Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of

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MA (Université de Montréal, 2015)
BA (Université de Montréal, 2013)

“Relational ethics for a world of many worlds:
An ecosocial theory of care, vulnerability, and sustainability”

Department of Political Science

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11:00 A.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Avigail Eisenberg, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. James Tully, Department of Political Science, UVic (Member)
Prof. Jeremy Webber, Faculty of Law, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Samantha Frost, Department of Political Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Robert Gifford, Department of Psychology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The dissertation attempts to do two things: First, to move political theory and philosophy from a human-centric to an ecocentric worldview. This entails thinking about justice and equality—and hence about reciprocity, solidarity, and cooperation—in both ecological and social terms. Second, I argue that the shared conditions of interdependency and vulnerability allow us to bridge the gap between the social and the ecological, and thus to reconnect politics with nature. As little attention has been paid to ecology and sustainability in democratic theory, my work’s ambition is to demonstrate the transformative potential of a relational ethics that is not only concerned with human animals, but also with the multiplicity of beings that inhabit the earth, and the relations in which they are enmeshed. The purpose is to think about ways of cultivating and fostering the kinds of relations that are needed to maintain human and more than human diversity, and therefore to sustain life on earth.

In order to accomplish this task, I begin by critically examining the scholarship on pluralism and diversity, and by pressing the limits of the prevailing frameworks within which these themes are generally approached. The argument I attempt to put forward is that most of the literature bounds the scope of diversity and plurality to the worlds of human animals, which constrains our understanding of difference and why it matters. Such scholarship remains largely confined to phenomena such as culture, religion, and legal authority at the collective level, as well as to epistemic diversity at the individual level. But these forms of diversity and plurality are not only exclusively concerned with humans, but they are also underpinned by a problematic conception of human animality. As feminism, care ethics, disability studies (among other critical approaches) have shown, much theorizing about reasoning, dialogue, collective action, and other fundamental concepts in democratic theory were conceived in the image of the Enlightenment man, and hence in opposition to embodiment, affectivity, and empathy. Moreover, political theory in general, and democratic theory in particular, have been built on a presumption of able-bodiedness and able-mindedness that excludes many forms of being human from political participation. And it is my contention that reflecting critically on our own condition of human animality—and on the ways in which it has been portrayed in political thought until relatively recently—will inevitably prompt us to reconsider the relations we entertain with each other and with more than human forms of life on earth.