a post-humanism of ignorance. By this, I mean that Eckersley’s account is at once post-humanist, in the sense that it assigns value to, and takes seriously the interests of, non-humans (in contrast, for example, to Slaughter’s humanism), and sets forth an epistemic position of ignorance, by arguing that in spite of this post-humanist view, it is impossible for humans to understand the value or interests of non-humans. Thus, her account does not entail the

---

5 I should make clear that I mean this to refer to Eckersley’s view that we are collectively ignorant of what is best for the non-human, rather than as a charge of ignorance against Eckersley herself. Hence why I have refrained from terming her view “ignorant post-humanism”. I should further add that I do not intend to argue that Eckersley’s view
overwhelmingly human-centric risk-based position advanced by Slaughter: she thinks that we ought to take the well-being of the non-human seriously, in contrast to Slaughter’s exclusive concern for human welfare, but we may often be unsure of what that well-being actually requires. This epistemic ignorance informs Eckersley’s subsequent proposal for a “precautionary principle”.

On the point of universalism, Eckersley’s position is harder to distil. Her position shares ground with Slaughter’s, though in a less rigid manner. Slaughter’s universalism is implicit: he does not directly propose a universalist understanding of the non-human, but universalism is the logical outcome of a political framework which, if properly implemented, requires us to agree upon the course of action in regards to the natural world which avoids causing harm. Eckersley’s position of ignorance presents something like a negative universalism: the presumed agreement that can be reached is a universal ignorance- specifically, an ignorance which is fairly consistent across societies.

The post-humanism of ignorance is insufficient to address diversities of worldviews as they relate to the nonhuman, particularly when such diversity manifests in the context of colonial power imbalances. Although I have noted important points of contrast between Slaughter and Eckersley, many of the same criticisms apply. Like Slaughter, Eckersley says much about protecting the nonhuman, but little about how we conceive of it or its value. The essence of her precautionary principle- that we not be excessively quick to conclude that an action will not cause environmental destruction- is not in itself objectionable. What I do find worrisome is the premise: that we can all agree on a certain definition of environmental destruction, and also agree

is unique in this regard amongst post-humanist thought (I am not sure if a “post-humanism of omniscience” exists), but merely that the two features in combination are salient to the present discussion.
on a method by which to determine whether a given action will result in environmental destruction.

To assume such a premise is to side-line important disagreements surrounding the definition and prioritization of environmental decisions. One way in which this dynamic has been characterised is in the distinction between mainstream environmentalism and environmental justice movements, in which the latter emerges from the way in which environmental destruction harms both the non-human and marginalized (often racialized) groups of people. (Pulido and Peña 1998). Recalling the criticisms I have made of Slaughter in relation to anti-colonialism, it might be argued that Eckersley presents a better position insofar as, in common with Indigenous perspectives on the non-human, she does think that the non-human does have some value unrelated to impacts on humans.

However, Eckersley’s account fails to meet the anti-colonial challenge insofar as it is also universalist (albeit in a different way than Slaughter’s). Eckersley posits a universal position of ignorance, which leaves no place for the affirmations of the value of, or relationship with, various elements of the natural world set forth by Indigenous worldviews. As I have shown above, there exists a colonial pattern whereby Indigenous peoples’ specific conception of, and connection to, the natural world is excluded from politics. While Eckersley’s position of ignorance does not in itself exclude Indigenous people from politics, it would require them to accept a universal position of ignorance, rather than allow them to affirm their knowledge of the natural world, and the political action this entails, and therefore fail to overcome colonial patterns of exclusion. By not contemplating Indigenous worldviews and their political implications, Eckersley offers no framework by which to understand the role in environmental politics of the diversity of such worldviews, particularly in a manner which sees the role they
play in politics as strongly tied to the practice of including or excluding certain ontological outlooks as a tool of colonialism.

The deliberative account proposed by Eckersley might appear as an improvement on risk-based accounts. And to be sure, Eckersley does not take the route of bringing nature into politics solely as a resource for human life; in fact, in discussing concepts such as “representing nature’s interests” and “non-human autonomy,” she clearly takes the view that the world beyond the human has some independent, yet unknowable, value beyond human interests (1999, 45-6). Although my aim here is not to defend or define a specific value which can be assigned to the non-human world, I do not object to Eckersley’s view that some such value exists. Instead, I think that the problem lies in Eckersley’s treatment of the unknowability of this value. My argument here is not that there is some obvious universal value assignable to the non-human but rather that Eckersley mistakenly treats the value of the non-human as a universal eternal mystery, thereby foreclosing the possibility that the value the non-human is taken to have in Indigenous perspectives can be politically relevant. Instead, I would argue that the precise extent to which those of us in Western or settler-colonial contexts are unsure as to how non-humans ought to be valorised can be better understood by considering the political context of this uncertainty.

It is unsurprising that engagement in, for example the land- and resource-based colonialism typified in North America, has led to uncertainty about what might or might not be in “nature’s interest”. Put simply, a long-standing political and social pattern of appropriating land and resources for the benefit of (settler) humans has understandably precluded detailed knowledge of the interests of non-humans. This pattern of colonisation continues in a diversity of forms: Simpson notes the connection between territorial dispossession and the development of ethnographic studies of Indigenous peoples, particularly in the suppression of Indigenous culture
(2014, 98), a phenomenon underscored by the case of the Thirty Meter Telescope in Hawaii discussed above. New forms of this dynamic are apparent in discussions of bioprospecting or genetic colonialism - the use of genetic resources for profit irrespective of the views of the people indigenous to the place in question (for example, to develop new pharmaceuticals) (Escobar 1998, 58; Bamford 2002, 37-40). A specific example of this is discussed by Indigenous Hawaiian scholar Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, who recounts mobilization by Indigenous Hawaiians against the University of Hawaii’s patenting of strains of the kalo plant; she summarizes this as “a system by which indigenous knowledge and farming practice is transformed into individual ownership” (2011, 149-52). What ties these examples together is inquiry into the natural world which ignores value the non-human may have in and of itself, in favour of determining its value to humans. What is equally clear, however, is that in all of these cases, culturally specific understandings of the value of the non-human continue to be held and developed by Indigenous peoples.

As a result, I think that Eckersley makes a mistake, however, in generalising this as a universal human experience: such a move posits a universal human knowledge (or, lack thereof) of the natural world, and therefore does not consider what an examination of human relationships might tell us about non-human nature. Both the republican and deliberative strategies fail to account for the extent to which outlooks on the non-human world held by settlers have been inflected by colonialism based upon the appropriation of land. This is perhaps more obvious in Slaughter’s account: his implied view that nature’s value lies in what it contributes towards human well-being strikes me as in many respects a natural extension of a view of the non-human which would endorse the appropriation of land for the purposes of resource extraction.
Eckersley, of course, does not take the same line, but her assertion of ignorance fails, to consider that this ignorance may have, at least partially, developed out of such colonial outlooks.

I neither seek to adjudicate the merits of the diversity of perspectives on the natural world specific to various Indigenous groups, nor do I advocate their adoption by settlers. Accordingly, my objection to Eckerley’s profession of ignorance of what is best for the non-human world is not, therefore, an objection to epistemic modesty. Eckersley’s “precautionary principle” that a given course of action may cause harmful environmental damage in a situation of uncertainty is not a terrible idea. I am not opposed to the suggestion that we err on the side of caution in an attempt to avert environmental destruction. The problem with Eckersley’s proposal is not that it is epistemically modest, but, on the contrary, that it declares ignorance of non-human nature a universal principle. Such a proclamation is problematic, precisely because of its immodest delegitimization of indigenous perspectives committed to making epistemic claims about non-human nature.

To be clear: I am not suggesting that everyone adopt Indigenous worldviews. Rather, I intend to reiterate the view I have discussed above that, because of the extensive manner in which engagements with the non-human by settlers have been, and continue to be, shaped by the aims and logic of colonialism, the extent to which they reproduce or resist colonialism must be understood as a fundamental measure of their value. Crucially, their perceived value relative to Indigenous perspectives has often had more to do with colonial politics than with objective consideration of truth. In other words, I do not seek to preclude considerations of how true or convincing outlooks on the non-human are, but simply to argue that such considerations ought not negate consideration of the politics of colonialism. And finally, for reasons noted above in

---

7 For discussion of the issue of appropriation of Indigenous spiritual practices by settlers, see Vine Deloria, Jr (1992); Bron Taylor (1997) explores this phenomenon in the context of the deep ecology movement.
discussions of universalism, such outlooks must be capable of functioning in the context of a deep diversity of understandings of the non-human.

Although Slaughter and Eckersley present divergent perspectives on how we ought to conceive of the natural world in making political decisions affecting the environment, the universalism of one sort or another present in both of their accounts precludes any substantial role for Indigenous perspectives in such political decisions, and as a result fails to address ontological dimensions of colonialism. In the next chapter, I offer further criticisms of Slaughter and Eckersley which focus on their arguments related to sovereignty and the state.
2. Land and Sovereignty

The previous chapter’s consideration of the environmental political theories proposed by Slaughter and Eckersley focused on the questions raised by the existence of a plurality of worldviews on the non-human, and specifically on the divergence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews. In this chapter, I will argue that these proposals are not only deficient in colonial contexts due to the way in which they take up ontological matters, but also that their views on the issue of sovereignty pose further problems.

Given that Eckersley more explicitly considers the relationship between environmental politics and questions of sovereignty, I begin with a consideration of her views, and subsequently return to Slaughter. Some of Eckersley’s views on the matter of sovereignty are related to her discussion of Habermas, which I have discussed in the previous chapter. There, in spite of criticisms on ontological matters, I agreed with Eckersley’s fundamental view: that non-human life ought to be accorded weight in political decision-making, and that the obvious difficulties of communication and knowledge involved in the attempt to do so should not be seen as arguments against the consideration of the non-human in political discourse. This set of arguments, however, does not say much explicitly about questions of sovereignty. Implicitly, however, Eckersley follows Habermas, who is generally concerned with how discourse functions within democratic states as they broadly exist. Eckersley’s criticisms of Habermas concern a divergent view of who ought to be included in such discourse, and how it ought to function, but do not take issue with Habermas’ basic assumptions about sovereignty.

In a more recent publication, however, Eckersley does spend more time considering sovereignty. Here, her key claim is that our political orders need to be reshaped such that democracy is prioritised over sovereignty, via what she terms “inclusive sovereignty” (2005,
The change in the structure of sovereignty Eckersley proposes does not, she clarifies, mean the end of states or their power. Rather, it means that “democracy must become a defining rather than a contingent feature of states in order that all citizens in all nations be empowered with the necessary civil and political rights to engage in transformative politics at all levels of governance,” and that “liberal democracy must give way to a more ecologically responsive democracy” (2005, 169). Furthermore, Eckersley makes a cosmopolitan proposal for a kind of reciprocal citizenship (at least in ecological matters), given that ecological concerns often cross state boundaries (2005, 176).

As was the case on ontological matters, I take a mixed view of Eckersley. Certainly, she is quite right to propose that democratic structures be revisited in light of environmental matters, and to point out the political implications of the fact that ecological destruction freely crosses state borders. Nonetheless, the manner in which Eckersley’s proposals on the issue of sovereignty all maintain, in a general sense, existing structures of state sovereignty, becomes a problem when Indigenous political perspectives are brought into consideration.

The reasons for this are illustrated by recent criticisms by Indigenous scholars of “recognition” models of politics. Dene scholar Glen Coulthard is a notable such critic who draws on Frantz Fanon’s analyses of colonialism to highlight flaws in recognition politics of the sort exemplified by Charles Taylor. Coulthard’s core objection to the recognition model is, in the first instance, that it grants such recognition only within the pre-existing boundaries of the “racially stratified capitalist economy and the colonial state,” (2007, 443; 446) and secondly that this recognition is bestowed upon the colonized by the colonizer, obviating the possibility of transformative praxis through anti-colonial struggle that Coulthard, again drawing upon Fanon, views as necessary (2007, 449). Such a transformative praxis, Coulthard writes, involves a
reclamation of tradition and culture via a recognition of one’s own freedom and humanity by the colonized (2007, 453-4).

Crucially, Coulthard argues that this present-day form of colonialism takes place in a different register than it has in the past: rather than deploying state violence against Indigenous peoples as its primary tool, colonialism in the form of the politics of recognition operates by seeking to have Indigenous peoples rely on the colonial government as a source of solutions to their grievances (2014, 25). For Coulthard, the problem is not simply that the wrong kind of identification with the established political structures of the colonial state are presented as the solution to colonialism, but that this kind of identification is proposed at all: criticising Nancy Fraser, he writes that theories of recognition fail insofar as they negate the possibility of Indigenous sovereignties separate from the sovereignty of the colonial state, as well as the fact that such sovereignties do not follow the model of sovereignty as a state (2014, 36).

Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel make a similar point when they write that “the larger process of regeneration, as with the outwardly focused process of decolonization, also begins within the self. It is a self-conscious kind of traditionalism that is the central process in the ‘reconstruction of traditional communities’ based on the original teachings and orienting values of Indigenous peoples...institutional approaches to making meaningful change in the lives of Indigenous people have not led to what we understand as decolonization and regeneration; rather they have further embedded Indigenous people in the colonial institution they set out to challenge.” (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 611-2)

---

8 This is not to say that the settler colonial state no longer deploys violence at all against Indigenous people. Indeed, as I noted at the outset, environmental destruction itself constitutes a new form of colonial violence, and one to which the exclusion of Indigenous voices or perspectives from political decisions about the environment contributes.
This analysis of sovereignty in the context of colonial states challenges the republican and deliberative accounts of politics I have mentioned above. Put simply, allowing for a greater inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the frameworks of environmental politics proposed by Eckersley and Slaughter is at best a politics of recognition by the colonial state. What Coulthard, Alfred, and Corntassel make clear is that decolonization on the part of Indigenous people necessarily includes an affirmation of Indigenous sovereignty, a practice incompatible with proposals to simply include Indigenous worldviews in colonial politics. Given the centrality of sovereignty in colonialism and decolonial practice, I would in fact argue that proposals to, for example, include Indigenous perspectives in the construction of Eckersley’s “inclusive sovereignty” are not a marked departure from historical power structures of colonialism at all.

Of course, Coulthard is making a broad critique, rather than one directed specifically at environmental political theory. As strands of larger theoretical traditions, Eckersley and Slaughter are open to criticism to the extent that they do not overcome the colonial shortcomings of their respective traditions. But there are two ways in which I think a specific critique of the failure by environmental political theorists to account for colonialism can be made. The first applies generally: insofar as environmental destruction often particularly affects Indigenous peoples, and simultaneously forms a key elements of many Indigenous political movements, political theorists who focus on environmental issues commit a major oversight by overlooking this crucial facet of environmental destruction.

Secondly, Eckersley and Slaughter both see environmental issues as a reason to re-consider sovereignty: for both, in a cosmopolitan direction which moves environmental matters beyond the strict purview of the state, and for Eckersley, additionally, in an expansion of sovereignty to include the non-human in some way. Thus, both are willing to re-imagine sovereignty in light of
environmental issues, but provide no indication that such a re-imagination might also involve the affirmation of Indigenous sovereignty. As a result, in spite of the link between Indigenous peoples’ conception of the non-human and their affirmations of sovereignty, the reconfiguration of the sovereignty of settler colonial states simply reiterates that Indigenous peoples must seek to take political action on environmental matters via the colonial state’s structures.

In my discussion of Eckersley, I noted that one of her core proposals is the political prioritisation of democracy over sovereignty. Quite rightly, she notes the fact that environmental issues cross borders of state sovereignty, and as a result that a cosmopolitan, democratic approach to these issues is to be prioritised in favour of the strict adherence to state borders and sovereignty. But while Eckersley opposes the reification of state sovereignty as the core political ideal on the grounds that it prevents the greening of politics, I argue that this analysis of sovereignty is not compatible with Coulthard’s arguments concerning Indigenous sovereignty.

But before explaining my criticisms of Eckerley connected to Indigenous sovereignty, it is crucial to explain why the incompatibility between Eckersley and Coulthard is particularly problematic. In my view, this is best done by considering Coulthard’s concept of “grounded normativity”. Coulthard argues that, in Marxist terms, the colonization of the Indigenous peoples of North America has involved dispossession to a much greater extent than proletarianization, and specifically that

Indigenous struggles against capitalist imperialism are best understood as struggles oriented around the question of land —struggles not only for land, but also deeply informed by what the land as a mode of reciprocal relationship (which is itself informed by place-based practices and associated form of knowledge) ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our
surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way. The ethical framework provided by these place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge is what I call “grounded normativity.” (2014, 60)

Coulthard then goes on to apply this concept in analysis of the Dene Nation’s opposition to pipelines in the Mackenzie Delta, arguing that “it was this place-based ethics that served as the foundation from which we critiqued the dual imperatives of colonial sovereignty and capitalist accumulation that came to dictate the course of northern development in the postwar period.” (2014, 64)

There are three key points to be drawn from this discussion of grounded normativity. The first is that it reinforces a point I have already highlighted: that in many Indigenous perspectives, ontology and sovereignty are deeply linked. Second, it illustrates the extent to which the struggle against territorial dispossession stemming from the sovereignty claimed by colonial states forms a crucial point of contention in Indigenous politics. Finally, Coulthard’s discussion serves to illustrate the manner in which Indigenous sovereignty is distinct as a political issue. Indigenous politics which involve questions of sovereignty are not at their heart a demand for resources or rights to be provided by the colonial state, and thus are also not demands which are in competition for zero-sum state resources. Rather, they challenge the sovereignty of the colonial state itself. Moreover, they do this in the context of a conflict over sovereignty which is already ongoing (and as the Dene example shows, can be re-entrenched by specific policies or projects). As a result, in colonial contexts, political theories which make arguments concerning sovereignty are by necessity positioning themselves in relation to this ongoing conflict.

Eckersley’s arguments for the prioritization of democracy over sovereignty remain within a framework of state power; in settler colonial contexts, this state power inevitably includes the
power of colonial states challenged by calls for Indigenous sovereignty. This means that Eckersley’s greening of deliberative democracy at best reproduces problematic dynamics of colonial recognition. This is particularly noticeable in two specific arguments made by Eckersley.

The first is her call for better support for NGOs working in the Global South. According to Eckersley, there is a need for state support in order to render NGOs’ work on environmental issues more successful (2005). This proposal seems at best insufficient to me, given that such NGOs are ultimately limited in their impact if the relevant political structures are not conducive to environmentally-friendly policies or Indigenous political priorities. At its worst, such a policy might further reproduce colonial dynamics by empowering outside groups rather than the people indigenous to the area in question: recall, for example, that in the cases discussed by de la Cadena, Indigenous groups were often just as much in conflict with non-Indigenous environmentalist groups as they were with governments and businesses in regards to the political salience of Indigenous ontological perspectives.

Secondly, Eckersley proposes a particular strand of cosmopolitanism. Though some forms of cosmopolitanism might be potential solutions to the problems at hand, it seems to me this is not the case for Eckersley’s cosmopolitanism. This is because, while it is certainly possible that a cosmopolitan account might modify, reduce, or eliminate the exclusive sovereignty of existing states to the extent that, in settler colonial contexts, there is the possibility of full exercise of Indigenous sovereignty, Eckersley’s account proposes something more akin to a reformulation of relations between existing states, and thus does not provide for greater Indigenous sovereignty.

On her account, cosmopolitanism ought to exist as an outlook within the context of existing state boundaries, for example through some form of “reciprocal citizenship,” i.e. the
notion that, due to the border-crossing nature of many environmental issues, citizens of one state ought to have a political say in environmentally significant political decisions taken in another state (2005, 176). Yet such a proposal has little to offer in the face of calls for Indigenous sovereignty which situate themselves outside of, and in opposition to, the colonial nation-state. Indeed, it might even be argued that this type of cosmopolitan proposal takes the elements of the politics of recognition criticised by Coulthard, Alfred, Corntassel, and others a step further: in addition to practicing a politics of recognition which seeks to incorporate Indigenous peoples into the colonial state, Eckersley’s proposal may serve to mask this conflict over sovereignty by ceding some of the state’s sovereignty to a cosmopolitan order - essentially, a widening of the scope and complexity of colonial sovereignty. To put it simply, the problem lies in the fact that while sovereignty is being re-imagined and redistributed, it is being re-imagined by the colonial state (just as Coulthard criticises the manner in which any concessions to Indigenous peoples’ rights are recognised only within the framework of the colonial state’s courts, so too Eckersley sees her cosmopolitan proposal as being undergirded by laws passed by nation-states (Coulthard 2014, 40-1; Eckersley 2005, 176)), and being redistributed outwards to a global cosmopolitan citizenry, rather than inwards to people indigenous to the lands in question. Broadly similar criticisms can be made of Slaughter’s account. I do not examine his arguments in great detail in this chapter as he does not make as many explicit proposals about sovereignty as does Eckersley. However, he certainly does not propose any departure from the colonial structures of sovereignty I have criticised here with reference to Eckersley. Additionally, the fact that his human-centric account does not even something like the “inclusive [of non-humans] sovereignty” proposed by Eckersley illustrates that his position provides no opening for the reconsideration of colonial structures of sovereignty rejected by anti-colonial Indigenous perspectives.
Thus far, the issues I have raised focus largely on the broad proposals for political structures advanced by Eckersley. I will now turn to a consideration of how these questions of sovereignty are highly relevant to discussions about perspectives on the non-human world: in a sense, that the issues I have just raised in regards to sovereignty are inseparable from the issues discussed in the previous chapter. In other words, I show why it is essential that environmental political theories which wish to meet anti-colonial demands consider both the ontological and sovereignty-related criticisms I have made of Slaughter and Eckersley. In order to show this, I will now turn to a number of perspectives which illustrate vital links between Indigenous perspectives on the non-human world, sovereignty, and colonialism.

Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor writes that “In an Indigenous context, IK [Indigenous Knowledge] is by nature also environmental knowledge.” (2005, 389) This argument draws a crucial matter to our attention: that the manner in which the world beyond the human is conceived of, and engaged with, forms a vital element of Indigenous worldviews and knowledges. Examples of this abound. Rarámuru scholar Enrique Salmón, drawing primarily on his own culture, has described “kincentric ecology” - the idea that “life in any environment is viable only when humans view their surroundings as kin; that their mutual roles are essential for their survival” - as an important feature of such worldviews. (2000, 1328) What renders Eckersley’s account of sovereignty deeply incompatible with these worldviews is that they are, in colonial contexts, often deeply political. Coulthard, drawing in part on Vine Deloria, Jr. (to whom I will return below) discusses both Indigenous relationships to the land generally, and as they relate to anti-colonial politics, writing that “Indigenous struggles against capitalist imperialism are best understood as struggles oriented around the question of land—struggles not only for land, but also deeply informed by what the land as a mode of reciprocal relationship
(which is itself informed by place-based practices and associated form of knowledge) ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way.” (2014, 60) Along similar lines is the following exchange between Kanien'kehå:ka scholar Audra Simpson and an interviewee she describes as a “traditional Mohawk woman”:

Q: Please tell me what nationhood is to you?

A: This is the disappearance of the boundaries between our reserves. In the ideal world, we would move through our traditional territory with no impediments, we would restore our relationship with the land as women. We would be free to do these things and not stay on the “ghettos” that they call reserves. (2014, 162)

While the above discussion of sovereignty and colonialism engages with specific histories and traditions which I will not explore here, I think that it underscores the fact that critiques of the politics of recognition apply in an important way to discussion of environmental politics: Indigenous relations with the non-human world often demand autonomy or sovereignty, rather than recognition as part of the “diversity” of the colonial state.

Indigenous place-based ontologies are much more than a set of knowledge about the natural world, which might act as a source of insight into how not to destroy it. They are also intimately connected to conceptions of sovereignty which are in tension with the sovereignty claimed by colonial states. While I hope to have already illustrated why this points to the necessity of settler politics which do not seek to recuperate Indigenous sovereignty via the politics of recognition, I now wish to further argue that this context also indicates a need for a

---

9 Simpson defines this designation in part as such: “A ‘traditional woman’ would be defined as someone who self-consciously practices ‘tradition,’ and rejects the authority of the settler nation-state to define her or accord her rights. She does not vote in federal or provincial elections, she does not pay taxes, she uses a ‘red card’ (with her clan, not her band number) to cross the U.S.-Canadian border, she may refuse to use a provincially issued Medicare card to obtain health care. ‘Traditional’ would entail a very adamant stance in terms of sovereignty…” (2014)
reconceptualization of settler perspectives on the non-human, whether from the risk-based view of Slaughter, or the universal ignorance of Eckersley.

As I have noted above in my discussion of Eckersley, environmental issues tend to cross political boundaries in a manner that defies existing decision-making structures. Above, I have called into question the extent to which proposals such as Slaughter’s and Eckersley’s, which seek to address this phenomenon by some form of cosmopolitan expansion of sovereignty, can respond to anti-colonial challenges. In doing so, I have drawn on Indigenous perspectives which instead favour the ceding of colonial sovereignty in favour of Indigenous sovereignty. Although this might play out in different ways, one picture of what it might entail is offered by Alfred and Corntassel:

In addition to creating zones of refuge and other breaks from colonial rule that create spaces of freedom, we will begin to realize decolonization in a real way when we begin to achieve the re-strengthening of our people as individuals so that these spaces can be occupied by decolonized people living authentic lives. This is a recognition that our true power as Indigenous people ultimately lies in our relationships with our land, relatives, language, and ceremonial life. As the eminent Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. asserts, ‘What we need is a cultural leave-us-alone agreement, in sprit and in fact.’\(^{10}\) (2005, 605)

It is important to note that Alfred and Corntassel do not refer to cultural decolonization in a depoliticised sense. Instead, they are clear in explaining that “zones of refuge” involve actual political sovereignty, aimed at “Indigenous autonomy and nation-to-nation relations between original and immigrant peoples” (2005, 604). Given the way in which the impacts of environmental decision-making inevitably spread, non-interference is not a simple matter: the
actions of settlers in colonial contexts will almost certainly have effects on Indigenous peoples, irrespective of how sovereignties are construed: even if settlers no longer seek to assert any form of sovereignty over Indigenous nations, their relationship with the non-human may nonetheless impinge upon Indigenous sovereignty as it relates to relationships with the land. The issue at hand is underscored by Deloria’s concept of a “cultural leave-us-alone agreement” mentioned by Alfred and Corntassel above. This notion underscores the fact that colonialism involves not only political structures of control, but also the exercise of colonial power over culture and worldviews. As a result, rethinking sovereignty in light of colonialism also requires rethinking outlooks on the natural world. Irrespective of political structure, the realities of environmental harm mean that if settlers hold views on the natural world which harm Indigenous peoples or their relationship to the land, colonial power continues to be exercised.

However, although I would argue there are undoubtedly worldviews concerning the non-human which are essentially incompatible with any sort of process of decolonization or relationship of reciprocity between Indigenous peoples and settlers, the task of decolonizing non-Indigenous environmental thought does not lie in working out an ideal conception of the non-human world and its value. Though the alternative conceptions of the non-human I will discuss in subsequent chapters may have numerous benefits— for example, that fostering a certain kind of relationship with the non-human is beneficial for one’s well-being— my interest here is in exploring how reconsidering settlers’ relationship to the non-human might combat the manner in which environmental decision-making risks hindering Indigenous sovereignty. As a result, it is my view that we ought to examine and re-imagine the political context of how existing environmental worldviews have been formulated. Crucially, I argue that we must evaluate such

---

11 An example might be a Lockean position which denies any possibility of Indigenous sovereignty and views the natural world essentially as the private property of whoever appropriates it.
theories in relation to historically dominant conceptions of human—non-human relations; in general, this entails some form of humanist superiority, but at a more specific level, this is linked to resource- or land-based colonialism.

Though some elements of the argument I make in what follows may be of broad relevance, it is important to specify that they primarily draw on a North American context. This distinction is illustrated in detail by Zapotec scholar Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez through comparative case studies of the Indigenous politics of the Inuit and Nisga’a peoples, the Indigenous peoples of Oaxaca, and the Zapatista movement. These comparisons lead her to argue that in the context of the Americas, a North-South divide of colonialism can be drawn, in which colonialism in the North (i.e. what became Canada and the US) primarily functioned through the colonization of land as a source of resources, whereas farther south colonialism more prominently colonized people as sources of labour and tax revenue (2013, 25-8) The centrality of the appropriation and theft of land by a population of settlers in understanding colonialism in the Northern Americas as the distinctive phenomenon of settler colonialism is echoed by many of the scholars discussed above, including Simpson (2014, 51-2; 98) and Coulthard (2014, 62).

Though the theories of environmental political thought under consideration do not explicitly advocate such colonialism, I argue that they fail to completely dissociate themselves from it in two overlapping ways: the manner in which risk-based approaches to environmental politics preserve a conception of the non-human as primarily a source of extractable commodities, and the manner in which calls for a direct incorporation of nature into politics short-circuit the dynamics of colonial relations between human groups.

It may remain unclear, however, precisely what kind of landscape of engagements with a non-human I propose as an alternative: my arguments for the adoption of an anti-colonial
analysis in the evaluation of perspectives on the non-human might seem to point either to prioritisation of Indigenous worldviews, or to a project of settlers forming new environmental outlooks with greater considerations to their connection to colonialism. In some sense, I wish to argue for both of these things. In the first instance, I certainly agree with the notion that the voices and worldviews of Indigenous peoples should have much more weight, including on environmental matters linked to Indigenous sovereignty and land-based ontologies. It is again vital to make the link to sovereignty: this prioritisation of Indigenous peoples on environmental questions is not a matter of rebalancing who does the talking within existing political arrangements, but rather a prioritisation intimately tied up with the relinquishment of colonial sovereignty in favour of Indigenous sovereignties. But on the other hand, particular in light of the way in which actions which affect the non-human are never confined in their effects to a single group, I argue that, recalling the calls for ‘leave us alone’ agreements, it is vital for settlers in colonial contexts to develop political and ontological outlooks on the non-human which reduce the extent to which Indigenous peoples must enter into conflict with settlers to protect their lands and sovereignty. Such politics stand in counterpoint not only to past political trends which appropriate resources and land to the detriment of both the non-human world and Indigenous sovereignty, but also to a settler colonial politics which would simply wait for Indigenous knowledge to inform us that harm is being brought upon the environment or Indigenous peoples, rather than developing strategies to avoid creating such a situation in the first place.\footnote{This is not to say, of course, that I object to such concerns being raised by Indigenous peoples, but simply that it is preferable to avoid creating situations in which they must be raised.}

The overarching orientation I wish to take here is one focused on political action. I take particular direction from a recent article which consists of a discussion between Corey Snelgrove, a white settler, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, a settler of colour, and Jeff Corntassel, an
Indigenous scholar. Collaboratively, they seek to problematize recent conceptions of Indigenous-settler solidarity and the recent emergence of “settler colonial studies” as an independent field of scholarship. They conclude this study by writing that

In this paper, we have argued for a contextual approach to the questions of settler colonialism, settlers, and solidarity. It is ultimately about accountability to each other, as the Tsalagi word, digadatsele’i suggests, and treating Indigenous resurgence as a process that cannot occur in isolation. This, as argued throughout this paper, demands a centering of and support for Indigenous resurgences, and a shift from a one-dimensional to a relational approach to settler colonial analyses that is connected to the issue of other Others. This also demands place-based solidarities – that is, relationships and practices – that center both Indigenous resurgences and more relational approaches to settler colonial power. After all, settler colonialism will not be undone by analysis alone, but through lived and contentious engagement with the literal and stolen ground on which people stand and come together upon. (Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Comtassel, 27)

Thus, while this project both examines the colonial nature of Western political theory and proposes new approaches to environmental politics for settlers, I do not view either of these things as ends in themselves. Rather, my central aim here is to examine the possibilities for ways of thinking which move away from colonialism in favour of non-interference with, and support for, Indigenous resurgence, and do so in a way informed by the perspectives and struggles of Indigenous peoples.
Although this chapter and the preceding one have discussed a range of issues, their fundamental aim is to be the first step in formulating and putting into practice political and ontological understandings of the non-human which can be effectively anti-colonial. Thus, the criticisms and arguments presented here will, in the remaining chapters, serve as a metric with which to test the suitability of such understandings on a theoretical level. To summarise, this will require not only the possibility of responding to the call for Indigenous sovereignty, but also an environmental outlook that can recognise both this sovereignty and the existence of a plurality of perspectives on the non-human.
3. Natural Vitality

Although the matters I raise in the previous chapters are multifaceted, I hope to have made clear that on the connected subjects of colonialism and environmental politics, substantively new political ideas and practices are needed. The majority of the remainder of this thesis seeks to explore the extent to which recent developments in new materialist theories can be of use in such an endeavour. In what follows, I will systematically explain and evaluate these theoretical directions.

In this chapter, I undertake the first part of my evaluation of the extent to which new (or vital) materialist politics, as set out by William Connolly and Jane Bennett, can contribute to anti-colonial ecological politics. Here, I focus on the ontological element of this question. In short, I seek to consider how well vital materialism can respond to the often politicised problems posed by the existence of a diversity of worldviews of the natural world in settler colonial contexts. This investigation is complemented by the following chapter, which focuses on vital materialism’s proposals on the issues of sovereignty and political structures, and the extent to which they can engage with Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty.

I think that Bennett and Connolly’s vital materialisms provide important tools in the construction of alternative settler environmental politics in colonial contexts. As will become clear, I do not think that they provide complete solutions, nor do I think that we will find a single, ideal way forward. But it does seem to me that an examination of their recent proposals can begin to provide answers to some of the substantial challenges I have raised in the previous chapter.

This chapter will focus on the content vital materialism can offer to a new and politically-oriented worldview on the nonhuman--one which addresses the often colonialist shortcomings
exemplified respectively by what I have termed risk-based universalism and the post-humanism of ignorance. I consider two main elements of this ontological matter. First, I argue that vital materialism offers a first step towards anti-colonial ecological politics through its visions of new relationships with the natural world. Second, I argue that it offers a further path towards addressing the colonial nature of environmental political thought through its valuation of the construction of ontological and political outlooks through engagement with a plurality of views on the non-human.

I have argued that one of the key challenges for environmental political thought lies in the manner in which ontological pluralism is taken up. This issue is crucial as without articulating an outlook which is compatible with such a pluralistic reality, we will not get very far in addressing the overlapping issues of environmental destruction and colonialism. As we saw in the previous chapter, colonialism impacts upon environmental matters in such contexts not only in the sense that the viewpoints of Indigenous peoples are excluded from politics, but additionally that this exclusion relates to the diverse understandings of the natural world held by Indigenous peoples. As a result, the crucial question to be asked of vital materialism is whether it can provide for an engagement with a deep diversity of ontological views in a context impacted by colonialism. While a variety of perspectives may claim to be pluralistic, I will argue here that vital materialism, as elaborated by Bennett and Connolly, takes a pluralistic approach which is well-suited to the task at hand.

I first of all consider the substantive ontological content of Connolly’s approach, starting with its discussion of humanism and post-humanism. Recall that I have offered criticisms of
manifestations of each: Slaughter’s republican view was so inherently human-centric as to preclude placing import on a great number of issues involving the non-human, while Eckersley’s post-humanism seemed likely to lead to a worrying lack of action or resolve. To take either of these views of the non-human as our basis for environmentalist politics leaves, I have argued, little place for Indigenous perspectives which present distinct understandings of, and engagements with, the non-human. Connolly’s views of the non-human are consistent with a wariness, if not outright rejection, of both positions. In the first instance, a great deal of his arguments are concerned with the rejection of what he terms “exclusive humanism,” given that “we are not unique; we are merely distinctive. Most things we pride ourselves on are either profoundly contestable…or shared to some degree with a diverse set of other beings and things…everywhere you turn connections and infusions between human and nonhuman things of multiple sorts proliferate. To be attached to humanity is also, then, to be attached to varying degrees to a variety of lively things and processes to which it is connected.” (2013, 48-9) In another formulation, Connolly writes that he “seeks to render us more sensitive to a variety of nonhuman forces fields that impinge upon politico-economic life as it too impinges upon the force fields. It seeks to extend our political and cosmic sensibilities.” (2013, 9) Thus, Connolly presents an account which at once counters Eckersley’s ignorance through its presentation of a concrete understanding of the non-human, and moreover presents an understanding of the non-human which is deeper and less human-centric than that proposed by Slaughter.

On this latter point, Connolly stands in sharp contrast to what I have characterised as Slaughter’s exclusive humanism. In a nuance with which I agree, however, Connolly’s rejection of such a position does not lead him to advocate its polar opposite. Notably, Connolly worries that anti-humanism and post-humanism “too readily leave the impression of not exuding care for
humanity at all” (2013, 50). To a certain extent, Connolly’s claims about humanism and post-humanism parallel criticisms I have made in the preceding chapter. I should clarify that Connolly’s arguments here do not perfectly apply to Eckersley: her position is certainly not anti-humanist, which perhaps aids in avoiding the outright lack of care for humanity rejected by Connolly. Furthermore, I wish in the current context to focus specifically on the problem of how such a lack of concern affects Indigenous peoples in settler colonial contexts. Thus, a slightly amended version of this critique seems to me to be warranted, in light of both the specific claims made by Eckersley, and the specific focus of this project: to the extent that Eckersley’s position provides limited possibilities for the political claims of indigenous peoples, particularly through the lack of space for Indigenous perspectives offered by her post-humanism of ignorance, it is possible to call in to question what part, or conception, of humanity Eckersley concerns herself with.

Connolly’s vision of a more horizontal relationship between human and non-human strikes me as being in agreement with this view. On the other hand, environmental politics in colonial contexts must not only exist in tandem with attention to colonial power structures, but indeed, as I have argued, recognize that the two issues are inextricable. Although Connolly does not make this analysis, I would argue that his perspective on post-humanism—essentially that efforts to accord greater value to the non-human must not cancel out political matters affecting humans—is compatible with such a view.

To elaborate on this point, it is important to reiterate that, while some kind of deeper connection with nature or care for its well-being may well be a good in itself, my aim here is neither to prove that this is the case, nor to focus on the manner in which vital materialism might help us to achieve such a connection or valuation. Rather, I seek to evaluate such
reconceptualizations of the natural world in terms of their political salience in relation to anti-colonialism. The vision of the natural world set forth by environmental political theorists such as Slaughter and Eckersley stands in stark contrast to Indigenous conceptions of the natural world, and by extension in opposition to anti-colonial politics rooted in Indigenous perspectives. Daniel Wildcat argues that, in order to take effective environmental action, it is necessary to take seriously the knowledge of Indigenous peoples, and specifically their deep and sacred relationship with the land, with the understanding that “in order to live well and fruitfully on this planet, humankind must sense the sacred in an experiential world beyond the human-created environments, information, and images that surround us.” (2009, 28-9) Connolly’s extension of sensibilities presents a position which, while it is not, and does not seek to be, identical to Indigenous perspectives, moves in a direction of an engagement with the natural world at odds with ontological frameworks influenced by colonial patterns of the appropriation of land.

Connolly’s arguments in *The Fragility of Things*, insofar as they provide a broad analysis of the American political and economic context, are weakened by the omission of any significant discussion of colonialism from his analysis; as a result, taking up his proposals in this project is necessarily a process of amendment, rather than mere application. Nonetheless, I think that Connolly’s proposal for simultaneous “slowing down” and “speeding up” provides further evidence that the kind of new relationship with the natural world described above is indeed relatable to the task of forming new outlooks which seek to break with colonial frameworks. According to Connolly, we are in need of “militant drives to slow down and retune practices of production, consumption, and demands for material ‘progress’ and, second, resolute strategies to speed up shifts in our orientations to self-identity, production and consumption processes, and the shaky place of humanity in the cosmos.” (2013, 136); in an earlier formulation of this
argument he writes that “the dilemma of today is that the fragility of things demands shifting and slowing down intrusions into several aspects of nature as we speed up shifts in identity, role performance, cultural ethos, market regulation, and state policy.” (2013, 39) The “slowing down” proposed by Connolly is, in some respects, not unlike Eckersley’s precautionary principle: her account of an “inclusive sovereignty” certainly shares some common ground with the horizontal relationships with the non-human proposed by Connolly.

The element of “speeding up” the creation of new worldviews and relationships discussed by Connolly is, however, scarcely present in Eckersley’s account, and it is on this point that I think Connolly’s strand of vital materialism shows distinct promise. The manner in which Connolly’s proposal for “speeding up” the formation of new orientations to the world turns on the criticisms I have made of the role ignorance plays in Eckersley’s green deliberative democracy: chiefly, that such an approach risks devolving into inaction or endless discussion of whether we really know enough to take some decisive environmentalist action. In other words, while Eckersley is relatively silent on courses of action to take, apart from simply being more cautious in our political decision-making, Connolly takes the view that such caution must necessarily be combined with broad and decisive reorientations of our perspective on the world. To be sure, Connolly does not provide us with a ready-made formula by which differences in perspectives on both politics and the natural world may be resolved, but his position constitutes an improvement on both Eckersley and Slaughter’s proposals insofar as it provides for the possibility that Indigenous perspectives are not political excluded in favour of a universalist position.

Of course, Eckersley makes plausible arguments as to why such a position of ignorance in regards to the non-human is justified. Connolly, however, offers what I view as a convincing
epistemological orientation to such matters. On this issue, Connolly characterizes his view as “speculative realism,” an outlook which make claims on what ought to be done with enough force to resist being cast as relativistic, yet is open to change and adaptation in a manner which avoids universalism (2013, 137-8). This approach is a remedy to some of the problems I have identified in both risk-based universalism and the post-humanism of ignorance. The salience of Connolly’s speculative realism stems firstly from the alternative it provides to universalism or the proclamation of confirmed ignorance- Eckersley’s claim that given our inability to know non-humans’ interests, it is ill-advised to make claims on the matter. Connolly succeeds in offering a non-universalist account of non-human value which convincingly addresses epistemic concerns of the sort broached by Eckersley. He provides an alternative to the purely risk-based approach of Slaughter through a re-engagement with the value of the natural world which I will discuss in detail below. Both of these contrasts serve to address the way in which professed ignorance or universalism leads to a discounting of Indigenous perspectives.

I argue that Connolly’s speculative realist framing of his proposals greatly adds to their strength, in an important epistemological contrast with Eckersley. Eckersley, as I have outlined, digs herself into an epistemological hole which weakens the potential of her theory: while she is not wrong to say that we can never perfectly know what is in the best interest of one non-human entity or another, she leaves her arguments at that, leaving us with little indication as to what ought to be done next, and moreover, perpetuate colonial patterns of exclusion. Connolly, on the other hand, offers a way in which hypotheses about the value and interests of non-human life, and our relationship to it, can be both constructed and acted upon, without necessarily making absolute truth-claims. Crucially, this does not simply equip us with a theoretical framework for making claims about non-human value in a way Eckersley does not. This alone is not enough to
prefer Connolly over Eckersley unless one seeks to argue that a conception of non-human value is a good in and of itself, something I do not seek to do here. Instead, what is laudable about Connolly’s understanding the value of the non-human through the process of “speeding up” is the way it reinforces his parallel argument for “slowing down,” i.e. taking actions which reduce humans’ negative impact on the natural world. In the specific context of this project, the value of this reinforcement lies in the way in which Connolly’s “speeding up” can allow us to reformulate our engagements with the natural world in a manner which takes into account the ways in which existing views and political actions relating to the environment have been enmeshed with colonial practices; as a result, the environmentalist actions undertaken with a view to “slowing down” harmful practices can take these matters into account, in a way Eckersley’s proposals, relying on a position of ignorance, cannot.

Although I find Connolly’s general framework promising, he is somewhat short on details about what exactly the formation of new perspectives on the non-human might entail.\(^\text{13}\) This, however, ought to seen as a positive element to Connolly’s account: a key reason why Eckersley and Slaughter fail to move away from colonial patterns of exclusion is precisely that they too quickly solidify a universalist outlook; in contrast, the openness of Connolly’s proposals is much more likely to produce a political outcome which moves away from such exclusionary patterns. I now turn to Jane Bennett’s proposals; although maintaining a similarly beneficial openness to eventual outcomes, I wish to highlight a more specific proposal made by Bennett which illustrates the manner in which vital materialist thought may aid in the abandonment of colonial structures.

\(^{13}\) As I will discuss later, however, this lack of insight is perhaps mitigated by the strength of Connolly’s account of how we ought to engage in the formation of a new ethos; it seems to me that Connolly might defensibly argue that it is premature for him to make concrete proposals in light of this.
Along similar lines as Connolly, Bennett argues for the reconceptualization of human—non-human relations in a more horizontal manner as a means of cultivating ecological sensibility (2010, 10). This broadly similar call to seek new and deeper connections to the non-human in spite of epistemological limitations merits the same positive assessment as I have just made of Connolly. But Bennett offers somewhat of a more practical suggestion to which I wish to draw attention: what she describes as a practice of “anthropomorphism”. Anthropomorphism is often invoked as a critique of arguments, either because they inaccurately humanize or romanticize the non-human, or else because they focus attention on cuddlier forms of non-human life to the detriment of less furry, but nonetheless ecologically vital, forms of life. Bennett’s arguments, however, avoid these pitfalls. Rather than directly ascribe specifically human characteristics to non-humans, she instead means to propose a practice of identifying resemblances and linkages between human and non-human: “we may at first see only a world in our own image, but what appears next is a swarm of ‘talented’ and vibrant materialities (including the seeing self).” (2010, 99) Although this formulation is somewhat vague, it seems to me that Bennett’s practice of anthropomorphism is a two-fold one: first, we are to invest effort in paying more attention to the vibrant nature of the non-human, specifically to the extent to which non-humans share characteristics with humans. Secondly, this expanded and more horizontal world-view is, for Bennett, not merely an abstract image of the world, but a politically salient one. She argues that such an outlook can spur us to expand to the demos to include the non-human, creating what she refers to as a “parliament of things,” although she clarifies that democratic politics will inevitably be anthropocentric to some degree, rather than perfectly horizontal (2010, 100-7).¹⁴

¹⁴ The concept of a “parliament of things” enters the realm of political structure and sovereignty, an assessment of which forms the core of the following chapter.
anthropomorphism corresponds, I would argue, to the element of “speeding up” proposed by Connolly: she proposes a political program which places an emphasis on the development of new outlooks on the world which are attuned to the non-human, rather than simply calling for the reduction of harmful actions. Although Bennett does not focus on economic relations and ideologies in the same manner as Connolly, her practice of anthropomorphism undoubtedly consists in the kind of rapid reformulation of identity and ethos embraced by Connolly. This practice provides (potentially one of several) concrete ways forward which ascribes non-human-centric value to the non-human while both preserving the valuable element of speculative realism as outlined by Connolly, and without drawing excessively post-humanist conclusions about equivalences between human and non-human.

As I have mentioned, neither theorist explicitly writes about what implications their arguments have for projects of decolonization. Nonetheless, it is my view that the practice of anthropomorphism can meaningfully contribute to the kind realignment of engagements with the natural world on the part of settlers I have argued is important to such a project. Part of the problem at hand, I have argued, is the extent to which settler perspectives on the non-human-including amongst some environmentalists- are symptomatic of forms of colonialism which operate through the appropriation of land and resources. This pattern is particularly evident in the risk-based understanding of the natural world implied by Slaughter. In his proposals, the natural world essentially remains a resource and potential source of risk to humans; as a result, his outlook maintains colonial relationships to the natural world, and thus eliminates the possibility of a politics which respects the connections to the natural world central to many Indigenous anti-colonial perspectives. The anthropomorphic practice proposed by Bennett offers a powerful alternative to this, by allowing the non-human to carry value and political weight which is not
strictly tied to human benefit or risk. Such a perspective, I would argue, goes some way towards remedying the phenomenon of Indigenous relationships to the non-human being rejected as politically salient.

What makes the position proposed by Bennett particularly valuable is the characteristics it has in common with Connolly’s vital materialism: it allows us not simply to include Indigenous perspectives on the non-human, but to do so in a sustainable manner. What I mean by this is that rather than simply viewing Indigenous perspectives as valuable because it seems to us politically the right thing to do, or else endorsing these worldviews without any understanding of what they mean, the practice of anthropomorphism described by Bennett can allow us to cultivate relationships with the non-human which afford us a greater understanding of, and perhaps sometimes parallel, Indigenous conceptions of the natural world. The parallels I foresee lie not so much in the specific content of such relationships to the natural world (which are often culturally specific), but in the political implications they have. Take, for example, the case of proposed mining in the Andes described above. Something like Bennett’s practice of anthropomorphism would almost certainly not have fostered the same kind of personal understanding of the mountains set forth by Indigenous residents of the area. But this is, I argue, neither necessary nor desirable. What it might have led to was a relationship with the local non-human environment which included points of identification between human and non-human life; in turn, this might well have led non-Indigenous actors to endorse a broadly similar course of political action as Indigenous residents (in this case, the cancellation or reduction of mining projects). It might also have been the case that this would lead to a greater degree of

---

15 In this specific case, it is worth noting that these views were shared by some non-Indigenous local residents, but also that this case is not a settler-colonial context in precisely the same way as North American cases. At the same time, and in a manner which supports my arguments, it might be surmised that the people in question held a variety of overlapping understandings of the local natural environment, but shared a perspective which allowed them to take each others’ view seriously and regard them as politically pertinent.
understanding of, and willingness to take seriously, Indigenous perspectives: resonances might be found between Indigenous perspectives and this kind of anthropomorphic practice. These resonances, I think, might be useful even though they need not involve perfect unity of positions or assignation of truth-values to alternative perspectives. Indeed, in this case, the central political debate (aside from the practical matter of whether to allow the mine to be built) revolved not around whether Indigenous perspectives on the mountains were demonstrably true, but rather around whether or not such perspectives were admissible to political debate.

A very similar situation might be foreseen in the Oka example: though settlers in that area would likely not, and would be ill-advised to, adopt precisely the same spiritual connection Indigenous inhabitants shared with the forest slated to be replaced with a golf course, they certainly could have, through a practice of anthropomorphism, come to have a relationship with the forest at once less prone to seeing it as expendable in the name of golf, and from which an understanding of the Indigenous perspective on the non-human environment was more easily understandable.

Thus far, I have argued that the perspective on the natural world set forth by vital materialism provides a means by which settlers in colonial contexts can reformulate their relationships to the natural world in a manner which, with real political benefit, begins to move away from perspectives on the non-human which reinforce colonial dynamics. In offering this analysis, it has become evident that such practices will likely lead to divergences of views at multiple levels (i.e. not merely between Indigenous peoples and settlers, but also amongst settlers). I now turn to a discussion of ways in which vital materialism may be useful in navigating these divergences and their political implications.
Connolly’s account is not merely valuable in terms of the proposals it makes for new outlooks, but also due to the value it places on a dynamic evolution of outlooks on the natural world. As I have argued above, anti-colonial challenges from Indigenous peoples do not simply call for the incorporation of Indigenous worldviews into an expanded pluralism, nor do they prescribe precisely what the relationship among varying worldviews should be. Indigenous worldviews are not abstract conceptions of what the world consists of, but rather place-specific understandings of how to engage with the world. As a result, and particularly on matters of environmental destruction, these worldviews have political implications. All of this is connected to colonialism at multiple levels: both in the ways in which environmental destruction sanctioned and carried out by settler colonial states and populations disrupts the natural environment and Indigenous peoples’ culturally specific relationship to it, and furthermore the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from political decision-making about the environment in settler colonial contexts.

Thus, there are two criteria by which vital materialism’s attitude to divergent views of the natural world must be measured. The first has to do with the value divergent worldviews are thought to have. Recalling in particular the rejections by Indigenous scholars of state-based policies of multiculturalism and inclusion I have cited above, vital materialism must be able to recognise the political salience of, rather than simply accept, Indigenous perspectives. In other words, Indigenous perspectives are not merely a cultural artifact to be respected or tolerated, but to be seen as the source of meaningful political engagement. But secondly, and relating to these same criticisms of mere surface-level acceptance, vital materialism must be able to not only engage with Indigenous perspectives, but to do so in a manner which is primarily motivated by the political imperatives of anti-colonialism, rather than a focus on evaluating the truth of views.
of the natural world. This second point is crucial. It means that, in colonial contexts, Indigenous perspectives are not simply one amongst many possible sources of inspiration in an expanded and multicultural marketplace of ideas. Rather, they have a particularly prominent weight given their grounded normativity in land which has been colonized.

Connolly provides a useful framework in which this situation might be approached, insofar as his speculative realism accommodates not only a plurality, but an evolving and interacting, plurality of worldviews. Crucially, Connolly does not simply recognise that such a plurality exists, nor does he view it as an inconvenience. Instead, he views a diversity of contributions as a crucial and valuable element in the formulation of new ways of interacting with both politics and the natural world. In considering how the new outlooks on the world he sees as necessary are to be developed, he writes that

it is imperative to negotiate new connections between nontheistic constituencies who care about the future of the Earth and numerous devotees of diverse religious traditions who fold positive spiritualties into their creedal practices. The new, multifaceted movement needed today, if it emerges, will take the shape of a vibrant pluralist assemblage acting at multiple sites within and across states, rather than either a centred movement with a series of fellow traveler attached to it or a mere electoral constellation. (2013, 41)

In further passages, Connolly first of all makes clear that this is not simply a call for collaboration between atheists and a subset of religions; rather, it is a call for a reconsideration of our perspective on the world through a framework which accepts deep and broad diversity: we must, he argues “seek creative ways to forge relations of agonistic respect between different lived creeds, theologies, and cosmologies,” adding that in his case, such a project requires
cultivating a better “knowledge of non-European orientations to existence.” (2013, 51) Furthermore, Connolly makes the argument that in light of what he terms global capitalism’s “minoritization” of the world, that the “new radical, pluralist assemblage” he advocates ought to “consist of alliances between minorities of multiple types who join together to reorient the common life.” (2013, 137)

Such an approach is valuable in the colonial contexts I am considering. Rather than simply saying that divergent- and crucially, non-Western- ontologies should be accepted or respected in some abstract manner, Connolly argues that such outlooks should play an important role in formation of new perspectives. Although he does not explicitly mention of Indigenous worldviews, it seems clear that they are included in the proposals. To be sure, further elaboration is needed to make clear that the specific case of colonized Indigenous peoples sets them apart from “minorities” writ large. But the core value I see in Connolly’s position is that by emphasizing the value of according greater weight to the perspectives of “minorities,” Connolly posits a remedying of imbalances as a core principle. Such an approach would, it seems clear to me, see the exclusion and marginalization of Indigenous peoples from decision-making regarding the land with which their perspectives particularly connect them as a critical problem.

It is also crucial that Connolly frames this construction of new worldviews partly in terms of religious or spiritual connections. Ojibwe activist Winona LaDuke specifically highlights religious colonialism—the suppression of Indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices in favour of Christian practices— as a key feature of colonialism in the Americas (2005, 11). She also makes clear that addressing colonialism requires addressing not only this manifestation of colonialism, but also understanding the spiritual and religious diversity involved: drawing on Chris Peters’ argument that a contrast exists between “Native spiritual practices as affirmation-based
and...Judeo-Christian faiths as commemorative,” LaDuke writes that “the difference in the paradigms of these spiritual practices has, over time, become a source of great conflict in the Americas,” in particular to the extent that Indigenous spiritualities/religions are often tied to specific places of spiritual significance, the importance of which has often been ignored by colonial policies of land and resource appropriation (2005, 13-4).

Connolly’s position then, offers a way by which both this diversity, and its political salience in colonial contexts can be addressed: for Connolly, diversity (including spiritual diversity) is not merely a cause for acceptance or celebration, but also a crucial source for the formulation of new relationships to the natural world.

Thus, Connolly’s vital materialism offers important tools to the project of developing new approaches to environmental politics in colonial contexts. This is the case in three ways. The first, which I have already mentioned in contrasting Slaughter and Connolly’s accounts, is that a valuation of the natural world can act as a powerful motivating factor in taking political action which reduces human harm to the non-human. Valuing and relating to the non-human through “speeding up” may motivate us to “slow down” harmful actions. Secondly, the speculative or contingent element of Connolly’s “speeding up” of the formation of new ontological outlooks makes space for Indigenous perspectives on, and relationships to, the natural world and sees engagement with such perspectives as desirable. Thirdly, environmental political action in colonial contexts requires political action, even in the absence of perfect agreement on the truth of claims, and Connolly’s position offers a convincing way forward from this dilemma, in a manner that treats the worldviews of marginalized groups as crucial for the development of new approaches to politics.
On the points just discussed, Connolly supplies more detailed proposals than does Bennett. Nonetheless, I wish to highlight similar directions in Bennett; I do not seek here to definitively assess one or the other scholar as a superior solution, but rather to point out the useful elements to be found in each by reading them in the context of a broader theoretical conversation.

In particular, I wish to draw attention to a passage in which Bennett considers the multiple ways in which political issues can be framed, and how decisions about such framings are made. There, Bennett begins by arguing that on political questions, it would do us well to move away from moralization, individual blame, and condemnation towards a politics which more fully recognizes the vital complexity of force acting in the world. She takes the example of blaming individuals such as George W. Bush, Saddam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden for the political disasters of the early 21st century. Such attributions of individual blame are insufficient, according to Bennett, because they fail to take into account the more complex web of both human agents and non-human actants linked to any given occurrence. What I wish to draw attention to, however, is how Bennett then qualifies her view on these matters. She writes that her proposals to replace the moralistic politics of blame with a vital materialism are contestable, and other actants, enmeshed in other assemblages, will offer different diagnoses of the political and its probabilities. It is ultimately a matter of political judgment what is more needed today: should we acknowledge the distributive quality of agency to address the power of human-nonhuman assemblages and to resist a politics of blame? Or should we persist with a strategic understatement of material agency in the hopes of enhancing the accountability of specific humans? (2010, 38)
Bennett not only avoids characterising her proposals as an absolute statement of universal value, but also recognises that people in difference circumstances (presumably including Indigenous people living in colonial contexts) will have different political viewpoints and priorities, and that these ought to be taken seriously by vital materialists. Connolly’s explicit engagement with the political implications of diversity (including spiritual diversity), and the role he sees such diversity playing in the elaboration of new ontologies, is undoubtedly more concretely applicable to environmental politics in colonial contexts. Bennett’s views on the matter, though less detailed, at the very least leave open the possibility that Bennett’s vision of a new ontological outlook need not trump the concerns of Indigenous politics, in particular given that it recognises the validity of differing outlooks and circumstances giving rise to differing political priorities.

In settler colonial contexts, political change cannot occur while ontological differences are ignored or actively opposed. The vital materialist perspectives explored here, in contrast to environmental political theories considered in previous chapters, offers important contributions to such a project. While both make proposals useful in the reformulation of outlooks on the natural world in a way which rejects colonial power structures, Connolly’s project is perhaps more readily applicable to the task given the manner in which it more concretely addresses the political nature of a diversity of worldviews, and does so in a way which seems well-suited to settler colonial contexts. Bennett, though more silent on this latter issue, nonetheless offers valuable proposals for the process of reforming ontologies. However, the project of adapting vital materialism to the politics of settler colonial states requires further elaboration of how this set of proposals can intervene in the specific context of colonialism.
4. Reconceptualising Sovereignties

In the preceding chapter, I provided my views on which elements of vital materialist thought may be of use in reconceptualising relationships with the non-human world in a manner which does not ignore or displace anti-colonial perspectives of Indigenous peoples. But as I have also argued, simply coming up with new ways of ontologically thinking about nature does not do enough to meet anti-colonial challenges. Instead, it seems clear to me that such shifts in worldviews must be accompanied by corresponding shifts in how settlers conceive of political sovereignty.\(^\text{16}\)

In this chapter, I therefore consider whether vital materialism also provides for such a reconception of sovereignty. I argue that on the question of colonial sovereignty, Connolly has much less to offer than he does on purely ontological matters. Connolly sees a largely unmodified version of existing (and thus in some cases, colonial) states as the appropriate venue for his ontological proposals to be taken up politically; as a result, he excludes the possibility for affirmation of Indigenous sovereignty. I then argue that on matters of sovereignty, Bennett maintains much of the openness that I found valuable in both her and Connolly’s ontological accounts; as a result, I view her proposals as much less diametrically opposed to Indigenous sovereignty than Connolly’s.

I first turn to an examination of Connolly’s proposals on matters of political sovereignty and structure. Connolly makes his views on what political structure is best suited to complement his proposals for vital materialist ontology explicit early on, when he writes that

\(^{16}\) Of course, I do not think that merely changing how people think about sovereignty will do much to alleviate the real harms caused by colonial states’ sovereignty; actual changes to political structures are of course necessary. But a certain conception of sovereignty needs to be developed alongside such changes to political structure, and as this chapter will make clear, such a conception is still largely lacking in vital materialist thought.
The democratic state, while it certainly cannot alone tame capital or reconstitute the ethos and infrastructure consumption, must play a significant role in reconstituting our lived relations to climate, weather, resource use, ocean currents, bee survival, tectonic instability, glacier flows, species diversity, work, local life, consumption, and investment...a new, new left will thus experimentally enact new intersections between role performance and political activity, outgrow its old disgust with the very idea of the state, and remain alert to the dangers states can pose...the fragile ecology of late capital requires state intervention of several sorts. A refusal to participate in the state today cedes too much hegemony to neoliberal markets, either explicitly or by implication. (2013, 40)

Connolly, in other words, does not hold any particular attachment or loyalty to the state as a political structure. Rather, argues that the only plausible way by which his political proposals can be implemented is via the power of the state. In the context of colonialism, however, Connolly’s pragmatic position faces a challenge which is not merely theoretical. Affirmations of Indigenous sovereignty as a core political position are not merely pragmatic claims that certain political ends are unlikely to be achieved via the channels of colonial states, but rather articulate that Indigenous sovereignty already exists, and stands in opposition to claims of sovereignty by colonial states. As a result, the continued claims to power of colonial states constitute a position in a conflict which can be traced to the very foundation of such states. Though I do not claim that Connolly specifically sets out to support colonialism, the arguments in favour of viewing the (potentially colonial) state as the prime vehicle for political change places his proposals in opposition to Indigenous sovereignty.
As I have already shown, drawing primarily on Coulthard, Alfred, and Corntassel, sovereignty forms a key axis in indigenous political demands. This point is further underscored by Indigenous Hawaiian scholar Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua: characterizing the American colonization of Hawai‘i as an illegal occupation, she argues that the US government ought not to have any sovereignty over the Hawaiian islands at all (2014, 58-9). In such a context, Connolly’s position on the state, even though he advances it on pragmatic grounds, stands in opposition to the indigenous sovereignty Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua argues forms a core grievance. The extent to which Connolly’s account is ill-equipped to provide insights useful to settler colonial contexts is further shown through the specifics of Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua’s analysis. Notably, she calls into question the proposal of the US federal government to extend recognition to indigenous Hawaiians akin to the legal status of federally recognised Native American tribes in the continental US. Such a move, Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua contends, contains an explicit claim of US sovereignty over indigenous Hawaiians and their territory (2014, 62). This objection echoes one I have already cited from Alfred and Corntassel above: namely, that a significant source of discontent for Indigenous peoples stems from the very fact of being claimed as contained under the sovereignty of settler colonial states. While Connolly may have good reason to argue that many of his political proposals are best accomplished via state structures, his arguments provide no response to the issues of the reaffirmation of Indigenous sovereignty. Proponents of such positions argue that the provision of more resources and representation to Indigenous peoples by the colonial state does little to improve (and perhaps even worsens) the underlying point of political conflict: that the sovereignty claimed by settler colonial states stands in direct opposition to existing Indigenous sovereignty.
I now wish to explore, in a similar manner, how Jane Bennett addresses issues surrounding sovereignty and political structure. I have already noted that, like Connolly, Bennett does not directly address questions of colonialism. As a result, any attempt to redeploy her project in the service of anti-colonial environmental politics necessarily involves a certain amount of extrapolation and reformulation.

In contrast to Connolly, Bennett does not take a clear position on the role of the state in her political proposals. In explaining her vision of a post-humanist political order that nonetheless recognizes the unique affinity amongst humans, she writes that “while every public may very well be an ecosystem, not every ecosystem is democratic. And I cannot envision any polity so egalitarian that important human needs such as health or survival, would not take priority…the political goal of a vital materialism is not the perfect equality of actants, but a polity with more channels of communication between members.” (2010, 104) This passage responds to one potential criticism of Bennett: that she prioritizes the non-human to the detriment of humans. On the basis of this quote, it is clear that she does not.

In addition, I wish to draw attention to that fact that here and elsewhere, Bennett speaks of concepts like “polity” rather than explicitly discussing the state. This may be intentional on Bennett’s part: the large-scale rethinking of our relationship- and specifically our political relationship- to the non-human may be a process whose outcome Bennett sees as unpredictable, and perhaps never quite finished. And as a result, it seems that the polity Bennett envisions may take a different form than the political structure proposed by Connolly, which I have argued fails to meet the demands of Indigenous sovereignty by largely preserving the colonial state. In other words, although Bennett’s proposals could be criticized as vague, I would instead argue that this openness preserves the possibility of a new political configuration which rejects colonial claims
of sovereignty in a manner attentive to the Indigenous sovereignties with which they are in conflict.

The second matter is the exclusion of some human groups from politics. In considering the obvious problems of how non-humans are to be included in her “parliament of things,” Bennett writes that “perhaps we can make better progress on this front by looking at a theory designed to open democracy to the voices of excluded humans.” (2010, 104) The theory to which Bennett refers is Rancière’s account of disruption by the demos. According to Bennett, Rancière argues that “the political act consists in the exclamatory interjection of affective bodies as they enter a pre-existing public, or, rather, as they reveal that they have been there all along as an unaccounted-for part.” (2010) This is a promising perspective to adopt with regards to the challenge of decolonization and of a politics that eschews patterns of colonial exclusion and appropriation. The emphasis on disruptive actions of marginalized or excluded groups of people would seem to provide support for a vision of decolonization driven by the perspectives, demands, and actions of Indigenous peoples. And finally, the non-human element Bennett adds to her vision of democratic disruption might also address the connection of colonial power relations and ontology.

Bennett’s discussion of Rancière merits further discussion in this context. She draws on Rancière’s conception of how the demos, particularly marginalized people within it, can disrupt politics by making visible what was not before, and thus changing the scope and nature of political discussion (Bennett 2010, 104-5). Rancière’s view may have some contribution to make to the changes to political sovereignty necessary to respond to Indigenous anti-colonialism. However, Bennett’s reading bypasses the question of marginalized humans and instead draws on Rancière’s work to imagine how the non-human
might more fully enter politics. In spite of drawing on a theoretical perspective that focuses on remedying the political inequality of marginalized humans, Bennett offers no views on how the political interests of marginalized humans might connect to the greater incorporation of the non-human into politics. On this point, Bennett is not demonstrably opposed to anti-colonial challenges but provides few concrete tools for the realization of such a project. Nonetheless, Bennett is certainly aware of the importance of such issues: in the introduction to the final chapter of *Vibrant Matter*, she lists the question of “how…hierarchies of race, class, gender, and civilization complicate the project of environmental protection” as one of the “good political questions” raised by the “discourse of environmentalism” (2010, 111).

Bennett’s vagueness on political questions can at times be frustrating, particular in her discussions of more obscure topics, such as the actancy of electrical grids. Nonetheless, I think that this provides an openness to political reimaginations, including on matters of sovereignty, that provides distinctly better possibilities in the face of ongoing colonialism than does Connolly’s proposed reforms of the colonial state. As I have written above, there is a sense in which this project is more about thinking about ontology and sovereignty. Not only does substantial change to political realities require, in my view, that our ways of thinking also change, but to a significant extent the simultaneous reconfiguration of ontological outlooks on the natural world and political sovereignty cannot be mapped out theoretically all at once. Instead, these projects require sustained action, and attentiveness to the political views and sovereignties of Indigenous peoples. Though Bennett’s tentativeness may provoke disappointment in the reader, in the political realm, it may help to ensure that conclusions are not jumped to: rigid preconceptions about a vital materialist future risk reproducing
colonialism just as much as the rigidities of the republican and deliberative democratic proposals I discussed at the outset of this thesis do.

Serious reformulations of environmental politics, on both ontological and political levels, are necessary if settler colonial contexts are to be taken seriously. In spite of the criticisms I have made here, I think that vital materialism can have a role to play in this endeavor. Certainly, on ontological matters, the vital materialist perspectives of Connolly and Bennett can make an important contribution to developing an approach that takes Indigenous perspectives seriously, and moves away from the colonial blind spots that many environmental political theories exhibit. On matters of sovereignty, however, further work is still needed to link this rethinking of ontology to a reimagining of political structure and sovereignty that recognizes Indigenous sovereignty as well as the relations between Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous conceptions of the natural world. In the case of Connolly, such a project would require contending with diverse views on political sovereignty. In the case of Bennett, a re-examination of Rancière may prove to be a useful starting point. Just as Bennett calls for the reconsideration of what constitutes the political in terms of non-human actants, so too we must call for the reconsideration of what structures politics takes amongst humans. On the whole, I think it is crucial that the questions of ontology and politics do not become separated: it is not enough for a new political theory of sovereignty to be developed in isolation from the new outlook on the non-human which vital materialism rightly calls for.
References


